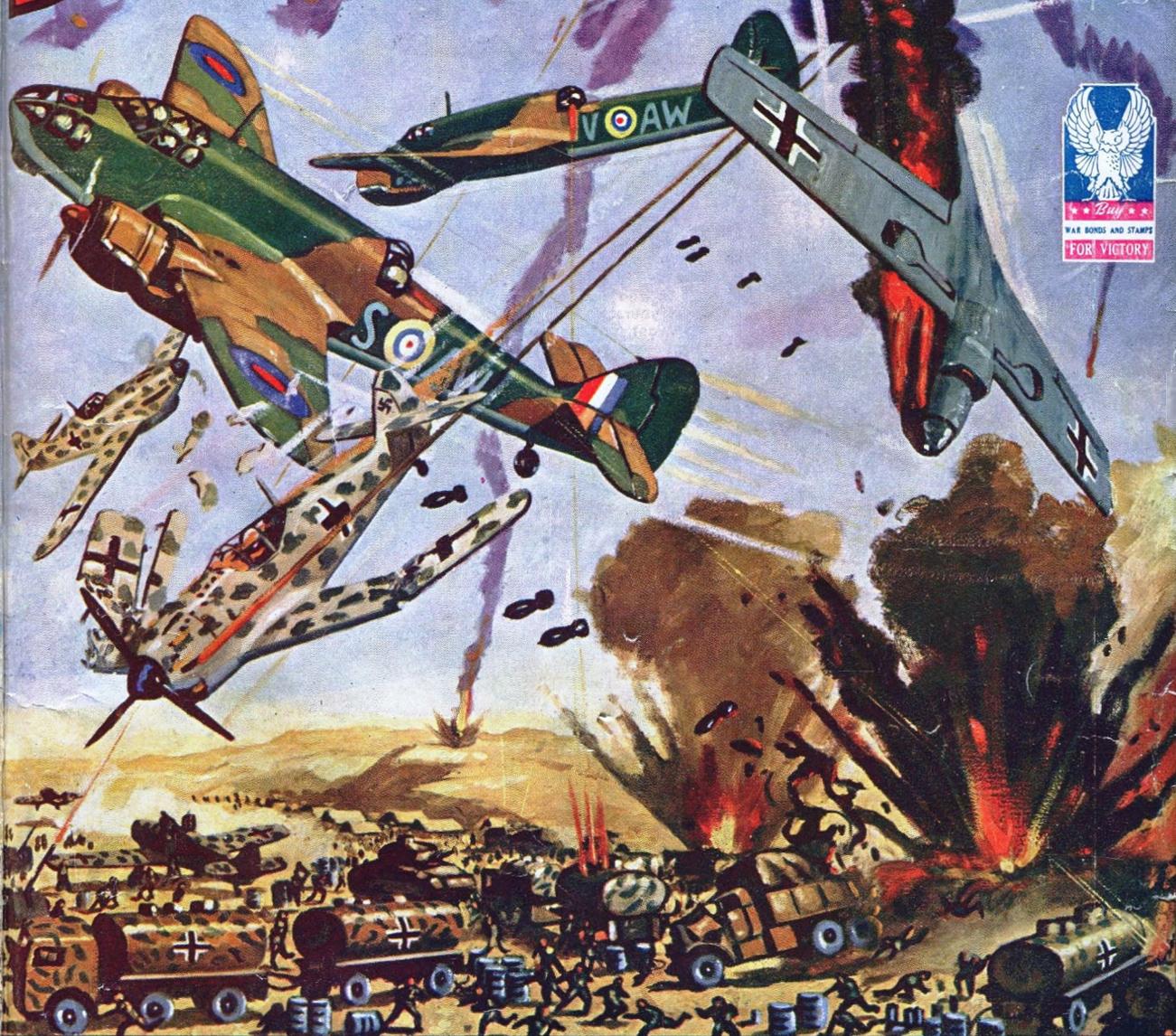


NOVEMBER



NOW
10¢

DARE-DEVIL ACES



A NOVEL OF YANKEE WINGS OVER JAPAN
TO HELL--AND BACK!

YOU'RE IN THE ARMY NOW!

by JOEL TOWNSLEY ROGERS

by HAL WHITE

GRIPPING AIR-WAR FICTION

ILLUSTRATED BY ROBERTS BOWEN, DANIEL WINTERS, AND MANY

NOVEMBER
DARE-DEVIL ACES
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LESS THAN
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A DAY**

AFTER 1/3 DOWN PAYMENT

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OR FAMOUS WATCH
ON OUR SAVINGS BOOK PLAN



\$3750

M212—The BULOVA "Senator"; a 17 Jewel model for men. 10K yellow rolled gold plate; leather strap. A great BULOVA VALUE.

Send \$1—pay \$11.83 after examination—then \$5 a month



A7 — Diamond Engagement Ring. 14K yellow gold.

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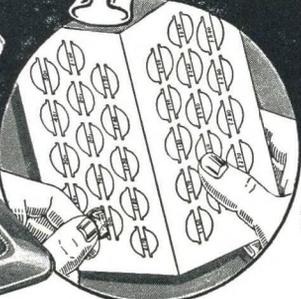


D124 — Man's Twin Ring. Diamond and Simulated Blue Sapphire. 14K yellow gold.

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I150 — Man's Initial Ring. Initial on Black Onyx. 10K yellow gold.

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Send coupon below with a dollar bill and a brief note telling me who you are, your occupation, draft classification, age and a few other facts about yourself. Indicate the article you want on the coupon, giving number and price.

WHAT I'LL DO

I'll open an account for you on our SAVINGS BOOK PLAN, send selection for your approval and examination on our MONEY-BACK GUARANTEE. If satisfied you pay the balance of 1/3 of the purchase price (required by Federal Regulations) after examination otherwise return selection and your dollar will be promptly refunded.

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Sales Mgr.

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\$1995

P177—Ladies' Kent Watch—7 Jewel; 10K yellow rolled gold plate; matching bracelet.

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\$2475

K313 — Military Watch — WATER-PROOF—EXTRATHIN—7 jewels. chrome case.

Send \$1—pay \$7.25 after examination—then \$5 a month



\$1650

K174—Famous Kent for men. 7 Jewels; 10K yellow rolled gold plate. Send \$1—pay \$4.50 after examination—then \$5 a month

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pay \$_____ and \$5.00 monthly thereafter until
full price is paid, otherwise I'll return selection and
you will refund my dollar.

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President
National Radio Institute
Established 27 Years

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I Trained These Men



**\$200 a Month
in Own Business**

"For several years I have been in business for myself making around \$200 a month.

Business has steadily increased. I have N. R. I. to thank for my start in this field." **ARLIE J. FROEHLER**, 300 W. Texas Ave., Goose Creek, Texas.

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**\$5 to \$10
Week in Spare Time**

"I am engaged in spare time Radio work. I average from \$5 to \$10 a week.

I often wished that I had enrolled sooner because all this extra money sure does come in handy." **THEODORE K. DUBREE**, Horscham, Pa.



**Extra Pay
in Army,
Navy, Too**

Men likely to go into military service, soldiers, sailors, marines should mail the coupon now! Learning Radio helps men get extra rank, extra prestige, more interesting duties, **MUCH HIGHER PAY**. Also prepares for good Radio jobs after service ends. Hundreds of service men now enrolled.

Mail the Coupon for a FREE lesson from my Radio Course. It gives you, at first hand, evidence of how N. R. I. will train you for Radio at home in spare time. And with this sample lesson I'll send my 64-page illustrated book, **RICH REWARDS IN RADIO**. It describes the many fascinating jobs Radio offers. Explains how N. R. I. teaches you with interesting, illustrated lessons and **SIX BIG KITS OF RADIO PARTS!**

Act Now! Many Radio Technicians Make \$30, \$40, \$50 a Week

Right now, in nearly every neighborhood, there's room for more spare and full time Radio Technicians. Many spare time Technicians are stepping into FULL time Radio jobs, or starting their own shops, and making \$30, \$40, \$50 a week!

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My "50-50 Method" Helps Many Make \$5, \$10 a Week Extra While Learning

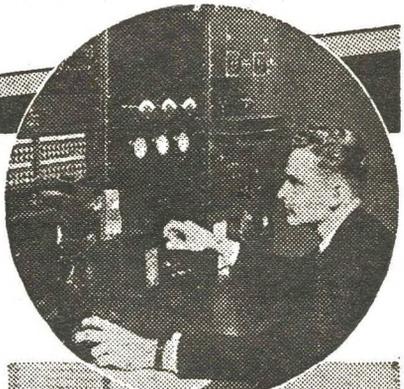
Many N. R. I. Students make \$5, \$10 a week extra money fixing Radios in spare time while learning. I send EXTRA MONEY JOB SHEETS that tell how to do it!

My "50-50 Method"—half building and testing Radio circuits with the six Kits of Radio parts I send, half learning from illustrated lessons—makes you "old friends" with Radio before you know it. Run your own spare time shop, get practice fixing friends' Radios, get paid while training!

Find Out What N. R. I. Can Do For You

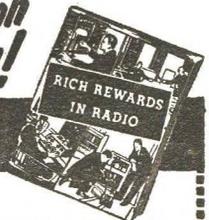
MAIL COUPON NOW for FREE sample Lesson and 64-page illustrated book. You'll see the many fascinating jobs Radio offers and how you can train at home. If you want to jump your pay—Mail Coupon AT ONCE! **J. E. SMITH**, President, Dept. 2MS9, National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

TRAINING MEN FOR VITAL RADIO JOBS



BROADCASTING STATIONS (top illustration) employ Radio Technicians as operators, installation, maintenance men and in other fascinating, steady, well-paying technical jobs. **FIXING RADIO SETS**, (bottom illustration) a booming field today, pays many Radio Technicians \$30, \$40, \$50 a week. Others hold their regular jobs and make \$5 to \$10 a week extra, fixing Radios in spare time.

**Mail Coupon
Now!**



**This FREE BOOK has Helped Hundreds
of Men to Make More Money**

Mr. J. E. Smith, President, Dept. 2MS9
NATIONAL RADIO INSTITUTE, Washington, D. C.

Mail me FREE, without obligation, your Sample Lesson and 64-page book, "Rich Rewards in Radio." (No Salesman will call. Please write plainly.)

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Address.....

City..... State..... ZIP

January Issue on Sale November 25th!

Every
Story
New

DARE-DEVIL ACES

Every
Story
Complete

Vol. 30

Contents for November, 1942

No. 3

Great Novel of Air-War in the Pacific

- TO HELL—AND BACK**.....*Joel Townsley Rogers* 26
"Kick that motor over, pal. She'll carry you to hell and back, shooting all the way. But when you get away, remember to say one last prayer—for the guy that stays behind!"

Two Thrilling Sky Action Novelettes

- DEATH FLIES EAST**.....*Daniel Winters* 11
Two against an army, they waited for the final showdown—a hard-eyed hombre with a debt of blood to pay—and the man who had killed his buddy!

- TROUBLE SHOOTER**.....*William Porter* 58
"You're a fightin' man, and I'll fly you anywhere, any time, against every flyer in the Nazi air force. But, brother—don't call me a Yankee any more. My pappy fought with Stonewall Jackson!"

Stirring Combat Stories

- YOU'RE IN THE ARMY NOW!**.....*Hal White* 75
"You may have been the pride of Fifth Avenue, pal, but over here you're just a hired hand. Do your job, and the medals will come along. Let me down—and I'll see that you never come back!"

- DESTINATION—NIPPON!**.....*Robert Sidney Bowen* 91
The gods of war play fast and hard, and a fighting man must learn the rules. But here's the story of an ace who had to rely on a man who never heard of them—or die!

Special Air Feature

- AMERICA TAKES THE OFFENSIVE**....*Lt. Gen. Henry H. Arnold* 88
The commanding general of the U. S. Army Air Forces reports on the prowess of American war wings in World War II!

Exclusive Departments

- THE HOT AIR CLUB**.....*Conducted by Nosedive Ginsburg* 6
Join the Squadron of the Flying Screwballs—Nosedive Ginsburg C.O.!

- ASEMBLIT**.....*Frederick Blakeslee* 54
A game created especially for air fans, by their favorite artist!

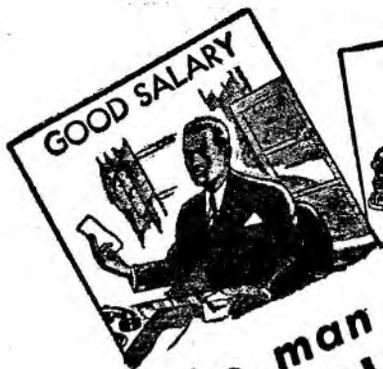
- STORY BEHIND THE COVER**.....*Frederick Blakeslee* 87
ME 109's versus Bristol Beauforts—in a smashing surprise raid in the desert!

All stories new; no reprints



This seal protects you!

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To the man who wants to enjoy
an ACCOUNTANT'S CAREER

IF you're that man, here's something that will interest you.

Not a magic formula—not a get-rich-quick scheme—but something more substantial, more practical.

Of course, you need something more than just the desire to be an accountant. You've got to pay the price—be willing to study earnestly, thoroughly.

Still, wouldn't it be worth your while to sacrifice some of your leisure in favor of interesting home study—over a comparatively brief period in your life? Always provided that the rewards were good—a salary of \$2,000 to \$10,000?

An accountant's duties are interesting, varied and of real worth to his employers. He has *standing!*

Do you feel that such things aren't for you? Well, don't be too sure. Very possibly they *can* be!

Why not, like so many before you, investigate LaSalle's modern Problem Method of training for an accountancy position?

Just suppose you were permitted to work in a large accounting house under the personal supervision of an expert accountant. Suppose, with his aid, you studied accounting principles and solved problems day by day—easy ones at first—then the more difficult ones. If you could do this—and if you could turn to him for advice as the problems became complex—soon you'd master them all.

That's the training you follow in principle under the LaSalle Problem Method.

You cover accountancy from the basic Principles right up through Accountancy Systems and Income Tax Procedure. Then you add C. P. A. Training and prepare for the C. P. A. examinations.

As you go along, you absorb the principles of Auditing, Cost Accounting, Business Law, Statistical Control, Organization, Management and Finance.

Your progress is as speedy as you care to make it—depending on your own eagerness to learn and the time you spend in study.

Will recognition come? The only answer, as you know, is that success *does* come to the man who is really *trained*. It's possible your employers will notice your improvement in a very few weeks or months. Indeed, many LaSalle graduates have paid for their training—with increased earnings—before they have completed it! For accountants, who are trained in organization and management, are the executives of the future.

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For your own good, don't put off investigation of *all* the facts. Write for our free 48-page book, "Accountancy, The Profession That Pays." It'll prove that accountancy offers brilliant futures to those who aren't afraid of serious home study. Send us the coupon *now*.

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Name.....

Address..... City.....

Position..... Age.....





Conducted by Nosedive Ginsburg

BEDECKED as usual with medals and ribbons, your modest commentator calls the meeting of the flying screwballs to order.

This is indeed a special occasion, chums. Rare and florid are the issues of art and pen which have greeted these old eyes during the past semester. Louie the Lush stood it for a week and then be-took him to the village jail for a little peace and quiet.

Nothing daunted, Nosey bestirs himself to the business of the month. We offer you first some strictly high-class piffle from one Franklin Kuschner, of Haines City, Florida.

Dear Noseburg:

Knowing you could not get along without another message from myself, I hereby am sending this to get you away from it all. I shall now comment on the September issue of D. D. A. After bringing it home I laid it down by an open window and left the room. The wind riffled the pages. Coming in I discerned a grayish vapor flooding the room. Knowing such things usually came from the Hot Air Club, I ran and got my gas mask and then opened the windows.

Seeing my pet canary was still alive I took off my mask and sniffed. I could smell nothing but ordinary smoke. The vapor having cleared somewhat, I sat down and opened the mag. I saw nothing more than usual in the Hot Air Club so I turned further. After reading the first few words of "Commandos Fight Alone," I no longer wondered where the smoke came from. That was the best story I ever read and it had more action than all the others put together.

It reminds me of some of the action you and I saw back in '18 when we were in the 93rd Pursuit Squadron. You were a handsome lad, the type that a loving mother desires for her only daughter. I will only go into detail on how you and I won the war. Remember the day I had got you from where you had crashed on No Man's Land and a bunch of Fokkers shot us down? We crashed on a Heinie private and set off his rifle. The shell hit a 16-inch Big Bertha and knocked it over backwards where it shot toward Germany. The shell landed in an ammo dump next to Berlin. The concussion made such a wind it blew the propaganda leaflets in the Propaganda Department all over Germany and the people seeing what lies the Huns were telling the Allies went and revolted and helped win the war, besides blowing all of the Heinies' equipment over to the Allies. Unfortunately, it blew the brains out of a German corporal's head and indirectly caused this war. I just thought I would say something in your favor, Ginsy, for I cannot stand to see people pick on you so much. Whatcha say we get together and win this war, huh?

Yours till we get around to it,
Franklin Kuschner,
Haines City, Florida.

With considerable trepidation we award you \$5.00 in War Stamps, Franklin. Shucks, we didn't win World War I single-handed, pal.

A fellow named Pershing helped a little too.

Going from the strictly truthful to the highly colored, we present one Jess W. Conner, of 64 North Mechanic Street, Cumberland, Maryland, who unburdens himself of the following:

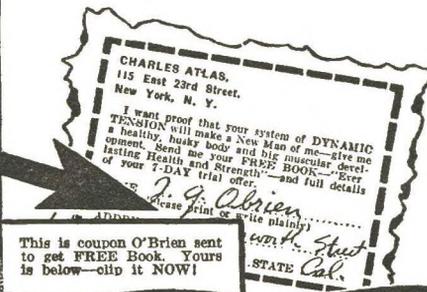
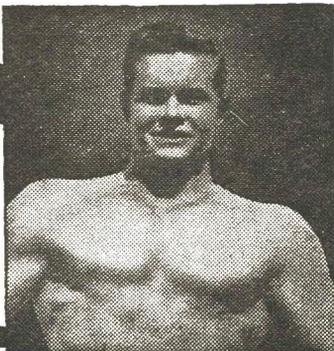
(Continued on page 8)

HE Mailed This Coupon

J. G. O'BRIEN

Atlas Champion
Cup Winner

This is an ordinary snapshot of one of Charles Atlas' Californian pupils.



...and Here's the Handsome Prize-Winning Body I Gave Him!

J. G. O'BRIEN saw my coupon. He clipped and mailed it. He got my free book and followed my instructions. He became a New Man. NOW read what he says:

"Look at me NOW! 'Dynamic Tension' WORKS! I'm proud of the natural, easy way you have made me an 'Atlas Champion!'" *J. G. O'Brien.*

"I'll Prove that YOU, too, can be a NEW MAN"—Charles Atlas

I don't care how old or young you are, or how ashamed of your present physical condition you may be. If you can simply raise your arm and flex it I can add SOLID MUSCLE to your biceps—yes, on each arm—in double-quick time! Only 15 minutes a day—right in your own home—is all the time I ask of you! And there's no cost if I fail.

I can broaden your shoulders, strengthen your back, develop your whole muscular system INSIDE and OUTSIDE; I can add inches to your chest, give you a vise-like grip, make those legs of yours lithe and powerful. I can shoot new strength into your old backbone, exercise those inner organs, help you cram your body so full of pep, vigor and red-blooded vitality that you won't feel there's even "standing room" left for weakness and that lazy feeling! Before I get through with you I'll have your whole frame "measured" to a nice, new, beautiful suit of muscle!

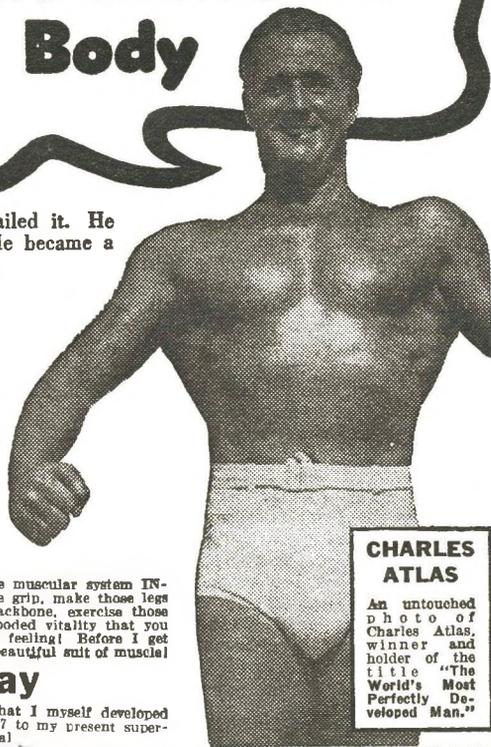
Only 15 Minutes a Day

"Dynamic Tension!" That's the ticket! The identical natural method that I myself developed to change my body from the scrawny, skinny-chested weakling I was at 17 to my present super-man physique! Thousands of other fellows are becoming marvelous physical specimens—my way. I give you no gadgets or contraptions to fool with. You learn to develop your strength through "Dynamic Tension." You simply utilize the DORMANT muscle-power in your own God-given body—watch it increase and multiply double-quick into real, solid LIVE MUSCLE.

My method—"Dynamic Tension"—will turn the trick for you. No theory—every exercise is practical. And, man, so easy! Spend only 15 minutes a day in your own home. From the very start you'll be using my method of "Dynamic Tension" almost unconsciously every minute of the day—walking, bending over, etc.—to BUILD MUSCLE and VITALITY.

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In it I talk to you in straight-from-the-shoulder language. Packed with inspirational pictures of myself and pupils—fellows who became NEW MEN in strength, my way. Let me show you what I helped THEM do. See what I can do for YOU! For a real thrill, send for this book today. AT ONCE, CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 83ZA, 115 E. 23rd St., New York, N. Y.



CHARLES ATLAS

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CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 83ZA,
115 East 23rd Street, New York, N. Y.

I want the proof that your system of "Dynamic Tension" can help make me a New Man—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscle development. Send me your FREE book, "Everlasting Health and Strength." No obligation.

Name
(Please print or write plainly)

Address.....

City..... State.....

(Continued from page 6)

Dear Nose-(censored)

Nose, old man, you may remember me, but case you don't, well—it was in the spring of 1917. I was going in to be examined by the army doctor to see if I could get in, when in comes Little Stinkweed (that's you) with the F.B.I. boys (funny thing about it was, they were begging you not to join; they said they want our side to win). The doctor passed you, even if you were bow-legged, cross-eyed, and had a hollow place in your head!

I think you got passed, for the doctor said he would do a favor for anybody as ugly as him. Well, by luck you went in the air force with me. We became good friends, so good that you got me to do your solo in the Spad for you. The instructor died of surprise when I landed the plane; he thought you were in it (you only wrecked 40 planes taking off, 40 landing).

At last we were up at the front. Well I was. Two days later 100 M.P.'s came with you, or rather, you came with them!

The C.O. of the 39th told us because we were green, not to try to get in the thick of the fight if we met Jerry. When we came back from the first fight you didn't come with us. The C.O. said he meant if it was too hot a fight to stay out, but we have 7 Spads to one Fokker!!

After, you learn that the Germans had seen that thing you called a face and kept away from you. You said just to show how brave you was you would go out on a lone patrol because the boys said you have the color of a Jap; you even went after Louie, your best friend, because he wouldn't fly your ship, while you hid some place (that's when he got the last name, Lush).

You were flying a B-19, which was a real plane, after you found that B-21, French—which is the Baby-21-French doll, got sick of a certain mug—when below you came 32 Fokkers 110. You dive your plane at them; you push the stick, but the guns didn't fire. What to do!

And this is where you got the name Nosedive; your nose was going to blow while you were in the dive; it blew! The hot air, junk and peanuts, that was in your head, came out!!!!

The Fokkers went down from the things that hit them; even Lush Louie came out!! Every plane was hit, and all went down. You went back to the field, jumped out of the plane, and said, "Ginsburg, the Kiro Jerk! I am the greatest flyer in the whole land of Nuts."

Well, you were thrown out of the army. You didn't understand what the general meant when he said, "You blew so hard that the Germans' planes went down, but 20,000 U. S. A. troops went down through the earth too!"

Well, you learned what he meant when you was going through China. When you came upon a hole, and nearby was 20,000

U.S.A. troops with Louie, who were making Lush of the Japs.

You see, they were blown through the earth and out in China.

Goodbye ? ? ?

Jess W. Conner
64 North Mechanic Street
Cumberland, Maryland

P.S. You know a masterpiece when you see it? Send me something, please. And that story is the truth!

Is this letter corny, or is old Nosey out of sorts today? At any rate, here's a buck's worth of stamps (though why we should encourage this sort of thing we don't know).

A sympathetic soul is Private Fortner, of Company H, who writes:

Dear Nosedive:

Don't be surprised to get this letter as you probably get a lot of jolts from friends. I have read your magazine for over five years, up until December, 1940. Since being in the army, I haven't had much time. I was just looking through an old one (Jan. 1941) and instinctively turned to your page. Some of the letters were pretty mean to you. I know you got your name from hitting the ground so often, but you could still fly rings around any Pylon. I have read your mag, and nearly all other mags concerning the air. I agree with some readers concerning World War I and World War II. They are all right, but I think you should stick to the first war until this one's over. Sure it's a good war to write about, a lot of material, but most stories written are, well (you can't print what I'm thinking). You know what I mean, so get down to business, and give us some more of those good old W. W. I. stories.

Yours till you pull out,
P. T. Roy Fortner.
Co. H, 159th Inf.

A. P. O. No. 7, U. S. Army
San Luis Obispo, Calif.

P. S. Print this and send me that buck. The future wife and myself could use it in our bank account.

Fifty cents in war stamps to you, Fortner, old boy, and fifty cents more for your future wife. Be sure you divide it evenly.

Getting down to the serious side, we find ourselves confronted with a super-colossal portrait, which does full justice

(Continued on page 106)

Home Training helps YOU WIN!



DRAFTING

Right Now

there is a tremendous shortage of skilled men in all branches of industry. Draftsmen, electricians, machine designers, tool makers, machinists are needed and the pay is big. Executives, too, foremen, superintendents, managers are wanted to help complete our tremendous production program.



HIGH SCHOOL

War Production Demands Better Men

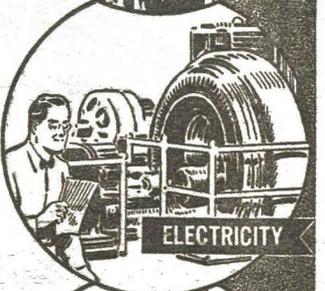
It is a duty you owe your country, yourself, and your family. You should know more and more about your job. You should be prepared to advance and to accept the responsibilities of the men ahead of you so that they in turn may climb and, climbing take you with them. No matter what your present job, you should learn to do it better or learn how to do the job of the man ahead of you. You need to know both theory and practice to make our tremendous war plants more productive. Yes, indeed, you are needed and needed badly right now.

Draftsmen, Electricians, Machine Designers, Machinists, Foremen, Superintendents, Managers Can All Profit by Home Study... No matter what your trade or profession there is a better place for you in industry. You can get the training needed right in your own home.

AMERICAN SCHOOL
Dept. G645, Drexel at 58th St.,
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

Use Spare Time, Learn At Home

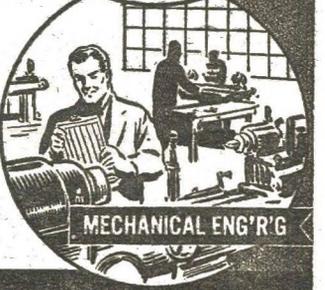
As little as one-half hour a day can produce surprising results in giving you a better education, more practical and theoretical training which will be reflected in your pay envelope. Never in the history of the world have there been so many opportunities for trained men, nor has it been so easy to get this training. The American School was founded over 40 years ago to provide home study for men and women who missed the opportunity to go to high school or college and to make it possible for you to LEARN AS YOU EARN.



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MECHANICAL ENG'R'G

MARK, CLIP AND MAIL THIS COUPON NOW!

Get facts FREE..

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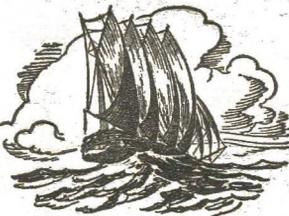
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DEATH FLIES

East

by DANIEL WINTERS

CHAPTER ONE

The Rising Sun

JOHNNY REAGAN kept the Grumman at ten thousand feet and looked for the dawn that was slow in coming. Five minutes before he had taken off from the deck of the *Hawk*. The big carrier was down there on the sea, somewhere below him, depending upon himself and four other picket planes to protect it against a surprise attack. But as soon as the sun sent the first light out of the east, Johnny would be free to take a look

He laid three eggs on the Jap—and hell broke loose below!



around. His impatience for that moment was strong within him, for a scouting plane, in the last of the previous evening's light, had reported a smudge on the horizon that might possibly have been an enemy battlewagon or carrier and Johnny wanted a look at such as that.

His impatience was born of many things; a week's inactivity due to bad weather, news of the sinking of the *Concord*, memories of a bad day he had spent in Pearl Harbor. It had another, more personal source, too.

He had just learned of the death of Willy Warren. And he and Willy had flown a lot of miles together.

His anger was directed at a single target, a flyer he had never met but whose name he would always remember. It was such a vast and flaming thing that he

the sea within seeing distance of the *Sara*.

The story had been told to him by witnesses, and it had not been a pretty tale. The two-place scout coming up against the wind, evidently wounded, trying to reach the haven offered by the carrier riding the long swell. And not three miles from the carrier, in plain sight of all on board, the plane had wobbled a bit, and a parachute had blossomed beneath. Just one chute—and the plane had flown on. It had approached the *Sara*, coming in low, on a decent angle. The landing had almost been successful. Almost.

But with half a mile to go, the crate had suddenly pointed its nose at water, and from three thousand feet had plummeted like a falling shell. It had hit not a hundred yards off the stern of the carrier, but it had gone straight to the bottom.

Two against an army, they waited for the final showdown—a hard-eyed hombre with a debt of blood to pay—and the man who had killed his buddy!

could exercise it with unholy joy against anything his guns might reach. The man he would always remember, a guy named Joe Thorn, was nowhere within reach. Anything handy he could vent his spleen against would do nicely, though. If he couldn't get a crack at Thorn, a Jap carrier would serve the purpose for the moment—but only for the moment.

Sooner or later he would meet up with Thorn, if things worked at all as they should and Death did not decide to cheat him of the chance. When he did, little would be said. But blood would flow to erase the stain of Willy Warren's death.

For Willy had died the way no man should die, an observer in the rear pit of a Douglas, abandoned by his pilot. The pilot had bailed out and the crate had crashed, and not a trace of it or of Willy had ever been found, though it had hit

And those on board had bitterly cursed the insane gallantry of a pilot who could do this thing—get his observer-bomber to take the silk, then try to bring in a battered ship and die in the attempt. And their surprise was as great as their disgust when, picking up the man in the chute, they had discovered it was not Warren, the bomber, but Thorn, the man responsible for the ship and the life of the man behind him.

Thus the story had been told to Johnny Reagan by men whose words he trusted. He knew the thing to be a fact—Warren had died because Thorn had taken to the silk and left him. And he would never forget it.

HE SEARCHED the sky to the east now, and there was a faint thread of light marking the meeting place of air

and water. In a few minutes he would be able to see.

Until then there was nothing to do but think. Think of Willy Warren, and the times they had had together, of the flights and the fights they had enjoyed. They had been together in the Philippines, had helped defend Bataan, had fought over Java and the Coral Sea. Willy Warren was a man to have behind you when you went looking for trouble. He was a guy to have on the bombsight when you had something juicy down below, something that wanted a lot of trouble dropped on its head. Willy could lay them down there on the target.

He dropped them with a precision born of long practice, with the exactitude born of his wonderfully mathematical mind. He dropped them with care and with a full knowledge of the power and destruction unleashed by the combination of machine and mind.

When they had gone through training school, two years before, Willy had said, "Johnny, you can fly these things. It's like driving a truck. You push the wheel here, you kick the rudder bar over there. But bombing is different. It's a beautiful science. We can have fun. You drive me where I want to go and I'll unload the eggs."

And that was how it had been. Willy Warren had made of bombing a great study, a fetish. And when they were aloft and working, Johnny never ceased to marvel at the accuracy with which their load was dropped.

By design and happy chance they had stayed together, on land-based and carrier-based planes, until a month ago. Then Johnny had been given a leave. And when he had returned Willy was working with another outfit. He had just succeeded in affecting a transfer which would have assured their working together again—when Willy had been given permanent leave.

It was not Willy's death that hit Johnny so hard, but the manner of his dying. You give yourself so long, so many days, and after that you're waiting for your ticket. But you like to go out the right way, in a manner truly fitting. Though Willy might have fancied the way he died, in there trying till the last moment, Johnny didn't care for it at all. For Willy had died trying to do a job that was not his own. He had gone west doing another man's work.

That man was one guy Johnny wanted to see.

But what he could see now was the ocean, ten thousand feet beneath his wings, and off to the south was the dim outline of the *Hawk*, rolling along into the wind with white water at her bow. He hiked away from there in a hurry, the Grumman taking him to the north and east, in search of the enemy carrier that might be in the neighborhood. There was no time to think of Willy Warren now, no time to think of anything. He lived in his eyes as the light spread over the sea, and he gave the ship full gun.

He flew for ten minutes before he saw the destroyer. One glance told him it was a Jap ship, and he knew that it might be part of the screen a carrier always has. He angled away from it into a ridge of cloud, and in two minutes he was through the cloud and ten miles away.

He saw the carrier then, just a speck on the horizon, but he had no trouble identifying it by its huge, high bulk. Then he was in the cloud again, holding to a course that would let him out near the ship. He began to be aware of the dryness in his throat, the ice in his stomach. He grinned in anticipation.

The morning would be well filled with work.

He waited impatiently, glancing at his watch and at the instrument panel. When the moment arrived, he pushed the stick away from him and started down the slide.

He burst out of the cloud like a diving hawk, and the sight below him was something to see.

They'd heard him coming. They undoubtedly had picket planes out themselves, and now they were trying to get crates off the deck to meet this sky-borne menace their phones had picked up. But Johnny didn't give them much time to work. He came out of the cloud, spotted the lovely, huge target, and went right on down. His angle of descent had to be altered only a bit, and there was the carrier below him, framed in his wind-shield, growing larger by the moment as he plummeted on it.

THEY got two planes away before he hit. They got out from under him and circled away, trying to get some altitude. But then he was down, almost on the flight deck, and his first move was to smear the deck. He had a half-dozen fifty-pound bombs stowed in the belly of the Grumman, and he let three of them go, in a lovely, precise line along the deck. He was so close that he bounced from the concussion when they hit, and he grinned with fine good humor when he thought of the panic beneath his wings. He threw a quick look over his shoulder as he cleared the end of the carrier and began to turn. The sight that met his eyes was a pleasing thing to a man wound up for killing.

His first three bombs had made three wonderful hits, and three craters flamed redly. The wreckage of planes was strewn along the deck, and off to one side, near the control tower, a plane had exploded against the structure. Johnny cursed happily at the damage he had done.

He went up and away for his turn, and now that he had made the carrier momentarily ineffective, he cut in his radio and called the *Hawk*. He gave his message three times, quickly—target, position, type of target. Then he turned and was back

flying over the Jap plane carrier again.

They were waiting for him, this time. The two planes that had succeeded in getting off wanted no part of the ack-ack screen that the gun batteries were throwing up. And if he had stopped to think about it Johnny himself would not have gone back in there with so wide a smile.

But it didn't seem important, the stuff they were throwing up. It wasn't nice, but his anger, his elation at this chance to hammer, ruled out all other emotions and considerations. He knew the big babies from the *Hawk* would be over here soon. They'd come with heavy stuff, quarter and half-ton bombs and torpedoes. The Jap carrier, in a matter of hours, would be a twisted piece of junk lying at the bottom of the sea. He didn't have much time to enjoy himself—

He got rid of the three remaining bombs in a hurry, turned on one wingtip and roared along the deck with his guns going, cutting at the gun crew. It would be good for the bombers from the *Hawk* if some of this a.a. stuff were out of commission.

And he did a job. He was vicious, unthinking of his own safety, and it was the utter recklessness of his attack that saved him from instant ruin. He saw the figures scatter and fall under the heavy rain of steel he threw, and in a moment he knew it was time for him to be getting out of here. The two planes that had taken off were up there waiting for him, and he would have to deal with them before many moments had passed.

The damage he had done to the carrier was relatively slight, for the heavy steel splinter deck beneath the flight deck's surface could be repaired in time. But there would be no time.

He got out. Out and up, and the two carrier planes were there waiting for him. He got one right away. The guy was careless in his rage and came straight in. Johnny went up, whipped the Grum-

man over on its back and came down. The Jap plane was dead in his sights and all he had to do was hold the button down for a two-second burst. The Jap ship lost a wing as if it had been snipped off by a giant scissor, and it simply fell right out of the sky.

He didn't even glance at it, after that first moment. There was lead whanging into his ship, and he turned quickly and got out of the line of fire. The ship roared past him, and he pulled the tiring Grumman around and gave it the gun.

The Jap turned. But he turned slowly and with a fatal sloppiness, and Johnny wasted no time. The guns sang out again and his teeth rattled with the vibration. He watched his tracer fall short, and he raised the nose quickly, and that was all there was to be done. The Jap plane shook visibly under the terrific pounding; then it seemed to fall apart slowly. Johnny watched the tail hinge down suddenly,

then fall off. The plane stayed on an even keel for just a moment, and in that time the pilot had raised the hatch and jumped. The unguided ship turned its nose up to the sky, and both wings dropped off tiredly.

Johnny headed for home.

HE BARELY made it. The Grumman was a limping bird, exhausted by its efforts and the beating it had taken. He met the *Hawk* and he had to wait for the last of the bombers to get off. He was nervous now from the reaction, and he eyed the gas gauge in a worried manner. But he had enough juice to keep him aloft until the proper moment, and they flagged him in, and the wheels dropped from the Grumman's belly and he set her down with skill and precision. He rolled the few feet the drags would give him, then cut the switch and sat there for a moment, thankful for the feeling of solidity the

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Hawk gave him. Then he climbed from the pit and a mechanic took her out of the way.

He went down and made his report then. All the news he had was good news and they were glad to hear it. Reports kept coming in every moment, and while he was there, they received word that the Jap carrier, identified as the *Mitatogi*, was listing badly and would sink within the hour. She was aflame from stem to stern.

The flight officer, Lieutenant Commander Harlow, grinned at Johnny. "Reagan," he said, "you got in a nice morning's work. We got the carrier and a cruiser and two destroyers from the escorting screen. We lost three ships. They reported that the carrier wasn't in very good shape when they arrived."

Johnny said, "I had a few packages to mail. I was lucky. They dropped right in the box."

Harlow nodded. "It was a nice job, Reagan. We didn't lose one plane to the carrier. The cruisers and destroyers scored the hits on our ships." He lit a cigarette. "You have to pay for anything you get. Some of the boys won't be coming back, but we got a bargain. It's the way it goes."

Johnny nodded. "I know." He'd been around when a huge price had been paid and nothing at all had been received. But this was different from Pearl Harbor. Much better. This way you got something.

Harlow said, "You'll probably get a medal or two for this. Good ones. But right now you'd rather have some sleep, I know. You can turn in."

And Johnny turned in. He was asleep as his head hit the pillow. He'd run through a lifetime in five minutes over that carrier. He was tired.

When he awoke four hours later, it was strange that his first thought was not of the morning's business. He awoke thinking of Willy Warren and a guy named Thorn. It was only when he'd lighted a

cigarette that he thought of the carrier and the work that had been done this day. His mouth tightened and the cold light came into his eyes and he was pleased.

Then he forgot about that for a time and wondered about Thorn. The man was always in his mind now, and though he had never seen him, really knew little about him, Johnny had a mental picture of what Thorn looked like. Not a pleasant picture.

He had inquired of the right people and in the correct places, but no one seemed to know much about Thorn—where he was stationed, what he was doing, how a guy could get in touch with him.

It had puzzled him at first, this lack of information concerning Thorn. But he got it, after a bit. Everyone knew how close he and Willy Warren had been, and most of the Navy knew how Willy had died. So when he asked about Thorn, they knew what he wanted. And they denied him the knowledge he sought because they were afraid of what he would do with it.

HE DRESSED and went up to the wardroom and had something to eat. There were only a few flyers on hand, for the rest were getting a well-earned sleep. The far-reaching picket and patrol planes had not sighted an enemy ship, and the *Hawk* was proceeding on her course.

It was then that Harlow came through the room, a radiogram in his hand. He glanced about; then his eyes hit Johnny and his face cleared as he came over.

"I have a job for a gent like you," he said. "Quite a business. You want it?"

Johnny nodded. "Sure. Give me the dope."

"You're to pick up a passenger," Harlow told him. "A very special passenger, from this—" he waved the sheet of paper in his hand. "You're to pick him up, but we don't know just where he is."

Johnny looked at him. "Say it again."

Harlow explained. He got up while he was talking and Johnny followed him to a chart tacked to the wall. "We're here," he said, and pointed to a place on the chart. Johnny nodded.

Harlow continued. "About here—" he placed his finger on a group of tiny specks some four hundred miles from the *Hawk's* position—"is the gent you're to bring back. He's on an island in this group. I've an idea how big the island is, and from the best charts we have it seems that your man, if he's still there and alive, is on a chunk of land some four miles long by two miles wide."

"How's the landing field?"

"There doesn't happen to be any," Harlow said. His tone was apologetic. "You're to find the place if you can, look it over, and see if you can set the ship down. If you decide you can't, you drop supplies on that damn island some place. It's a cinch the guy—if he is still there—will hear you and see you when you circle the place. He'll start a fire or wave a shirt or something, and you can bounce these rations off his head."

Johnny considered the thing. He'd be able to find the island, all right. It was the second of the group, heading in from the west. A few mountains, a reef over which the swells would be breaking in this sort of a sea, twin-peaked mountains he could make no mistake about.

But the man—there was something else again. You don't find places on a small island where you can set a ship down.

He asked Harlow, "Why the big rush? I mean, using a plane— Can't this guy wait for a ship?"

Harlow looked at him. "Our friends, the Japanese," he said, "are thought to be in this group of islands. Their planes and ships have been seen in the vicinity. This gent has to get off there in a hurry. He

can't wait for a ship and run the risk of being taken prisoner."

"He must be a mighty important guy. Who the hell is he?"

"I don't know," Harlow said.

Johnny said, "What the hell!" He stared at Harlow. "You go to all this trouble, and you don't even know who the guy is? What's the story?"

"All I know," Harlow told him, waving the paper in his hand, "is in here. It's from CINCUS, and there's only one person higher up the ladder than him. The guy you're picking up must be important as all hell. That is all I know. I was told to get him off that island as quickly as possible—if possible, and we're wasting time talking. Let's get to work."

In ten minutes Johnny was in the pilot's seat of a two-place Douglas, and the engine was good and warm. The seat behind him was vacant, and this was unusual and a reminder of the job before him. He'd had his course marked off, the probable weather he'd meet, and there was a bundle of supplies, on a small chute, to be dropped over if he couldn't set the plane down. Harlow waved, a worried expression on his face, and Johnny got the signal from the flight officer. He went off the deck of the *Hawk*, into the wind, and he wondered, as he always did, if he'd be able to pick up the big carrier again.

His cruising range was limited. He had enough gas in his tanks for the trip, but it would be cutting things fine. The round trip on the chart was eight hundred miles, and by the time he found the island he sought, allowing for a possible error and the changed position of the *Hawk* when he picked her up again, he had a thousand miles to fly before he hit the deck again. It would be a bit of traveling.

It was a hell of a job Harlow had given him.

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IN TWO hours of flying, all Johnny saw was a great deal of water down below. He was flying at ten thousand feet for greater visibility, for he didn't want to waste any time spotting the island. He knew he should be within sight of it by now, and five minutes work with the glasses brought land into view, off to the east. He changed course a trifle and in a moment raised the first island of the group. Beyond it, and smaller, was the second dot of land, the one he was looking for. It was unmistakable, with the twin peaks rising to the sky. As he approached, Johnny wondered how in hell a man was supposed to put a plane down there.

The island, he saw as he came closer, was a rugged place. The two peaks which were its main characteristics, were surrounded by lesser hills, sharply defined by steep gullies and tremendous cliffs that bordered bays reaching in from the sea. Johnny came in over the place, dropped down to a thousand feet and gave it a thorough onceover.

He circled the island once, slowly, and discovered one thing. If he could set the Douglas down here, he was a bit better than he thought he was. There wasn't a foot of clear land on the island. Matted forest and heavy undergrowth covered every inch of ground—and, even if a space had been cleared, the topography of the place was such that a bird would have difficulty setting down. The hills and gullies made a landing impossible.

Then Johnny saw the beach. There was about three-quarters of a mile of it, running along the west side of the island. Johnny went down low and gave it a good look. It appealed to him, somehow. It was only about a hundred feet wide, but a receding tide had left it perfectly level and hard-packed. Johnny wondered if he could set the ship down there.

Even as he thought of it, he saw the figure at the edge of the forest that lined the beach. It was one man, and he stood

well within the shelter of the woods and waved the remains of a shirt at the plane. Johnny swooped a bit lower for a better look.

The man was tall and blond, and he was burned almost black by the sun. There was a gun slung on his hip and his clothes were in rags. He was shoeless, and a week's beard covered his face. He looked as if he had been making tough weather of it.

Johnny knew it must be the man he'd been sent to pick up. He looked at the man again, glanced at the beach, then saw which way the wind was blowing along the tops of the trees. He made one wide turn with the Douglas and came up into the light breeze and headed for the beach.

He hit softly and held his breath. The sand supported the weight of the plane evenly, and she rolled along as Johnny killed the engine. He scanned the terrain ahead of him for possible ruts—but when he finally did see the rut in the sand, it was too late to do anything about it. He tried to turn the Douglas, but he didn't have sufficient speed. He kept his fingers crossed and hoped she'd stop entirely before he reached the small depression that stretched across the beach.

She almost stopped—but not quite, and Johnny felt the gentle bump and held his breath.

Then came the creaking of the wheel support and he cursed when he heard the sudden snap of breaking metal. The Douglas lurched down abruptly on the port side and came to a halt. Just a split second after the damage had been done—

Johnny cursed himself for not having examined the beach more closely, even though he knew it had been almost impossible to see the tiny dip in the sand.

He got out of the ship slowly, for he was tired. He looked at the undercarriage and saw that a pin had snapped, in the left wheel brace, and the plane was inclined to that side. He knew he'd never

get off the beach with the plane in this shape, and he cursed softly.

"It was a hell of a nice landing," a voice behind him said.

HE TURNED and saw the big blond guy he had spotted from the plane. The man was breathing quickly, and Johnny knew he had run from the trees on the edge of the beach to the plane.

Johnny told him, "It was all right, but not for long enough. I busted a pin in there and we don't roll until it's fixed. And to fix it you've got to jack this baby up and put a new pin in, and I see no jack around here, nor do I see a pin. And that means the Douglas lays where she is and we are out of luck."

The other man cursed. "I thought you'd come in all right. The ship can stay here, but we can't. We've got to get off this beach, pal—and soon. We ought to be in the air now."

Johnny shook his head. "Not unless you've got feathers. She won't roll with the wheel in that shape, and I don't see how the hell we can fix it." He looked at the man, then. "Why the rush? You seem to have been here for a while. Don't you like the place?"

"The island is fine," the big guy told him. "It was lovely until yesterday. Yesterday came visitors—six Japs in a small sloop. They're on the other side of the island. . . . They were, that is. After hearing you and seeing you, they're probably right over in the woods there someplace handy."

They were on the seaward side of the plane, and the fuselage was between themselves and the woods. Johnny peered underneath. He swept the shoreline with his eyes, but there was no movement there, nothing to alarm.

He said, "How wide is this place?"

"About three miles."

Johnny thought of the rugged country that lay between this shore and the other.

"It'll take a little while for them to make the trip. I think we must have an hour or so before they can get here anyway, even if they saw me right off the bat. They know you're here?"

The blond guy shook his head. "They have no idea there's anyone else on the island."

"Okay. They probably figure I came down short of gas, or something. Of course they'll be over. We've just got to do something before they come."

He looked at the Douglas. It was a sad affair. It had the appearance of a horse with a lame leg. It sat there, down a bit on one side, as if regretful of the accident, as if waiting for the many mechanics it had always known to come and right the trouble quickly. It looked impatient.

And Johnny knew there was nothing much could be done about it. That plane was heavy, and there were no means at hand of boosting it so that a person could get at the trouble. And if it were boosted, the equipment that would correct the trouble was lacking.

He looked at the other man. "We have an hour," he said. "You got any ideas? I think we better put a match in the right place and get the hell out of here. You must know this place pretty well. We can hide out until we get a thought. How long you been here?"

"Three days," was the answer.

Johnny looked at him. "You got a radio? How did you manage to get word out that you were here?"

"Yesterday a Fortress passed over," the man told him. "I have a flashlight. I signaled him and gave him the dope. I was lucky he saw me."

Johnny nodded. "Damned lucky. How the hell did you get here?"

"A rubber boat. Five days ago I got dumped in the drink. The boat held up long enough for me to get ashore here."

"You all alone?"

The man nodded. "I buried a pal in the

sand up the beach a way, three days ago. The pilot. He was dead when we hit the beach."

Johnny looked at him. The thought, the premonition, surged through him like a wave. He said, coldly, "What's your name, Mac?"

"Thorn," the man said, "Joe Thorn."

JOHNNY hit him. He didn't waste any time. The emotion, the roaring anger, came to the surface and he acted without thinking. He hit Thorn with a steaming right hand and the man went down. Johnny stood over him for a moment, and now that the anger had found a release, he was filled with a vast joy. He waited for Thorn to get up.

Thorn got up. There was surprise smeared across his face with the blood that Johnny's blow had drawn. He got to his feet and rolled with Johnny's next punch, took it on the side of his head. Then the two big men battled it out.

Johnny didn't feel Thorn's punches. He was filled with his mingled anger and pleasure, and thoughts of Willy Warren. He punched away with a joy and viciousness he had never known until now, and when Thorn dumped him, he got to his feet unhurt by the shock of the blow that felled him, and waded forward in the heavy sand to take the heavy punishment that Thorn was dealing out.

And finally the silent battle was over. Thorn lay on his back in the sand, supporting himself on his elbows. His face was battered and bloody and he looked at Johnny out of dazed and pain-filled eyes. Johnny walked to him, murder written on his features, his hands opening and closing in anticipation of the grip they would enjoy, in a moment, on Thorn's throat.

And then Thorn's eyes cleared a bit, and his right hand went down and came up with the automatic that had been holstered at his side. His bloody lips moved.

"That will be enough of that," he said.

"Stand just where you are. Don't move!"

Johnny stopped. His rage could understand the menace of the gun, the futility of action against it.

Thorn sat up, the gun leveled. "I don't know what it's all about. Quite a surprise, and quite a time. But whatever bug you have in your bonnet will have to wait. You'll have your chance, but not now. We have work to do—we have to get out of here."

Johnny had cooled. The action had purged him of the blind rage, and he could think now, and talk.

He said, "What happened to your pilot? You leave him in the ship when it fell? You make a practice of being the only one to get out of a loused-up ship?"

There was understanding in Thorn's eyes now. He said, "You've heard things."

Johnny nodded. "I heard about Willy Warren. The way you treated that guy. I was fond of Willy. He was quite a gent."

Thorn nodded. "Quite a guy. A nice guy. You know him?"

"Yeah," Johnny said, "I knew him."

Thorn's voice became hard and cold. He said, "Okay. So Willy was a nice guy. He is now not with us. Gone, like a lot of nice guys. And if we stand here beating our gums about him, we will soon be gone guys too. Let's get going. We have to get out of here."

Johnny looked at the slightly lopsided Douglas. "There's a pin busted in there. You got to raise it and put a new pin in." He didn't give a damn whether or not he got off the island. All he wanted was a chance to get his hands on this guy.

Thorn looked at the sunken wheel. "We have no jack. We have no pin."

"A genius," Johnny smirked. "The guy's a genius."

"So we jack it up," Thorn said, "and we find something we can use for a pin. And quick. We haven't got much time."

He looked at Johnny. "You gonna be-

have yourself or do I have to keep this thing in my hand?"

Johnny thought about that. He knew Thorn would never permit him to get close enough to get his hands on the man, and if he made a rush for it, Thorn looked to be the sort of a guy who had handled a gun before and could get it out of a holster in plenty of time to use it. There was no sense in being stupid. Besides, he didn't like the idea of staying here. He had a lot of scores to settle with a lot of little yellow men, and there was one big deal—the one with the man before him—which would never be finally arranged until they got out of here.

He said, "I behave—until we're out of here. Then you better keep that gun in your hand, because I'll get to you."

Thorn holstered the gun. "You feel strongly about me, don't you, Mac?"

"Very," Johnny told him. "Very strongly."

Thorn said, "Come on. We need a couple of logs."

THEY hastened up the strip of sand to the edge of the wood that bordered the beach. They searched along the shore for a few minutes and Thorn finally called, "Over here, Mac."

He had found a long, strong, fairly slender log which could be used as a lever. They had to find two more, shorter logs. One for a fulcrum and the other to jam under the base of the wing when they had lifted it to a decent height.

Johnny said, "We'll never be able to lift that thing."

"We'd damn well better lift it," was all Thorn would say.

They found the other two blocks and lugged the three down to the Douglas. As they worked, Johnny asked, "How come you're such an important piece of pork? How come I gotta curl myself up on this hunk of beach just to give you a ride?"

Thorn told him. "I know a lot. I've

been scouting around these islands for two weeks. I got a headful of information that we can use. I've got to get the hell out of here and tell someone. I was sent here to get the dope, and the guy who came to get me was on time and picked me up. We got lost in a storm, the first half hour, and we crashed. He was hurt badly and died on the rubber boat. Then they sent you."

Johnny said bitterly, "Bad luck surrounds you like a cloud. When this thing is over you can get a job as an executioner any time."

Thorn looked at him. "You make a guy feel good," he said.

"I'll make you feel good," Johnny told him. "Some day I'll make you feel just fine."

They worked hard. They jammed a small log under the wing of the Douglas, just where it joined the fuselage, then put the lever in place and went to work. It was a brutal job.

On their first effort, the Douglas lifted not at all.

Thorn said, "Come on, Mac. Put a little muscle in it. You're not lifting a pound of butter."

Johnny cursed and bent his back to the job. They were both big guys, and the lever was long and the fulcrum cleverly and correctly placed. But the Douglas was heavy. They nudged it up a trifle; then it stuck, and Johnny said, "Mister, we have one hell of a job."

Thorn grunted, "It isn't the first tough one I've had. Get shovin' on this thing. We gotta get the ship up in the air."

They heaved, and the plane came up noticeably; then the lever slipped off the stump holding it and the ship sagged to the ground again. Johnny cursed and rested his hands on his hips. He said, "Jackson, we're wasting our time. We better go find ourselves a place to spend the night."

Thorn looked at him. "You find a

place to spend this night, and all the nights that are left to you will be spent there. The hell with that! I want to get out of here. In a few minutes we're going to have trouble, and I don't mean with the ship. Let's get working."

They heaved, and Johnny felt the ship come up, and there was a joy within him that the two of them could do this thing. The plane lifted, and the wheel was clear of the ground. Johnny felt the blood pounding in his veins from the effort, and then he heard Thorn gasp, "Can you hold her?"

Johnny couldn't speak. He grunted and nodded his head, and suddenly the great weight was all his, and his body was doing alone the work that Thorn's had shared. He bore down upon the log with all his strength.

It seemed that he held the plane aloft for hours. It seemed that all the weight of the world was on his back and his hands and on the great muscles of his arms. It seemed that he could bear it no longer. Then, through the fog of his effort, his terrific strain, he heard Thorn's voice dimly. The man said, "All right, Muscles. Let it go. But gently."

And gently he released the weight of the plane. Gently he let her down, and suddenly there was no strain, no universe to sustain. The weight was taken by the log propped under the Douglas' wing. Johnny stepped clear of the lever—and the plane stayed up.

They both looked at it for a moment; then Thorn turned to Johnny and stared at him. "I didn't believe one man could do it, but it was the only way we had." He turned to the plane again. "We need another log to support her." He glanced up to the edge of the timber, then said, "You scout through the boxes and see if you can find a pin we can use. I'll go get the log."

They had removed the tool boxes from the Douglas before they started, and now

Johnny went to work, looking for the pin they would need. Thorn went up to the timber.

Johnny found the pin. He found it and tried it experimentally, and it damn near fitted. It would do, with luck, and he felt within him the glow of good fortune. All he had to do was to climb upon the wing of the Douglas, make the final adjustment, turn the ship so she headed in the other direction, and they were all set.

He could do it all in thirty seconds. He could set the pin in place and start the motor, and in a few minutes he would be in the air. And Thorn would be left upon the beach. Thorn and a half-dozen Japs who would eventually get him. It was a pleasant thought.

He entertained it for a moment. He tested the ship's balance with his hands. The single log under her now would suffice, would hold him until he got the pin into place. It would be an easy thing to do.

Then he rid himself of the idea. He didn't want to get Thorn that way. The hell with that! He wanted Thorn under his hands, or under his personal guns. He wanted him the hard way, and did not care to have their problem settled by several little yellow men he did not like, and whom he would be glad to kill along with Thorn.

He raised himself carefully on the wing of the Douglas, reached down inside the wheel mechanism and inserted the pin. It fitted a bit loosely, but he knew it would stay. He lay upon the wing edge, admiring the good fortune that had befallen them—or himself.

And then he heard the string of shots from the timberline and felt the slugs hit into the tail of the Douglas.

HE knew what had happened. The Japs Thorn had spoken of had come across the island, spotted the ship and himself, and had brought a light machine gun

into play. They had him for a dead duck.

The fuselage screened him for a moment, and he peered over the edge of it and saw the wisp of smoke that betrayed the gun's position. And he saw them. He counted four. Thorn had said a half-dozen. The other two were undoubtedly somewhere in the neighborhood, but there were four around the gun. As he looked they unloosed another burst and he felt the ship tremble under the beating.

And a fine rage enveloped him. They were beating hell out of a ship that had taken him a long way and which would be his means of leaving this place. They were potting him like a pigeon in a most unsporting way. They would have a little surprise.

He crawled into the back seat of the Douglas. He swiveled the gun carefully, hiding the movement as well as he could. He cocked it swiftly and let it go.

The burst was beautiful. The lead roared around the Jap gun, ripping the sand into little jets, pounding into the bodies of the men behind the slender piece of steel. He let the deadly hose play for almost ten seconds; then he cut it off quickly.

The Jap gun was silenced. They had not been expecting a reply. It was fine to be able to surprise some people.

He thought of the two other Japs, back there in the brush somewhere, and he thought of Thorn. Suddenly he had some concern for the man. They had probably seen him go back to the edge of the forest and had stalked him.

The shots rang out then. Two of them, spaced evenly. They came from a point midway between the Jap gun and the spot where Thorn had entered the wood. Johnny waited tensely, the gun swung on the spot.

Then Thorn walked out of the woods. The automatic was in his hand, but he held it carelessly, and on his face was a grin.

He called, "Hold that thing, Mac. The party is over."

And in spite of himself Johnny felt some relief. He hated this man, but he was glad to see him alive, somehow. It was a funny thing.

He stayed in the rear pit, at the gun, and Thorn came to the plane. He said, "I see we don't need another log. She stays up on her hind legs."

"She's fixed," Johnny said briefly. "Where were you when the ball game started?"

"Just coming out of the woods with a log. They apparently didn't know about me. Two of the monkeys were walking along, trying to get up the beach to take you from the other direction. They walked right into me."

Johnny looked at him. This was a handy guy, no matter what his faults. He said, "Come on aboard. Let's get the hell away from here before anything else happens. I got a date with a carrier. They won't wait. And I have a few things to say to you."

Thorn looked at him. "About Willy Warren?"

Johnny nodded. Nothing this guy could do or say would erase that business.

Thorn looked at him for a long moment. "Something just occurred to me. Something silly. What's your name, Mac?"

Johnny said, "To you, Thorn, my name is simply lots of trouble."

"Are you a guy named Johnny Reagan?"

Johnny stared. It got him down. He just nodded his head.

THORN met his eyes. He said flatly, baldly, "Just before he died, Willy Warren said to me, through the phone, 'Tell Johnny the next beer is on me.'"

Johnny looked at him, and he knew his amazement was plain in his eyes. Things began to happen inside him. He

said, "Go over that again, will you?"

Thorn looked at him. He said, "Willy told me, 'Tell Johnny the next beer is on me.' A funny thing to say. I thought you might understand."

And Johnny was shocked. For that was something Willy Warren would say only to a man he liked and trusted, and something he would say only at that last moment when he'd know, positively, that there would be nothing more said—that the last page had been reached.

For it was a phrase Willy Warren had always used when the going was really tough. There had been a few times when they'd been in truly tough spots and it had seemed they just couldn't get out. Then Willy would say over the phones, "Johnny, the next beer'll be on me." A joke. There wouldn't be any more beers, so Willy offered to buy them.

A silly thing. A thing very private and possessing meaning to only one other person. A thing said only in the times of great danger, under the stress of a great strain. A thing to be said only when the last chip had been played.

A thing that Willy Warren would say to a third person only in that moment of utter finality when the ball game was entirely over.

Johnny said, "Tell me more."

"We'd been out looking for information, and we got what we were looking for and were on our way back. Four Zeroes hit us and we got two of them. Willy did, from the rear pit. The other two got us, before a couple of our fighter planes came along and chased them. Willy got it bad, in the lungs. He hung around long enough to see that the Jap planes were taken care of, but he was hit too hard, and then he had to give it up. He just whispered that last funny little business to me before he left. I nursed the Douglas almost all the way back to the *Sara*; then she wouldn't go any farther and I had to take to the silk. Willy stayed with the

plane. There was no way I could get him out, no reason to get him out. He was dead. I made sure of that. All I had to do was look at his chest to know. I left him there."

"He was dead," Johnny said. "You're sure of that? You didn't go out and leave him there, hurt, maybe, and not able to take the ship in himself?"

Thorn looked at him. "He was dead. I wouldn't bother going to all this trouble to explain to anyone else, but it's all right with you. I know that you were important to Willy. To you I'll explain. You satisfied?"

Johnny looked at him. Thorn was speaking the truth. It was in his eyes, in his bearing. Here was a man who would not leave a pal in a busted plane and take to the chute to save himself. Here was a tough guy, a good guy, a guy Willy Warren would have liked and trusted. Here was a man to whom Willy would have said, "Tell Johnny the next beer is on me."

HE SAID to Thorn, "It's all right. It's all right and I'm sorry about the mess. I didn't understand. I didn't know you."

Thorn grinned at him. "It's all right. You gave me a hell of a time, back there a bit, but the matter seems to have straightened itself out. You satisfied?"

Johnny looked at him. He thought of the moment when Thorn had been walking down the beach and he himself had been set behind the .50 caliber in the rear seat. The temptation had been enormous. And so had Thorn's behavior—walking down like that, as if unaware of the opportunity he was presenting to Johnny.

Johnny nodded. "I'm satisfied. Sometimes I get an idea too fast and it stays too long."

Thorn said, "You are excused. And I'll save you a few questions. They have

me doing special work. I know this part of the world. I used to sail around here, for copra. In these islands. So they set me looking here and there. These little spits of land are mighty ticklish spots." He waved a hand. "Those bays you saw as you came in. Deep. Sheltered by the cliffs. These people—" he indicated the dead Japs—"have been industrious. They store supplies in many places, and ships and subs come in and restock and refuel. The Navy sends me out to look in the likely places. Sometimes someone gets hurt. Like Willy."

Johnny began to understand.

"People misunderstood about Willy. A lot of them. You didn't do much to correct a wrong impression."

Thorn looked at him. "That isn't my job—correcting wrong impressions. I've got other work to do. It doesn't matter what most people think."

Johnny could understand that. He felt that way himself.

He said, "What the hell are we waiting for? The *Hawk* is rolling along out there. Let's get going."

He got into the front seat and Thorn grinned and climbed in behind him. Just before he turned on the big power plant, Johnny said, "And listen, Thorn. From now on you've got a permanent chauffeur. You got someone to do the driving. I used to do it for Willy. With you it'll be fun, too. You get in my sort of trouble."

Thorn said, "You're hired, mister. The pay isn't good and the work is hard, but you've got a job."

Johnny grinned and turned on the juice and the big motor roared out. He swung the plane in a moment and headed down the beach. It was funny how you made some friends. He set her rolling down the beach. It had been quite a day.

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"Kick that motor over, kid. She'll carry you to hell and back. And when you get away, remember to say one last prayer—for the guy who stays behind!"

CHAPTER ONE

Hirohito's White Warlord

IT WAS in Onomichi or Fukuyama—one of those crowded, roaring paper-and-wood cities along the Honshu shore of the Inland Sea—that Major Kirby Collins of the flying marines saw that damned white man's face a moment, amidst all the swarms of brown-faced, bullet-headed, slant-eyed throngs which packed the narrow streets to scream and jeer at him and young Mallon.

White face, white man, among those brown Yamato swarms. Swimming suddenly into focus, like a dead bleached chestnut on a wooded hillside—like a white maggot in a nest of ants. He was thin as a pole, half-naked, filthy, wearing some kind of long dirty yellow skirt from loins to ankles, and wooden *getas*. But he was six feet tall, and white.

Blond-gray scraggy beard upon his face. Red-rimmed blue eyes. A blue tattooing on his chest. A globe and anchor. "*Semper—*"

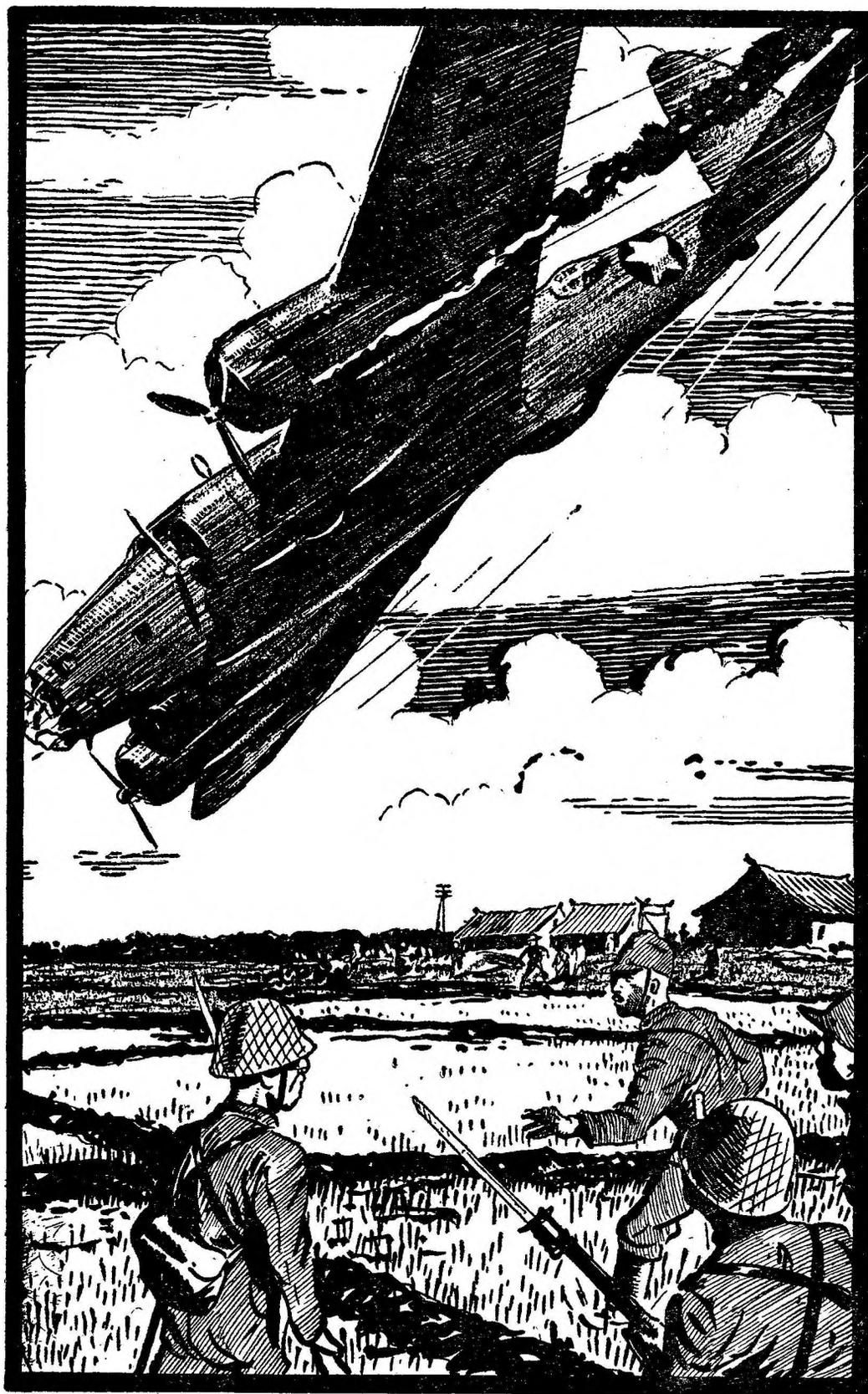
Impenetrably in that instant, the eyes

of that apparition glared at Kirby Collins, pin-pointed, blue as ice. And into Kirby's mind there flashed a memory of golden wings, and of a bare blue morning in San Diego six years ago. A little silver ship had gone rocketing up into the immense blue sky, while on the field below men stood watching it with pride and expectation. Up like a new-milled bullet, bright and clean. High up, circling in wide sweeps, no bigger than a gnat. Miles up, heading on its last sweep, and out of sight.

Never to be seen again.

The mystery of the new Rockwell-Omega, no ship like it ever built before, which had vanished in the empty sky, March, 1936, on its first test flight.

He was dead! He had been dead six years. His swift marvelous little rocket ship had shed its wings, and plunged into deep, fathomless Pacific waters. He was lost and drowned at sea. The soupfin shark had eaten his flesh, and the phosphorescent worm his bones. His rusted engine lay in the bottom ooze, six thousand miles away. His name had been crossed off the register of those who wear



The crippled Fortress came down—and the brown men were waiting!

the golden wings long, long ago—but there he was!

No starved beachcomber, either, though he was as drunk as one. The filthy robe he was sprawling on was of the heaviest and richest silk. The girls behind the wall must all be his, and the strutting brown soldiers were saluting him as they passed. He had got his price.

"You damned, you double-damned—" breathed Kirby.

But there was no word for it. A renegade white Simon Girty among the Indians. Judas in hell.

HONSHU, the Yamato's great main island. The swarming cities of the Inland Sea. Brown short-legged men in kimonos and straw hats, in breechclouts and New York-styled polo shirts, in oily dungarees with bandannaed foreheads, in dusty shapeless cotton uniforms, shouting, surging, expectorating towards Kirby and Bart Mallon.

Brown bobbed-hair *mogos* from the shops and factories, brown painted Yoshiwari dolls, brown women with broad flat faces under fantastic pompadours of horselike blue-black hair. Fat brown slobber-chinned infants, hoisted up on their coolie parents' shoulders, getting a look with their expressionless black eyes at the *keto-jin*, the white hairy devils from beyond the eastern sea, whose broad rich land would some day be their land, when the last of their pale gorilla race, like the aboriginal white Ainus of Nippon itself, had been exterminated from the earth.

City after crowded smoky factory city, belching and hammering out the instruments of war. Street after endless narrow street was packed with the brown ant men jeering at Bart Mallon and Kirby Collins. The firecrackers exploded beneath their feet, and the red-circled victorious banners flapped across the streets overhead.

In their dirty bandages and torn rags

of uniforms, in native straw-soled sandals to replace the shoes which had been taken from them, Kirby and the pale young bomber of the Fortress went stumbling along. Their hands were roped behind them.

In front of them, mounted on a high horse, the little spidery brown colonel of the Household Guard rode with chest thrust out, huge straight-handled samurai sword dangling. From his horse's tail hung the torn and defiled banner of the sunset and the starry night, which Bart Mallon's young bride had given him as a good luck token.

Banzai! Banzai! Banzai!

It was the old Indian game, Kirby thought. They had all been blood-cousins of these Yamatos, when you got down to it. It was natural their instincts were the same. They always took their captives around from village to village and made them run the gauntlet, before getting down to the final business. The main difference was that these Yams had a lot more and bigger villages, and there were a hundred million of them instead of only a few stray thousands. But it was the old Indian gauntlet, all the same—before the fire and stake.

"How are you feeling, boy?" he said from the side of his teeth, to the pale, red-haired boy stumbling along beside him.

But there was no need of asking. "What day is it, sir?" Bart Mallon's lips moved, with a hazy jerk of his head.

"Monday," Kirby said, tight-lipped. "It's still Monday."

Keto-jin! Keto-jin! Keto-jin! The sweat and the sickness and the sleepless shame of it. A brown monkey boy darted out and picked up pieces of steaming offal in his hand, hurling them at Kirby's face as he ducked. A bunch of firecrackers exploded at his heels. The knot about his swollen wrists tightened, with a jerk of agonizing pain. If he could only get his

hands free for two minutes, and tear loose that flag, and strangle that damned brown spider on the horse with it, he would take whatever they had to give him in the way of butts and bayonets, and die happy.

"Today is Monday, sir?"

"Yes."

THIRTY hours since they had come whipping and blazing down in their shattered Fortress, in yesterday's bright terrible noon, from the cold clean freezing winds six miles above the gray-green Yamato island shores and the hazy purple sea. Casey Smith and Bugs O'Ryan, the pilot and navigator, had been dead at their posts, and Kirby had pushed Smith's body aside to grab the shattered wheel.

All engines were dead and burning. Half of the right wing was gone, and half the rudder. At his command Roxie and Perkins and two of the gunners whose names he hadn't got had bailed out at five thousand feet. But the screaming Zeroes, whipping around like a hatful of bees, had buzzsawed them into dead meat as they dropped, though they had delayed the pulling of their cords. Bart Mallon hadn't bailed out, lying unconscious on the floor. Kirby had thought him dead. Nor had Sergeant Finch, the stern gunner, cut off with fire eating up his legs, but still serving out the guns at those screaming yellow red-eyed sons.

A good man, Sergeant Finch of the Bomber Command. You had to hand it to the army. All of them. They had the stuff.

Only Bart Mallon had been still alive in the great burning shattered crate with Kirby when they took earth in a roaring belly landing, like an express train piling up against a wall, and the brown men had rushed them, screaming. He had tried to land in fields that looked as little inhabited as anywhere, but the ant men were everywhere. It was a wonder they

hadn't torn them limb from limb, right there in that moment, the dead as well as the living. For there were the great fires in Kobe and Tokyo, and the blasted factories and oil depots, and the great naval yard at Nagasaki had been smashed, with three of their great new fifty-thousand-ton battleships upon the ways. Hate and terror was in the brown ant people, but the crackling, shouting soldiers had driven the mobs back. They had been taken, half conscious, for the questioning.

They had been taken alive to tell what base they had flown from. What other planes were there? How many of them there had been—how long it had taken them to come—what bomb loads they had carried—

To all those shouted questions, in gibbering half-intelligible English punctuated by slaps and enraged screams, Bart Mallon had only replied with a dazed muttering, and Kirby Collins of the marines had closed his grim tight lips, running his tongue around inside them.

Which had seemed to enrage them more.

But they had ways of opening lips. Any man's lips can be opened, in spite of all the story books, given time and the proper treatment. He knew that. Drive a man into a particular state of insanity, and he talks without being aware of it. All the strength of the mind is gone, all personality.

He would hold out as long as possible, that was all. He would make it tough for them to crack him. There was another and more intensive questioning still to come, he sensed, perhaps in Kobe or Tokyo itself. With some more cunning interrogator, a better master of English, clever to find any weakness. In the meantime there was this Indian gauntlet-running to give the screaming brown millions a sense of victory in compensation for their terror of yesterday's noon. And to soften him and Bart Mallon up for that next ordeal.

"Monday. You're sure of it, sir?" Bart Mallon muttered.

What difference did it make what day it was? Today was like tomorrow would be, from this time on.

"I've got to write to Jessie tonight," Bart Mallon muttered. "I always write to her every Monday night, to catch the morning plane out and the mail boat down from Sitka."

Jessie Barsen, his new young bride, back in San Diego. Mary Barsen's and old Slim's daughter.

"Why not let it slide this week?"

"No, no, no, no!" Bart Mallon said, petulantly and impatiently. "If she didn't hear from me every week, on the day she expects it, she'd imagine something had happened. I've got to write to her as soon as we get back to camp. I mustn't forget it. How much longer till we get home?"

Poor guy! Asking with his dazed look how long before they got home. A long time, boy.

A long, long time.

A GUARD behind them jerked the ropes tied to their wrists, tightening the cunning knots deeper. "*Raku! Raku!*" they shouted, banging down their gun butts. Or something like it. Meaning, perhaps, "Silence!" Or "Step livelier!" Or just an epithet. He would have to learn to guess the meaning of the new masters' great and lordly will, thought Kirby, by their gestures and their tones. Like a newly landed slave in the old days, just out of Africa.

Bart Mallon was jerked into some kind of partial awareness for the moment. He stumbled and caught himself, with a dazed glance around him, sweating.

It make Kirby a little sick to see him, with his waxen face, the freckles on it standing out like paint-spots on china, stumbling along with his remote look, as if he were sleep-walking. With the thin

line of dried blood which had seeped out through the dirty and carelessly applied bandages around his dark red hair. He was only twenty-one, not much more than a half of Kirby's own hard-bitten, hard-lived forty years, and with his eighteen-year-old bride back home waiting for him.

All ended for him now, but not for her. That was the toughest of it. What it was going to mean for Jessie Mallon, Mary Barsen's daughter. It was too bad they couldn't tell her he was dead, not just missing. So that she could get the grief over with, and go on. Not messing up her young life, still clutching to the barren empty dream that some day he might come back.

It was going to be all right for Bart Mallon, maybe, if he only didn't wake up out of it. Dreaming still that he was going home, among a million yowling Yamatos, stumbling on and dreaming. But it was going to be black for his young wife Jessie, Mary Barsen's daughter.

A flying man should never get married. And if he did, he should always carry a homing pigeon tied by a spider thread to his right wrist, trained to break the cord and fly away home when he got it. Or leave a pack of cards built up in a tower on his desk at home, so delicately constructed and balanced that it would collapse instantly when he stopped breathing, wherever throughout the world that might be. Then a woman would know, and could get it over with.

He had thought of cards, he supposed, because of Slim Barsen. Slim had always been a great one for cards, and to build houses out of them. It was too bad he hadn't left something like that for Mary.

"It's Monday, you say, sir?" Bart Mallon muttered beside him, with tight lips. "I guess I must have missed a couple of hands in this game. We made the big hop yesterday, didn't we? And they brought us down. Where are we, sir?"

"Honshu, their main island, boy."

"I've got—" Bart Mallon said—"I've got to let Jessie know. As quick as possible. They'll give us some chance to communicate, won't they? Letters by the Red Cross."

"Sooner or later they may get some system working," Kirby said. "Maybe they'll give you a chance to speak a little piece on their short-wave broadcasts beamed to the States. They do it sometimes, you know, to get people back home to listen to their claptrap. Some little message telling how swell you are being treated, and how lovely the scenery is in cherry-blossom land."

"She's got to know," said Bart haggardly. "She can't live in suspense, just hearing that I'm missing. It's hell on a woman, to be waiting and hoping, and not know. If I die and you don't, sir, will you promise to let her know?"

"What makes you think you are going to die, boy?"

"It would be better if I did. Only she's got to know. I don't want it to be with me like it was with her father. She shouldn't have to go through with that again."

SLIM. . . .

"It wouldn't be the same with you as it was with Slim," said Kirby Collins to the pale young bomber. "Not at all. She'll know just where you went down, and at what time, and what caused it. Some of the others must have seen us going down. She may have already got the War Department message. If you aren't listed by the Yamatos as alive within six months, at most, she'll know you must be dead. It's not the same at all as if you had just vanished in a clear sky, somewhere over a million square miles of ocean, with no idea what had happened. And with every ship at sea looking for

you for months and months. And the newspaper headlines full of it. And rewards offered for information about you. And crazy false reports still coming in, after six years, from Arizona or Lower California or some remote spot in the Sierras, of the wreckage of your plane having been sighted, or of you wandering somewhere in a daze. Things still to keep a woman full of hope.

"It's not the same, at all," he said. "Jessie will know about you. Slim went down at sea, of course. He's a mile deep. But since there was no one who saw him, and no wreckage or body to be found, Mary will still be waiting until the end of her chapter. But after a little while without any word about you, Jessie will know."

CHAPTER TWO

The Man Who Had Died

THEY had had their hour of glory.

Hand it to the army! Hand it to all of them. They had done it well.

Twelve singing hours of that long massed flight. Sixteen Fortresses in V's of V's, locked perfectly and tightly bow-to-wing, sitting motionless at the world's roof, while the black seas crawled far below. While the dawn came up, and the sky was red around them, though the seas were still black below. While the seas turned green beneath the haze below.

Sitting motionless and singing, while over the world's rim towards them the gray-green Yamato islands crawled. Remember Corregidor and Manila. Remember Hong Kong and Singapore.

Remember the brown monkey pets, brought into the household because they looked so cunning. Fed from the table, taught how to read books and use the

plumbing, treated like men. Cute little animals, so polite. And all the time, while the household was asleep, out in the kitchen sharpening their dirty little knives, for the throat-cutting planned from the beginning.

Remember the pirate shores, the centuries of shipwrecked European and Yankee sailors cast up there, to be put to tortured death by the bloody Shoguns. Remember the Portuguese priests burning in their pyres. Remember the Ainus, the big simple aboriginal men of those Yamato islands, overwhelmed by the merciless hordes of the brown men first coming from their ape jungles. The big pale simple Ainus, with their knowledge and their books, gentle men of peace, not bloody killers, helplessly crying and wringing their hands while they and their wives and babes were slaughtered by the murderous brown dwarf men, and the murder went on through the years.

Remember—

Oh, hell, remember Japan!

Miles up within the thin breath of the stratus haze at the world's roof, sixteen of them, great Fortresses of the Bomber Command, singing on their way to those gray-green Yamato islands, and on their wings the star. Coming over on the dot, in the bright and beautiful noon. Unloading it.

They had had their hour of glory.

Captain Sasey Smith, U. S. Army, was the name of the skipper of the Fortress to which Kirby Collins was assigned. A big rangy-shouldered young fellow, no more than twenty-five, already with iron-gray hair.

"Pleased to have you along with us, sir," he had said, with a warm hand clasp, to Kirby. "Bugs," he had said, to Lieutenant Bugs O'Ryan, the crop-headed young navigator, introducing Kirby, "this is Major Collins, of the flying marines. Assigned by the navy to see how we army buzzards operate. If you lose your bear-

ings, just call on him. The regular sea-going stuff."

"It'll be a relief to have you, sir," said the crop-headed big-domed young navigator, with a stammering grin. "I can pick out Polaris, and I know 270 on the compass is west. But I don't suppose the navy calls that navigating. What do you fellows steer? A big circle course, you call it?"

"Don't horse me, son," said Kirby somewhat indignantly. "I can ride them, too."

LIEUTENANT Bugs O'Ryan had been an instructor in astronomy at Harvard, he had confessed later to Kirby, which meant that he could teach navigation to the admirals. But the army must have its little joke. He would get some of those guys on a fleet of polo ponies sometime, thought Kirby, and show them how a sea-going marine could stick to leather.

"Lieutenant Bart Mallon, the bombardier," said Captain Smith, continuing the introductions. "He got his rating by passing the standard test at the army school for bombardiers in Georgia. All the candidates stand on a chalk mark and see which one can spit tobacco juice on a dime. If they hit it from twenty feet, they're bombers. If from fifty, they get the dime. Major Kirby Collins of the flying marines, Bart. He's going along for the ride."

"And getting it," said Kirby to the red-haired young army bomber, shaking hands.

"Your name is quite familiar to me, sir," said Bart Mallon, with his warm smile, flushing. "I think my wife's late father was an old friend of yours. You got your flight training at Pensacola together, I believe, and were later together in the service."

"Who was that?"

"Raymond Barsen, sir."

"Slim Barsen!"

There was no change in Kirby Collins' tightly smiling face.

"Yes," he said, not making too much of Slim. "We were in the service together. Then he got out, and went into commercial flying. There was a lot more money in it. Chief test pilot for Rockwell. A damned good flyer. Your wife's father, you say? You don't mean little Jessie? Congratulations!" he said, as the young red-haired army bomber nodded, with his warm face. "It must be something fairly recent. I've been away from my personal mail two months, and hadn't seen the bid. Mary must have sent me one. How is she—Mrs. Barsen?"

"We were married last month," said young Mallon. "Jessie is with her mother in San Diego. Mrs. Barsen is fine, thank you, sir. She often speaks of you."

"That is kind of her," said Kirby. "I'm glad she's happy. Her little girl, too. Your wife. It's hard to realize she's grown up and married. Last time I saw her she was a bony-kneed kid of twelve or thirteen, with long curls tied back with a ribbon. Thin and hoppity, sassy as a catbird. That was back in '36, when I went to San Diego to do what I could to help. She used to call me Kirb. We got along well together."

He smiled with brown lean face a moment at the memory of Slim Barsen's and Mary's daughter. He would have liked to have had a daughter like that himself.

"That was at the time her father disappeared, you mean, sir?"

"Was drowned," said Kirby. "Yes."

"You think it's definite that he went down at sea, sir? I've heard so many theories about it from Mrs. Barsen."

"Some trace of his ship would have been found by this time, otherwise," said

Kirby. "It had only a certain radius, after all."

"It certainly was about the toughest way that it could have happened, for Mrs. Barsen. Jessie has told me she doesn't know what her mother would have done without your help. You certainly showed yourself her father's friend, sir."

Kirby didn't want to talk about Slim Barsen. He and Slim had never clicked too well. But Slim had clicked with Mary, and that was all that counted. He couldn't keep edging away from talking about Slim, as if the name was a bad taste in his mouth, or the young fellow would get an idea he hadn't liked him.

"I TRIED to do what I could to help, of course," he said, a little awkwardly. "Straightening out financial matters, and so on. Slim made a lot of money, but it always went through his fingers. Crazy about gambling, for one thing. Then he kept a couple of—Well, he spent a lot of money. He left Mary in pretty much of a hole. No insurance, and the rent not paid. Didn't mean to, of course. What man knows that he's going to die? But there were just a few small things like that, which needed a man to look after. I didn't do anything, really. There was nothing that could be done, except to see that the kid didn't bear too much of the grief, and to promise Mrs. Barsen that if he was alive I'd find him. She still thinks he may be found, does she?"

"Oh, yes," said young Mallon. "It's a kind of obsession. Jessie and I have agreed if anything like that ever happens to me—well, I hope it doesn't. But if it does, we've agreed that she is going to put me out of her mind like a click."

"You're young and in love," said Kirby. "It doesn't make any difference what you agree or don't agree. You'll still fol-

MAKE EVERY PAY DAY WAR BOND DAY!

low out your instincts, and it's a woman's instinct to stick to one man. But nothing like that is very apt to happen to you. It never happened before, that I know of. I mean, not just that way. Not with everyone watching a test flight, of a sweet new ship, in a bare, cloudless sky, just climbing for altitude, heading around seaward for the last fifty-mile lap of his circle before he reached the roof—and vanishing. It will never happen to another man, I suppose, in just that way."

"I suppose that's why Mrs. Barsen still hopes that she'll hear from him, sir," said young Mallon.

"Yes," said Kirby quietly. "She is a lovely lady. A very lovely lady. Slim wasn't a tenth good enough for her. No derogation of him—any other man wouldn't have been a twentieth good enough, let's say. If her little girl is half as lovely and beautiful, I—you—well, I give you my congratulations."

"Thank you again, sir. She is the most beautiful girl in the world."

"Be good to her," said Kirby quietly, almost savagely. "Be damned good to her. I told Slim that once, about her mother. Slim—well, Mary certainly loved him. They had a happy life together for thirteen years. She was only seventeen when she married him, younger than your Jessie. Thirty when Slim died, and still the same."

"I guess, sir, she's still the same now," said young Mallon politely.

Ribbing about his mother-in-law. Thirty-six must seem to him about the grave.

"Yes," repeated Kirby, "I was young once, too. And I took your late father-in-law by the shoulder, boy. You know how young men talk. I took him by the shoulder as I'm taking you. And I said to him, 'You good-looking, good-for-nothing, gambling, drunken, skirt-chasing, lazy chunk of meat, be damned good to her, think a lot of her, treat her well, or by the living Harry I'll follow you to the

ends of hell, and you'll wish to God that you had not been born!' That's what I said to Slim." He grinned.

Captain Casey Smith had rejoined them then, with more of the crew to introduce, where they stood in the shadow of the great dark Fortress, in the midnight, on the dimly lighted field, talking about Slim. And the motors were warming up. It was near the take-off hour.

Lieutenant Bill Roxie, and Sergeant Perkins, and beak-nosed Sergeant Finch, and two others, those two young corporal-gunners with their bright keen-smiling faces that Kirby remembered. Casey Smith had named them all to Kirby. But the motors had been opening up then, and the names of those last two Kirby hadn't got. He only knew that they were all brave men.

HE HAD spoken to Bart Mallon about Slim Barsen once again, in the air a thousand miles out, while they had been having morning coffee.

"You know," he said, "you're damned lucky about Jessie."

"Don't I know it, sir?" grinned Bart Mallon.

"I mean," Kirby explained, "damned lucky that her father's dead. It sounds like a hell of a thing to say, of course. I don't mean to be derogatory. But it was a funny thing about Slim. He lived a pretty free sort of life himself. He liked the girls—he was that type. A regular wild man, you could call him. But with Mary and the kid he was one of these strict, old-fashioned 1890 husbands and fathers, with an over-developed proprietary instinct. It's not an uncommon form of compensation, I suppose. Probably the psychologists have some name for it. Mary never looked at any other man, from the day she met him. Yet he would fly into the most violent rages at her over nothing. And as for Jessie, it infuriated him to think that she would some day

grow up, and that some other man was going to mean more to her than he did. If he had been still alive when she got to the age of going with the boys, I have an idea that he would actually have locked her up, if he could have found any way of doing it. You might never have met her."

"The lord of the harem," Bart Mallon said. "The psychologists do have a name for it. I'd rather got that idea about him already, sir. Jessie told me that he always said he would kill any man who ever married her. I guess you're right; I'm lucky."

On their way to the gray-green Yamato islands.

THEY were brave men, all of them. And they had had their hour of glory. Coming in in the bare bright noon, miles above the thin ghostly stratus, at the roof. They had split from their tight formation three hundred miles out, each Fortress heading for its appointed target, from Tokio to Nagasaki. And the gray-green islands moving in beneath, and the great smoky cities.

Taking their runs across their targets, indifferent to the frantic smoke puffs breaking a mile below and the screaming Zeroes climbing up like gnats, while the sticks of eggs went lazily sliding earthward from their bomb bays, down the immense blue spaces of the air. Some fun, eh, Yamatos?

They had hit.

But it wasn't in the cards that all of them should get away unscathed, as had all the ships of that epochal raid of Jimmy Doolittle's, which had first carried the war to Nippon's heart. It wasn't in the cards.

Roaring away from above the burning shipyards and the great blasted munitions and electrical plants at Osaka which had been their target, careening wing up, wing down, amidst the bursts of flak smoke reaching higher, Captain Casey

Smith's great Fortress had got it. A contact-tipped five-inch shell, screaming up from some super German a.a. gun, had caught the great rocking, fleeing ship where she raced like a mad elephant at thirty thousand feet. A direct hit, the lucky one out of ten thousand.

The great B-17 was tough, but she couldn't take that. A destroyer couldn't have taken it. A hundred pounds of steel and fulminate and scrap-iron shrapnel, which had been set to burst at contact with a feather. It hit her on the bow, and the world blew up around her.

Casey Smith dead at his shattered wheel, with his iron-gray head blown away. Bugs O'Ryan, the owl-eyed young navigator, never again to pore over the movements of the infinite stars again at Harvard. Bart Mallon, lying prone at his bomb sight, with red seeping from his scalp, and limp as a dead man. The great Fortress still seeming to roar onward for an immeasurable instant, with her bow open to the thin rushing freezing sky, while most of her right wing quietly dissolved and broke from her like soggy bread in water, and her tail assembly drifted away. Then rocking, whipping down—blazing, with all motors dead.

A great shattered hulk of flinched metal, falling. A roar of wind and fire about her.

Kirby Collins had crept and clawed his way along the catwalk to the pulpit, flung around like a rag in a dog's teeth. He had hauled Casey Smith's headless body out of the way, fighting with a fragment of shattered wheel and the intact rudder bar to get her under some control, with the surfaces that were still left to her. And all the time whipping and whirling down through the miles, and the fire in her.

At best he hoped to ease her in her final crash, to save Bugs O'Ryan and Bart Mallon, if they were still alive. The streaking Zeroes had been around them then, flashing by like Sioux. At five

thousand feet he had given the order to bail out, and Perkins and Roxie had gone out, and one or two of those young gunners whose names he never knew—perhaps only one of them, for one of them must have been in the bow when that blasting shell had hit. They had gone out, delaying their pull, arms tight at their sides, dropping straight. But with the Jap ships on them, they never reached the ground alive.

Only Finch, cut off by fire in the tail, had stayed at his guns, screaming and laughing and beating it back at those flashing vicious little murder ships. He may have got one of them, or two, or three. For he was a good man, Finch. A good man with a gun. But his guns had stopped, and his screaming also, back there in the blazing, crackling tail, before they hit.

Only Bart Mallon of the Fortress crew and Kirby Collins of the marines, silver army wings and golden navy, had been still alive when she hit. And the screaming mob might have torn them to pieces where they lay, flung out fifty feet upon the ground.

Only they must be saved to tell what they knew for Tojo.

THE waxen-faced young bomber's mind seemed to be clearing now. Talking rationally, anyway, about letting Jessie know that he was dead.

It would have been much better for Bart Mallon if he had never awakened. Perhaps, thought Kirby, the pressure on his brain had lifted only temporarily, and would bear down again, returning him to his dream of going home. No man can be hurt in a dream.

As for himself, he was old and hard and grim, and he could take it. It would be a long time before they could get anything out of him. Though in the end, of course, they would.

This howling parade business was just

the running of the Indian gauntlet, to warm the blood of the brown ant spectators, and get him and Bart softened up. The parade before the circus. After the gauntlet there waited the stake, symbolically.

It wasn't going to be a roasting bee for them, of course, actually. The Yamatos hadn't officially burned any white men alive for more than two hundred years. They must have read in a book somewhere that it wasn't considered civilized. And they liked to be civilized as all hell.

If he could only hold out for a week, until that next terrific raid of eighty Fortresses had time to hit on schedule. But a week was a long time. Longer than centuries of death.

Kirby felt old and very tired. He thought of the things that kill a man by inches, although they aren't quite death, and a man still keeps knowing about them. He and Bart would be old, old men very soon. They would lose, as old men do, some of the things that were a part of them. The elasticity of their muscles, the use of their joints, the clearness of their vision, their hearing and some of their minds. Only they would grow old by days and hours, instead of years.

But it was going to be hardest on Bart Mallon. Young men love their youth, their strong bodies and bright minds. Old age to them is worse than death itself. Perhaps, before those things began to be done to him, Bart Mallon would be back in his crack-brained far-off dream. If the dream was strong enough, it would be all right.

Kirby decided that, if his hands were ever free a moment, and he had the chance to do it surely and quickly, he would kill Bart. He owed that much to Jessie—to Bart himself, as a fellow human being. Let him die quickly, young and clean and full of life and the joy of it still, without being old and broken and full of pain.

"She's got to know," Bart Mallon re-

iterated, stumbling along beside him. "It's Monday, the day I always write to her, so as to catch the boat from Sitka. She'll think something's happened. And she'll be waiting, waiting. Like her mother. She won't ever know I'm dead."

CHAPTER THREE

Flyer in a Fog

NOT completely clear in his mind. Still a little in the raveled edge of the dream. Flying through the edges of a big wet cloud, and seeing glimpses of clear blue, and then the grayness closing.

It worried Kirby, just impersonally, just as a soldier. That incomplete, groping sort of half-awareness was worse than either one thing or the other. It meant Bart might be aware enough to give coherent answers to questions now, yet still not awake enough to realize what he was doing.

"Don't mention places, boy," Kirby said with tight lips. "There are things they want to know."

"Of course, sir. Sorry."

"Keep your head," said Kirby. "Keep your tongue. No directions, and no places. Get together a cool clear head, or else go back into the dream so deep nothing can rock you out of it. How are you really, boy?"

"I'm all right," said Bart Mallon with an effort. "I'm really quite clear-headed. I was a little woozy for a while, but I've got it now. We're down. We're in Japan. They're going to question all of us, you mean, and we've got to keep our mouths shut. Where is Casey?"

"They're all dead."

"I thought he was talking to me just a moment ago."

"No, that was me," said Kirby. "You know me, don't you?"

"Yes, sir, I remember you. I've heard a lot about you. You're Kirby Collins.

You were a great friend of Jessie's father. He was a terrible fellow, really. She was scared to death of him. A drunk and a gambling fool. But Mrs. Barsen thinks a lot of him, so we won't tell her, will we?"

"No, we won't tell her," Kirby said. "We won't tell anybody anything. Get it in your head."

"No. We're in Japan. Yamatos. We can't tell anybody anything. Not even Jessie that we're dead. What are they waiting for? Why don't they bayonet us to death, like those British in Hong Kong? They're waiting to find out about bases and scheduled raids from us. But we won't tell them anything."

It was pretty hopeless. In a minute he'd be talking about the mail-boat from Sitka again. It had to be impressed on him, as much as possible.

"I think they're probably waiting for the return of some big Yam, perhaps old Tojo himself, or that fat-faced cockeyed buzzard named Shita something in the Philippines, to preside at the inquisition," Kirby said, tight-lipped. "I have a feeling, anyway, that something big and tough is looming. Keep your mouth shut when they start on you, boy. Don't try to out-talk them or out-smart them. Just keep it shut. And keep your head."

"What's that rag dragging along from the horse's tail in front? Is that the flag that Jessie gave me?"

"That's the flag," said Kirby.

"You foul stinking sons of lice!" Bart Mallon opened up his teeth in a hoarse, glaring scream, wildly lunging.

IT DID no good. No good. A roar of gibbering appreciative laughter rose from the brown dwarf men. It was something they had been hoping for. The rope behind the waxen-faced red-haired young bomber brought him up sharp, with his spine arched back, a look of supreme agony on his face. A stinking fish head

came hurtling over the heads of the strutting guards to strike him in the mouth. One of the guards brought up his gun butt sharply, giving him a warning jab with it, not hard, but definite, behind the ear, at the edge of his dirty bandages.

"*Raku! Raku!*"

Bart Mallon went stumbling onward, with the dazed look in his eyes, his head hanging.

"What day is it, sir?" His lips moved.

So he was back in the fog again.

A flight of planes came roaring low above the roofs of thatch and tile, down the center of the narrow street between the paper houses and the endless dingy shops. Mitsubishi 37's, two-seater fighters, a dozen of them. Coming at five miles a minute, fifty feet above the ground, locked wing to wing. Hand it to the Yamatos, they could fly trick acrobats. Those writing goofs who had had it all doped out for years prior to December 7, 1941, that the Yams made bum aviators because their eyes were slant or because they lacked a sense of balance and muscular coordination, had never seen a circus and the squat brown boys in the center ring.

Circus stuff they were doing now. Showing off above the massed crowds on the streets. They came skimming the tile roofs with that swift terrific song, fast as lightning, tight as packed sardines, and above the heads of the two stumbling *ketojin* Fortress flyers and the crowds along the street they rose upward like one linked machine in a straight screaming zoom.

Up like a handful of comets, their sharp shark-shaped bows pointed at the sky, their blunt wings spread out like shark fins. The end of the long, hot day was coming now. The red sun had moved down on the horizon, beyond the China Sea. It was rising now upon the Azores, half around the world, on its way to light the shores of great America. But here now it was going down, the great red sun, upon the land of its rising. The time would soon

be here of the sunset and the starry night.

The sky in which those fast sharp-nosed ships went zooming up was red and blue, and white clouds floated in it. Kirby Collins turned up his tired, beaten face. The evening star was already out, with a pale sliver of a moon. Those trick Mitsubishi 37's, going up like rockets, were sky-blue on their under-wings, he had seen. But in the sunset light they all looked silver.

Silver ships, a dozen of them, going up like rockets. Up like new-milled bullets, bright and clean. They had probably just left some factory. They were still being turned out by the thousands. No better type of its kind had been devised. It struck Kirby Collins in that instant how similar they were in their outlines to the lost Rockwell-Omega of Slim Barsen—Fast, sleek, and new. No other ship like it ever built—in '36.

They were more than similar. They were the same.

THERE was a long high wall running along the narrow street at one side now. A wall of rubble and cement, with a ridge-shaped red tile top surmounting it, and on the other side of it a glimpse of the tile roof of some ornate gold-decorated pagoda temple or great private house.

They had passed beyond the roaring center of the town now, the shipyard and factory district where the tens of thousands of out-pouring workers, given an hour's holiday to watch the captured *ketojin* go by, had packed the streets so thickly. They had traversed into a residential district, of great *taikans'*—rich men's—homes. There were fewer spectators along the streets. Fewer voices, less commotion, and the sunset lying quietly on the world, soon going down. Above the high red-topped wall along the way a dozen faces of Yamato girls peered down, giggling, bright-eyed, rice-powdered, red of lip. Some of them in European costume. Some, perhaps, not Japanese at all.

Giggling, whispering, calling with soft mockery, like strange dolls, with low voices of soft doves. Kirby Collins felt an eerie creeping of his skin. A sense of something near, something terrible and dark. On either side of him and Bart the little helmeted guards were throwing out their stiff-kneed stride more spankingly and bending back their heads upon their necks more rigidly, bringing down their boot heels with a click.

"*Raku! Gumma!*" shouted the little spidery colonel on the big bay horse in front.

Or whatever it was they shouted. All words were the same.

The rifles of the brown dwarf soldiers flashed. Their hands slapped leather with precision. They shouldered arms as they flung their feet, chests out-thrust, strutting. The straight-handled dress sword of the little spidery colonel on the horse had flashed from its scabbard. He touched the hilt to his forehead, with the blade pointed in an angle upward, like the horn of a unicorn.

"*Gumma!*" he shouted, with his eyes to the side of the road.

Kirby Collins saw that apparition then, sitting on the sidewalk with its back against the wall, beside the blue gate in the wall. Tall, bony-ribbed, half-naked, dirty. Wearing some kind of yellow skirt down to his ankles, with a woven-reed round pagoda hat on his head.

Blond scraggy beard upon his face, red-rimmed pale eyes. White face, white man, sitting drunk, beside a blue gate in the long high rubble wall. A dirty beggar, drunk and gutter dirty, in front of the wall of some great brown *taikan*. With head lolling on his chest, and a bottle in his hand.

A white man, debased and drunk, here in Yamatoland.

Some German beachcomber, living on scraps tossed to him by his brown brothers of the Axis. Some damned White

Russian grandduke's son, offspring of the Czars. A blue tattooing on his chest. . . .

A globe and anchor! The *Semper Fidelis* of the U. S. Marines.

THERE he was! A white Simon Girty among the Indians. Benedict Arnold, the Iscariot. Anything that could be named.

There he was—and perhaps in his heart Kirby Collins had always known it, and known just how he had done it on that bright bare day, flying that sweet new secret ship. The Yamato airplane carrier waiting three hundred miles off shore. Up, up into the sky, and vanishing beyond vision, beyond sound. Then heading seaward and down to the waiting carrier on that vast empty sea, with its banner of the Rising Sun.

If he couldn't land on her flight deck without special gear—and if anyone could have done it, he could, for he was good, he was damned keen—then he had dropped her squash and flat alongside, within fifty feet. And there had been small boats standing by, with buoys and floats to slap beneath her wings the moment she had settled; and there had been a crane swung overside from the Jap ship to hook onto her; and she had been hoisted aboard within a dozen minutes, hardly time enough to get her undercarriage wet.

With a special hatch to receive her, she'd be out of sight within five minutes more. It didn't even need a carrier to have met her, if it had been done that way. Just any innocent Japanese *maru* with a cargo crane.

What had his price been, a million bucks? For the brown men it had been cheap at any price.

Look at it. The Mitsubishi 37 two-seater had been produced in 1939, by its name. Three years it had taken the patient brown dwarf men to copy that beautiful little Rockwell Omega line for line, to get ready their blueprints, their jigs and dies.

She herself had been their mock-up. How many thousands of those ships had come streaming out of their hammering secret factories before the 7th of December, 1941? Before the day they struck from Singapore to Oahu, the day long planned? Thousands, thousands of those swift unexpected ships.

And with them, beneath the umbrella of them, in six months time they had swept over a quarter of the world, and a hundred million people, and had gained the bastions of the sea. Even their one-seater Zero now, the Mitsubishi 40, swift, high-climbing, tricky, agile, they owed to that Rockwell-Omega of Slim Barsen's.

A million bucks, perhaps. Slim had been the sort who would name a million dollars as his price, when they had approached him, discreetly sounding him. Because to him that was the limit of imaginable wealth, and a sum of which he had always dreamed. To be a millionaire, no more nor less. Yet if they had paid him a hundred millions for that Omega, it would have been a cheap price. Though if they had bought him, himself, for one bent dime, it would have been too high.

He had lost it, thought Kirby. He had tossed and gambled it away, a million dollars or whatever the sum had been. In six years, in all the dives of the East. Drunk, dirty, half-naked, starved, sitting beside a blue gate in a long high wall, with a bottle in his hand, upon a pile of rags, with the cooing, softly giggling strange brown girls peering over the wall top above his head to see the *keto-jin* go by.

THE lolling head of that apparition lifted. He looked swayingly at the little spidery brown colonel on the horse, whose sword was flashing to his forehead. His head stiffened on his neck. He looked with his pale red-rimmed eyes at Kirby Collins in that instant. His fumbling left hand dropped across the blue tattooing on his chest.

"*Gumma! Gumma! Raku! Raku!*"

It was him that the little spidery brown colonel was saluting, Kirby saw. It was him for whom the little dwarf soldiers on each side were snapping their hands to the rifle salute, eyes right, legs kicking high and stiffly, boot heels clicking as they passed.

The dirty yellow robe about his loins was richest silk. He was sitting on a garment of rich crimson silk. There was a gold watch on his wrist, though the four-eyed, buck-toothed Son of Heaven himself had turned his gold in to the national fund long ago. The whiskey bottle lying on his lap, in his lax dirty-nailed hand, was imported Scotch, not native saki, of a stock which must be small and carefully guarded in Japan. Upon the farther side of him, tucked in the yellow sash which held the skirt about his loins, were two naked swords with guardless hilts—the five-foot, two-handed *katana* and the short two-foot sword which always accompanied it, of the samurai knights.

He sat there on the sidewalk, accepting the salute with indifferent loftiness. The great palace behind the wall was his. The girls were his. For him the salutes of the brown dwarf men, to which he did not even bother to respond. He had got his price.

His pale eyes looked at Kirby Collins. His lip was lifted above his yellow teeth in a look which Kirby remembered as of old, though never so intense. He made no sign, gave no nod. His eyes looked at Kirby without recognition or emotion. Only about his mouth there was that snarl of wolf or tiger, that look of an unrelenting hate.

He arose, picking up the heavy silk robe which he had been sitting on, and threw it around his lean naked shoulders. He turned, and went through the blue door in the wall.

"*Raku! Raku!*"

"If it's Monday, sir," muttered Bart

Mallon, "how much farther before we reach home?"

The evening shadows were coming. Kirby was glad, damned glad, that Bart hadn't seen that apparition. He wished that he had died before he had seen it himself. The last thing in the world that he would have wanted to see. And perhaps it would be the last.

Those impenetrable red-rimmed eyes. That uplifted lip of unrelenting hate.

CHAPTER FOUR

All That Money Can Buy

WITH his crimson robe about his shoulders, his swords thrust through his sash, his long yellow skirts of the *Shinto* priesthood shuffling silkenly about his ankles, on his high-clogged wooden *getas*, tall and lean, the man who had been Slim Barsen went across the stone-flagged courtyard with its cherry trees and fountain toward the portico of his crimson-painted, gold-decorated pagoda house.

Soft voices cooed to him, about him. The girls down from the wall, clustering about him, their lord, with their soft hands, their meek downcast faces.

"My bath," he said.

"The European clothes for dinner afterwards, *taikan*?"

"No," he said. "I'm done with them."

"The general's uniform?"

"Priest's robes are good enough."

They cooed among themselves. "The *taikan* is going to make devotion at the Shrine."

Major Yama Hideoshi met him at the entrance of his portico, bowing from the waist. Suave, decorous, impeccable; in dress blues, as always, shoes like mirrors, buttons polished, with the gold *aiguillette* cords of an aide upon his tunic. With sidearms of sword and pistol also, as always. You didn't need to look at Hideoshi to know how he was dressed. Even

in the middle of the night, if summoned, he would instantly appear, impeccably uniformed.

Hideoshi, his aide. His valet. His intimate friend and confidant, his roistering drinking companion, his chauffeur, butler, bar-keeper, trainer, his jiu-jitsu and sword-play instructor, his patient punching bag when he put on the gloves, his court jester and buffoon, his banker. Well, what else besides that was Hideoshi to him? It would hardly be correct to say that Hideoshi was his nurse-maid, and even less so to say that Hideoshi was his guard.

Always charming, always obliging, always quick and ready for anything suggested—drink, cards, girls, games. Hideoshi had been valet to a senator in Washington.

"Let's have a drink, Yama," he said.

"Most happy, General," said Hideoshi, smiling.

Hideoshi followed him into the bar-room. A little bar-room of chromium and mirrors. He had had it installed only last September, from stuff imported from America on one of the last boats, the duplicate of one in a Hollywood film which one of Hideoshi's friends had seen in Honolulu—no Hollywood films here for the last several years—and which had caught his fancy when it had been described to him. Next month he might decide to have another, but this one still pleased him.

Ginger Rogers had been sitting in it—the bar in the Hollywood film—and so the obliging Hideoshi, having painstakingly studied the still of the scene to be duplicated, had endeavored to duplicate her, too, with a little Japanese *mogo* sitting on one of the high red-cushioned chromium stools, with a Ginger Rogers bob, a Ginger Rogers hat flaring up from her pert little painted brown face, and her bow legs in silk stockings crossed in a Ginger Rogers style, when he had presented the

finished bar to the *taikan* with a flourish. But she had not given the tall pale-eyed man the atmosphere he wanted, and he had put the flat of his hand upon her face and pushed her six feet from her stool.

Hideoshi had gone behind the bar. He had deftly put on a white apron. He picked up a cloth and wiped away imaginary slops. He stood beaming.

"How much is rye?" said the tall man.

"Fifty cents. Dollar," said Hideoshi, somewhat dubiously, seeking for his cue.

"Too much." He shook his head. "I'm only a poor panhandler. Only got a dime, boss."

"Redeye one dime," said Hideoshi.

The smiling Japanese poured out a glass. The tall man downed it. "Okay," he said. "We've been a Bowery bum. We're a couple of Hell's Kitchen toughs now. Let's wreck the lousy joint!"

HE PICKED up a glass and hurled it, grinning as it struck a mirror with a crash. He picked up glasses in both hands, hurling them headlong. Hideoshi had slipped off his apron instantly, to come out front. Laughing, the brown little man picked up a bottle, and sent it crashing against the rows of bright bottles arranged behind the bar. The tall man pulled the long twohanded *katana* from his sash, with one swift motion. He swung it above his head in both hands, smashing it down on the bar.

"*Banzai!*" he said.

The polished satinwood groaned and split. "*Banzai!*" he howled, swinging the *katana* at bottles, tables, chairs and mirrors. "*Banzai!* Chop off heads! Ten thousand cheers!"

The little brown man stood out of the way, a little puzzled, but smiling politely. The general had not given him the cue for this scene.

"Big shogun slaughtering Koreans," panted the tall man. "*Banzai!*"

Crash!

"Oh," said Hideoshi. "*Banzai!* Kill Koreans!" He pulled out his pistol very quickly. Firing from the hip, he sent five shots quicker than sound and echo into a wine glass behind the bar, like five bees heading homeward on each other's tails.

"Okay," said the tall man. "Let's shoot some craps."

Hideoshi followed him into the billiard and card room. The tall man reached for a box of dice on the billiard table, and pulled out a pair of red ones. He weighed them in his hand, and put the box away.

"Shooting a million bucks," he said.

"You're faded," said Hideoshi.

"A million to two more, as a side bet, that I shoot a four and make it."

"It's a bet," said Hideoshi.

The tall pale man clicked the dice together in his hand, and sent them sliding across the green baize cloth. "Read them and weep!" he said.

"Pair of twos," said Hideoshi resignedly.

"Kiss me, three and one, for three million bucks!" said the tall man. "What do they look like to you, you little brown grinning buzzard?"

"Pair of twos," said Hideoshi resignedly.

"Shoot the three million bucks!" said the tall man.

"You are faded."

"Baby needs a pair of new shoes! Bones be good to me," the tall man said, rubbing the dice back and forth in his hands. He shook his head. "They're cold," he said. "They're not hot enough for three million bucks. Let's change the cubes."

He reached for the dice box again, and felt around, picking out a pair of large white ones.

"Be warm for me, galloping dominoes!" he said. "Three million bucks. Hit him with a natural! Laugh those off!"

"Snake eyes," said Hideoshi, with a faint twitch of his impassive mouth.

"You lie! It's a seven."

"Seven it is," said Hideoshi resignedly. "Five and two. I just thought I'd scare you. That's six million dollars I owe you. Shoot the six millions."

"DAMN it," the tall man said, with an angry jerk of his mouth. "Damn it, you take all the fun out of the game. You ought to make me slam them up against the edge of the table. You ought to make me rattle them, not just click. You know damned well I'm handling them. You oughtn't to let me use my own dice, either. That first pair was only even numbers, and my chance of rolling a four with them was three in one, feeling the spots as I cast. Next pair had only naturals on them. What the hell kind of a game do you call that?"

"Sorry," said Hideoshi apologetically. "I was thinking of something else. How much do I owe you now?"

"Eighteen billion, three hundred and eighty-seven millions," the tall man said. "But, hell, you take all the fun out of the game."

He hurled the dice against a lacquered screen.

"Would you care to play some roulette, General?" said Hideoshi politely.

"No, I'm tired of that, too. Let's wreck the joint."

"No mirrors to break," said Hideoshi sadly.

"To hell with breaking mirrors and wrecking joints, anyway. That's for boys. There are fifty Chinese bandits with their hands tied behind them all kneeling in a row to be beheaded. Off with their heads!"

He had pulled out his long two-handed sword again.

"Wheow!" he yelled, swinging it.

The heavy blade hit the heavy mahogany edge of the billiard table with a chopping crash. But the table was stronger than the delicate little satinwood bar-counter in the bar-room had been, and it took a deep bite, but did not split.

"It's not a Chinese," the tall man yelled. "It's a Russky! His neck's leather! It's old man Timoshenko himself, with a neck of chromium steel! *Banzai!* Chop off old Tim's head!"

He whanged his two-handed sword down again, upon the gash of his first blow, biting deeper.

"*Banzai!*" said Hideoshi, with his sword out and striking furiously with it. "Chop off Timoshenko's head!"

His blade broke upon the table edge with a sharp ping of flying steel. The tall man laughed as Hideoshi picked up the broken pieces of blade and examined them sadly.

"Battle sword, modern," said Hideoshi apologetically. "More delicate. Not headsman's sword like *katana*."

Laughing like a horse, the tall man lifted up his long two-handed sword and whanged it down again. This time the heavy edge of the billiard table, hit precisely for the third time at the same point, was chopped through. Swinging the blade around him in complete circles like a throwing hammer, pivoting on his heels, the tall man swept it through *satsuma* vases standing on teakwood tables, through the glass of a bookcase front, laughing, staggering, pivoting, whirling, with crash on crash; while Hideoshi ducked politely from the waist, keeping out of the way.

"Russkies! Koreans! Dutchmen! Aussies! Chinks! Limeys! Yanks!" he shouted with blazing laughter. "Wham! Off roll their heads! But your battle sword was too delicate. Ping! Did it break!"

He paused in the middle of the floor, regaining his balance with a stagger, still laughing, with the point of the long sword dug into the floor, resting on it like a staff.

He wiped his jerking mouth with the back of his dirty hand, and thrust the long sword away into his sash again, be-

side the other, the short sword, nestled there.

"Hell, that was fun," he said. "More fun than a million dollars. I'm hungry. Let's eat."

HE LED the way into the dining room. They sat down cross-legged on mats at the foot-high table. He clapped his hands. "Radio San Francisco music!" he said. "Food! What is it?" he asked the brown girl kneeling by his side, with head bowed, offering a steaming dish before him.

"Eggs," she said. "Special white eggs for the *taikan*."

"White or brown, they look alike to me," he said.

Hideoshi giggled. His head rocked back and forth on his neck, giggling. His whole body rocked back and forth. He waved both hands before his face, speechless, suffused with mirth. His gold teeth showed back to his back molars.

"You are so funny, General," he said. "White eggs or brown, they look alike to you."

"And taste alike, Yama. Close your eyes, and see. What else is there?"

"Octopus, *taikan*," said the kneeling girl beside him. "Raw fish. Seaweed. Radishes. Sweet potatoes. Rice."

"I'll take the eggs," he said. "What's the matter with you, Yama, that you haven't got Australia yet? I'm damned hungry for some beef and mutton."

"It is one difficult thing," said Hideoshi with regret.

The tall man ate with his dirty hands, licking them and sucking his fingers, and wiping them on his skirt.

"Rice," he said. "Rice and rubber. Rice and tin. Rice and oil and tin and rubber and more rice. Or have we got the oil yet? Well, it's in the ground. Six months or a year, and we'll get it. Let's hope we don't have to eat it. Plenty of rice, anyway. But I wish you'd go after

some of those meat-eating countries pretty soon, Yama. You've been promising them a long time."

"So sorry."

"I want a steak."

"Tomorrow, General."

"Yes, I know. Like the last time. Dead donkey. Take Australia, Yama."

"There is a limit to my abilities, to my regret."

"A generalship and a million dollars, and everything that I could think of that I might ever want so long as I might live. And you can't even get Australia for me and a steak."

Hideoshi fidgeted a little uncomfortably.

"Would you like a pipe, General?" he said.

"A pipe is always pleasant," said the tall pale man, with a jerking lip. "It's mild and soothing. Healthy, too. I think. In the States I used to use cocaine. What was the name of that little brown rat who owned the fishing boat at San Pedro?"

"Commander Yamacucha. He's Admiral Yamacucha now. In command of the Andaman squadron."

"He used to get me cocaine. All I wanted, for nothing. He and I became great pals. First to approach me with the proposition, I think. I used to get quite a kick out of the stuff in those days. It's illegal in the States. But I've rather grown away from it since I came here. It razzles your nerves. It doesn't leave you happy."

"Very bad business," agreed Hideoshi. "We manufacture great quantity of it, of course. Nine-tenths in whole world. But no Japanese use it. Solely for export to Chinese and Americans."

"I know," said the tall man. "Useful stuff, in its place. But the pipe is milder."

"We supply that, too."

"I know, Yama. The Manchukuo poppy monopoly. No danger of it ever running out. I can always have that, anyway, if

not steaks. Which is better than in the States. Pipes!" he clapped his hands.

"Would you excuse me if I do not join, General?" said Hideoshi apologetically. "My weak stomach. So sorry. You know, unable to stomach pipes."

"Sometimes, Yama, I almost think that you are, at heart, a prude and an ascetic. What you sacrifice for me!"

"Am very bad man," said Hideoshi, matter-of-factly.

"I won't argue that. In your own way. But I am a much worse one, Yama."

A kneeling girl—the same that had been there before, or another; he got them mixed up, mostly; they were all alike to him—came and presented him the opium pipe. She had put the little pin-point of drug in the low flat bowl, and had lit it for him.

"Come, darling," he said, reaching out an arm to embrace her.

But she eluded him with a giggle, and escaped. Hideoshi also giggled.

"They all look alike to me," said the tall man.

Hideoshi giggled again.

THE tall man lay upon an elbow. He sucked on his pipe with his hard jerking mouth. His red-rimmed eyes, implacable, brooded, looking stonily at a point beyond Hideoshi's shoulder. Hideoshi did not turn his head. He knew that there was nothing of interest behind him—that the tall, thin, dirty white man with the scraggy cheeks and the pale red-rimmed eyes was looking at nothing.

Still, the look of his eyes was implacable, and it made even Hideoshi's hard brown apelike little soul shiver somewhat and whimper and suck its knuckles deep inside him. Taikan Barsen, the *keto-jin*, the tall pale-eyed pale-skinned crazy man, had a hard mouth. Not smiling all the time like pleasant Japanese.

"Where are they headed for, Yama?" said the white *taikan* with the hard eyes.

"Osaka, where they dropped their bombs, General," said Hideoshi promptly. He did not need to ask who.

"Why wait for Osaka?"

"Some maximum psychological effect is hoped to be experienced by them there," Hideoshi said.

"Yes. It's a point. But two days more on foot, at the rate they're going—" the tall white man commented. "It's not getting down to the business of the questioning too quickly."

"A few days, perhaps even a week more or less, is not necessarily of moment," said Hideoshi. "Their base must be far away. They will not likely be coming again so immediately. Even so long as two weeks, if they kindly oblige by giving fullest information at their disposal at end of that time, should be time enough to be prepared locally for next raid which may be scheduled. Also to initiate counter measures to assault base and destroy, even if at sacrifice of airplane carrier. Only necessary to be sure that when they speak, they speak truthfully and fully."

"Who's going to supervise the questioning?"

"Tojo himself."

"Who is going to conduct it?"

"Many experts. Major Huchi, Colonel Maruchi, General Womma, all of Intelligence. Assisted by Major Taimuchi of Medical Corps to see that interrogation is not conducted too wearily and intensively at one time, thus killing goose that lays golden information eggs. It will be done patiently, but completely."

The tall pale man smoked, with his hard eyes, his stony mouth.

"Major Kirby Collins, U. S. Marine Corps," he said. "And this young Mallon. Second Lieutenant Bartlett Mallon, U. S. Army Air Force. Those were their names on their identification tags. They didn't think to remove and dispose of them."

"Are you acquainted with the older man, General?"

"Did he look as if he knew me?"

"Not the pale red-haired younger one with the bandaged head," admitted Hideoshi. "This Mallon looked as if he knew nothing yet. But the older man—he looked at you, General."

So Hideoshi had been watching over the top of the wall, along with the girls. He had thought so.

"He looked at me, but he did not speak."

"I did not hear him speak, General."

"He will not speak," said the tall hard-mouthed man. "I would not care to have him speak my name, even twenty years from now, after the war is over—in San Diego, Washington, New York or San Francisco. I would not care to have him speak my name in his own mirror in the locked privacy of his bedroom. But he will never speak my name anywhere, any time. I am quite sure of it."

"I think you may be assured of that, General," said Hideoshi.

The tall man smoked.

"This Mallon, of course, had never seen me. But it must be the same one. The same name, rank, and service. Have you got the clipping, Yama?"

"The clipping from the San Diego paper, brought by the fishing boat making contact with the submarine?"

The tall man nodded, smoking. "There aren't many clippings pertaining to me these days," he said. "The service might as well be discontinued."

HIDEOSHI pulled his worn sealskin purse from his tunic. He opened it, extracting a soiled and much folded newspaper clipping. He read it in a high sing-song.

"The wedding of Miss Jessie Barsen, daughter of Mrs. Raymond Barsen and the late Captain Raymond Barsen, to Second Lieutenant Bartlett Mallon, U. S. Army Air Force, was announced—"

"You don't need to read it all. I wanted to be sure it was the same name again."

"The clipping service marked your name," said Hideoshi in apology. "That's why it was brought. It was not for the fishing boat nor the submarine to judge its importance or unimportance."

"I am no longer a matter of news," said the tall pale man. "There are other things important, for them to blat and howl about in their damned newspapers. It was not deemed necessary for them to say anything about me, only my name as her father—the late. It is well. Odd that it should be him with Collins. Two birds with one stone."

He smoked.

"Who is in charge of them?" he said. "The man upon the horse?"

"Colonel Upshita, of the Imperial Household Guards. He also will assist at the questioning."

"Communicate with the gendarmes along the route, and have him halt at the Shrine with them."

"Have him halt the *keto-jin* at the Shrine, General?"

"They ought to be there about now," said the tall white man, with his hard jerking mouth. "Order Colonel Upshita in my name to halt them at the Shrine, when he reaches there. I will question them myself. From them I will get things quicker and more completely than Hoochi, Coochi and Poochi, or whatever you said their names were, will get in a thousand years. Did you think I was afraid to face them?"

"But the Shrine is sacred, General. By the divine prescription of the Tenno, the Son of Heaven. It is sacred for ten thousand years."

"*Banzai!* And so am I."

"You also, General. But to let the *keto-jin* pause at your Shrine, with their dirty shod feet, from which they do not remove their shoes, would be a pollution."

"There is nothing sacred," said the tall

man with a jerk of his mouth. "Haven't I proved that?"

His eyes were on that point beyond Hideoshi's shoulder, with their pale red-rimmed glare. And Hideoshi knew that there was no one, and nothing of interest, behind him. Unless it was the great black shadow of the king of the *keto-jin* spirits himself, who comes up from the place of fire of which the Christians speak. He himself did not believe in that; yet he felt his spirit like a small monkey cower deep inside his liver, moaning with a terror of something in which he did not believe. And perhaps, it occurred to him, this pale red-eyed *keto-jin* himself, the Taikan Barsen, was that king of hell.

"The Shrine," said the tall man. "It is a holy place. And there I will do magic, and they will speak."

He put his pipe down. He arose, with his dirty crimson robe loose on his lean pale shoulders, in which the white muscles rippled and played. He felt the hafts of the two swords which protruded from his sash, upon the lean white muscles of his chest, the long five-foot beheading *katana*, and the short two-foot sword which with it the samurai knights always carried.

"One for each, Yama," he said.

Though he did not say how he would divide them.

He pulled out the longer sword now, and lifted it in two hands, and smote it down on the low table with its dirtied dishes and stale greasy food. Food and pottery and chopped wood flew, in a hurricane of shards.

"Dinner is over," he said.

At the wall telephone Hideoshi was transmitting the order, to be relayed to Colonel Upshita along the route. Slowly the tall pale man thrust back his long murderous blade into his sash. He tightened the sash and wrapped long yellow silk about his lean loins. He looked towards Hideoshi at the phone, but with eyes that did not see him.

They saw only two swords stained deep with blood, in the quick and immediate future.

CHAPTER FIVE

"I'll Fly to Hell!"

ONE OF THOSE Japanese policemen stood beside the road ahead, Kirby Collins saw.

The evening was darker. It was open country now, a dirt road. There were cedars in strange twisted shapes, curiously beautiful. The beautiful Inland Sea was not far away, and the sound of its washing waters.

Away from the dirty befouled ant-heap towns. If there were only fifty or a hundred thousand Japanese in Japan, and no more of their dirty roaring factories, but all lived in open country, they would be a perfect little race of men, thought Kirby, in a perfect little country. He would like to help them approach that state of perfection.

There was a double row of straight tall poplar trees, black in the silvery evening, which went off at right angles from the road ahead, at the point where the gendarme was standing. At the distance of a quarter mile in from the road, at the end of the poplar row, there stood a roof upon four pillars. One of those innumerable Shinto shrines which dot Japan, where men can pray to themselves and their ancestors, which is more satisfying to the Yamato soul than praying to a god.

The little policeman bowed from the waist as the horse of the little spidery colonel came up to him. The colonel reined in. "*Raku! Raku!*" said the guards, and halted. Kirby stood, with the blood draining from him. Thirty hours without sleep. But he had a feeling that pretty soon he was going to sleep a long time.

"Sssssss!" said the little gendarme, straightening up from his deep bow to the

little spidery colonel on the big horse.

"*Raku raku! Raku! Gumma!*"

"*Gumma, gumma. Raku.*"

"*Raku.*"

"*Gumma.*"

The policeman saluted, and heeled away. He got on his bicycle and pedaled off.

"*Raku,*" said the colonel explanatorily, turning in saddle, to the guards behind, pointing with his sword up the row of poplars to the temple at the end.

"*Raku. Gumma,*" said the guards, picking up their rifles again. "*Raku!*" they said to Kirby and Bart Mallon.

They turned off the road, and marched over a sward of smooth close-clipped grass, between the rows of poplars on either side, towards the temple standing at the end.

A little wind blew on Kirby's back as they marched up the grassy alley, between the rows of tall funereal poplars. An east wind, he thought; for he had an idea that they had turned west. Some quotation came to him: "*Fill their belly with the east wind. . .*" Something from the Bible. He forgot the rest of it, but it was something about the futility of men's endeavors, he thought. He wasn't filling his own belly with the east wind yet, however, for it was blowing on his back.

"Are we almost home now, Casey?" said Bart Mallon beside him.

"We're almost home."

Bart Mallon laughed. "I called you Casey," he said. "My head's a little woozy. You are Bugs O'Ryan."

"It's all the same."

"What day is it?"

"It's later than we think."

"We make the big hop pretty soon, don't we?"

"Yes, very soon."

"I wish I could tell Jessie that we're making the big hop. But of course I can't."

"No, of course you can't. But sooner or later she'll know. I wouldn't worry

about her just now, boy, anyway."

"She has blue eyes," said Bart Mallon.

"She is my wife. Her name is Jessie."

"Never forget her," said Kirby Collins.

"Just think of her forever."

"Oh, yes, sir, I'll do that. Bugs—"

"Yes?"

"Excuse me, Sergeant Finch."

"Okay, I'm here."

He had to answer for all of them.

"Why do you fellows keep crowding in on me?"

"Sorry," said Kirby.

Perhaps he was aware of the grim guards, in his dim mind. Perhaps of something else.

"Tonight's the night, isn't it, sir? I just remembered. It must be almost time!"

"It is," said Kirby.

Not that he knew.

THE Shinto temple was just four square concrete pillars, about fifty feet apart, supporting a red-tiled pagoda roof, about twenty feet high. Low stone steps on all four sides. On three sides the spaces between the supporting corner pillars were covered over with some of those Japanese paper side-walls. In the front, however, the wall was recessed back about twenty feet, making a kind of shallow anteroom beneath the roof. A tall bronze urn stood in this front part, and then the paper wall behind, enclosing the rest of the space beneath the temple roof, and nothing more. It looked like a tomb, thought Kirby. The tomb of some great dead beast, buried behind that wall.

"*Raku raku,*" said the colonel.

They halted. The soldiers stooped, supported by their rifles, and removed their shoes. The colonel pulled off his own boots in saddle. He rode his horse up the low, flat stone steps into the front part of the temple, reverent and unshod. The horse stuck its muzzle into the bronze urn, and pulled his nose back out, munching a bird's nest.

Four of the little dwarf soldiers pushed Kirby and Bart Mallon forward, up the steps, while the rest of them stacked arms and settled down in sock feet, with their helmets pushed on the backs of their heads, upon the grass outside. The four grim little men who had been designated for the task pushed the two *keto-jin* up and into the temple. They forced them to their knees in front of the great urn, facing the rear wall.

No word said. The guards dropped the ropes which were tied to their captives' wrists, and yawned, stretching themselves. Two of them went out again, to join the others who had stacked arms, and to stack their own. Two, however, remained on guard, with the bayonets on their rifles, alert.

Kirby Collins had an idea what that kneeling posture meant. But he didn't think they would go through with any beheading yet.

He thought it was just the first act of the works.

Bart Mallon must have thought he was in church then, in his fog. His lips moved, praying. Looking up at the blank paper wall in front of them, with lips moving, and perhaps seeing visions. But there was no god behind that wall, only a great dead beast.

The evening air was darkening fast, from fair silver to black. Mosquitoes hummed, stung Kirby on the face and neck. Great bloated mosquitoes. He suffered them without movement, waiting, trying to figure what was coming next. That terrible, twisted mouth of Slim Barsen's. The eternal hate of it—his cold eyes.

There was still a little light outside, but beneath the roof of the temple it was growing black. He could barely see the two soldiers, standing on guard with their bayoneted rifles, but he heard them slapping at their own mosquitoes, conversing in a low *rakurakuraku*. The little spidery

colonel sat on saddle on his black horse, and the horse stirred a little on the floor of the sacred temple.

The darkness was deeper. Bart Mallon, still in his fog, was praying to a God who was not here. Kirby Collins waited. They would not open his lips, least of all that white Yamato, Slim Barsen.

The colonel lit a match to apply to a cigarette. In its glow his brown spider face twitched, wrinkling with the mosquitoes. His little black spider eyes glittered brightly, looking down at Kirby and Bart Mallon. His sword lay across his pommel. He had two guns on his belt. He smoked, while his horse moved about on skittery feet, dragging that torn rag still at its hocks, though by now there was little left of it.

It was all black beneath the temple roof, except for the glow of that little spider's cigarette as he sat and meditated. Perhaps he knew what was coming.

Kirby knew, too, but it didn't make him any more comfortable. What was coming was Slim Barsen. ❀

There was the sound of a car coming off the road, a quarter mile distant. Kirby turned his head upon his shoulders. The two straight rows of poplars were black now in the night, pointing to the black, star-sprinkled sky. The alley of smooth sward between them, wide and straight, seemed to stretch out to the stars which lay at the end of it. It was really very beautiful, that straight level stretch between the poplars, and the stars beyond forever.

But the lights of that great car coming—

A great humpbacked charcoal-burner. They hadn't got their oil yet. Let them drink it when they did get it—with a funnel at their throats.

A great car, with flags flying in sockets on each side the hood. It stopped at one side of the temple, not in front; and its passengers got out of it.

The sound of rifles outside snapping to the present. "*Raku! Raku! Taikan!*"

"*Gumma,*" said the voice of Slim Barsen.

HE CAME in, the tall pale man, with Hideoshi, who had driven him in his great car. He came up the low flat steps at the front of the temple, and paused at the top to remove his wooden *getas*. With his long, dirty yellow *shinto* skirt swishing about his ankles, and his rich crimson robe thrown carelessly over his lean sinewy shoulders. With the two straight sword hafts protruding from his sash, the long and short *katanas* of the samurai. One for each, as he had said to Hideoshi.

It must be too dark for them to see him now, he thought, coming into the blackness of the temple. Yet Kirby Collins knew who he was already, of course. Kirby had recognized him, had probably seen that globe-and-anchor on his chest. He had had his robe off when they were passing by, he remembered. Foolish of him to have exposed it. Foolish for him to have ever had it tattooed on at all. *Semper Fidelis*—always faithful—the motto of the marines. It was a laugh.

He was going to laugh in a few moments, with his hard twitching mouth.

No matter if it was light or darkness, Kirby knew who he was already. Perhaps had guessed before what had become of him, though he had kept silent because of Mary. As for that young army man whom Jessie had married, he hadn't known him and never would.

Kirby knew him, but Kirby would never say anything to anyone. That was sure. He was glad that neither of them could see him now, though, even if Kirby knew who he was.

He came in with Hideoshi, always following him, always close behind him. His shadow, he should call Hideoshi. Except that there were probably no shadows in the temple here.

It was too black, he thought.

"Colonel Upshita?" he said.

"Yes, General."

"Where are you, Colonel?"

"On my horse here. Where you see my cigarette."

Hideoshi giggled. "Where you see his cigarette, General—like a firefly. That's Upshita."

"Where are the *keto-jin*? Oh, yes, kneeling. A restful posture. What guards are here?"

"Here, sir! Here, sir!"

"Oh, yes. Remain at attention, the two of you. Colonel Upshita, it has pleased me to have these two *keto-jin* brought to the sacred Shrine, which by the edict of the Tenno, the Son of Heaven, has been made sacred for ten thousand years."

"*Banzai,*" said the little spider on his horse, waving his cigarette. "General Barsen is also sacred to Japanese for ten thousand years. His wish is law to all Japanese. The general desires to question the *keto-jin*?"

"Yes," said the man who had been Slim Barsen. "I think that perhaps, in my more direct and forthright way, I may more quickly get possession, here and now, of what lies in their minds. And thereafter set free these *keto-jin* for further voyagings, and no less quickly, too."

He had pulled out his great two-handed sword from his sash, with a single sweeping gesture. He reached forward, touching the back of Kirby Collins' neck with his deft expert fingers. The back of the young American army bomber, too. Getting their position fixed in his mind and heart and brain, in the black darkness of that tomblike place.

He won't do it, thought Kirby Collins, tight-lipped and silent, kneeling on the stone floor. *There is too much the Yamatos want to learn from us. It's just part of the questioning. He has that great headsman's sword, and he is mad as a hat-*

ter, and his damned mouth is all twisted up with a crazy hate. But he isn't going to kill us—not now.

“YES,” said the man who had been Slim Barsen. “Very quickly.”

And there was no more need of words. He had them placed. His mouth was twisted up in a snarl with his implacable hate, so that his canines were caught within his lip. His crazed unending hate that would last through hell. He lifted up the great two-handed sword above his shoulder, swiftly and expertly. It cut through the darkness with a black lightning swish.

Now, Major Yama Hideoshi was a very cunning man. Even among the Japanese he was phenomenal for his cunning. Otherwise he might not have been appointed aide to General Barsen, which was a post requiring unremittingly the exercise of a very keen intelligence, as has been seen. Major Hideoshi had also a phenomenal sense of hearing. His sense of touch or feeling was incredibly sensitive and alert, also.

In fact, Major Hideoshi was a very superior man all over, even compared to other Japanese, who are all the children of the Sun Goddess, and as far removed from other men as they are from monkeys.

Major Yama Hideoshi was so very quick and cunning, in fact, that he was almost as cunning as a fly, which can sense a swat coming toward it while it is only a gleam in the rolling eye of a fat man in an easy chair.

Major Hideoshi had that quickness and that cunning. Moreover, he had seen that hard look about Taikan Barsen's mouth, and he had had that warning, too—a terrified warning to the liver of his small brown monkey soul.

His hand had snapped his gun out, *click, click, click*, as that blade swished.

He stood there, Yama Hideoshi, in the

blackness, with his gun in his hand, jamming it into the liver of the whirling General Barsen, and pulling it *click, click, click*. The great swishing *katana* sword of General Barsen had gone right through his neck from left to right, as if through air, so heavy, keen and swift. He himself had given the general instruction in the *katana*, though of course he had never been so good as the general, because it requires a tall man, a rangy man, with long lean sinewy shoulders, and a great stance of widespread feet, to swish and swish that great two-handed sword a little quicker than black lightning. He stood there, Yama Hideoshi, and it had gone right straight across his neck, and all thereto pertaining, and he pulled his gun finger very quickly, *click, click, click*.

But the gun was empty. He had emptied it in the bar-room, in the happy joint-wrecking game or maybe shooting at Koreans. In one way or another since he had emptied it, he had not had a chance to load it up again, with the games that he and Taikan Barsen had played. If it had been his sword that he had snatched for, he would have found its broken blade quite useless, too. It went, the quick gun in his hand, just *click, click, click*, as his quick gun finger pulled the trigger.

And even the jerking of his finger must have been just an empty reflex action, for the swishing sword had gone right through his neck, including windpipe, spine, spinal cord and jugular—and though there was a fraction of a second while he was clicking out his gun that his head still reposed upon his shoulders and the smile upon his face, his head had no more connection with the rest of his body below his shoulders than a billiard ball has with the table it lies on. And the smile on his face no more meaning than the smile of a billiard ball. Perhaps it never had had.

It rolled off, his head, with a bump to the floor, as his knees collapsed beneath

him in the darkness, and he dropped, with a great geyser of arterial blood spurting up from his still pumping heart.

Swish! Swish!

"What do you men mean by dropping your rifles?" said Colonel Upshita sharply, waving his cigarette. "*Raku, raku, raku!* Do you want to be shot?"

"Don't blame them, Colonel. They just lost their heads. Where are you? I haven't quite got you yet."

"Where you see my cigarette, on my high horse."

"Oh, yes, a fine high horse. I've got him by the tail. What's tied to his tail, Colonel?"

"The rag of the flag of the *keto-jin*. Their flag of the sunset and the stars of night, you remember."

"Oh, yes, I remember. I haven't got you quite. Would you just bend your head down towards me, Colonel? Thanks."

KIRBY COLLINS heard the brief staccato exchange of "*Raku! Raku!*" words. Not two minutes had passed since the tall gaunt man had come up the steps from his car parked beside the temple. He heard the sudden *swish*.

It was poised above his head. *He won't do it, he won't do it.* But he didn't realize what the man who had been Slim Barsen would do, and had already done.

The blade swished down. It cut sharp and clean. And his head was still on his shoulders.

Again the *swish*, where Bart Mallon knelt with swaying head beside him.

"Your hands are free," said Slim Barsen. "Get up."

Kirby moved his arms around in front of him. His hands were two blocks of wood at the ends of chains of hot fire. Still, they were free.

"It's in there," said the voice of the man who had been Slim Barsen, with a tone in it almost like a sob. "It's in there, back of the paper wall. I got back each

part, after they had copied it. I put it all together, just as it had been. They built the shrine for it. They made it a sacred god. For boys to come and worship, for ten thousand years.

"It's in there. Perfect as the day it left the factory. Gas and oil in it, too. Extra gas tanks. I saved them, drop by drop."

"I?" said Kirby. But he knew.

"What do you want me to do?" he said.

"Paper walls," said the man who had been Slim Barsen. "Kick her motor over, and tear through. Down the steps, and a straight runway eastward. I designed it with that runway east. The prevailing wind, and it's an east wind now. Blowing from across the Pacific. Blowing from Pearl Harbor—from San Diego.

"A straight runway into the wind, between the poplars. And she lifts like a rocket. Vladivostok five hundred miles due north. You wouldn't even need a compass. With the extra gas tanks, plenty to spare. Just hang her to Polaris, Kirby, and sit back and sleep."

"It won't carry three, Slim."

"I know that."

"You've planned it all out, every move and every detail, a long time, haven't you?" said Kirby curiously. "You've planned it out for years. Why haven't you ever done it yourself?"

He said it over his shoulder, for the blood was coming hard to his hard keen fists again, and he was moving fast.

Sliding the door open, sliding inside, feeling that ship over, with quick hands.

"Even two machine-guns," he said. "A little under-firepowered for these days, but we aren't going to go chasing Zero babies."

"They're just to open up and clear the way as you take off," said the voice of that man in the blackness. "Whoever might be in the way. You open your engine, and you open them up, and you go tearing out through the paper wall and through anything that's in front that's

flesh and blood. Only an urn to move out of the way. I'll move it."

"Why help me?" said Kirby almost savagely. "Why help this boy here? If you knew who he is, maybe you'd want to kill him. Why didn't you ever do it yourself, when you've planned it in every detail?"

"I couldn't see it," said Slim Barsen.

"No, you couldn't see it, and I guess you were right. You could have made Vladivostok, and gone on into Central Asia. But that wasn't what you did it for, was it? A life in Central Asia. Sure, why hop, why run away? You're sitting pretty, General. You're doing all right."

"I couldn't see it," said Slim Barsen. "They've given me everything I wanted, according to the bargain. But they had to keep me safe. As soon as I got here they put out my eyes."

IN THE cockpit, with the dazed young red-haired army bomber up in the rear seat behind him, Kirby Collins looked down before he kicked the starter. The ship was perfect, he knew that. Slim was a crackerjack mechanic, eyes or not.

"Be back again, Slim!" he said, with a trace of that old remembered friendship in his voice. "Be back again, and maybe sooner than you think!"

He kicked the engine over then. He slammed the throttle open, and with them the racket of the guns. He went shooting forward like a silver bullet, through the paper wall, and down the low slat steps, between the fleeing brown shadows, and down the wide level alley between the poplars with fleeting wheels.

Up, up like a rocket. Up like a new-milled bullet. Up to the world's roof. And heading north then, hanging it on Polaris, straight for Vladivostok five hundred miles away. . . .

In the empty Shinto shrine Slim Barsen stood a moment among the dead men. The sacred silver bird had flown away.

How often he had thought of its flight. He would have liked to have watched it go, if nothing else.

He knelt upon the floor, and tucked the edge of his robe beneath his knees, and the front fringes of his sash, unwinding it from about him.

Now, of the two swords of the samurai knights, the long one is the headsman's sword, to be used in battle only. The shorter one is also used in battle, but it has other uses, too, when the time has come for that. The man who had been Slim Barsen had told Hideoshi that there would be one blade for each. Poor Yama. He hadn't understood quite at the time, but he knew now.

He had had his blade, and this other was for him, Slim Barsen. It was the time for this.

He knelt upon the floor of the empty Shinto temple, among the headless dead men, and said, "I have done a clean thing for you, Mary. God bless you, and take me into His eternity when my sins are cleaned. And may my country forgive me also. Ah—"

He felt around him on the floor in the darkness. A piece of rag was on the cold stone floor. He clutched it, and bit it in his teeth, to ease the pain. A piece of the flag which had been tied to the tail of Colonel Upshita's horse. He was clutching it still as he fell forward, and they would find him so. . . .

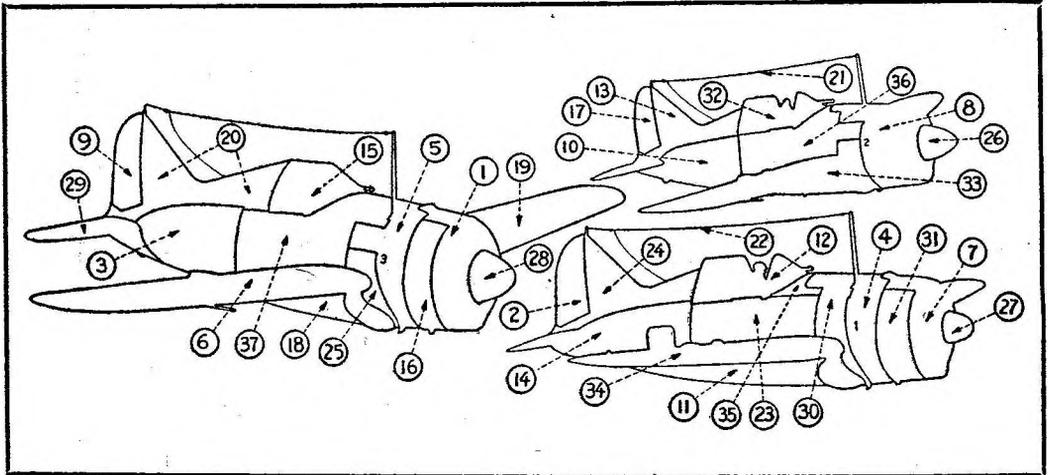
An hour away, Kirby Collins looked back at the young army man behind him, who had tapped him on the shoulder. Bart Mallon's head was clearing in the swift cold sky.

"Why couldn't we tell Jessie and her mother that some place in Japan," Bart shouted, "we ran into some fisherman or somebody who saw Captain Barsen's ship fall, and can certify he's dead? It would be a great relief for her, and only a small lie."

"I think it might be done," said Kirby.

ASEMBLIT

By **FREDERICK BLAKESLEE**

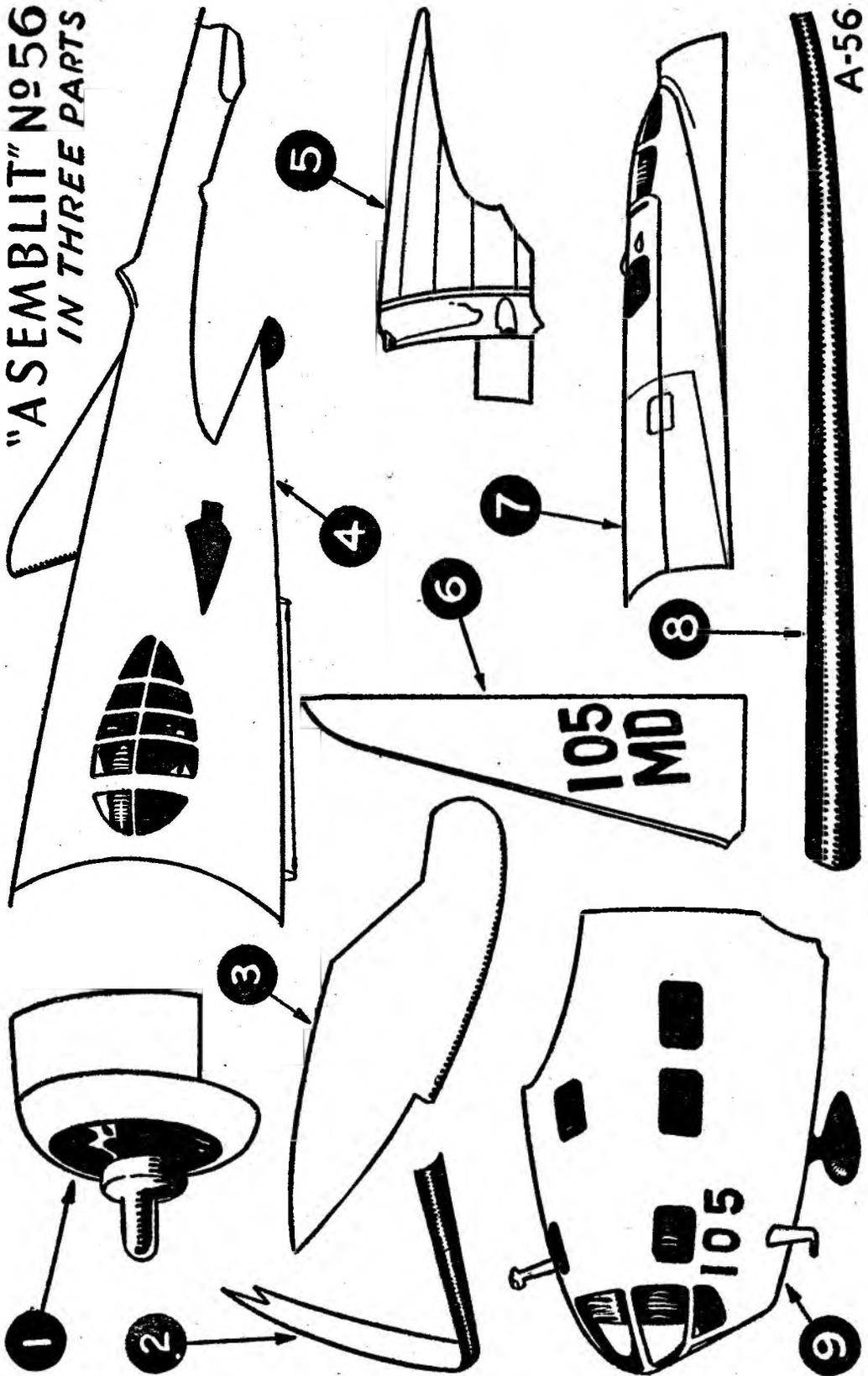


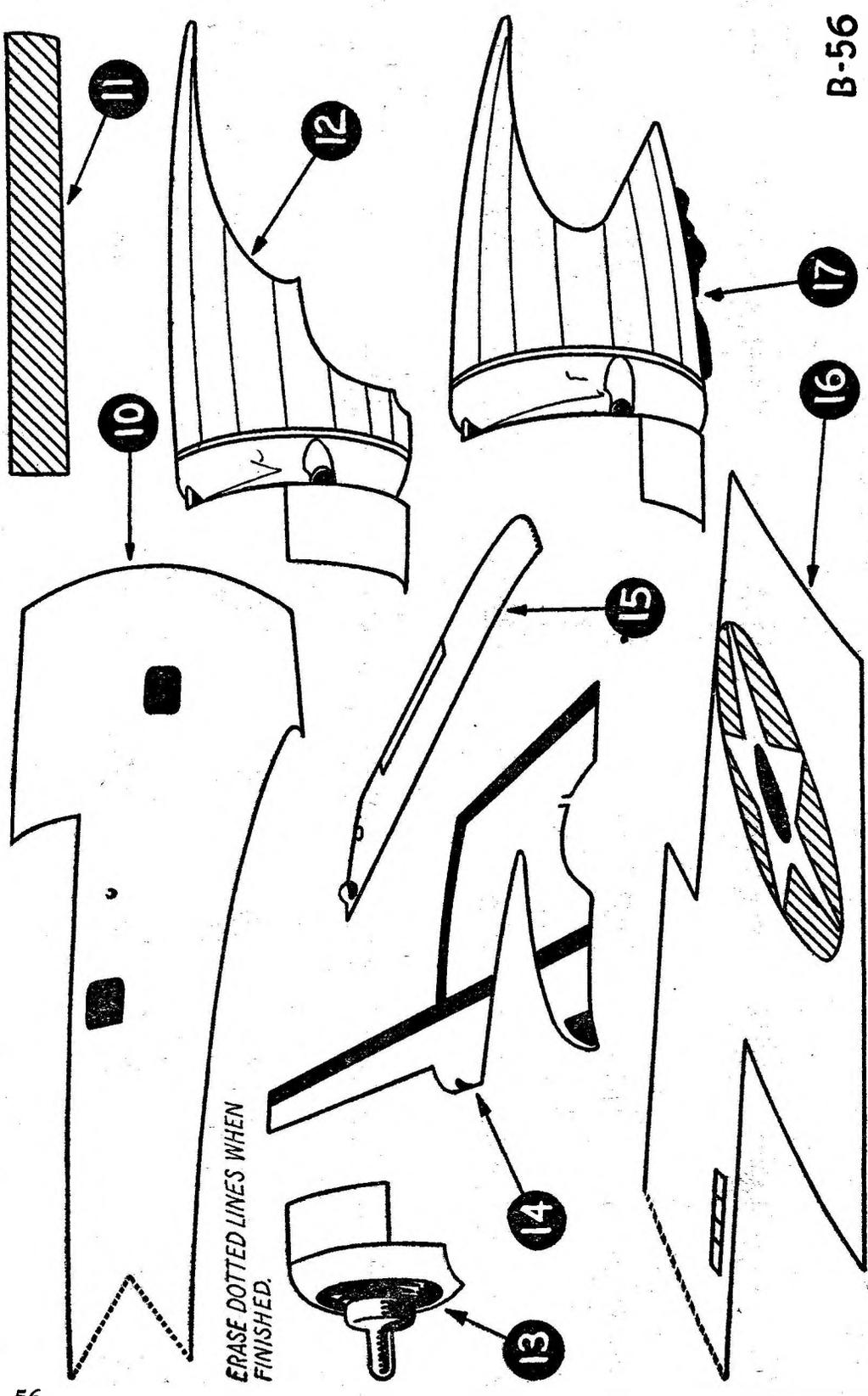
THE Brewster "Buffalo" was the subject of our last ASEMBLIT puzzle, and, as you know by now, there were three of them. The trick was to separate the three and then put them in formation. Above is how it should have been done.

This month I am giving you a well known American giant that is making its weight of bombs felt more and more. The Japs have good reason to fear it. As usual, the numbered units are not in the order in which it is put together, but simply for you to use in checking the solution.

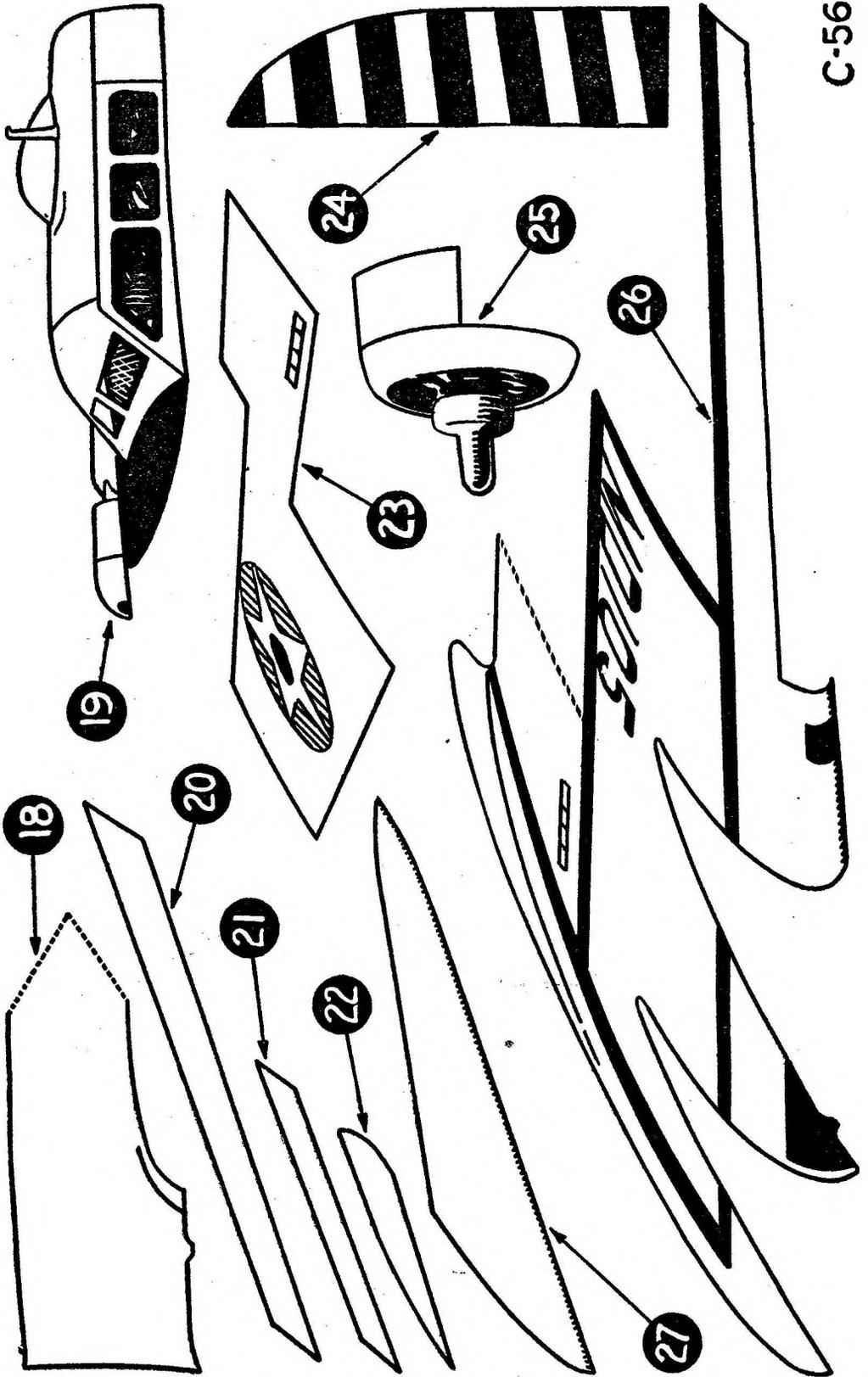
To all those who have sent in their solution and want that fur-lined bathtub, I'm sorry to say I can no longer get them. You see, the fur came from a rare animal called the Jeeperpuss. Before I could send an expedition to the Bronx to collect the Jeeperpuss, the army stepped in and requisitioned all Jeeperpuss fur to line their jeeps with. What could I do? Buck the army? Not me!

**"ASEMBLIT" No 56
IN THREE PARTS**

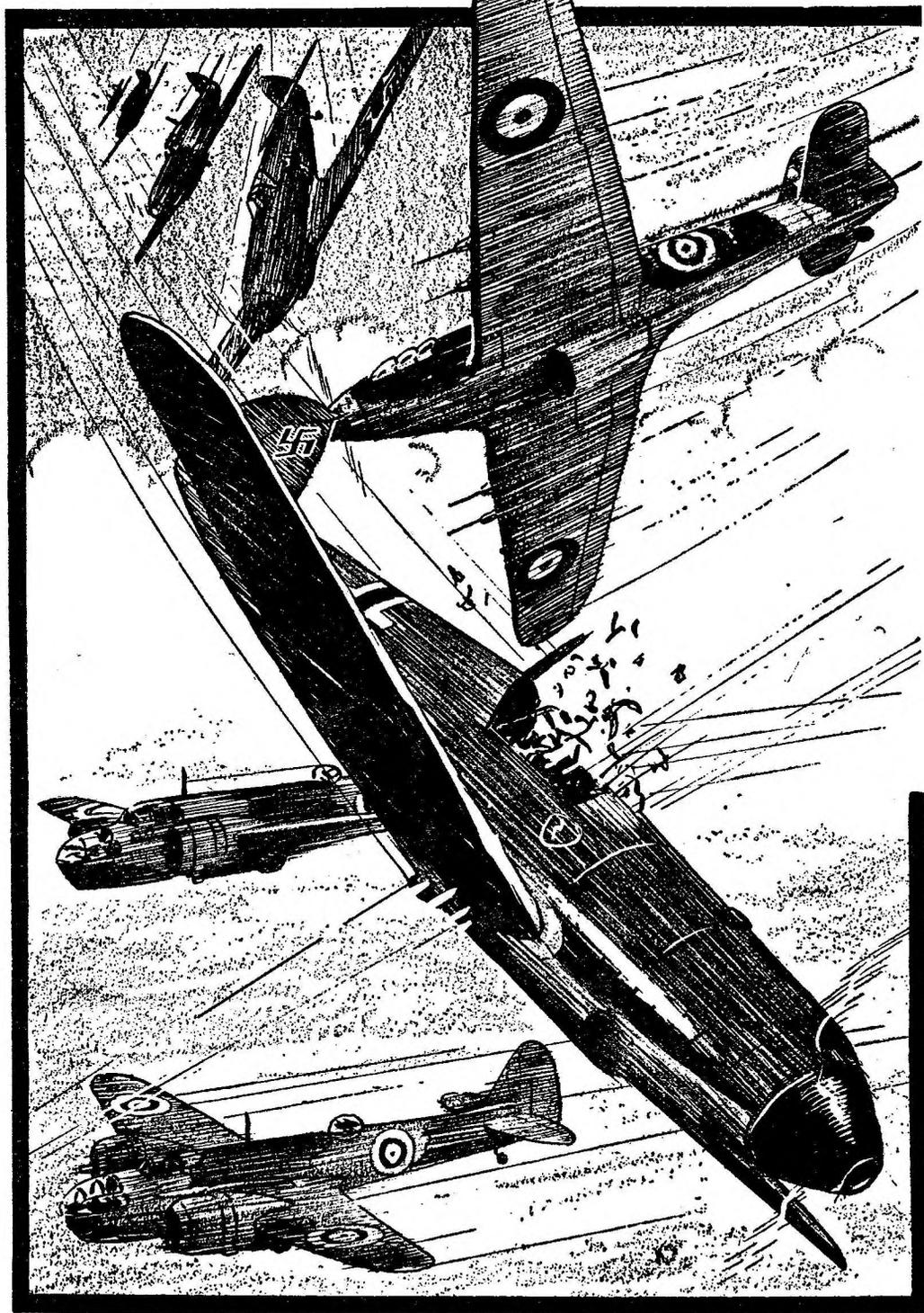


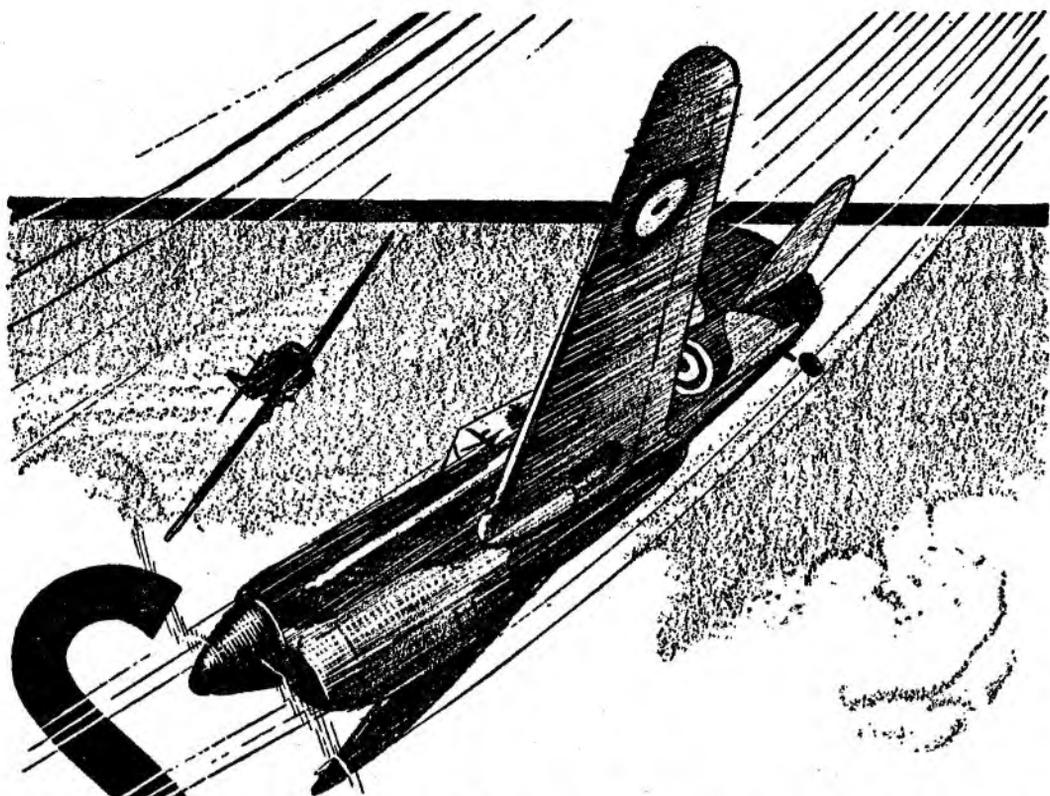


ERASE DOTTED LINES WHEN FINISHED.



TROUBLE





SHOOTER

By WILLIAM PORTER

CHAPTER ONE

The Yanks Are Comin'

THE Tomahawk came into the base at Bir El Achmed doing a slick three hundred miles an hour. The festivities began with howling, vicious power dives at the battered GHQ shanty and the big oil tank. Then the plane stood on its tail, climbed straight up for a thousand feet, and did a very slick outside loop with the prop practically digging sand on the pullout. In the stillness of a desert morning, the racket was terrific.

"The war in the desert is over, chums—Sheridan has arrived to take over!"

A lean, stoop-shouldered Britisher, dressed in shorts and a pith helmet, came out of the headquarters shanty and stared mournfully at the sky.

"Not another one," he pleaded, looking heavenward. "Please, not another one."

The Tomahawk turned itself inside out with two consecutive Immelmans and finished off with a snappy slow roll. The slow roll ended almost on top of the

Britisher's helmet and the slipstream blew sand in his eyes.

"Please, not another one," he repeated plaintively. "No more Americans!"

The P-40 howled into a steep climb, pivoted on one wingtip at three hundred feet, and then nonchalantly made its approach to the runway deadstick. The wheels kissed lightly as a feather and the Curtiss rolled gently and quietly toward the line. A couple of ack emmas ducked out from the shade of the ramshackle hangar and trotted to meet him.

"Tell that bloke to come see me," the officer yelled. "If he can still walk!"

He swung on his heel and started back toward the shanty, shaking his head in slow despair.

"Americans," he said.

Phil Sheridan rolled the Tomahawk in front of the hangar and opened the greenhouse over his head. He was hot and dirty and dry, but he felt fine. He swung a foot over the side and crawled out on the wing.

"Let the bands play," he said. "The war in the desert is as good as over. Sheridan has arrived!"

The mechanics looked at each other and shrugged their shoulders. If an Englishman talked like that, it would mean he had a slight case of sunstroke. But Americans were naturally crazy. The grease monkeys knew about Americans.

"Coo," one of them said.

"Flying Officer Sheridan," the Yank went on cheerfully, "fresh from Cairo, with a brand new plane. How's business, gents?"

The mechanics looked at each other.

"Rippin', I'd say, sir," one of them answered. "The captain would like to see you."

One of the mechanics was opening the hangar doors. It was quite a job. They squeaked and scraped and groaned; he swore beneath his breath and pushed like hell. Inside, Phil could see the dim out-

lines about a dozen aircraft. Some of them were Tomahawks; others were bigger, slightly hump-backed.

"Hurricanes?"

"Yes, sir. At first the squadron was all Hurries. Then, when the replacements came in, they was all Tommies. Sort of half and half, sir."

"Variety," Sheridan said, brushing some of the sand out of his pants legs, "is the spice of life. See you later, gents."

"Right, sir. Cheerio."

SHERIDAN hiked briskly across the field. The sun was hot, viciously hot, and there wasn't a breath of air moving. Libya in August would make hell feel like a summer resort. By the time he had taken half a dozen steps, the soles of his feet were burning. He knocked on the door of the headquarters shanty and somebody yelled for him to come in.

The man behind the desk was lean, slightly bald. His skin was the color of mahogany, and his eyes were deep-set.

Group Captain Hastings looked more like a Sikh or a Hindu than an Englishman—until he spoke.

"Warmish, what?" He had a bottle of Scotch in his hand. He tilted it over a cracked earthenware cup. "Say when."

This guy and me, Phil Sheridan thought, *are going to be great chums*. He snapped off a fancy salute.

"Flying Officer Sheridan from replacement center in Cairo. Ready to fly, sir." He glanced at the cup. "Uh—when!"

Hastings put down the bottle and shoved the cup across the desk.

"There's some water over there in the jug if you want it." The C.O. corked the bottle, put it away into the drawer, and put his feet on the desk. "Sheridan, m'lad, you're now a member of the most remarkable squadron anywhere. We're an interceptor squadron, y'know. When anything Eytie or Jerry flies over, we intercept it. We're reconnaissance. When-

ever some confounded brass hat in Salum or thereabout thinks something needs bombing, we fly out and look it over. Then we fly escort for the lads who bomb it."

Phil Sheridan whistled between his teeth.

"Never a dull moment," he grinned.

"Quite," Hastings said dryly. "We're in the hot spot, you know. Stranded out here. And Rommel's push is due any time. It's going to be a big one. We'll catch plenty hell. Confidentially, that push, when it comes, may be too big for us to handle. It might get all the way to the Suez." He scowled for a moment, wiped the sweat from his cheeks with a handkerchief. "But meanwhile, we're here, forty miles from God knows where. It's like sitting on a stove. You may enjoy yourself. I doubt it. Any questions?"

"Myself," Phil Sheridan said, "I just like to fight. And the more people I have to fight, the better. I'll enjoy myself. That's a promise."

"Good!" Hastings grinned.

The door opened and another flyer entered.

"This," Hastings said to Sheridan, "is Mr. Jackson. He says we're to call him Stonewall. Jackson, this is Mr. Sheridan."

"Suh, I'm happy to know you," Stonewall Jackson said warmly. "'Nother American. That's nice."

Phil had to fight to keep from grinning when he spoke. Stonewall's Georgia accent was thick enough to cut with a knife, and he was a breath of the Old South. He was tall but thick-chested, and he had a mop of thick black hair that made little curls on the back of his neck and waved elegantly over his temples. His face was long and mournful. He looked like quite a guy.

"Hello, chum," Phil said. "How y'all?"

Jackson didn't think it was funny. His face was twisted in a puzzled frown.

"Sheridan?" he said. "Of co'se, you

couldn't be a relative of that great rascally No'thern general, Phillip Sheridan?"

Phil did grin that time.

"Sure," he said. "Least that's what my folks claim. He's a great uncle twice removed, or something like that. I was named for him. Only we don't generally call him a rascal."

"Suh, don't be deceived!" Jackson thundered, squaring his shoulders. "He was a rascal from way back!"

Sheridan chuckled.

"Depends on the point of view. Guess he was about the greatest cavalry officer that ever forked a horse. That's what Pop says."

Stonewall Jackson nearly strangled. A warm red flush crawled up his cheeks. His nostrils flared.

"As the directly-descended great-grandson of the greatest cavalry officer that ever lived, Grandpappy Stonewall Jackson, I am forced to inform you that you are mistaken, suh!" he sputtered stiffly. "And if you care to—"

"I'm damned," Hastings said wearily from the other side of the desk, "if I understand a bloody thing you're talking about, but it looks to me as if you chaps were getting off on the wrong foot." He smacked the table hard with his hand. "Confound it, there'll be no more petty quarrels within this squadron! Do you understand that?" He rubbed his hands over his eyes and sighed. "The Canucks fight the Canadians. The Scots fight the Irishman. Now, by the Lord Harry, we'll have none of this business of two Yanks battling!"

Jackson wheeled around.

"Captain Hastin's, suh, I am not a Yankee! I have told you that befo'." He took a long breath and got a grip on himself. "Mr. Sheridan, I am quite willin' to forget the Yankee chicanery and cheatin' that gave them their victory in the Wah between the States. The past is dead, and we-all are fighting in a great new cause.

So far as I'm concerned, your name might as well be Smith or Jones. I bear you no ill-will, suh."

He finished his speech like a bright-eyed schoolboy finishing an oration, and extended his hand. Phil Sheridan took it.

"Chum," he grinned, "that's mighty white of you."

"Thank God," Hastings sighed. "Now if you lads can get back to this war for a moment, you might be interested in knowing that you're flying escort duty for three Blenheims that are attacking an ammo depot near Fahaza. You'll be on the job alone. Give you a chance to get better acquainted. Not a very big show, but an important one."

He gave them instructions and told them to return for a check-through just before take-off. Stonewall Jackson and Phil Sheridan saluted and walked out together.

After they had gone, Hastings swung around in his swivel chair and spoke to a little orderly who was sweeping out the rear of the shack.

"Fotheringay," he said, "what the devil was the war between the States?"

Fotheringay thought for a minute.

"Never heard of it, sir," he said.

"Ignorant bloke, aren't you?" Hastings swiveled back around and got the bottle of Scotch out of the drawer and took a long pull. "Matter of fact," he said, "neither did I. Americans!"

CHAPTER TWO

Death on Wings

THE ME 109 Immelmanned out of a thirty-degree dive and came back with its guns talking plenty. Phil Sheridan crouched a little lower in the pit and held the nose of the Tomahawk steady, thundering in at the Nazi head-on at three hundred miles an hour. He waited until the Boche was close, dangerously close,

before his thumb hit the firing button. Smoky tracer reached out its fingers, clutched at the ME 109. The 'Schmitt wavered, then howled off on one tip and passed beneath the belly of the Curtiss. Phil hammered the P-40 around and tailed after him.

A thousand feet below, three beat-up, mangy-looking Blenheims were finishing their work over Fahaza. Fahaza was just like most desert outposts—three or four little buildings, a water-hole, and the ammo dump lay-out. The biggest building in the dump had been blasted on the Blenheims' first bombing run, and as Phil came out of his turn, he caught a glimpse of another shed spewing boards and wreckage upward. Another bomb had gone home! A tower of smoke and sand shot into the sky.

"Well, chum, here I come!" the Yank grated between his teeth as the ME swung into his sights again. The Boche started to climb, hanging by its prop, clawing frantically upward. The Tomahawk closed the gap. Sheridan threw another burst into the 109's fins. The Boche staggered and slipped to the left in a last desperate attempt to get out of the line of fire. Relentlessly Phil followed him over and down. When he started to straighten, the Yank let him have it. A howling bucketful of tracer smashed the ME's greenhouse to bits, nailed the pilot to the instrument panel. The 'Schmitt snarled into a crazy spin and headed for the sand.

"One for baby!" Sheridan howled happily.

"Nice straight shootin', suh," he heard Jackson drawl through the intercoms.

"Aw, that wasn't so much," Phil grinned. "Great-uncle Phil was the real straight-shooter of the family."

There was a muffled, disgusted snort in the earphones.

"Which reminds me, Dixie, how many ships have you got to your credit in this war?"

"Fo'. What about it, Yankee?" Jackson demanded belligerently.

"That," said Phil Sheridan, "is wonderful. That baby that just went down was my fifth. What's the matter with the soldiers of the South these days?"

"Hold onto the line fo' a moment, suh," the Southerner snapped.

There were four of the ME's left. Originally there had been six. One of the Blenheims had winged one, and Sheridan had just polished off the other. The Yank had been on duty with a Channel squadron before his transfer to the desert, and he had removed a quartet of Nazis from this mournful globe during his stay there, so this made his fifth.

"Call me 'Ace,' chum," he yelled into the throat mike. Stonewall didn't answer. He was too busy. Sheridan saw the dusty Hurricane slam in a hair-curling vertical with a 109 on its tail. The Nazi tried to follow and got lost. The vertical turned into a half-roll and then a half-loop, then, suddenly, the Hurry was three hundred feet below with its guns pointing upward. Eight Brownings howled and hammered together and tore the belly out of the 'Schmitt. It turned over on its back and shrieked toward the earth, a coil of dirty black smoke twisting from the pit.

"There you are, suh!" Jackson panted triumphantly through the earphones. "Reckon we're all even up."

Sheridan rubbed his eyes and swallowed. That was fast, slick, and beautiful. That was right off the top of the bottle. Brother Jackson handled a Hurry as if it grew on the seat of his pants.

"Not so bad yourself, Dixie," Phil said—but not into the mike. He opened the sending switch and yelled, "Luck, chum. Pure luck."

By that time the rest of the ME's were headed home. Wide open, those 109's were a little faster than the Hurry and they had a good forty m.p.h. edge on the Tomahawk. A wild goose chase across

the desert would have been nothing but a waste of gas. The Blenheims turned slowly and headed back for the roost. Stonewall Jackson brought up the rear on the portside, and Sheridan slipped into position on the other side of the V.

AS THEY climbed away, the Yank glanced overside. The ammo dump was still burning furiously, and there were three piles of mangled wreckage on the sand—not a bad day's work.

Phil snapped open the sending switch and spoke into the throat mike.

"So it's five up," he said. "Even all the way round, Dixie."

"It'll be one helluva snowy day in July, suh," the Southerner drawled back, "when a Sheridan can get ahead of a Jackson."

"Maybe you're mistaken, chum," Phil Sheridan said. "Next month's pay says I make it number six before you do."

"That, suh," Dixie said, "is a bet!"

It turned out to be more than a bet. It turned out to be a small-scale war—all by itself.

They were about eighty miles from the Blenheim's roost—Ophira, south of Bir El Achmed—when they stumbled onto a Fiat C.R. 42. The Fiat looked lonesome, and it was in a hurry. Sheridan spotted it first. The Eytie was only a couple of hundred feet above the sand, and the sun silhouetted the shadow of its wings on the dunes.

"Single enemy ship below. Going the other way," he reported through his throat mike to the leader of the Blenheims.

"Right. He won't cause any trouble," the squadron leader barked back.

That was obvious. The biplane was concerned only with getting home. Sheridan put his nose against the glass and studied it carefully. It was the first 42 he had ever seen—a short, stubby biplane, pants on the wheels. Nice-looking and

slick, but for a guy who cut his teeth on Tomahawks and Hurries, any biplane looks like something belonging to the Wright brothers.

Then, suddenly, Stonewall Jackson cut his Hurricane out of formation and skated off on one wing. In a split second he was diving right for the Fiat's pit, three thousand feet below.

"So that's the way it is," Sheridan muttered to himself, smiling grimly. "Well, chum, I need my next month's pay!"

He slammed the P-40's nose down and kicked the throttle wide open. There's one thing a Tomahawk can do better than anything with wings. It dives like a bucket of buckshot. In half a dozen seconds Sheridan was on the Southerner's fins, taking the elevator down at four hundred miles an hour.

"What the devil are you chaps—" the indignant voice of the squadron leader came through the phones. Hurriedly Sheridan cut the switch. He knew what the S.L. was thinking and saying right now, and he didn't want a guilty conscience. He grinned and smacked the throttle again, just to make sure it was wide open.

The whole business looked like a set-up. The two Americans opened fire at almost the same time, coming in, side by side, with their guns lined at the Eytie's midsection. Twelve lines of assorted .50 and .30 tracers riddled the air with smoky death.

There was only one trouble. The Fiat wasn't there any more. The tracer kicked up one hell of a mess of sand and then stopped abruptly while Sheridan and Stonewall Jackson pulled their ships out of the dive and looked, bewildered, for the Italian. The Fiat was just rolling off its back, a good three hundred yards behind them. And it was still going home.

The Hurricane and the Hawk howled into a vicious vertical, still together, fly-

ing almost like one plane. As they started to overhaul the Italian again, Sheridan hauled the nose of his crate upward until he had an extra fifty feet of altitude. That gave him a little advantage, a better opportunity to settle on the 42's tail. Stonewall Jackson went the other way, down to get under the belly, until his prop was almost digging sand.

"All right, Eytie," Phil growled between his teeth, "let's see you get out of this one!" The Fiat's fins were in his sights and he slammed the trigger button hard.

The Italian didn't even seem to try. All of a sudden the Fiat turned inside out—later, Sheridan swore that it completed a reversal of direction in less than twenty feet—and the nose, not the fins, was in the Yank's sights. Two red eyes of flame were spewing lead from under the cowl. A handful of lead mauled the nose of the Hawk and staggered her for a moment. When the Yank reached for the button again, the Fiat was gone. Its topside wing almost took the paint off the Curtiss' belly. And when Sheridan howled into a turn to follow, he almost locked props with Mr. Stonewall Jackson. The two R.A.F. crates shied wildly in opposite directions.

"Watch where you're going, lunk-head!" Sheridan yelled into the mike.

"You, suh, don't look exactly like Doo-little yourself," Jackson came back.

Phil Sheridan swore vigorously from the side of his mouth as he clawed the P-40 back on the level and tore again after the toe-dancing Eytie. As he turned he caught a glimpse of the Blenheim formation. They were sticking tightly together, still climbing, heading for home.

"Somebody," Phil Sheridan told himself, "is going to catch hell for this." Running away from escort duty to shadow-box with some poor little guy who's only trying to mind his own business. Brother Hastings was liable to be

irritated. But Sheridan would let Churchill himself get irritated before he'd let this son of the South get number six first.

"This time, Yankee," Jackson said, "keep outta mah way!"

"Just keep your own nose clean, chum—"

The Fiat's rear end was sliding into the sights again. Phil throttled down, took it easy. His thumb went to the trigger button, waited, poised. From the tail of his eye he could see Jackson maneuvering into position beside him.

"Get away from here, Dixie. This is my meat—"

Then the Fiat made his move. The sleek biplane whipped over on one wing-tip, slashed around to dive, and ran head-on into a solid wall of lead. Tracer beat into the motor ring, smashed the radial to hot metal, blasted out the center section, riddled the pit. The Fiat stopped dead still for a lethal, obliterating instant. Then it went to pieces in the air and plunged.

"That," said Phil Sheridan, "is more like it."

"Sorta liked it myself, Yankee," Jackson drawled in the earphones. "Don't mind sayin', either, that I can use the money."

Phil Sheridan sat up in the pit and yelled.

"What do you mean by that? That was my baby, chum!"

"Yours? You trying to be funny?"

"Now, listen, you knuckle-headed Johny Reb—"

"I beg your pardon, suh!" Stonewall roared.

"If you think you can snitch that Eytie right out from under my nose— You hadn't even touched your guns when I opened up, you—"

Sheridan stopped in the middle of the sentence and caught his breath. Somewhere in the roar of the Allison inline there was an irregular sound, a metallic

thump. He glanced at the airspeed indicator. With the gun almost full on, the Curtiss was doing not quite 250 m.p.h., and the oil temp was rising. Phil Sheridan added these facts up and was not happy.

"Look, chum," he said into the mike, "you better go home. I got a sputter. That gent in the 'Fiat got a couple of slugs home."

There was a silence for a moment. The Hurricane skated over in Sheridan's direction, came alongside. The Yank could see Dixie staring at him mournfully through the greenhouse.

"You-all think you'll be able to get back?"

"Maybe—with luck. You go on home and tell the C.O. I'll be in pretty soon."

"No, suh. I'll stick with you." He could see the Southerner shake his head. "Now that I've won all this money from you, it wouldn't be sporting to go off and leave you alone."

"Won money like hell!" Sheridan roared. "Listen, you son of the Confederacy, I—"

"Don't y'all think it might be bettah," Dixie drawled, "if we maintained radio silence goin' home? Wouldn't want to attract the attention of the enemy with you in your helpless condition."

"Helpless?" Sheridan thundered. "Helpless?"

The Southerner wasn't listening. The Hurricane slid behind Sheridan, camped fifty yards above and behind his tail, a nice protective position.

"All right, chum," the Yank growled between his teeth, "just wait till we get home. Just wait."

THE members of the squadron at Bir El Achmed knew one sure way of telling when Group Captain Hastings was angry. The captain had, standing in one corner of his shanty, a Malacca walking stick. He'd dig out the stick and

start to pace. When he was sore. Right now he strode up and down the apron, pawing the sand from his eyes occasionally, beating a muffled tattoo on the ground with the end of the walking stick.

He looked at his watch and paced a little harder, staring toward the horizon. Then he heard it, the faint, distant murmur of motors.

"Ha!" he snorted

About two minutes later he could see them. The Hurricane and the Tomahawk came in low, and not very fast. Hastings had been listening to aircraft motors for a long time, and it didn't take him long to realize that one of those was sour. He scowled. A second later the sound of one engine stopped altogether.

"Fotheringay!" Hasting bellowed. "Stand by for a crash. Pass the word along."

It was the Tomahawk that was limping, limping badly. Hastings tensed as he watched the stub-nosed ship mush toward the end of the runway, the three-bladed prop twisting slowly. A Tomahawk is not an ideal land plane to set down dead-stick. It came in fast, gathering speed instead of losing it. The wheels came down.

"Get it up!" Hastings muttered fiercely. "Get the nose up, you fool Yank—"

The nose came up. The Curtis hung in the air for an instant, a good twenty feet above the sand. Then she hit, belly down. A cloud of dust swirled up and swallowed the crate crash. Hastings started to run, swinging his stick. Half a dozen ack emmas plunged after him.

When the dust settled, Phil Sheridan was standing up in the cockpit. He dusted off his uniform slowly and deliberately. The C.O. arrived in a private dust cloud of his own.

"You all right, Yank?"

"Myself, I feel wonderful. How do I look?" Sheridan grinned.

"Healthy, confound it! Why the devil

didn't you break your bloomin' neck?" Hastings snorted angrily.

Sheridan swung himself lightly over the side of the ship. Over on the other runway, Stonewall Jackson was hopping out of the Hurricane. The Southerner strode briskly across the sand.

"I have a few things to say to you gentlemen," Hastings began, biting off the words. "Hurry up, Jackson!" he bellowed. "This includes you too."

Stonewall Jackson came on the double, smiling affably. He flicked a nondescript salute and started to sit down on the fuselage of the Tomahawk, where Sheridan was already sitting.

"Attention!" the officer thundered.

Grinning a little, the two Americans came to their feet.

"I have just received a report from the officer in command of the Blenheim flight you men supposedly escorted. He told me all about it. He was a bit miffed." Hastings wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "He thinks you should be court-martialed, and by God, I—"

"But, Cap'n Hastings, suh, what if we did leave those Blenheims? They were just goin' home, all safe and sound. I just saw this heah Eytie and went and shot 'im down. What's the matter with—"

"You shot him down?" Sheridan exploded. "Listen, chum, if we have to go through this—"

"You both pulled out and left your patrol. You both went off on a wild, exhibitionistic goose-chase." Hastings took a long breath. His eyes were narrow. "You not only disobeyed orders, but you also deserted your post in the face of the enemy. And you might be interested in knowing that a pair of roving ME's caught up with those blasted Blenheims before they got home. One of the Blens went down."

Suddenly Jackson and Sheridan weren't grinning any more.

"Not so bloody funny any more, eh?" Hastings snapped. "Well, by the Lord Harry, you're going to have time to think it over. You're both confined to the drome and committed to the guardhouse."

"Guardhouse?" Sheridan sputtered.

"Fo' how long, suh?"

Hastings smacked himself smartly across the knees with the Malacca walking stick.

"Indefinitely," he said. "And the next time—the next time, by heaven, it's a court martial!"

He spun on his heel and stalked off, leaving a large, pinching silence behind him. Sheridan turned to the Southerner, scowling in disgust.

"Well, Dixie, see the mess you got us into?"

"Me? You're just like all Yankees," Stonewall yelled, waving his arms. "It was unjust accusations that brought about the Wah between the States. Dirty Yankee practices, suh!"

Fotheringay adjusted his pith helmet and started to trot obediently after Hastings. He scowled mildly above his glasses.

"The War between the States," he said. "My, my. I must look that up. Yes, indeed!"

CHAPTER THREE

Say It with Bullets

PHIL SHERIDAN had been in several clinks during his lifetime. Some of them were better and some were worse, but he'd never been in one that was hotter. The first night he and Stonewall Jackson spent in this one wasn't so bad, but with sun-up the place began to boil. Heat poured through the metal roof like water through a faucet. By noon of the day after their arrest, they were too limp with heat to even argue. They sat in their shorts at opposite sides of the cell and glowered at each other.

About twelve-thirty things began to happen. The Yanks couldn't make much sense of it. First a couple of Hurries took off. They were gone maybe twenty minutes and then came back. Hastings met them on the tarmac and there was a lot of excited talk, but Stonewall Jackson and Sheridan couldn't catch any of it. About two o'clock a mixed flight of Hurricanes and Tomahawks, their emergency bomb racks loaded, took off. When they came back, three of them were missing.

"What the hell gives here?" Sheridan growled, glancing across at the Southerner. Dixie shrugged.

A few minutes later the ack emmas starting pushing more ships onto the field. Jackson and Sheridan stood at the barred window and watched, more amazed by the instant. Hastings was out on the tarmac, carrying his walking stick, shouting at everybody who came within hearing distance.

The Hurricanes and P-40's started turning over. In a moment the hangar was empty; every ship at Bir El Achmed was on the line, ready to fly. And the pilots were hitting the pits. Occasionally somebody stopped to talk to Hastings, but he brushed them off and pointed toward the crates.

"They can't do that!" Jackson yelled. "That's mah Hurricane somebody's a-fix-in' to fly off in!"

"My Hawk, chum," Phil Sheridan growled, "is already rolling. Looks like they're evacuating the field."

"Evac—" Jackson's brows knotted. He scratched his jaw. "I suppose it's possible, suh."

Both Yanks were thinking the same thing. This was the Libyan-Egyptian border. Here wars were fought as no place else in the world. Sometimes battle lines changed sixty and seventy miles in a single day. And Bir El Achmed was not part of a regular defense line; it was simply a British outpost, located where it

would do the most good. And this was Rommel's big push—that was the talk that had been going around the mess ever since Phil Sheridan arrived. Where it would end, nobody knew.

"Probably there's a column headed this way," Sheridan muttered. "And nothing here to stop them. So out go the Hurries and the Hawks."

"That strikes me as a rather cowardly gesture," Jackson said. "My great-grandpappy, Stonewall, woulda stayed and fought to the last man."

"Your great-grandpappy would have got on his big black horse and run like hell," Sheridan said, watching the Southerner from the corner of his eye.

"Look, Yankee, you-all cain't—"

"All right, all right, so I apologize."

THEY hung by the window and watched in glum silence as the remaining ships, battered and dusty, howled into the air. In five minutes the planes had all left, and an ominous silence settled around the little outpost. There was still a good many of the ground force around the drome, but soon they too began to disappear. Sheridan saw Fotheringay come out of the headquarters shanty with a huge briefcase in each hand. He talked with Hastings for a moment, then left on the double, headed for the winding road that flanked the field.

"They got trucks out there," the Yank said. "Hear 'em?"

There were trucks, all right, although the Yanks couldn't see them from their cell—three battered old lorries that plunged away in the heat and sand, with men packed tightly all over them.

"By God," Jackson said, scowling, "d'you suppose they'd leave us heah, alone, in the path of the onrushin' enemy?"

"Maybe that's for being bad boys," Sheridan grinned. "Maybe—"

The words stuck in his throat. Both

Americans heard it at the same instant. Like two puppets on one string, they cocked their heads toward the west. This was a new sound, and they both recognized it. Planes, several of them. And they weren't Hawks and Hurries.

Sheridan plunged for the window and stared toward the horizon. He could make out silhouettes against the sky. They came in echelon, ten ships to the line. The first group had a funny dihedral break to their wings.

"Junkers 87's," he said to Stonewall without turning his head. "And a mess of 110's. God, there must be fifty of 'em!"

"All fo' us?" Dixie drawled. "My, my, we should feel flattered. All this attention!"

"And not a soul left on the field," Phil grunted. "Son, this is gonna be the Fourth of July!"

Then, all of a sudden, a pith helmet appeared outside the high narrow window in the cell door. The lock turned, clicked rustily. There was a polite knock.

"For God's sake, come in!" the men yelled in unison.

It was Hastings. He had two briefcases even larger than the ones Fotheringay had been carrying. He looked warm and casual.

"You chaps think I'd left you? No such luck! Matter of fact, you're about to be—ah—what is the word they use in the American cinemas?"

"Sprung," Phil Sheridan said.

"Quite right. Sprung. You're delivering me to Mirazak." Mirazak was two hundred miles inside the Egyptian border.

"You got a plane?" Stonewall Jackson asked, coming to his feet.

"An auto. You're driving me." Hastings nonchalantly made himself comfortable on the bunk. He set the two briefcases down beside him. "You Yanks have a reputation for being dare-devils. My own experience confirms that. I couldn't very well let you fly," he added

apologetically. "After all, you're grounded."

The noise of the motors was louder—much louder. Somewhere nearby an airplane began its dive.

"And you're an Englishman, so the game is played according to the rules, war or no war," Sheridan growled.

"Which is, eventually, what wins wars," Hastings said sharply. "There is an official car outside. I came here in it, and now I'm leaving in it. Maybe you've guessed—we're right in the path of the enemy advance, and it would simply be a waste of men and planes to fight it. This car is an American make. I understand it will run very, very fast." He got up and listened calmly as a thunderous roar shook the walls of the cells. "I expect you to prove it."

THE largest part of the bombing force passed directly over Bir El Achmed without even stopping to look. A couple of Stukas and three ME 110's hung around to lay some eggs and gun the deserted field. By the time the two Yanks and Hastings got outside the guardhouse and plunged for the hangar, the big formation was already out of sight.

"Lively, gentlemen!" Hastings yelled as they plunged across the apron. An ME stood on one tip and slashed down across the runway with its forward guns yammering. Lead spattered the sand a dozen yards behind them. They ducked their heads and ran.

The car sat in a far corner of the hangar with the frayed remnants of a tarpaulin over it to keep the sand out. The headlamps were gone; the windshield had been broken in several places and plugged with rags. The steel top had lost its arch. The three remaining fenders were dented into fancy shapes. From the one in front, on the left, a dirty Headquarters flag still drooped. That car was the whole battle of the Middle East summed up.

"I'd rather have an airplane," Sheridan grinned wryly as he bounced into the driver's seat. The cushions had been gone for years. There were two old blankets thrown over the bucket seats. Dust oozed upward and choked him.

"Move over, suh," Stonewall Jackson said. "You had better let me do the drivin'."

"Now listen, mushmouth, if you—"

"Drive, confound it!" Hastings roared from the back. "Drive!"

Sheridan hit the starter. His jaw dropped in amazement as the motor took hold instantly, bursting into full-throated blasts. If this crate had ever had a muffler, it had long since disappeared. The noise was almost as loud as a Tomahawk's Allison.

"Hang on, son," Sheridan growled. "Here goes nothing!"

They roared out of the hangar in low, out into the blinding light and heat. They turned on two wheels. As they plunged across the apron and past the headquarters shanty, one of the ME's threw a bucketful of lead in their approximate direction. Sheridan went into high, hurdled a small ditch, and headed down the road like a bat out of hell.

"By Jove," Hastings muttered to himself, "they were right about it. It will run fast."

For a while Phil Sheridan thought they might get into the clear. The two Ju87's had gone about their business after sending up the oil tanks in a cloud of black smoke, and the ME's seemed busy with minor mopping-up operations. They drove eighteen miles in thirteen minutes without any particular opposition.

Then Jackson scowled.

"Do you hear anything?" he asked.

"I don't need to hear anything," Sheridan answered grimly, getting a tighter grip on the wheel. "Look!"

Little columns of dust and sand were springing up ahead of the car's nose. They

were close together and very rapid, and they walked right toward the radiator cap—machine-gun fire. Stonewall Jackson put his head out and stared upward.

"Another stinkin' 110," he reported. "I'm afraid he wants to come along."

Two sudden holes appeared in the hood, almost under Phil Sheridan's nose. He ducked low, clinging desperately to the wheel as the car skidded crazily. Sand spewed up behind the tires, showered the top with dust. There was a solid impact somewhere over Sheridan's head. A .50 shell, smashed and spent by the impact, thudded into the floorboards at the C.O.'s feet.

"You all right, suh?" Jackson asked, turning.

"Of course," Hastings yelled shrilly. "Keep driv—"

That was as far as he got. Afterward, Sheridan and Jackson figured out that the m.g. slugs from the 'Schmitt must have blasted the rear tires. With the jalopy doing a slick seventy miles an hour, a hand grenade couldn't have done much more damage. The car almost took off. Sheridan fought the wheel, but he might as well have wrestled a revving prop. The car headed for a small dune. It started up, clawing into the sand.

Then something solid stopped it cold, and Phil Sheridan hurtled forward against the instrument board. He heard Stonewall Jackson yell something, and there was a heavy weight and a sharp pain in his back. Then everything was blackness.

SHERIDAN never did know just how long he was out. It couldn't have been very long. Somebody was shaking him by the shoulder, and he had a nasty headache. The somebody was Hastings. He was clutching the British flag he'd been carrying, and he was liberally sprinkled with sand. The sharp pain in the Yank's back turned out to be the end of the flag pole.

"That 'Schmitt is gonna sit down over there," Stonewall Jackson said. Stonewall was, mysteriously, in the back seat under a small mountain of sand. He had a large bump over his eye.

A Messerschmitt had just bounced in, and the Boche pilot was setting the ground brakes. The three-seater skidded to a dusty stop and the pilot pushed the greenhouse open.

"Dare say we could run for it, you know," Hastings suggested.

"There's a very nasty machine gun in the back of that crate, suh," Jackson said. "An' a machine-gun bullet can travel even faster than ol' Phillip Sheridan with some Confederate soldiers followin' him—"

"Listen, Johnny Reb, you—"

"Stop that!" Hastings barked sharply.

"Can you see the Jerries?"

"There's a couple of them coming this way. It's us they want, all right." Sheridan reached over and banged Dixie's hand sharply. An old .45 clattered to the floor. "Listen, knucklehead, you cut loose with that thing and that machine gun'll make mincemeat out of us."

"Right," Hastings sighed. "Well—up, lads. After all, we're officers of His Majesty's air force. Got to be a gentleman in the face of the enemy."

They disentangled themselves, fought their way out of the car, and stood in a line beside it as two of the 'Schmitt's crew came over on the double. The third man remained in the rear of the ship, close to the Maxim gun.

"You will put up your hands and keep them up, please!"

The Nazi who spoke was big, almost as big as Stonewall Jackson. He was evidently the pilot. His helmet flopped loosely about his ears, and he was in his shirt sleeves. He carried a revolver in his hand, and when he talked, he sounded as though he meant it.

"You speak English. Good!" Hastings sighed. "My German is deucedly poor."

The radioman, who trailed at the pilot's heels, came over and searched them casually for guns. Then he stuck his head inside the window of the wrecked car, shouted something in German, and came out with the two briefcases. He smiled triumphantly and jabbered something in German.

"Good! That is what were looking for." The big pilot smiled grimly. "You should not have left the headquarters flag on your car. Then we would not have spotted you so easily. Which of you is the commanding officer?"

"I am. Captain Hastings, 92nd Desert Squadron, His Majesty's Royal Air Force."

"We had orders only to get your papers. The commandant will be very pleased when he finds that we have you too." The pilot turned and spoke a few words sharply to his companion, who nodded and then yelled at the man in the rear seat.

"You, Captain, will return to the base immediately with me in the airplane. I will leave Ehrlich here to guard your friends."

He spoke again to the radioman and then handed him the revolver.

Stonewall Jackson was looking intently toward the west. There was a small layer of dust hanging just above the horizon. The Southerner didn't have to ask about that dust. He knew what it was.

"You look worried," the German pilot chuckled. "You're quite correct. That is one of our advanced columns. They have already annihilated and passed your little base at Bir El Achmed. Ehrlich will march you back to meet them." The chuckle turned into a laugh. "I hope you like our prison camps—unless, of course, one of our tanks eliminates you before they realize you are prisoners."

He spoke a few more words to the one called Ehrlich, took the Webley from Hastings' belt, and ordered the Limey to

march. Hastings didn't move for a moment. He looked, a little wistfully, at the far horizon.

"Bir El Achmed," he said quietly. "Desolate little hole—but I rather liked it there." He smiled weakly at the Americans. "You lads take care of yourselves."

The Nazi nudged him in the ribs with the Webley and he turned and started to march. Sheridan realized suddenly that he hated to see this lean Englishman go.

FOR a moment Ehrlich seemed a little undecided. He kept watching the Englishman and the Boche pilot from the tail of his eye, as if wanting to be sure they got there before he started to move the Yanks. They were already halfway to the idling ship. The rear gunner opened the hatch and stood upright, leaving the Maxim for a moment. And then, suddenly, the Southern Confederacy went into action.

"Well, fo' God's sake!" Stonewall Jackson roared, evidently very amazed at something. He was looking past Ehrlich, in the direction where Hastings and the pilot were walking. He yelled so loudly that even Phil Sheridan jumped to see.

It was an old trick, the oldest trick in the book, but it worked. For an instant the Nazi guard turned, startled, in the opposite direction. Almost immediately he realized the error of his ways and turned back, but by that time Stonewall Jackson's head of long curly hair hit him squarely in the stomach and catapulted him into the sand, knocking the wind out of him. The revolver thudded into the sand.

"Get it!" Jackson yelled. "Get the gun!"

Sheridan dived for it, scooped it up with his right hand. Suddenly the whole picture was clear and vivid, his own actions outlined ahead of him like a chart. He hit the sand on his belly, hard, pulling up the revolver to firing position as he did so. The sidearm cracked once, viciously. The gunner in the rear pit of the 110

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march. Hastings didn't move for a moment. He looked, a little wistfully, at the far horizon.

"Bir El Achmed," he said quietly. "Desolate little hole—but I rather liked it there." He smiled weakly at the Americans. "You lads take care of yourselves."

The Nazi nudged him in the ribs with the Webley and he turned and started to march. Sheridan realized suddenly that he hated to see this lean Englishman go.

FOR a moment Ehrlich seemed a little undecided. He kept watching the Englishman and the Boche pilot from the tail of his eye, as if wanting to be sure they got there before he started to move the Yanks. They were already halfway to the idling ship. The rear gunner opened the hatch and stood upright, leaving the Maxim for a moment. And then, suddenly, the Southern Confederacy went into action.

"Well, fo' God's sake!" Stonewall Jackson roared, evidently very amazed at something. He was looking past Ehrlich, in the direction where Hastings and the pilot were walking. He yelled so loudly that even Phil Sheridan jumped to see.

It was an old trick, the oldest trick in the book, but it worked. For an instant the Nazi guard turned, startled, in the opposite direction. Almost immediately he realized the error of his ways and turned back, but by that time Stonewall Jackson's head of long curly hair hit him squarely in the stomach and catapulted him into the sand, knocking the wind out of him. The revolver thudded into the sand.

"Get it!" Jackson yelled. "Get the gun!"

Sheridan dived for it, scooped it up with his right hand. Suddenly the whole picture was clear and vivid, his own actions outlined ahead of him like a chart. He hit the sand on his belly, hard, pulling up the revolver to firing position as he did so. The sidearm cracked once, viciously. The gunner in the rear pit of the 110

stood bolt upright for a moment. Then slowly he fell backward, tumbled over the rim, and slumped lifeless on the other side.

The big pilot was blazing away with the Webley now, but Jackson and Sheridan were both flat on their stomachs. Ehrlich was still twitching senselessly beside them. Phil Sheridan drew a careful bead and fired. The Nazi staggered. Sheridan fired again. The pilot of the ME slid to the sand soundlessly.

"Clip this one again for good luck," Jackson panted, scrambling to his feet. Sheridan laid the barrel across Ehrlich's temple and Ehrlich stopped twitching.

Hastings had a slight head start on them, but he had the two briefcases to carry. They all three reached the idling 110 at about the same time. Carefully, gently, the Yanks laid the body of the gunner out of the way. Then they crawled in, or started to.

"I'll fly it," Sheridan said, starting up the step.

"Go 'way, Yankee." Jackson was already halfway in the pit. He placed one foot neatly in Sheridan's chest and pushed.

"Good heavens!" Hastings pleaded as he clambered into the radioman's seat, "let's get out of here. You—Mr. Jackson, you're there. You fly it. Damn! that confounded column is right behind us!" He was right. They could already see the dusty outlines of the tanks against the clear blue sky.

"All right," Sheridan growled between his teeth, bouncing into the gun pit, "but you'll regret it."

DIXIE took the Messerschmitt off in a hurry, blasting into the blue under full gun. He made a circle at eight hundred feet and leveled off. Down below, the Axis column was belting across the sand. It was a small detachment—a dozen tanks, several scout cars, and some infantry in big open trucks. Stonewall Jackson stared overside at this machinery.

He licked his lips.

"What the devil are we waiting for?" Hastings demanded through the intercoms. "Let's go. Those Jerries might cause trouble, and I want to get to Mirazak—"

"Did you-all notice," Stonewall Jackson drawled, "there are bomb racks on this crate? And they're loaded?"

"Yeah," Sheridan chipped in from the rear seat. "It'd be a shame to waste 'em."

"Confound it, I forbid it! You bloody Yanks—"

"Cap'n Hastings, we're gonna need your cooperation. You have to lay the eggs. And you might as well," Dixie announced calmly, "because I'm goin' in there, even if I have to just play with mah machine guns."

The ME went down to the end of the column and turned. Jackson throttled the Mercedes-Benz down and let her slide toward the sand until there was only three hundred feet of air beneath her wings. The tanks clattered on blissfully; somebody in an open turret waved cheerfully at the 'Schmitt.

Hastings was sputtering in protest, talking about court martial, talking about all Americans in general and two Americans in particular, vowing that he was leaving the army for the insurance business at the earliest opportunity. Sheridan grinned and kept quiet.

"All right, suh," Dixie called through the intercoms. "Any time. Like shootin' fish in a barrel."

"Confound it, this is kidnaping! You can't do this to an officer of the British—"

"Now!" Sheridan yelled.

Still sputtering, Hastings bent over the sights. The three lead tanks were right beneath the Messerschmitt's belly. Suddenly the slick 110 hefted upward, bounced lightly as a stick of bombs left her belly. Jackson smacked the throttle wide open and brought the control column back to his belt buckle.

The concussion tossed her in the air like a balloon in a high wind, sprayed her underside with sand. Sheridan bounced forward, thumped his head on Hastings' seat. The 110 completed its turn; he glued his nose to the glass and looked overside.

One of the tanks wasn't there any more. The battered remains of it lay in the bottom of a gaping bomb crater. One of the other lead tin cans was blossoming flame and smoke. A speeding truck full of infantrymen piled into the crater, right on top of the tank, before the driver could get straightened out. All in all, the column was a nice cheery mess.

"Blimey!" Hastings exploded. "I was rather good, wasn't I?"

The other stick of bombs got the third tank and blew a scout car to old metal. The infantry trucks were halted and men were piling out, heading for cover. On the burning sand there wasn't much of a place to hide. Sheridan went wild with the Maxim, chasing the figures and spilling them face down in the heat. Somewhere down below a machine gun opened up, but the Jerry's fire was wide and wild.

Then a formation of 109's showed up.

There were four of them. Sheridan spotted them and made a report. The Nazis had about a thousand feet advantage in altitude, and they circled around in evident bewilderment.

"Confound it, now do we go to Mirazak? Those bloody ME's—"

"Always in a hurry, aren't you, suh?" Jackson drawled. "Just a moment. Let's say hello to these new visitors."

"That's the first smart thing I ever heard you say, Dixie," Phil Sheridan yelled. "Well, what the hell are we waiting for?"

It was quite an affair. Jackson ripped into the ME formation from the top of an Immelman, smacking them in the middle before they got their bearings. One 109 went down immediately, the hatch smashed by a bucketful of hot .50 slugs. And, just a moment later, Phil Sheridan winged another one with his Maxim. It was wild and cockeyed—a confused hurly-burly full of the roar of super-charged motors, the buck and thump of the guns, the dust and wind of Egypt.

Hastings clung tightly to his seat, his teeth clenched tight. His eyes were wide and his breathing labored. And, above all



"DUST OFF THE DUKE!"

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the racket, he kept hearing this uncanny yell—a high-pitched shriek that ended in an ear-splitting *y-e-e-h-o-o*.

“What in God’s name, Mr. Jackson,” Hastings moaned, “is that bloody noise you’re making?”

“That, suh, is the rebel yell. The fightin’ yell of the great Southern Confederacy.”

“Yeh,” Phil Sheridan jeered, swinging the Maxim as he talked, his voice trembling with the bouncing vibrations of the gun, “those Johnny Rebs were great yellers. But they were sure bum fighters.”

“Suh!” Stonewall Jackson shouted, kicking the 110 around neatly to give Phil Sheridan a beautiful bead on a passing Boche’s belly. “Suh, you lie in your teeth!”

“Listen, knucklehead, you better be pretty careful who you call a liar—”

Hastings put his hands over his ears and sank low in the seat. His eyes were glassy. He sighed deeply. The 110 was going wild, toe-dancing around the sky like a crazy grasshopper, flying and fighting like an inspired angel—or devil. Sometimes Hastings wondered if this war was worth all the trouble.

“Americans,” he said, shaking his head sadly.

IN CAIRO two weeks later, the sun was warm, but not too warm. The air was filled with balmy breezes, and life looked wonderful—if you forgot about Uncle Erwin Rommel for the moment. There was a very nice little parade, and bands played, and a brigadier general with a mustache pinned a little blue ribbon with a bronze cross on the chests of Stonewall Jackson, Phil Sheridan, and an English gentleman named Hastings.”

Afterwards, the brigadier general took Hastings aside for a gin sling in the officer’s club. They sat there on the terrace and looked out at the Nile.

“Got a pleasant surprise for you, old

man,” he confided. “These American chaps—er, what’s their names—Jackson, yes, and Sheridan—you know, they were scheduled for transfer. To an American outfit, y’know. Regular procedure.”

He chuckled. “But I’ve done you a favor, Hastings, m’lad. I’ve gone directly to the American general staff—directly, mind you—and guess what?”

“What?”

“I’ve arranged for them to stay with you. Right-o. They’ll be in your new squadron. They’ll be with you till the end of the war!”

Hastings made a faint strangling sound. The glass dropped from his fingers and smashed on the stones. All the good gin guttered over toward the railing, ruined forever.

“What’s the matter, old boy? Shock too much for you? Too happy for words?”

Hastings took a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his face.

“Yes, sir,” he said. “Too happy for words.”

Down on the street, directly below the terrace, there was a fight going on. There wasn’t much punching, but there was a lot of talk. The sound of two angry voices came floating up—

“What do y’ mean, suh, Stonewall Jackson was a bad officer? You can’t say that, you confounded son of a Yankee polecat—”

“Listen, sweetheart, you can’t talk—”

Hastings sighed again.

“You know, sir,” he said, “some day this bloomin’ war is going to be over. Some day it will all be forgotten. But the War between the States will never be over.”

“Eh?” The general’s eyebrows crawled upward. “What’s that? War between the States? Never heard of it.”

“Neither did I,” Hastings said. The noise in the street became louder, more furious. “But, by God, some day I’m going to look it up!”



YOU'RE IN THE ARMY *Now!*

Morgan had the
Albatross dead to
rights.

By **HAL WHITE**

"You may have been the pride of Fifth Avenue, pal, but over here you're just one of the hired hands. Do your job, and the medals will come. Fail—and you never come back!"

WHEN Blaine Duffield joined the 83rd Observation Squadron, A. E.F., he came with sullen rebellion in his blue eyes and a chip nicely balanced on his shoulder. The chip was not pinned on, like his second lieutenant's gold bars. It just rode there, on the

smooth British whipcord, and old Thomas Duffield's son waited fiercely for someone to knock it off.

In all his twenty-three years as a rich man's son, the self-centered Blaine had never been denied anything he wanted—never, until he joined the army.

The army had told him, in blunt words of one syllable, just where he got off. As a prospective Spad pilot, they'd said, he was a floperoo. Even if his old man did have fifty million dollars he was still a floperoo.

But if you want to be an observer, Mr. Duffield, they'd added, you can go ahead and take the course and maybe get an assignment to a D-H outfit. Maybe—if you're good enough.

Mr. Duffield blazed like a three-alarm fire in the wholesale district. What was the use of being a Duffield, with your name in the social register, if you couldn't get what you wanted? His father was a dollar-a-year man in Washington, and he would show these army big shots a thing or two.

He promptly wired old Thomas Duffield what the brass hats were doing to his little boy. He wired from Orly. And back to Orly, cold and hard as the under-sea cable that carried the message, came the reply:

"Sorry, son. You're in the army now."

So they had Blaine Duffield across a barrel—a most undignified position for a young gent who, only a few months before, had had all the girls swooning at his feet. But the lad knew which way was up. And if up meant up in the observer's pit of a D-H, that was better than back to the States in disgrace.

Still smoldering, he took the observer's course. He had his hackles up now. He was angry and determined, and he sailed through the instruction with flying colors. If he had to be an observer, for the time being, then so be it. But they wouldn't keep him there very long!

HE REPORTED to the 83rd on a fine summer day. But there was storm brewing, black and ominous, in his eyes as he clicked his heels before Major Robert Rodney and laid his papers on the desk top.

"Lieutenant Blaine Duffield reporting for duty, sir."

The tones were respectful, but the square young chin was scornful. Anybody could see that this blocky, red-headed fellow behind the desk had no social standing. He was as rough as sandpaper. Duffield decided that on general principles he didn't like the guy.

Rodney's big fingers riffled the papers—preliminary pursuit training, transfer to observation. He quirked a bushy eyebrow at the sullen, rebellious young face before him, and got the set-up.

For a moment he was angry. Blast these cocky lads who thought that observation was a comedown. Couldn't they realize that it was just as important, just as much of a challenge to the best a man had to give, as piloting a pursuit crate?

But none of that showed in his face or voice as he got to his feet and held out his hand.

"Glad to have you with us, Lieutenant. You'll like it here, if you do your job. I'm assigning you to B Flight, with Lieutenant Morgan as your pilot."

"Yes, sir."

"Morgan's going out this afternoon, adjusting fire for a howitzer battery. You might as well go along, get your hand in."

"Yes, sir."

The keen eyes appraised him, noted the scornful chin. "It's no pink tea, Duffield. The Huns love artillery observation crates the way a farmer loves a skunk. You have to work fast, before they come running with the old shotgun. Can do?"

"I don't anticipate any difficulty, sir," Duffield said stiffly. "I suppose we'll have pursuits flying cover for us."

"You will." The C. O.'s good-natured

mouth was suddenly grim. "But don't lean on them. Don't—" the blocky commander's words were clipped and incisive—"don't ever forget that the D-H is very much a fighting ship, too. That's all for now. See you later."

Duffield went to his hutment and found that an orderly had already brought in his stuff. He busied himself unpacking, but his lip curled as he thought of what the major had said. The D-H a fighting ship? Why, that big lumber truck couldn't get out of its own way!

Later, he met Bill Morgan and some of the others in the mess bar. They seemed a decent enough crowd—for an observation outfit. He and Morgan got together at the bar and talked.

Duffield felt he would get along all right with Morgan. The pilot was no fancy pants, but he had family and money behind him, and he talked Duffield's language. He looked rough and ready, with his wide shoulders, keen, quiet gray eyes and easy smile. His face was darkly tanned by wind and sun, his build stocky and solid, and when he lifted his glass you could see the big muscles move in his arm.

He said, "Here's to the best for you, pal. This is a good outfit, a fighting outfit, and you'll like it."

Duffield thought he could unburden his soul to this man, and he said, shrugging, "Thanks, old man. The 83rd will do, I suppose—until I can find something better."

Morgan glanced at him quickly, his gray eyes narrowing. "What do you mean, something better?"

"Now, look," Duffield said. "Don't pretend that you like this observation stuff. D-H's—flying haywagons!"

Morgan set down his glass. "Haywagons, eh? Mister, you've got a lot to learn." He turned away.

"Hey, wait," Duffield said quickly, but Morgan kept on going. The new observer stood there, feeling baffled, staring sourly into his drink and feeling all the old hot rebellion surging inside him. . . .

THE D-H cruised slowly back and forth, parallel to the trench lines and behind them, with Morgan in the pilot's pit and Duffield behind him. Above them cruised a pair of Spads, quick, watchful, restless, the sharper note of the Hissos cutting through the heavy drone of the big Liberty in the D-H's nose.

The afternoon was clear, the visibility excellent. The target was a German battery position in the forward edge of a battered patch of woods some two miles behind the Hun trench lines. The American battery of 155 mm. howitzers was adjusting with one gun firing.

Duffield watched the first shell erupt into smoke and flame to the left of the German battery, and short. He spoke into his one-way mike. "One hundred, left; fifty, short."

He heard the heavy thud of the gun and the second shell was on the way. Again he spoke into the mike, his tones bored and weary: "Fifty over; deflection okay; bracket."

The third shell landed squarely in the edge of the wood, and he saw debris climb on the smoke as the big missile winked into flame over there.

He said, "Target—take it away," and reflected that that American battery was not to be sneezed at. These 155 howitzers, with their steep angle of fall, were the berries. They could drop shells on a dime and give you eight cents change.

But was this war? Was this the fighting and the glory he had come for? The day was bland and cool and sunshiny. Morgan, in the front pit, looked half

asleep, his big shoulders hunched. Above, the Spads circled, humming.

The American battery went into action with all its four guns, and the wood over there became a caldron of smoke and flame. But Blaine Duffield, the new observer was thinking, was just a sightseer, a passenger in a blasted rubberneck bus, telling others what to do. Nuts!

But Morgan now was looking up and ahead at something, all his seeming sleepiness gone. And there was a new note in the Hisso motors above them, a challenging snarl as they banked and circled up there. Duffield studied the sky.

Something was coming, and it was coming fast. Enemy ships, five of them, bearing down from the northeast and gunning at top r.p.m.

In spite of his boredom, Duffield felt a queer little shiver up his spine. Of course, the Spads would handle the situation. That was their job. They would hold off the enemy until Morgan could wheel this big, awkward crate back to safety. But still—

Duffield stood there, his hands on the tourelle of the Lewis gun, his eyes on the enemy ships. They were Albatrosses and already their guns were warming, jetting red flame as they moved in for the kill.

Morgan glanced back, his mouth grim, his thumb stabbing to call the observer's attention to the Lewis gun. This was going to be a fight, and his gesture said, "Get set. This will take teamwork."

Strangely, Duffield wasn't afraid. For all his snobbishness and selfishness there had never been fear in his tall body. He had never, to this time, met anything that he couldn't take in his stride.

The green-winged German ships came in roaring, and suddenly they were tangling with the two Spads; the sky was full of noise and the smoking loops of tracer bullets.

Morgan had banked heading for home. Running away, Duffield thought disgust-

edly. That was all these wagons were good for, to run away when the fighting started. But Morgan was looking over his shoulder, keenly alert, the gray eyes behind the goggles grim and ready.

ALMOST instantly, one of the Hun ships got it, a short burst right amidships. It went down, end over end, the motor howling. But the remaining four were doing all right for themselves, and suddenly one of them evaded the Spad barrier and came drilling for the D-H.

Duffield's hands jumped to the gun breech, and the Lewises racketed. The tracers were way off, a clean miss, but the Hun pilot was putting his slugs where they would do the most good. Lead slammed into the wings and fuselage of the D-H, bullets spanged on the metal parts and screamed away in ricochet.

The Yank's eyes widened, and he had a moment of panic. The Albatross roared past and down, on his right, so close he could see the savage set of the German pilot's jaw.

Another Hun crate slashed down and again the slugs pounded the American ship. Duffield's burst this time was closer, but still a miss.

Morgan turned, barked a fierce oath and a loud "Hang on, you!" and then things happened. The D-H went up in a swift Immelman, switched ends, leveled, dived. Duffield gasped and his stomach went up into his throat as he grabbed desperately at the tourelle to keep from being hurled out.

Sky and earth were whirling; nothing was where it should be. He was blind and dizzy, and through it all he heard the savage chatter of Morgan's fixed Vickers guns in the forward pit.

Morgan had that second diving Albatross dead to rights. He caught it just as it came out of its dive, and his slugs sent it into another dive that was its last. It went down, spinning, whirling, smoke

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gushing from the gaping motor housing.

But the other Boche plane, down there, was circling for a crack at the D-H's belly. Morgan spilled the big ship on her side, the left wing pointing straight down. He glanced back at Duffield, and shouted, "Get into it, you damned—"

Duffield had a clean shot at the crate below, but he was still dizzy, and he missed again. The German ship got in a burst that knocked splinters out of the floorboards under Duffield's feet. A very short burst it was, though, for a pair of gray wings came screaming out of nowhere and the Spad pilot's racketing volley sent the German to his fathers.

That was all. The remaining two Germans had had enough for one day and they fled with the Spads in hot pursuit. The D-H, a bit the worse for wear but still in the running went back to the drome.

Blaine Duffield had time, as they flew, to think things over. Morgan didn't look back or speak, and his big shoulders were hostile. Duffield realized that he had been shown a thing or two, and he didn't like to be shown. He didn't like to admit that he was ever wrong about anything.

On the tarmac, Morgan got quickly out of his pit and looked at Duffield climbing down. Morgan didn't speak, just glared, spat disgustedly and stalked off to the mess bar.

The mechs and one or two pilots stared curiously at this by-play, and the new observer's jaw went out a foot. Nobody could spit at a Duffield and get away with it. Seething inside, he followed Morgan.

THE pilot was standing at the bar when he got there. Others were in the room, at the bar or tables, but Morgan was alone. Duffield found a place about eight feet away from Morgan and ordered.

Glass in hand, he leaned an elbow on the wood and regarded Morgan. For a few moments neither man spoke. Then

Morgan poured himself a drink from the bottle in front of him lifted it in his big fist and turned to Duffield.

The pilot's gray eyes with the white circles around them, were blazing but he said only two words: "Haywagon, eh?"

Duffield nursed his own glass in his palm and spoke deliberately. "Not a bad limousine, at that. And you did a nice job of chauffeuring, Morgan. See me after the war. I might find a place for you."

Morgan hit him then, a rousing, roaring punch. Duffield landed on his back, tossing his liquor, glass and all, over his own shoulder as he fell. He had deliberately goaded Morgan into this but he hadn't expected to get action quite so fast.

But he was up instantly, snarling fierce, eager oaths through his teeth, and boring in. Not for nothing had he been boxing champ of his senior college class.

It was a good fight, a slashing, battering, knock-down-and-drag-out fight. Duffield did the slashing; quick, expert punches that cut and stung. Morgan, with less ring technique but plenty of the old moxie, did the battering.

A circle formed around them. No one spoke, no one interfered. There wasn't a sound in the room except the shuffle of footwork, the harsh breathing of the battlers and the smashing, sickening impact of hard knuckles on flesh and bone.

It took about ten minutes, and when it ended there was a lot of assorted wreckage lying around—including Blaine Duffield, who lay in the ruins of what had been a nice table. Blood dribbled from his nose; his eyes were glassy and his head rolled weakly.

A cataract of cold water brought him sputtering to his senses and he was helped to his feet. When his sight cleared, he saw Morgan standing there.

"You do all right with your dukes, pretty boy," Morgan was saying. "Never would have thought it of you. Now if you can put your mind to it and learn which

of a Lewis gun is which, you *might* make a soldier. Give the matter a little thought, will you?"

For once, Blaine Duffield had no answer. His mouth opened, but blood dripped into it, and no words came out. Nobody in the intent group noticed Major Rodney standing in the open doorway, and the C.O. did not announce his presence. He ducked out and returned, chuckling, to the operations office.

AFTER what had happened, Duffield might have asked to be transferred to another pilot, but he didn't. He was mad now, to the marrow of his bones, and he had resolved to make good in this blasted prep school of war. Later, he would fly a Spad or know the reason why.

B Flight, all five of them, went out on reconnaissance the next morning, and Morgan was mildly surprised when Duffield showed up on the tarmac and clambered grimly into the observer's pit.

He was pleased, too, but he would not let Duffield see that. Standing beside the ship, he reached up and patted the tourelle of the Lewis gun.

"This is a firearm, mister, not a Fourth of July toy to make a nice noise with. It has to be aimed. You swing it on the tourelle, and look through the sights, and—"

"You handle your end, and I'll manage mine," Duffield snapped. "And—if you don't mind too much—the chauffeur's seat is up front there."

"Listen, you—" Morgan began hotly. Then he caught the twinkling eye of the major, who was standing behind Duffield, and realized that his own sneer had let him in for the observer's retort. He got into his own pit and sat there, blurbing the motor and grinning faintly.

The five heavy ships, Captain Remington riding point, went up and drilled along on their own side of the lines, preparing to cross farther to the north. But they

were still on their own side of the lines when the Fokkers spotted them.

Apparently the Kaiser's gashouse gang didn't care anything about lines and had never heard the advice to "shiny on your own side." Those toughies came barging right across the railroad tracks, taking off their coats and rolling up their sleeves as they came.

Ten men in five DeHavilands took a good look at the Fokker quintet and spat on their hands. Even for the fast and maneuverable Spad, the Fokker D-7 was no pushover. Duffield remembered with a wry smile that tight, howling Immelman of Morgan's, the day before, and felt better. But he knew, too—they all knew—that there would be some new faces in the hot place tonight.

The main event began without preliminaries. The two sides came together with a roar of guns and motors that lifted the hair of the doughboys watching below. It was dog eat dog, and, if you didn't want a hind leg chewed off, you had to step high, wide and handsome.

The D-H's stepped. They twisted and rolled like pursuit crates.

Blaine Duffield braced himself in his reeling pit, and his gun was hot under his hands. Powder smoke whipped into his face and clamor rolled around him. Sky and earth and whirling planes rolled around him too, as Morgan tossed the D-H. But he was set for it now, and it did not bother him.

Morgan was giving him the break, and doing it with a master's touch on the controls. Duffield was off at first. Then he began to get his eye in. He tapped Morgan's shoulder and indicated a Fokker making a fast, skidding turn on the left.

Morgan banked, put the left wing down a little and Duffield leaned to his sights. The Lewis jolted on its mount, spitting flame and noise. The tracers cut right mid-section, as clean a kill as any man could wish. The Fokker staggered.

Duffield's whoop of triumph was cut short by an ominous buzzing around his ears that made him swear and duck.

A glance showed a Fokker bearing in on the right. Remington's observer had him in a crossfire, but missed. The Fokker came on, still firing, and so close that the red flame of the Spandaus seemed to Duffield to be right in his face.

Morgan sideslipped, and the Hun roared over them, his landing wheels almost taking Duffield's head off. The Fokker zoomed, pulled a deadly bead on another D-H up there and put a burst into the big ship's belly. The D-H fell like a stone.

Then Remington tagged one with his fixed Vickers. The Fokker took the long count and headed crazily for earth.

That was more than enough for the Hun patrol. Those who were left headed for their own lines—and fast.

Morgan sat pounding the coaming softly with his gloved fist, his big shoulders shaking with laughter as he watched that hasty departure. It wasn't funny, of course, for men had died there in the high skies. But it was a victory that none of them had really expected. Blaine Duffield was surprised to discover that he was grinning too.

ON THE tarmac the two men got out of their pits together. Morgan lighted a cigarette and looked Duffield up and down as though he were some prize exhibit.

"Not bad feller," he drawled. "Not good but not bad."

"Lay you a month's pay against those motorman's gloves of yours that I'm flying a Spad before you're three months older," Duffield retorted savagely.

Morgan took his cigarette from his mouth and spat explosively, "Still got that bug, eh? Glory stuff. Sure, I know. I can see the headlines: *Famous War Ace Returns in Triumph to Broadway.* *New*

York's Millions Turn Out to Honor Blaine Duffield, Great Lone Wolf of Battle Skies."

Duffield blinked surprised, for the dig hit home. He had imagined those headlines himself, almost word for word. He gaped, and Morgan went on, in low tones for his ears alone:

"You may have been the darling of Fifth Avenue, flutter pants, but over here you're just one of the hired hands. The sooner you get that through your thick skull, the better off you'll be." Morgan turned and walked off, leaving Duffield staring after him.

SLEEP was slow in coming to Blaine Duffield that night. He tossed and rolled and did more real thinking than he had in all his pampered life before. He had a vague feeling that Morgan was right, but he wouldn't admit it, even to himself.

One thing was sure, though—if it was action a man wanted, and fighting, he could certainly get it with the D-H's. When he thought of that hot scrap today, and relived the moment when he had seen his tracers go home in the pit of the Fokker and send it screaming earthward, he thrilled to the hair roots.

He slept, finally, and the morning was another day. Two ships, Morgan's and

THE HOT AIR CLUB		November
Popular Publications, 205 East 42nd Street, New York.		
I like these stories best:		
1.	
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Street	
City	

another, went into Hun territory in the afternoon on a photographic mission. Five Camels flew cover for them.

They got their pictures, but on the way home they fought, and fought hard. They lost the other D-H and one of the Camels, but Duffield nipped his second Fokker and he felt good about it.

His pictures turned out splendidly, too, and the major congratulated him.

"Nice work, Duffield—a good job all around." The C.O.'s hard, weather-tanned face was wreathed in smiles, and his hand on the observer's shoulder was friendly.

Duffield would have liked to do a little grinning himself, but Morgan was standing there, arms folded, smoking a cigarette and grimly eyeing his back-seat man. Duffield was hanged if he'd give that guy the satisfaction of saying, "I told you so."

So he merely nodded and said, "Thanks, Major. I'm trying to do my share of the farm work around here."

The C.O.'s eyes narrowed at that. He opened his lips for a blazing answer, but thought better of it.

"Well, you're a good man with a hay fork, Duffield," he said. "I might even get you a raise in wages one of these days."

Time went on, and the 83rd continued to do its job. Sometimes they won, and sometimes they lost. But they took everything as it came, quietly satisfied to be doing their best. This was teamwork, and the devil with personal glory.

All but Duffield, whose towering ambitions died hard. He used to look up, wistful-eyed, at the Spads and Camels passing above. Swift, beautiful things, each of them under the hand of a real knight-of-the-blue.

But what was Blaine Duffield doing? Spade work; pick-and-shovel. Not even a stick in his hand and a rudder under his feet. He just went along for the ride. Nuts!

And then, late one afternoon, Captain Remington and his B Flight men got a hurry call to the office. Major Rodney was there, his head bent intently over a map on his desk. His face was grim, and, when he looked up and spoke, his voice was grim too.

"Look, men," he said. "Look at this map. Here—" his pencil bore down on a point—"is the forest of Verlainé. There's a bridge across the river there.

"The Huns are in the forest, in great force. They're beginning to cross the river on that bridge. Our boys on the other side are outnumbered, and they are under heavy artillery fire.

"They can't reach the bridge to blow it up, because of machine guns in the forest. Our artillery can't reach it fast enough with shells because there is this high hill to the south, on our side, too steep to get our shells over it and down on the bridge."

He was silent a moment, looking from one face to another of the silent group.

"It's our job," he said finally, "to bomb that bridge—and you chaps are elected."

No one spoke, and the major went on. "You'll have a covering flight of Spads, but there will be plenty of opposition from German air. The thing must be done fast, or not at all. Any questions?"

There were some. When these had been answered, and the mission mapped out, pilots and observers hastened to get into their flying clothes and onto the tarmac. The ships were warming, the big Liberty engines roaring their song of power. Mechs were hurriedly putting bombs in the racks.

MORGAN spoke to Duffield as they were getting into their pits. The pilot's face was sober, but his tones were friendly.

He said, "Well, old man, the bomb trips are all yours, and I'll try to line up the target for you. We'll smash their

lousy bridge if it's the last thing we do, huh?"

He smiled suddenly, and Duffield returned the smile.

"Right on the nail," he said quietly. He was thinking of that phrase, *the last thing we do*, and he knew it might be just that. Morgan was burying the hatchet. He was saying, while there was yet time, "Let bygones be bygones."

One by one, the heavily-loaded ships lurched and jiggled across the tarmac, picked up speed and took the air. They climbed to five thousand, heading northeast. The five blue Spads joined them.

This was to be a diving attack, and when they were two miles southwest of the bridge, Remington signaled the bombers into line formation.

Duffield looked at the sun, just touching the western horizon. He probed the sky for enemy ships, saw none—yet. Restlessly he fingered his bomb trips. The Spads were ahead now, circling alertly.

Remington's gloved hand lifted, came down, and in the same moment he shoved the stick against the firewall. The D-H dived like a roller coaster, leveled at five hundred, and two bombs sped bridgeward. They hit the water, failed to halt the gray-green tide of infantry traffic pouring across the bridge.

Morgan and Duffield were last in line, and, in the few seconds before Morgan dipped his own nose, Duffield had a chance to inspect the fiery pit of hell itself down there.

The German shellfire on the American side was so heavy that the doughboy defenders could not lift a head above their shallow trenches. A few machine guns were in action, but not enough to slow the enemy advance.

American shells were bursting on the German side, but the steep hill forced

them to fire too high to reach the bridge. Smoke, shot through with livid flashes of flame, lay over everything, and up through the smoke came fierce anti-aircraft fire at the diving Yanks.

The second and third Yank ships were hit before they could drop their bombs at all. One of them plunged to a flaming crash on the German side; the other limped away with its controls shot loose.

The fourth ship got through, but met such a blast of machine-gun bullets that the observer's aim was off.

Duffield set his teeth, felt his stomach crowd right up behind his tonsils as Morgan tilted the D-H on her nose and dived in his turn.

Down—into the flaming crater of a volcano, slugs rattling on the wings. Shrapnel boomed dull-red around the rushing ship and jagged pellets screamed their song of death. In the front pit, Morgan's big shoulders were hunched.

Then the Fokkers came. Out of nowhere they came, and the air was suddenly filled with a new screaming and the high, staccato rattle of Spandaus. They rushed down so recklessly close to the ground that their wings almost brushed the helmets of their own troops.

One of them appeared directly in front of the D-H, just as Morgan leveled out of his dive. Another was cutting in from above and to the right. Morgan's Vickers went into violent action at once, and Duffield dropped his bomb trips and his hands jumped to the breech of the Lewis gun.

Morgan's Hun zoomed into the clear, joined the other above, and both enemy pilots rained lead on the big Yankee crate as it sped away. Duffield got one of them smack in his sights, and spilled the gent. A Spad whooped down and junked the other.

But the bridge was still there, the gray-

Our Boys Need Bombers—Buy U. S. War Bonds!

green tide of enemy traffic still flowing across it, and the air was thick with Fokkers.

Remington had come around, was diving a second time. But again the Fokkers shoved him away from his target and his bombs exploded harmlessly at the river's edge. Smith and Barnham, in the other D-H, ran into a concentration of Hun ships and had to turn and fight before they could even begin their dive.

MORGAN, his jaw muscles tight, ran a savage gauntlet of Spandau slugs up there, and put his heavy ship into a desperate, vertical power dive that might have torn the wings from a Spad.

Duffield gasped, and grabbed for support. For an instant the whole wild scene jumped and flickered crazily before his eyes. Then he steadied, and hunkered over his bomb trips.

Through shrapnel and machine-gun fire the D-H howled downward.

And now they were in the clear, the bridge below and ahead. Morgan hauled back the stick, leveled off. He glanced back at Duffield imploringly, his clenched teeth gleaming between powder-blackened lips, and Duffield shouted reassurance.

Now—now! Duffield jerked the trips, looked eagerly down and back to observe the result. Right on the middle of the bridge fell the two vicious twenty-pounders. Flame spurted and concussion ripped the bridge apart. Debris outclimbed the towering column of smoke and fell back into the water.

Men were in the water, too, thrashing around the wide, yawning gap that had been a bridge. Morgan slanted a look and hit the coaming with a hard, triumphant fist. Duffield shouted, and leaped to his Lewis guns as the Fokkers came tearing.

The D-H was six hundred feet up, and climbing. But it was on the German side of the river and going farther into German territory. Morgan was about to turn

when a mess of stuff slammed into the tail assembly.

The rudder went haywire. Morgan tried elevators plus ailerons to bring them around, but the elevators must have been damaged also, and the ship reeled and twisted, threatening to go completely out of control. He couldn't turn.

Duffield grabbed for support, halting his fire for a moment, and jerked his head to see what was going on. Morgan put the ship hastily onto a bee line, shrugging his shoulders hopelessly.

Duffield shrugged, too, when he realized what was happening. "Hindenburg, here we come!" he muttered, and turned for one last whirl with the Lewis gun before they washed out.

Ahead lay a field, surrounded by the shattered, jagged remnants of what had been a woods. Morgan was trying for that field. It was a mile behind the bridge, right in the heart of enemy territory, but he had no choice. If the Fokkers didn't get them first, Morgan might land there.

High in the air, above the bridge, the fighting continued. Remington and Smith were trying to get out of that hot spot now, three Spads helping them. The other two Spads saw Morgan's plight and came howling to take the Fokkers off his back. Duffield was glad when the Spandau slugs quit coming, for it had looked like curtains for a minute.

Morgan slid the D-H toward the field. But Duffield saw with concern that something was the matter with Morgan. His face had gone a pasty-white under the smoke film, and his head lolled weakly on his shoulders. Duffield saw the red stain seeping through the right shoulder of the big pilot's flying coat. Morgan was hit, and badly.

SOMEHOW, Morgan got her down to a bumpy landing. The ship rolled, reeling and bouncing, and came to a stop. Morgan reached weakly to cut the switch.

Then he sagged forward against his safety belt, out cold.

Deep twilight had fallen now. He strained his eyes and ears, but he could see nothing dangerous near at hand, nor hear anything except the continued clamor of battle at the bridge.

He leaned forward, drew Morgan's limp body against the seat back. The pilot's head rolled weakly. In the half dark his face was a pale oval. His eyes were closed and his mouth hung open. His breathing was hoarse and irregular.

Duffield reached to unhook Morgan's safety belt and began to lift him over the seat back into the rear pit. Then he dropped him suddenly as rifle fire crackled from the woods to the left, and bullets came hissing. German reserve troops were in those woods, and they had seen the ship come down.

The Yank grabbed for his Lewis gun and hurled hot lead at the flashes. The firing stopped. It began again in a minute, but Duffield was tugging desperately at Morgan's heavy, inert body, getting him into the rear pit.

The half dark was all that saved them. The air was thick with flying slugs that

slapped the ground, thudded into the ship, plucked at Duffield's flying coat. But only one of them found flesh, and that one ripped savagely across the American's back muscles.

He felt the blood running, and snarled like a wounded tiger. But he got Morgan into the rear pit, and braced the limp body there. Then, swearing fiercely under his breath, he horsed the ship around until she pointed about southwest.

He was reaching to spin the prop when he saw that the Huns were closing in on him, firing as they came. Once more he ran to snatch at the Lewis, and his bullets raked the oncoming Germans, sending them headlong to earth.

That stopped them briefly, gave him a chance to get the motor going. He leaped for the pit of the slowly moving ship. He slapped the throttle hard against the stop, and the Liberty roared her challenge. Flame winked from the exhaust stacks, and the prone German marksmen sent answering flame, and slugs that came too close for comfort.

Duffield sent the ship bouncing and reeling across the field, and pulled her into the air. He was out of range now,

More than human, less than a god—

"TAA THE TERRIBLE"

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THE great pale men from Earth brought horror to peaceful Arania—enslaving its people, looting it of its beauty. But the day came when the slave-people loosed the fierce and savage power of their awesome demon-god—Taa the Terrible, who could destroy a world—and did! Don't miss this thrilling complete science-fiction novelette by Malcolm Jameson!

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and it was just a sort of pole vault to the American side of the lines. But setting her down, he knew, was going to take some maneuvering.

Duffield jockeyed the D-H over the river, where the red flash of gunfire and shells had died down. A lone archie took him on, and shrapnel bloomed scarlet around the fleeing wings. He thought, with a queer, twisted smile, that now he was a war pilot. War brought some funny breaks!

FOR miles the D-H droned through the night, over woodland and rolling ground. Once he saw a fine field on the left and he thought, with a wry smile, that it was just his luck to be on the wrong side of the street for it.

The dizziness was getting him now. His head reeled, and so did the wings of the D-H.

"But you're a peegot now, Duffield. You asked for it, and you've got it. Let's see you strut your stuff."

He remembered the small metal flask in the pocket of his flying coat.

The liquor blazed inside him, and he felt better. His sight cleared. He looked to the right, and saw the drome of the 83rd down there in the moonlight.

Blaine Duffield was vaguely surprised at the lump in his throat. He swallowed it angrily, turned his gaze ahead and his head jerked up with a start. A field at last, and dead in front.

"Crank the old crash wagon, boys," he muttered. "We're coming."

He leveled off and heard the eerie whistle of the wind in the struts. But the field was short. He couldn't fishtail to kill his speed, and he feared to overshoot. Grimly he hauled up the nose.

She pancaked. She hit hard, bounded once like a kangaroo, and hit again. The landing gear groaned with strain, but somehow it held until the ship had nearly stopped. Then the left wheel collapsed

and the left wing snagged the ground with a splintering of wood and a ripping of canvas. The D-H spun half around, kicked up her tail, and there she was.

The liquor had helped Duffield for the moment, but now the dizziness was coming back—

He couldn't make it. He fell prone in the dust, and went quietly to sleep.

IN THE infirmary, the fierce bite of iodine jerked him briefly back to consciousness.

Through the night, Blaine Duffield slept fitfully. But it was dawn before he became fully alert, and then he turned his head and looked into the eyes of Bill Morgan, in the next bed.

Morgan must have been suffering torture with that hole through his shoulder, but he was smiling. "Hello, soldier," he said. "How you doin'?"

Duffield moved slightly, and winced. "Can't complain, Bill. How *you* doin'?"

Morgan grinned. "All on the up-and-up, thanks to a scrappin' son-of-a-gun that doesn't know when he's licked. Hate to lose my back-seat man, though."

Duffield blinked. "Whaddya mean, lose your back-seat man?"

"Son, you're a pilot now. Skipper said so. You'll have your Spad yet."

Duffield shut his eyes. He knew now what he wanted. It was what he had just seen in Bill Morgan's eyes and heard in his voice—admission to the splendid fraternity of fighting men.

Spads or D-H's or Handley-Pages; air or sea or land—it didn't matter where you were or what your job might be. It was how you did it that counted.

"I—I'd rather stay with the 83rd."

Morgan's brows lifted in amazement. "Says which?"

"You heard me. I *like* this bunch of wild men. I like the ships. All right, grin, you big ape. I'm in the army now—and I like that too!"



STORY BEHIND the COVER

THERE is no telling what the British and Germans will be doing in Egypt by the time this magazine comes out. Right now both sides have dug in and are awaiting the next move.

The scene on this month's cover is a raid on one of Rommel's Afrika Korps supply dumps on the El Alamein front in Egypt.

Note the expert camouflage job on the Mess 109's. Flying over desert terrain they are hard to spot, and at rest it is well-nigh impossible.

In this case the Bristol Beauforts caught the Germans flat-footed and plastered their gas dump. They got away safely, leaving huge fires and having shot down several Messerschmitts.



America

By
Henry H. Arnold



BEFORE December 7th, the nation had thought in terms of a continental United States. But for some time, however, your Army leaders had looked further into military technique and procedure. For years we had worked and planned, despite "starvation" budgets, to find ways and means of meeting the all-out destructiveness that accompanies modern war machines. When war came, they were ready with the plans on which we had labored—labored while America slept, in the complacency of a mistaken security afforded by broad oceans.

1. Our first job was to move troops and implements of war to distant outposts, in the Pacific to the ill-fated Philippines, to Alaska, to Australia, to Iceland, to South America.

Yes, within a few weeks after December 7th, we successfully moved over half a million American armed men to our outer defenses in accordance with *established* plans, despite enemy submarines, planes, and warcraft. We established garrisons which could defend us and become spearheads of offensive attack. No—not at first—for a treacherous enemy, without even the semblance of the warning usually given by civilized nations, using numbers far in excess of those available to our forces, struck with degraded savagery. Hence,



General Arnold Reports
on America's War Wings!

Takes the Offensive

Commanding General
United States Army Air Forces



although from the very first our plans called for offensive action, while we built up our strength we were limited to defensive measures.

Our concentrations of men and material are not designed to defend ourselves against attack, but to insure our delivering knockout blows when we have made suitable and proper dispositions.

2. In the first six months of war, the Army Air Forces, although lacking adequate numbers of planes, made successful attacks upon the enemy in the Pacific. We have successfully bombed Japanese ships at sea on many occasions. We have damaged their warehouses and supply centers on land.

Our score of destruction thus far by air power is—

Thirty-three Jap warcraft bombed and sunk.

Forty-four Jap transports, freighters and tankers bombed and sunk.

Over three hundred Japanese fighters and bombers destroyed in air combat.

Over two hundred Japanese fighters and bombers destroyed on the ground.

From recent papers you know that the Army airmen, uniting with the Navy, have quite recently sunk several more of the warcraft that the Japs will need so badly to carry on the war.

How many thousands of Japanese troops were drowned when the transports sank I will not estimate. But since each transport carries many soldiers aboard—and dozens of such transports have been sunk—you can do your own arithmetic. Furthermore, the number of their soldiers and ships is not unlimited. There are not millions more Japanese soldiers where these came from. Japan has paid in blood for every inch of soil it has overrun.

We take just pride in what our flyers with few planes—against great odds—have done. But we must not rest on our laurels. We must think of it only in terms of the gigantic struggle ahead.

One great myth has completely disappeared during the first six months of our war—the myth that the Japanese are fanatic super-fighters, on the ground or in the air. They are tough, well-trained and well-equipped, but are not supermen. Give our flyers anything approaching equality of numbers in the air, and they blast the Japanese out of the sky. So far, our record is about four to one. For every one of our planes shot down, the Japs have lost four.

The day of reckoning is not as far off as some people think.

I am telling Tokyo that we have thousands more Colin Kellys and Butch O'Hares and Doolittles on the way. This is just the dawn of a day of wrath!



The story of American combat flying in World War II—and the inside details on why the Japanese fear Yankee planes and men!

3. *Our third great task, in the first six-months of war, was building a well-rounded air force.*

Air power does not merely mean having sixty thousand or one hundred twenty-five thousand planes. Air power depends on the first-line combat planes, those in reserve to replace those lost, the training, cargo and transport planes, the gliders . . . well-equipped bases, supply depots in strategic locations . . . our productive capacity of new planes . . . our facilities for training pilots and mechanics—those are the factors which measure the effectiveness of an air force.

Combat operations require many *different kinds* of planes. No one aircraft will do everything.

Not long ago a friend of mine showed me a model airplane he has built. He said it had the fighter plane's blinding speed and could carry heavy bombs as well. I said, "I hope you are right, but nobody has ever bred a horse that could pull an ice wagon and also win the Kentucky Derby."

4. *Let me tell you how these American planes are doing in combat.*

How good is the Flying Fortress? I'll tell you—it has no peer in its field today.

Captain George Schaetzel, who recently was given the Distinguished Flying Cross, flew a B-17E, our newest model Flying Fortress, in a successful bombing mission over Davao, in the Philippines. In spite of the fact that anti-aircraft shells pounded his plane and enemy fighters killed his rear gunner and destroyed one of his engines, he led his bullet-ridden plane—with hundreds of holes which made it look like a sieve—back to his home airport, over a thousand miles of open sea.

Lt. Alvin Mueller, also decorated, received over a hundred hits from anti-aircraft guns and enemy fighters on his plane, but he brought that B-17 back home. Captain Hewitt Wheless bombed Jap trans-

ports in the Philippines, shot down at least six attackers, and returned home in a B-17 with one engine shot away, one put out of commission, a gas tank hit, the radio destroyed, some of his control cables shot away, the rear landing wheel blown off and both front tires riddled with bullets! He was such a tough nut to crack that after the attacking Jap Zero fighters had used up all of their ammunition they flew alongside his plane to see what kept it in the air!

The ability of the B-17 to batter its way through enemy fighters and knock out its objectives should make us proud.

Our B-25C medium bombers can go farther, faster, and carry more bombs than the best ships of our enemies. Gen. Ralph Royce led a successful expedition, which he described as a "picnic", two-thousand miles from Australia to the Philippines—and back again.

5. *How do our men stand as fighters?* I'll give you an example.

There was a Jap attack on Darwin, Australia. The Japs had seventy-two planes. Our fighters took to the air. In the battle was Lt. Robert McMahan. Bullets whipped through his fuselage and his motor cut out.

He had a choice to make—should he bail out or glide to safety? He took neither—because his guns still worked. A Jap Zero fighter swooped down on him; McMahan shot him down. Another Jap fighter came at him, and McMahan fired his guns. That Jap went down. McMahan's motor was now ablaze, but when a Jap dive bomber swept under him, he again let go with his guns—and destroyed it. McMahan then jumped, and landed safe and sound.

This is how they fight—these young Americans that Hitler called "soft!"

We have the best young pilots in the world—and they are proving their superiority in combat.

DESTINATION-

Nippon!



Lacey heard his rear guns yammer—and another Jap cut himself a hunk of hell!

The gods of war play fast and hard, and a fighting man must learn the rules. But here's the story of an ace who had to rely on the courage of a man who knew none of them—or die!

By
**ROBERT
SIDNEY
BOWEN**

COLONEL Bradford Landon, U.S. Army Air Corps, looked out the window of his headquarters at the flat expanse of ground shimmering in the blaze of the Australian sun, and smiled secretly. It was a smile of fierce pride and complete satisfaction with the personal accomplishments of one Colonel Landon.

It had been a long hard road with pitfalls all over the place. It had taken much careful planning, and much pulling of political strings to get where he was. But he had made it. As of his arrival in Australia yesterday he was in complete

command of that sun-baked expanse of airfield out there, and everything upon it.

At last he was in a position he should have been given months ago. But it was better late than never, and now he was going to conduct an air war as an air war should be conducted.

He turned his head from the window and glanced at Major Lacey, whose command he was taking over. Once again a flicker of annoyance went through him. Just look at that man, Lacey! A commissioned major, yet from the look of his clothes you couldn't tell but what he might be one of those Australian bushmen he had heard tell about. A grease-smearred shirt, torn at the shoulder, a pair of dirty shorts, and a scuffed-up pair of sneakers that even the lower ranks should not be allowed to wear.

And this was the way the man had greeted his future commanding officer! Of course Lacey had explained that he didn't expect the new commandant so soon, and that he was pitching in with the repair work because they were short of mechanics. That was all very well, but why was this station short of mechanics? Washington should have been notified and the thing taken care of at once. A fine thing for the commanding officer to be working on engines. Bad for the troops, very bad.

The Air Corps was doing a fine job, inexperienced as its members were with the *true* science of warfare, but— Well, he'd take care of that in time. He hadn't been the second man in his class at West Point for nothing!

"I'm holding a general parade tomorrow morning, Major," he suddenly spoke aloud. "I want every officer and enlisted man to attend the parade. A general inspection. I'm afraid you've been a trifle lax about details around here."

Major Lacey's eyes hardened just a little but there was a pleasant smile on his lips.

"You're right there, Colonel Landon," he said easily. "The small details have gone overboard because we had to let them go. We've only had time to look to the big things. The Japs are getting closer every day, and every minute we spend on unimportant stuff is as good as an hour lost. You'll see for yourself, sir, after you've been here a while."

Colonel Landon smiled like a patient father listening to the long-winded explanation of a ten-year-old. Then he opened his mouth to put Lacey straight on a few points of military necessity. But before he said anything, he heard the voice speaking just outside the open window.

"So we go down on the floor a couple times?" it said. "So what? We take a nine count, see? And then up we is and throwing everything in the book. Them Nippons ain't got no chance at all. I'm telling you—them Japs is dopes. Us guys is going to chase them to a fare-thee-well. And that ain't maybe, neither!"

As the voice died away Colonel Landon looked at Lacey in horrified amazement.

"What in the world was that?" he demanded.

"Sergeant Kerrigan, sir," Lacey replied with a grin.

"Sergeant Kerrigan?" Landon gasped. "A sergeant, and he can't even speak English?"

"It's bullets, and flying, out here, Colonel," Lacey said quietly. "Kerrigan is just about the best machine gun and air cannon man we have. And he's a damn good pilot, too. Wish we had a thousand like him."

It was several seconds before Colonel Landon's tongue could form the words.

"You mean to tell me that the man is a pilot?"

"Not on the records," Lacey replied. "He was a civilian pilot before the war. A lot of hours in his logbook. Too old to serve in the flying end, so he enlisted

as a mechanic. We let him do a lot of check hopping to keep his hand in. Never can tell when we might have to use him. He's quite the character around here. A little rough around the edges, but solid gold all the way through. Would you like to meet him?"

BEFORE the stunned Landon could say yes or no, Lacey stepped to the door and called out. A moment later a leather-faced man who was just a shade smaller than a small mountain, shouldered into the room. He blinked from the sudden change of light and pulled a big paw across his bushy-browed eyes.

"You call me, General?" he grunted.

"Our new commandant wants to meet you, Kerrigan," Lacey said as the corners of his mouth twitched. "Colonel Landon, this is Sergeant Kerrigan. Kerrigan, your new C.O., Colonel Landon."

The big non-com brought his heels together, straightened up as much as the ceiling beams would permit, and flapped a big hand to his brow and down.

"Howdy, Colonel," he boomed, and then stuck out his big paw. "Welcome to a lousy mess, but we're doing all right. Them Japs is sunk right now—only they ain't got wise to it, yet."

Landon hesitated, flushed as he saw the look in Lacey's eyes, and then reluctantly put out his own hand.

"Thank you, Sergeant," he said stiffly. "Major Lacey has given me quite an interesting picture of things around here. I'm afraid you'll have to prepare yourself for a few changes."

"And how there'll be changes!" Kerrigan boomed blandly as the true meaning of the words sailed over his head. "We'll twist them Japs into knots that will still be there when they got beards 'way down to here. The General, here, has done a swell job. Just let him give you the lead and you won't be missing no tricks at all."

"Yes, yes, of course," Landon stumbled. "Well, get on about your job, er, Sergeant. I have more things to discuss with Major Lacey."

"Sure, on me way right now," Kerrigan said, and flapped up the big hand again. Then turning to Lacey, he said, "That Forty is sweet as honey, now, General. You want I should smack it around a little to make sure, huh?"

"There'll be a new ruling about flying, Sergeant!" Colonel Landon cut in harshly before Lacey could speak. "You will apply yourself to your duties as a mechanic only. Now, get out of here!"

The big non-com looked surprised and hurt. He caught Lacey's look, and shrugged, and shuffled outside. As the door closed Colonel Landon spilled air between his teeth like escaping steam.

"Well, Major, as you heard me tell that Kerrigan, there are going to be some changes around here—and soon! We'll start off with that general inspection parade tomorrow morning. Eight o'clock sharp, and—"

"I beg your pardon, sir," Lacey broke in quietly, "but I would suggest that you hold it later. At eight, most of us are usually in the air meeting the Japs, or off on some special mission."

"Well, there'll be no special missions tomorrow morning!" Landon barked. "We'll consider them later—after I've made my general inspection."

"Very good, sir," Lacey said evenly. "And will you, or shall I, so inform General MacArthur's headquarters?"

"What's that?" Landon gulped, and blinked.

"Orders for all special missions come direct from Air Command at General MacArthur's headquarters," Lacey told him. "They come through every midnight. It's been like that for a month now."

"I see, I see," Landon mumbled down his natty tunic front. "Well, we'll see if any orders come through tonight. Mean-

time, keep that Kerrigan out of the air. And everybody else who has no right to be in a plane. You can go now, Major. I see you've got a lot of desk work piled up here. I'll look it over and have another talk with you later. I can't say that I've been impressed, Major!"

Lightning went through Lacey's eyes but was gone in an instant.

"I'm sorry, sir," he said evenly. "But I'm afraid we've been thinking more about how to impress the Japs!"

Before Colonel Landon could catch and digest that one, Lacey gave him a snappy salute and beat it out of the station's headquarters office.

"I've read about this sort of thing in the last war," he grated out softly. "But, in this war, too?"

He let the question hang in midair and continued on over toward the mess in brooding silence. He was about to go up the front steps when a shadow fell across his path. He glanced up to see Sergeant Kerrigan. The big fellow's face was blank bafflement.

"That guy ain't really taking over, is he, General?" he got out like the rush of a tornado. "It's just a gag, ain't it, about me sticking the hell on the ground? Look, General, you gotta do something about this! I gotta fly once in a while or I'll go nuts in this hot joint!"

"Keep your shirt on, Kerrigan!" Lacey said not too gruffly. "I'm afraid it's out of my hands, and in the hands of the good Lord. He's the new commandant. Straight from Washington. And that is that!"

THE long and trying day finally came to an end for Lacey. When the evening mess was over, and all the planes were bedded down for the night, he slipped away from the others for the peace and quiet of the Australian night.

He walked slowly around the rim of the huge flying field and bitterly cursed

the fates that had sent Colonel Landon.

The man was ten times worse than any stuffy, moth-eaten British officer of the old-school-tie clan. All day long he had forced Lacey to accompany him from spot to spot, while the new commandant complained and ranted about this unimportant item, and that unimportant item.

Funny thing about this Landon, though. He did know his stuff, and he wasn't any desk pilot, either. He'd taken one of the P-40's up for a hop, and, while not a few of them sort of half hoped he'd spin in, he'd put on a good flying show. Yes, he had his good points. He could fly; he knew his engines, his navigation, and all the rest of it. If only he'd get rid of the starch in his bearing and actions. If only he'd dirty himself up a bit, and be human, he'd have every man Jack of them sitting in his rooting section—and one Major Lacey, in particular.

"God knows I don't want the C.O. job!" he murmured aloud.

Lacey saw the figure of a base orderly hurrying across the field toward him. The man panted up and took a swipe at the peak of his cap in salute.

"Been hunting all over for you, sir," he said. "Colonel Landon wants to see you in headquarters as soon as you can get there."

COLONEL LANDON was waiting for him in headquarters with maps spread out all around him. At Lacey's entrance he looked up with a grunt.

"Where the devil've you been, Lacey?" he snapped and mashed out a cigarette. "Orders from GHQ Air Command have come through. Why weren't you here to take them down?"

Lacey pointed to the name sign Landon had had placed on the door.

"This is your office now, sir," he said as evenly as he could. "You're in command of the base now."

Landon grunted again and gave an impatient little wave with his hand.

"All right, all right!" he growled. "But I need your help in this. Complete co-operation by all ranks is the basis of any success. Sit down."

Lacey sat down and lighted up a cigarette without being invited. The colonel fussed over the maps and some official papers for a few moments.

"Air Command seems to think that there is a secret concentration of sea and air forces at Kupang, on Timor," he suddenly said. "What do you think about that?"

"I agree," Lacey said. "Known it for some time. You can't get near the area without running into clouds of Jap Zero fighters."

Landon thought that over.

"Air Command wants pictures of the area," he said presently. "Wants them bad. Necessary for an attack in force. Wants them tomorrow."

A cold chill ran through Lacey but he took pains not to let it show in his face. He had been expecting a request just like this for a couple of weeks now. An air and sea invasion could well start from

Jap-occupied Timor. GHQ realized that, and wanted to find out what was going on up that way.

"Then we'll have to get them, sir," Lacey said quietly.

"Of course," Landon grunted and shuffled through some of the papers on his desk. "According to these reports, Jap air power over Timor is very strong. We'd have to send along a mighty big fighter plane escort to make sure the photo planes got there—and back."

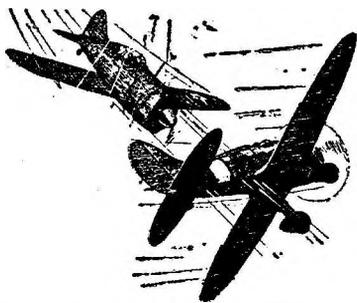
"And even then, the chances are no photo planes *would* get back."

"Exactly what I think, too," Landon said. "So—it strikes me this is a one plane, volunteer-crew job. Don't you think so?"

Lacey nodded slowly.

"It's our only hope of success, Colonel," he said. "And I know a flying team who would like to take on the job."

"I was hoping you might," the colonel grunted and gave him a keen look. "Saves the trouble of putting the thing up to the entire station and picking the first two volunteers. I have a feeling the less publicity we give this thing, the better. What flying team do you have in mind?"



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"Sergeant Kerrigan and myself," Lacey replied instantly.

Colonel Landon didn't change expression.

"I was expecting that too, Lacey," he said. "Of course, it's out of the question. Kerrigan is a mechanic, and not a member of the flying personnel. We don't do things that way."

Lacey took a deep breath, and then leaned forward a bit in his chair.

"You, Colonel, are commandant of this base," he said slowly. "What you say is law, and goes, regardless. But, permit me to say that there isn't a pilot here who would not be glad to have Kerrigan sitting in the rear pit on any kind of a mission!"

"I refuse to permit Kerrigan to go along with you, Lacey," Landon cut in. "Because I've already selected the other member of your team."

"Who?" Lacey shot out in amazement.

"Myself," Landon came back at him.

LACEY sat up straight, and stared.

"You?" he gasped. "But you're commandant here. And you—"

"And I am not fit for the job?" Landon cut in harshly.

"No, I wasn't thinking of that," Lacey said. "But, this will be a tough nut to crack, Colonel. We may get through; we may get our pictures—but whether we get back here with them is something else again."

"Exactly why I'm going along," Landon said. "You and I come from different schools, Lacey. We don't seem to see eye to eye on anything. That is unfortunate, but there's nothing to be done about it right now. There is one thing, though, I've followed through my entire military career. It has been to learn to do the job of any man under me. And something else, too. Not to send a man out on a job that I couldn't, or wouldn't, do myself!"

Lacey shook himself a little like a punch-drunk fighter coming up off the floor.

"I don't get it," he grunted. "You're the damndest combination of man I ever met. Okay! Luck to us both. We better start making flight plans now, and see that the ship we select is all in shape. You know, Colonel—"

Lacey stopped and shrugged off the rest.

"Do I know what?" Colonel Landon pressed.

"Nothing," Lacey murmured after a long pause. "As you say, we come from different schools. Let's get to work."

THE new dawn was no more than a faint gray line on the eastern lip of the Coral Sea as the Vultee YA-19 three-place attack-bomber received its final "dusting off" for the venture ahead. For half the night mechanics, under the watchful eyes of Landon and Lacey, had labored over the plane.

All that time Sergeant Kerrigan had worked like a beaver, only pausing now and then to cast an agonized, pleading eye in Lacey's direction. Lacey, however, had ignored the look every time, cursing softly under his breath.

Eventually, though, Kerrigan couldn't stand it any longer. He wiped his greasy hands on a hunk of waste, tossed it over his shoulder and walked over to where Landon and Lacey were making last minute checks on the navigation charts.

"This is a three-place job, General," he said to Lacey. "I better go along with you. You might be heading into a mess of trouble. Now, with me along in the rear—"

"Sorry, Kerrigan," Lacey stopped him as kindly as he could. "The colonel and I will make out okay."

"Am I saying you won't?" Kerrigan cried and stood his ground. "But you might run into trouble, see what I mean?"

Them Japs is dopes, but they can crack smart once in a while. Supposing they smack you a good one, and you have to come down? You're in the soup. But I know every island around here, and, well—"

"That will be enough, Sergeant!" Colonel Landon barked at him. "You heard what Major Lacey said. Now get back to your job. If you're through, then get back to your quarters."

"Look, Colonel, don't get sore!" the big non-com pleaded. "I ain't telling you your business. I'm just telling you that though them Japs is do—"

"Sergeant!" Landon thundered. "Return to your quarters. Until further word you're relieved of all duty. You will spend your time in the base library. Get as many books on English as you can, and—and, for God's sake, study them! Now, *get out of here!*"

Kerrigan blinked and a dull red crept into his grease-smeared face. He seemed to rise up on his toes and sway forward a little. Lacey's heart skipped a beat in fear that the big fellow was going to start swinging. In fact, he set himself to leap forward, but he didn't have to. Kerrigan relaxed and came down again on his heels.

"Yes, sir," he mumbled deep in his throat. "An' the best of luck to you both."

Half an hour later Lacey opened up the P & W and took the Vultee off and into the air. He held it in a steady climb until he was a good eighteen thousand feet over the base. There he made a final check of instruments, and camera operation. Then he banked around and put his tail to the ever-increasing band of light on the eastern horizon, and flew out over the broad blue-black expanse of the Indian Ocean.

EVENTUALLY, when the continent of Australia was out of sight far behind him, Lacey eased the nose up for more altitude, and gradually worked around on a true crow course to the north-

west and the southwestern tip of the island of Timor.

His head was full of thoughts and they were all of the same thing. This flight, and Colonel Landon back there in the rear pit. Little by little his rage at the new commandant went up.

If they did get back safe, and sound, and successful, Landon would probably become well-nigh insufferable. He would have clearly demonstrated that he had all kinds of courage, and every bit as much ability as the next man. That demonstrated he would no doubt go completely overboard to cram down their throats his stuffed-shirt ideas on strict discipline, smart military appearance—

Lacey finished his thoughts with a bitter groan, and then started as Landon's voice came over the inter-com.

"You all right, Lacey? Something wrong? Want me to take over?"

"No, everything's fine, sir," Lacey replied. "Better get set with your aft camera—we're getting close. And be ready with your aft guns, too. Chances are we'll have to snap pictures and bullets at the same time."

"Everything in readiness aft, Lacey," came the frosty reply. "You get us there—don't worry about me."

"Wouldn't dream of it!" Lacey snapped and hand-heeled the throttle forward to the stop bracket. "Sorry I brought it up!"

Something came over the inter-com, sharp and crackling, but Lacey didn't hear it. At least, he didn't make out the words. For, at that instant he had suddenly caught the faint flash of wings far off to his right front and a few thousand feet lower. Those wings, of course, meant just one thing—Jap planes out on patrol!

He stared at them hard, and climbed up a bit more, swerving toward them a bit. The sun was now up over the eastern lip of the world and the more he had it behind him the less chance of being spotted by approaching planes. Sitting stiff and straight at the controls he kept his

eyes glued to the group of planes. He counted fifteen Zeroes. They passed underneath him and faded into the sun.

By that time there was something else to look at dead ahead! A humpy black line on the western horizon. The Jap-occupied island of Timor. But, naturally, that wasn't all that he spotted. Weaving back and forth in the sky above that humpy black line were swarms of dots.

They were Jap planes on patrol over Kupang! He held his course for several minutes more until the objective to be camera-shot took on definite shape and outline. Then he made one final check of his forward guns and his own automatic camera. Satisfied that everything was in readiness he spoke into the inter-com.

"Down we go, Colonel!" he called out. "They don't see us yet because we've got the sun at our backs. I'm going to dive and go in over low. Then I'll wheel and make a second run back. Start your camera when I flatten out, and—well, good luck, Colonel!"

"And luck to you, Lacey!" came the senior officer's voice in his earphone. "We'll get through. I'm sure of it. The damn Jap rat isn't born who can stop us. Let's go!"

A TINGLING warmth slid through Lacey as he tightened his grip on the Vultee's stick and got set for his dive. Now that they were going into battle, Landon was almost acting human. What a swell guy he would be if he'd only throw his damn book of rules away.

Shrugging away his thoughts, Lacey dropped the nose and sent the Vultee downward like a screaming shaft of lightning. The force of the dive pinned him to the back of the seat, and he had to sing at the top of his voice to relieve the terrific pressure in his ears. Then, when the glassy blue surface of the Indian Ocean was but a couple of hundred feet below him, he hauled out of the dive and shot forward like a bullet.

By then the objective was but a mile away, but the patrolling Jap planes had sighted him and were starting to pile down from their great altitude. He didn't see them coming; he only heard their distant fire, because he was too busy with the job in hand. His automatic camera was turning over, and he had hauled the plane up for a bit more altitude so that a maximum amount of ground could be shot.

Hunching forward over the stick he raced straight in over the harbor, saw the array of warships and troop transports anchored there, and knew definitely that all rumors about Jap concentrations at Kupang were absolutely true. Ashore he could see thousands and thousands of Jap troops waiting to board the transports.

In the next instant death started pouring up at him. The harbor and the shoreline blossomed out in flashing red, yellow, and orange. It was as though the Vultee had plowed straight into the crater of a belching volcano.

Then suddenly he was in clear air, and wheeling up and around for a return run on the camera target. Clear air? Clear, save for perhaps half the Jap air force prop-screaming down at him.

Even as he went up on wing and wheeled, a Zero plane loomed up square in his sights. It was simply a case of a half-second burst from his guns, and the Zero wasn't there any more.

It was a ball of fire falling down into oblivion.

"Okay, Colonel?" he barked into the inter-com, and rammed the Vultee down again.

"Perfect!" came the faint reply. "Here's another one for us!"

Lacey heard the rear guns yammer, and as he half jerked his head around to the left he saw a second Jap Zero fighter come apart at the seams and go down in a shower of smoking red.

He started to shout congratulations,

but just at that moment something hit the engine with a terrific bang, and his whole face felt numb. A black cloud seemed to seep inside the cockpit and engulf him.

In the next instant, however, the black cloud had disappeared, and the numbness had left his face. There was just a dull ache in his left cheek, and a gash made by a hunk of something flying back. But what started his heart pumping with furious joy was the fact that the Pratt & Whitney Twin Wasp was still roaring out its thunderous song of power. The cowling looked as if it had been passed through a meat grinder, but the engine was still going. The anti-aircraft hit, or whatever it had been, had damaged only the cowling.

When the black cloud floated away and he glanced down, a startled cry burst from his lips. It seemed that he had hardly started his return run over Kupang, but that wasn't so—he had more than started it. In fact he had actually completed the run and was now a mile from shore and ripping across the glassy blue surface of the Indian Ocean. That was a wonderful thing to realize, but it did not mean that death and failure had been cheated. The sky was still filled with fanatic devils flying Zero fighters, and they were coming all-out in a frantic effort to cut down the streaking Vultee.

Lacey automatically cut off his camera and twisted around in his seat. The colonel was handling his rear guns like a veteran. Two long trails of smoke far behind were proof that two of the Zero fighters had come within range.

Lacey turned front and nosed down the Vultee a hair to get every additional ounce of speed possible. By the grace of God, or the flying stupidity of the Japs, his return run over Kupang had caught them flat-footed—with the result that he had been able to build up a fair lead before they whirled to give chase. If he could but hold that lead until he was beyond the shore range of the Jap fight-

ers, success of the venture would be in the bag!

And then the gods of war up and kicked him in the face!

Rather, the P & W in the nose suddenly let out an earthly grinding wail, and then changed to the sound of a peanut roaster falling down a flight of metal steps. A glob of oily black smoke belched up through the bullet-shredded cowling. There was a single stab of flame—and then the engine went dead.

“TO your right, and down, Lacey!” Colonel Landon's voice roared over the inter-com. “Some small islands down there. Think we can make one of them?”

Lacey had already spotted the small patches of brown that stuck up above the surface of the Indian Ocean. He took a flash glance behind, then automatically nodded, and barked into the inter-com.

“We've got to!” he shouted. “Hang on, and watch the landing. It'll be more of a crash, I guess. Get your camera plates out and protect them if you can.”

Lacey swerved the Vultee around to the right and stuck the nose down as much as he dared. Holding the stick with his knee, he released the exposed plates from his forward camera and shoved them up under his tunic. Then he set himself and glued his eyes to the nearest of the small group of islands. It looked mostly rocks and a patch or two of scraggly trees. But on the far side he spotted a short length of wave-washed beach. It was going to be the toughest landing he ever made—and if he didn't make it just right, it would definitely be curtains for both of them.

For a moment he considered the idea of nosing up for as much altitude as his gliding speed would allow, and ordering Landon to bail out with him, and try to make solid ground that way. But as guns started yammering in the air behind, he chucked the idea. There was too much

risk of pursuing Japs catching up with them and riddling them with bullets before they could parachute to the island. No—it was a landing, or nothing.

The last had just about left his lips when the plane was over the near end of the strip of wave-washed beach and losing altitude like an express elevator. He eased the nose up, dropped the wheels, and held the controls in a grip of steel, and prayed. Seconds, minutes, years dragged by, and then the wheels banged against the sand. The Vultee bounced and swayed in the air; then it dropped down on the sand again. It ran forward several yards, and then suddenly the right wheel gave way. The wingtip crabbed in the sand and the plane spun like a top, then lurched forward, nose in the sand and tail in the air.

Lacey climbed and half fell out of the cockpit and down onto the sand. Then he reached up and gave Landon a hand.

"Make it snappy!" he barked. "Dive into those trees and drop flat. Be right with you. Get going!"

The colonel started to ask questions, but Lacey gave him a push that almost sent him sprawling, and then crouched down beside the nose of the plane. He struck a match from a box he took from his pocket and put the flame to a little river of spilled gas on the half-crumpled wing. Then he whirled and dived headlong for the trees, one hand clamped to his belly to protect the photo plates he had stuck up under his tunic. By the time he was on the ground beside Landon, the wrecked Vultee was a tower of seething flame.

"Why the devil did you do that?" Colonel Landon demanded angrily. "Now how the hell can we attract searching planes, if any are sent out?"

Lacey gave him a hard stare.

"We can't!" he said in a flat voice. "I fired the ship to fool those rats up there. They know we've got damn valuable pic-

tures. Let them think that we're okay on this island and a Jap destroyer will be along to make sure *nobody* rescues us! Let them think we crashed and burned up, and maybe they'll go away. They . . . Duck low, and don't move! Here's the first of them coming down!"

Lacey slapped a cautioning hand on the colonel's shoulder and then pressed his own face to the ground. His heart was a trip-hammer in his chest, and his brain was full of fervent prayer that the diving Japs would not see them hugging the ground under the low branches of the trees. Down they came, at least a dozen of them, one at a time. Each sprayed the burning wreckage with bullets.

After what seemed a lifetime of yammering terror, the last Jap came out of his screaming dive and went whining away.

Then Lacey lifted his head, looked at Colonel Landon, and cursed. The right side of the man's face was smeared with blood. But he wasn't dead, or even unconscious.

"We learn something every day, Lacey," he said. "My error. You were dead right. They certainly wanted to make sure we were finished."

"They may make sure some more!" Lacey said grimly. "Hold still while I have a look at that bullet crease. Got a pocket first aid kit with me, thank God. Hit any place else?"

"Ankle," came the white-lipped reply. "Can't seem to move the damn thing."

Lacey squirmed around and had a look. It was true. A stray shot had caught Landon in the right ankle.

"Just relax, and I'll do what I can," Lacey said gently. "I'll fix up something. Then we'll just have to wait."

AT the end of the next couple of hours the two marooned Air Corps officers hardly passed a dozen words between them.

(Continued on page 102)

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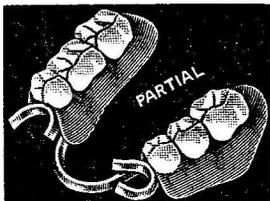
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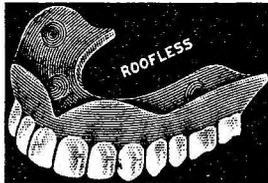
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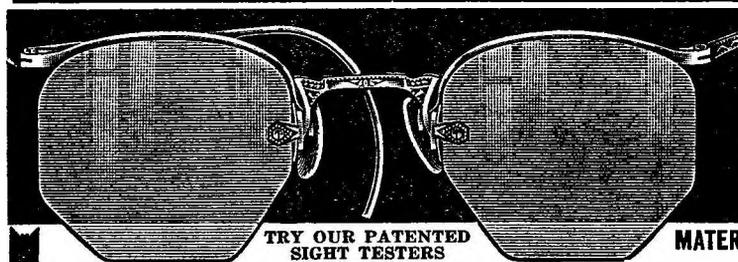
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Dare-Devil Aces

(Continued from page 100)

But suddenly Lacey was jerked back to the present by the distant sound of a plane's engine. Instinctively he scrambled to his feet and parted the lower branches for a better look at the sky above. He fixed the position of the engine's sound, and strained his eyes. A hellish eternity dragged by, and then suddenly he saw it. He saw the wings and fuselage of an Air Corps Vultee, of the same type he had lost, start nosing down!

A glad cry clogged halfway up his throat as he suddenly caught flashes of sun on wings high up and to the west. He looked, and groaned aloud.

Landon, who had rolled over on his stomach and had his face strained upward, saw what was happening.

"A plane looking for us!" he cried. "But those are Jap planes to the west, aren't they?"

"Jap vultures!" Lacey said bitterly. "I had a hunch they'd go refuel and return to hang around. That pal of ours up there must see our wreckage. He's coming down. Good God! Doesn't he see those Japs? They'll tear him to shreds."

The Vultee high in the air kept on coming down, however.

Hardly realizing what he was doing, Lacey stepped out onto the edge of the beach and started waving frantically at the diving Vultee's pilot, pointing at the Zeroes, but if the pilot saw him he paid no heed. He kept plummeting down until it seemed to Lacey that he was going to dive straight into the sea.

In the nick of time, however, the Vultee pulled out level and came whanging straight toward the strip of beach—but now with a screaming bunch of Jap Zeroes piling down on his tail.

It was then Lacey stopped waving and pointing. He stopped cold and stared bleak-eyed at the grinning face of Sergeant Kerrigan at the controls of the

Destination—Nippon!

Vultee! The big non-com waved his hand just once and then he was way past them and prop-screaming up into the sun.

"That was Kerrigan!" Lacey heard Colonel Landon cry out hoarsely. "Damn him! Does he think he can beat the whole Jap air force? The fool! He drew you out from cover, and now those Japs know that we're still here. They'll tear him to pieces, and then come back for us."

Something seemed to snap in Lacey's brain. He whirled and stabbed a stiff finger at Landon.

"Keep your trap shut!" he barked. "If Kerrigan dies, he'll die trying to save us—"

Lacey didn't wait for an answer. He turned around and fixed agonized eyes on the mess of Jap Zeroes following Kerrigan's Vultee up into the sun. They were close and the leading Zero pilots were already opening up their fire.

And then suddenly, miracles took place up in the blinding glare of that Indian Ocean sun!

For a moment Lacey blinked stupidly, and unconsciously brushed both hands across his eyes. But it wasn't any sky mirage—it was actual fact! Kerrigan's Vultee had wheeled far off to the right and was coming back and down again. But the Zero fighters weren't roaring after him now! He was all alone and unmolested. But not so with the Jap Zeroes.

Out of that blazing sun had popped their equal in long-range American fighter planes! One Yank for each Jap Zero. And even as Lacey started breathing again he saw two Zeroes tumble out of the sky like flaming clay pigeons.

"Good Lord!" Colonel Landon breathed. "I—can't believe it. What the devil's happened? That Kerrigan is coming down again—and, by heaven, he's going to land!"

"Did you think he expected us to jump up to him?" Lacey cried joyfully. "Here! Grit your teeth, Colonel. I'm going to

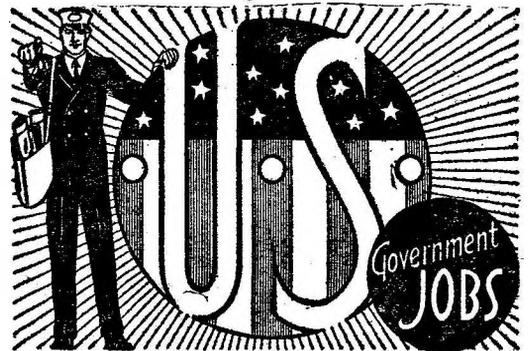
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Lacey bent over and hoisted the wounded colonel over his shoulder as gently as he could. Then he turned and staggered out onto the strip of beach.

Foot by foot the big non-com brought the Vultee down. Then, in the last few seconds allowed, he wind-braked vigorously, cut his speed to practically nil, and finally settled onto the sand. His plane had hardly stopped rolling before he was out of it and racing over to Lacey's side.

"Hi, General!" he boomed. "Some fun, ain't it? Better step, though. Them Japs is in the soup, but one of them might try a sneak on us. This big shot hurt bad?"

"Only wounded!" Landon thundered. "Get us out of here, and fast!"

"Hell, Colonel!" Kerrigan growled in a hurt voice. "I didn't come down to stop for a few beers, you know."

Lacey wanted to laugh, but he didn't have time, nor the strength to do so. His gashed cheek was smarting like hell, and the colonel was heavy as lead. He and Kerrigan got the senior officer aboard, but the man fainted from the pain. Kerrigan leaped into the forward pit and took the Vultee off as though he had a runway of a couple of miles or so.

TWO hours later, Kerrigan sat down on his home base and taxied over toward the parked ambulance. Right behind him every one of the Yank fighters came sailing in.

A couple of minutes later the ambulance crew had the wounded colonel out and on a stretcher. As they started to carry him to the ambulance the officer opened his eyes. He lifted his hand in an order.

"Wait!" he said weakly. "Kerrigan, come here. I don't understand. Did you see those Japs waiting up there? And—what the devil were you doing there?"

The big non-com blinked.

"Well, to tell the truth, sir," he said, "I got worrying about the General. We need him around here bad, see? And when it got past time for him to be back here I talked it over with some of the boys. We figured that maybe you'd made one of them islands—there's plenty 'tween here and there. Anyway, it was worth a try. So we set out."

"But you *didn't* see those Jap Zeroes?"

"Sure I seen them!" Kerrigan replied. "Japs is dopes. They give it away for me. I seen them messing around and knew right then and there that you guys must be cracked up on one of them islands. Maybe they figured we would come looking, though I don't guess they got even that much brains. Anyway, I seen them circling around so I took a good look, and saw your burned crash. So down I come—and seen the General all okay and waving at me. After that it was a cinch. Them dumb Japs fell for it hook, line and sinker!"

"Fell for what?" Landon demanded.

"Why the surprise we'd cooked up, in case it turned out like we hoped it would," Kerrigan said with gestures. "I went down while the other boys stayed in the sun where them Japs couldn't see them. But they seen me, and figured it was soft meat for them. So down they piles, and I do my bit. I let them get just close enough and lead them right up to where the boys is waiting. Then I kick off and come down for you and the General. It's—well, like I been saying, Japs is dopes. See what I mean?"

Colonel Landon moved his head and looked at Lacey. He smiled.

"I think I see what a lot of things mean now, Lacey," he said quietly. "As I said yesterday, there'll be some changes made. But I don't mean now what I meant yesterday. I'll start the changing, myself. Come see me at the hospital—and be sure to bring Sergeant Kerrigan."

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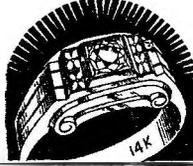
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Dare-Devil Aces

(Continued from page 8)

to the noble Ginsburg profile. Unfortunately, we haven't space to reproduce it, but the letter which accompanies it rambles on as follows:

Dear Most Illustrious of the Exalted Eagles:

I have whipped up this great piece of literature to give you a few pointers on how to make your magazine greater. I hope you don't (stink), I mean think that I am outspoken.

I have been reading D.D.A. for over a year and a half and I think it's the best mag out. First, I like the stories because there's something different about them. Second, I enjoy the Asemblits and Stories Behind the Covers by Fred Blakeslee. The stories I read in D.D.A. a few months ago about the Four Apostles were great, and I waited to see a few more, but they never came. So let's see more stories about the Four Apostles. I'm sure the readers agree when I say that stories about fighting Yanks who have joined the R.A.F. are getting a little tiresome. How about having more stories about different members of the United Nations, like the Dutch and the Russians? I think that the readers would like to learn more of the Red Air Force. In the stories I have read about the Russians they're cold, grim men. That's crazy.

I hope my pointers don't go to waste. Now if you've got any of those things called dollars creeping around your shack, even if they are green with age, I'll take all you can give me. (Personally I think the title I've given you is worth the cash.)

Yours till you swat the cooty munching on your left ear,

Richard Geriak
194 Lockwood Avenue,
Yonkers, N. Y.

P. S. I hope you like my picture of you.

As one eagle to another, Richard, take this dollar's worth of stamps and resolve to do better things in the future. Personally, we thought the picture was a bit flattering.

The last award of this month goes to Bob "Breezy" Longwith, of 1210 So. 17th Street, New Castle, Indiana. You should see the old Ginsburg fighting jaw jut out at that libelous intimation that he was nuts. But then, on second thought, we always hold that every good man has his detractors. On third thought, it does seem as if we have more than most, but

(Continued on page 108)

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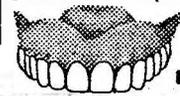
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Dare-Devil Aces

(Continued from page 106)

we will let that pass. Mrs. Longwith's favorite son writes as follows:

Dear Ol' Ginsky:

I have read the last three issues of D.D.A. and I think it is a swell mag. How would you like me to say a few good things about you? Every time I read the Hot Air Club everybody's always telling you that you're a nut, and that your magazine stinks. Personally I think your mag and you are swell. But there are two things that're wrong with it; there's not enough mention of good old Freddy Blakeslee. His planes are swell. I've got a few tacked up on my wall. His Asemblit and Story Behind the Cover are some of the best parts of D.D.A. I can actually make air battles out of those Asemblits. You may think I've got a lot of nerve to be telling you what I think about your mag because I'm only 13. But I always have been interested in aviation and I'm not the only guy my age who reads D.D.A. The second thing that's wrong with your mag is that you haven't got enough room for the Hot Air Club. Couldn't you get some more room some way?

Well, so long, and I hope you'll print my letter and also hope you'll enjoy a change in the type of letter you've been getting!

Yours till next time!

Bob "Breezy" Longwith
1210 S. 17th Street
New Castle, Ind.

P. S. If I do win a buck, see if you can put it into a year and a half subscription to D.D.A. It's my favorite.

The following issues failed to win cash awards, but they smell much better than the general run of the mail bag, and we give them to you free for nothing. Besides, we had some extra space to fill in this issue.

Greetings Ginsky Old Pal,

Just thought I'd drop a few lines in your way. I have been a reading fan of yours for five years now. And I still think your mag tops 'em all. A couple of years back you had some stories that were so bad you had to wear a gas mask to read 'em. I did not give up then because I knew some day you would get some really good stories in your mag. Well, Ginsky old pal, you have fulfilled my dream. Your mag tops 'em all. "Leatherneck Wings" by William Porter was great. Imagine a sailor like me praising a Marine. Would it be asking too much to get more like it? And if that isn't enough, I'll get the whole Navy to back me up.

The Hot Air Club

Julian J. Carleton Sea 2/c
Box 1318
U. S. Naval Air Base
Pearl Harbor, T. H.

Ginsy the Goon:

While perusing the pulsatingly exciting pages of the latest D.D.A.'s, was both astonished and humiliated to find that a fellow Texan, one Larry Tootle by name, duped you to the extent of wangling a greenback from your "billicatessen" with a far-fetched squawk about the extent of technical exactitude with which your mag is edited.

In the defense of Ginsy, who has long been a pal of my old man's (he used to be the milk man on our route), how do they expect the Great Nosedive Ginsburg to check technicalities when they won't even loosen the strings in his double-breasted strait-jacket to let him copy-read the stuff?

Lissen, Ginsy, old pal, I'm running for the border next year, and if I'm elected, I intend to start a movement for bigger and better-lighted padded cells for misunderstood geniuses like us.

It'll be safe for you to answer with a message in code. Just scribe it on the back of a sawbuck, and address it to: Looney Lukas, Cell 13.

Elmo Osborne
Route 1, Gardendale
Corpus Christi, Texas

Oh, Illustrious Jerk:

In the magazine's honor and not yours I have taxed my great brain to write this letter praising *Dare Devil Aces* and all its articles, with the exception of one written by a hatchet-head fishface named Ginsburg.

Before reading the magazine I always don my gas mask, rip out the Hot Air Club, and throw it out. This proved fatal because the other night after being thrown out it fluttered near my dog. Being just a pup and not knowing better, he smelled it. He immediately turned the colors of the rainbow and many other colors. He rushed

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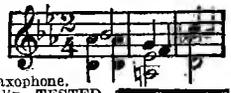


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Dare-Devil Aces

in the house and with a dying moan threw himself at my feet (which have at least a little milder smell than the "Hot Air Club"). I phoned the veterinary and told him to come and take care of him. When he arrived he asked me if that happened to the dog from Ginsburg's "Hot Air Club" for he had many of the same cases already brought to him. I answered him with a quick yes, and he said that the bill would be five dollars, so I wrote this letter to tell you of the damage you caused and hoped you will send me the five dollars for the bill and also a Blakeslee original to pay for the damage.

Undolizing yours,

Robert Boeck
166 Riverdale Avenue
Yonkers, N. Y.

Dear Buzzard,

Belonging to the Squadron of flying screwball. I guess I am as dumb as Louie the Lush. But I am organizing a Squadron of F. S. Send me some ideas of what we could do.

Eugene Brankman
628 Minor Avenue
Hamilton, Ohio

Dear Sir:

Are there any old issues of *Dare Devil Aces* as far back as 1936-1937 or 1938? If so, will you kindly send me the price of them, but they must have the covers on and all the pages in. I am interested in the March, 1938 issue.

Yours truly,

Eugene Schaffstall
266 Moore Street
Millersburg, Penna.

We have been hearing a lot about the Zero planes in news dispatches from the Pacific. Lieut. John M. Jenks, Headquarters, A.A.F. passes on some interesting dope about this plane, which I think you fellows would like to hear about. Lieut. Jenks says:

Japan's "How to Fool the Enemy" department must have stayed up nights working on its wacky system of aircraft designation. But once you have the key, the great Zero mystery folds up like a parachute.

The so-called Zero is generally described as a fast, highly maneuverable fighter plane. Its chief claim to fame was gained in action against Allied aircraft in the Southwest Pacific. Matter of fact, it

The Hot Air Club

is one of the best operational fighters in the world. Actually, there is no single Japanese plane with the exclusive designation of Zero. Every Jap plane of every type placed in service during 1940 is a Zero. To make it more complicated, this includes both Army and Navy ships.

The Japanese designate their military aircraft with two numerals, representing the year the plane went into service. To start with, the Jap calendar begins at 660 B.C. As a result, our year 1940 becomes 2600 (according to the Son of Heaven). Only the last two numerals are applied to plane designation. Consequently, 1940 models are designated by "00", or just plain "Zero."

This strange setup appears to be a deliberate attempt to baffle unsuspecting foreigners, but even the Japs must stew and fret to understand it. For example, there is a Navy single-seater fighter; an Army single-seater fighter; an Army heavy bomber; a Navy torpedo bomber; an Army light bomber and a four-engined Navy flying boat—all designated at T-97.

The Zero fighter generally referred to is a single-seater Navy ship made by Mitsubishi. It is sometimes called the Mitsubishi Zero. Its official Japanese name is the "Mitsubishi Navy Fighter T. O."

The Zero looks like a North American AT-6 with a slimmer fuselage and wing guns. It retains its raw metal silver color and is often identified by the sun flashing on its duraluminum stressed skin. It carries one 20 mm. cannon and a .30 caliber machine gun in each wing and a pair of .30 caliber machine guns mounted to fire through the propeller. Early models of the Zero lacked pilot armor and were extremely vulnerable to machine-gun fire. Later Zeroes carry some pilot armor but offer much less protection for the pilot than standard American pursuits.

One of the United Nations' leading authorities on the Navy Zero is Lieut. Col.

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Dare-Devil Aces

Boyd D. (Buzz) Wagner of the AAF, who has had considerable contact with them both in the air and on the ground. He describes the Zero as follows:

"It's not a wonder plane, but it has the respect of all our pilots. The Zero's wings and fuselage are made in one piece, which means the Japs can't change wings if they are damaged, but must replace the whole job.

"The landing gear folds completely into the fuselage, creating no additional drag, and the plane is entirely flush riveted with only a few drag-creating protuberances. The cockpit is roomy and comfortable. Armament is controlled by a lever on top of the throttle which permits the pilot to fire either cannon or machine guns.

The Zero is credited with a top speed of well over 300 mph and does pretty well up to 30,000 feet. It can dive as steeply as AAF fighters but has trouble pulling out as rapidly. It has outclimbed AAF pursuits, however, and a favorite maneuver in the early days of the war was for a Zero to allow an enemy pursuit to get on its tail and then go into a steep climb, flip over in a sharp loop and come out on the tail of its opponent. The Zeroes cannon have not proved effective against other fighters but have caused considerable damage to heavy bombers.

AAF fighters have an advantage over Zeroes in their sturdier construction, pilot armor, leak-proof tanks and heavier armament, .50 caliber machine guns and 37mm. cannon."

Which reminds us—it is going on to three o'clock, and there is a good ball game up at the Polo Grounds. There is a cop on the Eighth Avenue bleacher entrance that lets Nosey in free, so what are we sitting here for? Be seeing you in the next issue.

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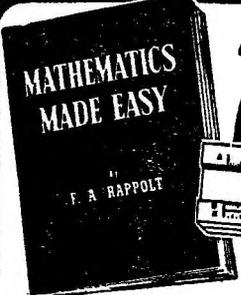
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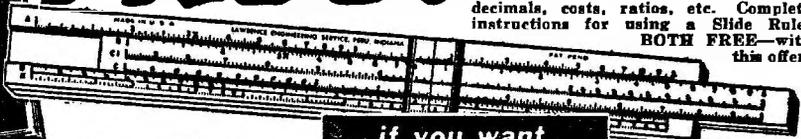
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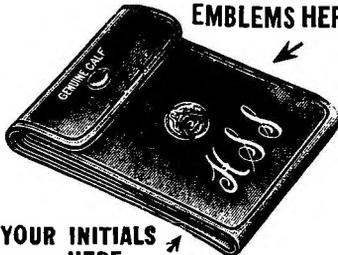


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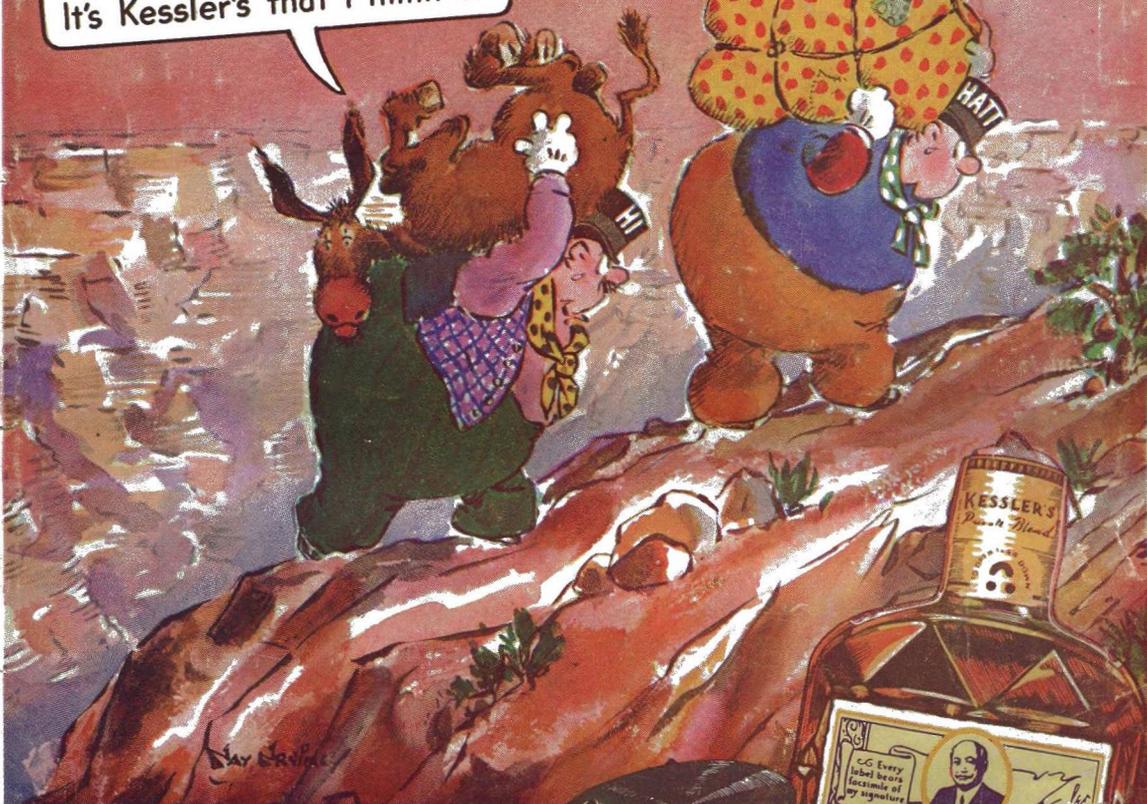
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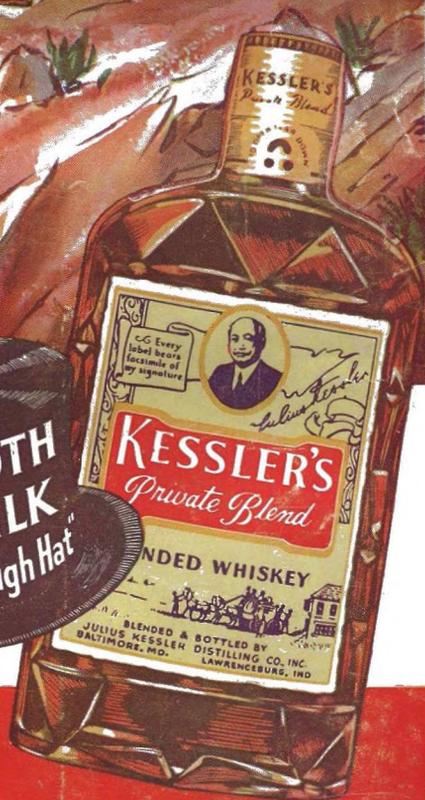
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