

# AIR ADVENTURES

FAIRIES FLYERS

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FEBRUARY • 15¢



Death Has  
Red Wings

BY ALEXANDER BLADE

SPITFIRE SQUADRON

By ARCH WHITEHOUSE  
AND STORIES BY

# Stop your **Rupture** worries and look **Younger!**

Wouldn't it be a grand and glorious feeling to forget rupture worry completely and let peace of mind and new zest for living make you look younger? But you can't if a gouging, uncomfortable truss nags you constantly, if you never know a moment's security, if you feel your rupture is growing worse all the time, with not even hope of the opening closing up. Worry, worry, worry, day after day, for all your life . . . why, it's bound to make any man or woman look old, haggard, and worn out beyond their years. Don't, don't, don't submit to this terrible, needless tragedy of dragging, ageing worry. At this very moment, as you read these words you can

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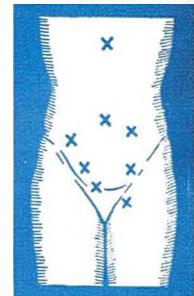
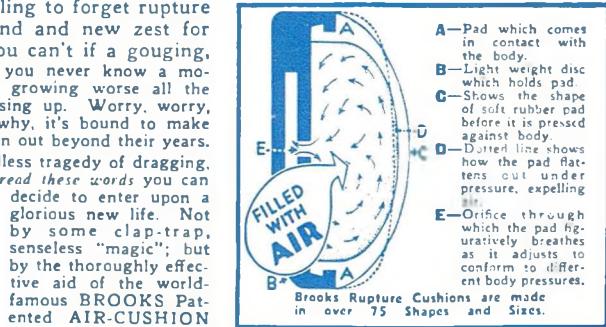
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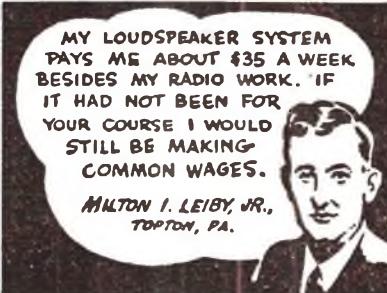
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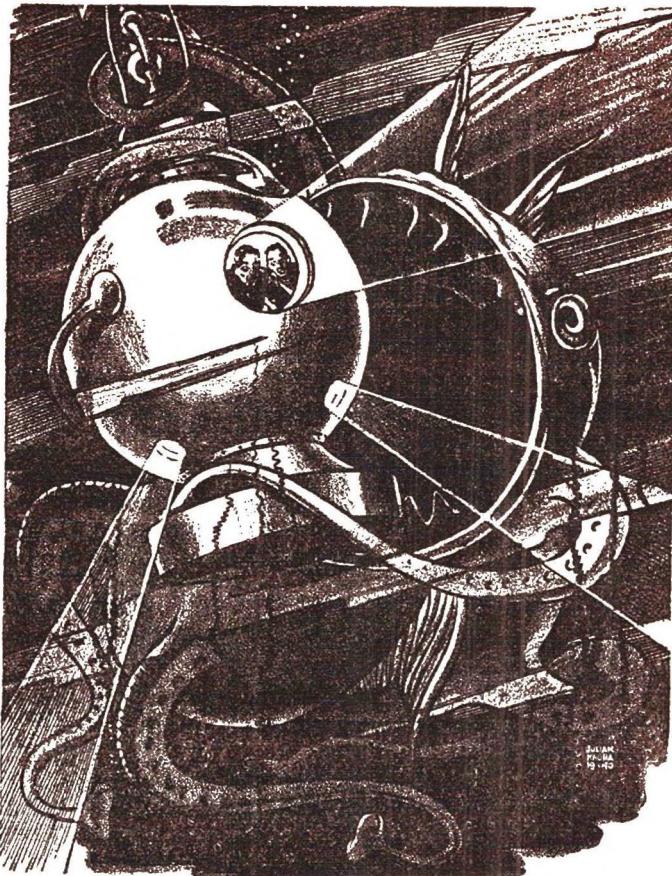
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## UNDERSEA PRISONER by HARL VINCENT

Four discs of weird luminosity swam into view . . . four ghastly orbs grew steadily larger and larger . . . and then appeared an ugly, squirmy monster, a giant octopus rearing its hideous body on three of its sucker-lined arms while the other five arms were weaving and twining toward the dangling sphere! Two eyes were beneath, two above a cavernous, wide-open mouth that was lined with row upon row of glistening incisors! The terrifying creature advanced . . . the car swung crazily in toward that yawning mouth . . . ! "God!" screamed Augustine. "It's going to swallow us!" Sealed in a shell . . . over 15,000 feet under the ocean . . . a giant squid about to swallow them whole . . . were these two enemy scientists doomed to die this horrible death? Don't fail to read UNDERSEA PRISONER . . .

ONE OF THE MANY  
ENTERTAINING STORIES IN THE

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NOW ON SALE AT ALL NEWSSTANDS!

**AMAZING**  
**STORIES**



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Front cover painting by Robert Fuqua, depicting a scene from Death Has Red Wings

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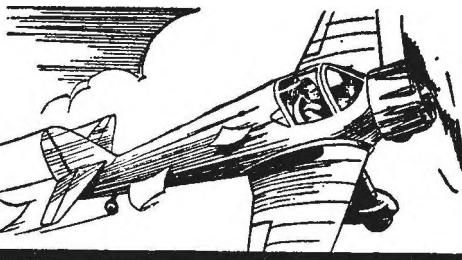
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# From the EDITOR'S COCKPIT



**H**I there, kiwis! Have we got a swell issue this time! The best authors in the game have got together to turn out a number which we think is a honey. Bill O'Sullivan; Arch Whitehouse; Orlando Rigoni and Robert Sidney Bowen! A real fiction treat, topped off with the best air-war cover that Robert Fuqua ever drew.

**A**ND that isn't all. We're proud to introduce to you a newcomer in the ranks—Alexander Blade, a real flying guy with a pedigree this long. Take a look at his exploits on page 115.

**S**URPRISE! We got a letter from that prince of air-war writers the other day—none other than Joe Archibald. So stick with us, peelots, 'cause it's dollars to doughnuts that Joe will be with us next issue with a bangup story in his best style.

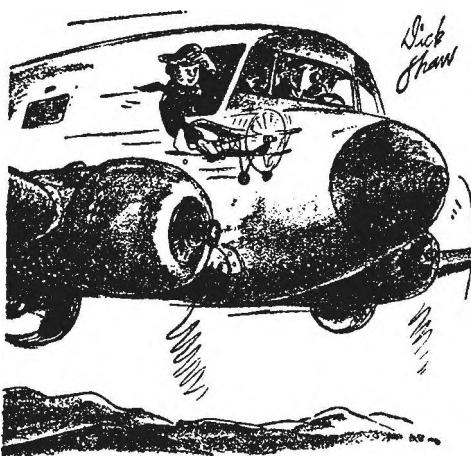
**N**OW to action. Looking over the lineup for this issue, we noticed that Bill O'Sullivan was missing. Well, that would never do. So we sent him a hurry-up telegram, and Bill came through a week later with just about the best aviation novel he's ever turned out. It's called *Spy Ships Over the Andes*, and it tells of how the Navy's ace pilot got the jump on a vicious *Staffel* of foreign air vultures, men who'd invaded the Americas with treachery in their eyes and black murder in their hearts! Write us how much you liked this yarn, peelots.

**N**OT to be outdone, that ace of fictioneers, A. G. J. Whitehouse—"Arch" to you and me—has spread himself for fair in *Spitfire Squadron*, a real authentic account of the war in the skies nowraging over Scotland between invading Nazi Heinkels and stalwart British pursuit ships. We don't know when we've read a yarn that more vividly tells the story behind the headlines than this one. And for another modern story, let me refer you to Alexander Blade, who wrote *Death Has Red Wings*.

**B**UT whoa, there! Stick me on K.P. if I forget to mention the reader-author prizes which *AIR ADVENTURES* is handing out, without any ifs, ands, or buts until further notice. For full details, turn to page 113. To the author of the best story each issue—\$75. For the second best yarn—\$25. And—to the reader who picks the yarns in the order in which he thinks they rank, coming closest to the final selections—\$10! Yes, sir, peelots, a check for ten bucks to the best story picker among you. So come on, get in on the fun! Mark down your choices, tell us in 20 words or less why you selected the Number One yarn, and mail in the coupon now!

**F**ROM Charles S. Verral, author of *The Boy Who Couldn't Fly* in the first issue: "Just a note by way of congratulations on the first issue

of *AIR ADVENTURES*. It's a nice job; packs a meaty hunk of fiction. Orchids to H. W. McCauley for his cover." To which we add: Thanks for the kind words!



"Don't be so childish, Jenkins. It wouldn't work in the wind tunnel and it won't work here."

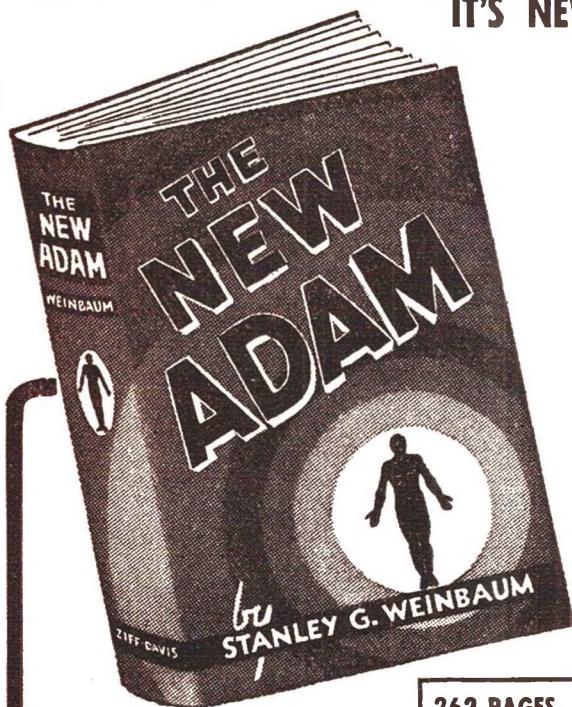
gestions. Glad to know what you're thinking, and we get a real kick out of hearing from you.

**W**ELL, suppose we ought to say something about the war that they say is being waged "over there." This much is certain—if the boys don't pull an offensive before next spring, a few million infantrymen, artillerymen and assorted warriors are just going to pack up their ol' kit bags and go home. And so, for that matter, are we. Be seeing you all next issue—and it'll be a pip!

—Rap.

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# Spy Ships

By  
**WILLIAM  
O'SULLIVAN**



**Hell began to pop over the Andes when Bick Nelson went into action in an effort to uncover the spy ring operating in the airlines**



**B**ICK!" "Chubby" Qualters quavered. "For cripes' sake, man, take it easy!"

Only one man was calm in the uproar that had built up for twenty minutes on the Annapolis waterfront. Only one man sat almost unmoving as the giant Consolidated patrol boat laid a threnody of roaring cylinders where peace had once been.

That man was "Bick" Nelson—Bickford Nelson, Lieutenant, Junior Grade, U. S. Navy, the records had it—and he sat at the controls of the twenty-five ton flying boat that had been laying siege to the peaceful waters where the Severn flows into Chesapeake Bay. Where the United States Naval Academy goes about its dignified business of sending men down to the sea in ships—in warships.

Bick restrained a grin with difficulty



# Over the Andes



Bick Nelson fired and Hudson's gun clattered to the floor

when his gray eyes touched on the stricken face of Ensign "Chubby" Qualters, co-pilot and Bick's junior in command of the great Navy boat. Qualters was sitting frozen in the seat at Bick's right, his brown eyes incredulous as Bick pulled out of a terrific dive and started a screaming ascent into the skies again.<sup>1</sup>

"Bick!" Qualters quavered, his eyes bulging. "Er—I mean, Lieutenant Nelson, sir! My God, you'll be bilged! Fired out of the Service, sir!"

Qualters swallowed hard when the great, winged boat screwed its twin three-bladed propellers in the arc of a wingover and nosed down for the sun-flecked, copper dome of the Chapel, inside the Naval Academy yard.

"Good God, sir—you're—you're diving at the tomb of John Paul Jones!"<sup>2</sup>

Bick could have said, "Sorry, kid—orders. Orders from the Navy Intelligence Office!"

But instead he remembered the sallow, quiet man who waited for him in Carvel Hall, famed old hotel of Maryland's capital city. Commander Dawes. Ledbetter Dawes, the Navy's feared,

<sup>1</sup> The patrol boat here mentioned is the new twin-motored (4,000-h.p.) Consolidated flying boat, Model 31. It is still in the experimental stages as to ordnance.—Author.

<sup>2</sup> After his bitter service under Catherine the Great, Empress of Russia, where he served as an Admiral of the Russian Navy following his star-studded days in the Colonial Navy, John Paul Jones died in Paris and was buried in an unmarked grave. Many years later the body was identified beyond doubt, carried home on a warship, and in 1913 placed in the crypt of the beautiful chapel at Annapolis.—Author.

little-known, almost legendary ace Intelligence operative.

So all Bick said was, "Pipe down, Chubby."

He eased the Deperdussin control wheel back slightly and felt the electric "booster" take hold and help him nose

the boat up, scant yards from the Academy's—and the Navy's!—shrine.<sup>3</sup> He hurried the 50,000-pound load of metal and wood and men and torpedoes down along the Yard, skimmed the bandstand, roared along the canyon formed by high-walled Bancroft Hall and the opposite Mahan Hall, and tortured the air with a screaming climb up over Dewey Basin.

The roadstead of satiny-blue water was a mess for the gods to behold!

The Matapeake ferry stood heeled at a rakish angle on a sandbar. A half-score of small shipping floated with hulls turned up to the mild November sunshine. Across the Severn, wires dangled brokenly from two of the tall masts of the Naval Experimental Station with its huge radio apparatus.

Spa Creek, where the bridge reaches across into Eastport, was a welter of drifting crab and oyster boats. And along the waterfront sea-wall was massed the entire population of Annapolis that could run, not walk, to the scene of carnage!

Bick blinked, impressed even at the extent of his own damage to Annapolis.

<sup>3</sup> These electric "boosters" for the plane's elevators are electrically operated, ease the strain on the pilot. The booster gear takes hold and works with the pilot's movements of the elevators.—Author.



"Bick" Nelson

He turned his eyes and stared down at the gray cruiser that rode at anchor, below. Two Navy scout planes were starting into the air from it, and a third plane was already taking its place in the catapult.

"They're after me!" Bick knew. He grinned slightly, to Chubby Qualters' horror. Then he twisted his head and stared back into the control cabin behind him.

"Sparks" Malone, the radio man, was clutching at his equipment and trying to make sense out of the crackling earphones. Gunner's Mate Oshinsky and O'Kelley were where they had been for the past twenty minutes: hanging to the .37-millimeter cannon in the after-turret and trying to keep the three of them — Oshinsky, O'Kelley and the cannon—in their respective component parts.

"Stand by to land!" Bick sang out in his best quarter-deck voice.

"Aye, sir!" came the choked but obedient answers to his roaring-voiced order. O'Kelley turned his Irish-blue eyes to Oshinsky's not-Irish-blue eyes and murmured:

"Th' Saints be praised this day! 'Tis the foolest words have ever been spoken—'Stand by to land!'"

**O**SHINSKY shrugged. "The guy's gone balmy. They'll get him for this!" Sparks Malone said, "Shut up!" and listened to his earphones intently.

He saluted Bick in the mirror and said, "Admiral Pillsbury orders you to land, sir." He licked his lips. "Er—

he's been ordering you to land for twenty minutes, sir."

Bick yawned and thought of Ledbetter Dawes, down there in Carvel Hall. He cut the throttles of the four great motors and eyed the air-speed indicator as he nosed down for a landing near the sea-wall. But there was misgiving in his heart when he said:

"Tell the admiral I'm ready to come in now, Sparks. Just that way, say it!" He slanted his gaze at Chubby Qualters and ordered, "Take over, Mister."

"Aye, sir," Qualters gulped. He reached for the big Dep wheel in front of him. That message was insult added to injury!

The sun was shining on Bick Nelson's red hair when the rangy pilot stepped out onto the patrol boat, with its squad of armed Marines. A Devil-dog captain saluted briefly, grudging curiosity in his eyes. But he didn't ask any questions. All he said was, "You're under arrest."

"Sure," Bick agreed pleasantly. "Why not?" The way he acted, it was an expected pleasure. He eyed his crew and grinned. "Happy landings, gang. I'll be seein' you!"

"He'll be seeing the brig!" Oshinsky told O'Kelley and Sparks.

"God!" Chubby Qualters whispered brokenly, his eyes tragic on Bick Nelson's retreating back. "The guy is washed up. And—a good guy he was, too! Now, what got into him to make him do that—?"

\* \* \*

ADMIRAL PILLSBURY asked the



Mercedes Volta

same question, repeatedly.

"I can't say why I did it, sir," Bick answered as repeatedly. And with the utmost truth. He couldn't say, because he had given his oath to Ledbetter Dawes *not* to say!

"Beached," the old sea dog growled, his clear blue eyes boring at Bick from under shaggy, white brows. "Removed from the flying list, until further orders."

And then he grinned, suddenly.

Bick, incredulous, blinked—and then he heard the steady *ah-whoo, ah-whoo, ah-whoo-o-o-o-o!* of the Matapeake ferry's distress whistle. The ferry that shuttled from Annapolis to Matapeake, a distance of eight miles across the Chesapeake, had few friends at the Academy: the ferry's rates for passage were as notoriously high as the Naval officers' pay was notoriously low! There was, after all, a saving humor in the situation, with the ferry grounded on the sandbar.

"You're at liberty until further notice, Mr. Nelson," Pillsbury dismissed him gruffly.

Bick went along the Yard and headed for a gate. He grinned when one of the "Jimmy-legs" on watch there stared at him in wonder. He walked Maryland avenue for a block, then bent his steps toward the State House.\* He winced at the crowd that followed him; but those were orders, too—the orders of hard-eyed, thin-lipped Ledbetter Dawes.

*"Let plenty of people see you come into Carvel Hall."*

Bick bought some newspapers, among them the Baltimore *Star*. "I'll have plenty of time to read, waiting for dark!" he knew.

He went up the steps into Carvel,

\*Annapolis, a beautiful old Southern town, besides being the seat of the Naval Academy is also capital of the sovereign state of Maryland.—Ed.

and made a flourish of registering. He tried to be nonchalant about it when he asked for a certain room—a room that would be directly under that of the Navy's ace espionage operative.

"Don't disturb me," he told the clerk. "I want quiet."

The man grinned. "I hope you'll have better luck getting it than the rest of Annapolis did, today!"

ABOVE stairs, Bick looked out the window at the fire-escape, and he mentally saw himself climbing up it to the room above, once dark had come. He sank down into a chair and picked up a paper. The *Star* had a screamer that read:

#### ANOTHER TRANS-CARIB AIRLINER CRASHES

Bick grunted when he saw it was the American-owned Trans-Carib Line that was in trouble again. The Trans-Carib flew from New Orleans to South America.

"Hell, why don't they put some *pilots* on that line!" he murmured. "That makes five—or is it six?—crackups they've had in a couple of months! And all aboard it dead!"

He scanned the article and saw the crash had happened in the Andes, between Valparaiso, Chile, and Buenos Aires, the Argentine. A *flying boat* fooling around over the Andes mountains, with their treacherous winds and freezing temperatures!

"They musta been drunk!" Bick growled. "Six Trans-Carib Clippers down in two months!"

Then he started, his eyes riveted to the following news item:

Curiously enough the radio operator at the Valparaiso base, which the big boat had left only a short time before, swears to having established communication with the ship some ten minutes *after* the fatal crash had been reported. He has been relieved of duty and confined to the Strangers' Hospital, at Valparaiso, for observation.

"Wacky," Bick judged. "The whole Trans-Carib outfit is wacky." He turned a page and summed it up with: "Too much imagination."

\* \* \*

AND 4,500 airmiles to the southeast, those same words were being repeated in a sound-proofed, secret room of a great European embassy.

"Too much imagination!" the *Herr* Undersecretary growled gutturally, as he paced the gloom of the thick-walled room. He stopped, his weight balanced evenly on his spatted, patent-leather shoes.

"That mock-radio trick of yours would have fooled nobody but the stupid Americans! Pah!"

A blob of black stirred in a corner of the room, and a hissing breath sounded—an apologetic, contrite hissing, it was supposed to be.

"So ver-ry sorry," a weary voice purred. "So ver-ry sorry, Excellency."

The *Herr* Undersecretary relieved himself of a guttural curse.

"I have no confidence in you, anyway," he said brutally. "Your people are an inferior people!"

He came to the center of the room and a light clicked on. A table light that was carefully designed to throw no illuminating rays to the upper part of the room—or to *faces* that might be revealed in that upper part of the room!

"I am only just arrived here at Buenos Aires," resumed the official, "and it takes time. But before I am here another week, not a solitary one of you brown Johnnies—"

The *Herr* Undersecretary stopped at the new hissing breath that filled the small room. His manicured hand went rigid at the changed tone of that hiss—a hiss that was more menacing than apologetic. On his hand was a heavy gold ring of the "signet" type, only no

initial or emblem was represented on the golden circlet. Instead, it was criss-crossed by geometric lines, and for its center had a solitary moon of plain gold.

"*Dumkopf!* Stop that insane hissing!"

The hissing stopped, and after a moment the *Herr* Undersecretary went on.

"I—er—do not know much about you—er—people, but I have no confidence in you," he said bitterly. "None! This is your last employment with my great government. Your last! Pah, that silly radio trick, to make the Americans think their flying boat was still in the air!"

"So sorry," the voice from the dark corner murmured again, but the weariness had gone out of it. The figure in that corner stirred imperceptibly and came closer to the table with the light.

"**B**UT it did fool the Americans, Excellency. For two hours, they thought they were hearing from their flying boat. For two hours, Excellency—while your compatriots were leading them to death—Valparaiso thought they were in communication with that boat. Then, the hidden warplanes from the secret field at—"

"Silence!" The *Herr* Undersecretary smashed the table with his fist, and the light jumped. "That you should dare to speak the name of that place!" He stood rigid a moment, his eyes peering into the gloom.

"Come into the light, my man! I have a feeling I have seen you before, some place. Come into the light, I say!"

The hissing started again. "First time my humble eyes have been honored by sight of Excellency," the voice said. "So sorry, so ver-ry, ver-ry sorry—"

"Come into the light!"

“—ver-ry sorry . . . for you!”

Flame spurted from hip level and stabbed swiftly and accurately for the immaculate left breast of the *Herr Undersecretary*’s frock coat. The foreign diplomat fell with the roaring echo of the automatic—but an echo that the “ver-ry sorry” little man evidently knew would not be heard beyond those walls.

The dim figure came full into the light then, his flat, black almond eyes expressionless as they studied the ring hand of the dead man—and the ring on that hand.

The brown face was impassive as brown hands darted to the other’s hand and nimble brown fingers swiftly removed the circlet.

A small, soiled chamois bag was produced from the little brown man’s pocket, and the ring tinkled when it fell into the open neck of the worn pouch.

“Seven!” the little brown man hissed. “Seven rings now, in all. There is but one more to get. So ver-ry sorry—only seven. So ver-ry sorry must get one more ring. Ver-ry, ver-ry difficult, that one other ring!”

At the door of the small room, the little brown man turned. “So ver-ry sorry,” he murmured, his eyes impassive in their regard of the dead *Herr Undersecretary*. “But men like Excellency himself, men like Honorable Commander Dawes, men like—like *me*—Ito Katsiburo!—are born to die. Man like ‘Crash’ Cassidy—born to die, too—born to *die!*”

The little brown man, Ito Katsiburo, faded into the quiet gloom and was one with the black walls.

\* \* \*

LEDBETTER DAWES paced the room again and again, and that monotone that had been going on in the corner ceased. The top-flight Navy es-

pionage agent stopped in his tracks.

“Damn it, you! Keep saying it! Say it until *I’m* convinced! Say it until *you’re* convinced! Say it until you can go out into the world and convince *everybody*. *Say it!*”

Bick Nelson stood at attention in the corner and started saying it again.

“I’m Crash Cassidy, I’m Crash Cassidy, I’m Crash Cassidy—”

## CHAPTER II

### Strictly Solo

BICK started up, hours later, when Ledbetter Dawes came back into the room. The Navy pilot’s forehead was wrinkled in the concentration that it had taken him to master half a hundred photographs of pilots, mechanics, hostesses and radio operators. He shed his uniform for a suit of worn tweeds.

A score of maps, detail of transport-plane personnel and regulations, a dozen of Spanish idioms—all these were on the table that the Navy operative had set them out on. Bick started to say something but Dawes held up his hand. His eyes approved the fit of the strange tweeds.

“Hold it—*Cassidy!*” He reached a photograph from the table—a photo of a sloe-eyed, sensuous-lipped girl in trim uniform. “Who is this?”

Bick licked his lips. “That’s Mercedes Voltar,” he said. “One of the hostesses. But, look, Commander—”

“And who is this?” Dawes asked, breaking in on him with a photo of a grinning youngster with a mop of wavy, dark hair.

“‘Skid’ Harris, my co-pilot on the *Gaucho Clipper*. He’s twenty-two, isn’t married, both parents dead, he hails from Indiana, and drinks a bit when nobody is looking or minds!”

“And this?”

"Norton Phillips, one of the owners of Trans-Carib. That photo of a harbor is Valparaiso, Chile. That other is Cartagena, Colombia. That's the hangar at Lake Pontchartrain, outside New Orleans. That's 'Sparky' Seemon, my radio man. And listen, Commander, did I beach myself just to fly for a lousy outfit like Trans-Carib?"

Dawes lighted a cigarette and took a long drag on it.

"Maybe you'd like to know what Trans-Carib is, son—besides being what you term a lousy outfit. Maybe you don't know that Trans-Carib, in addition to being a transport airline, is a potential string of bases—of military bases—for American defense of the Americas. Or for foreign attack *on* the Americas, if those babies can get in! And get in they will, if this series of disasters keeps up!"

Bick gestured with his hands expressively. "Then why don't we fire that bunch of kiwis manning it now, and take it over ourselves? Why don't we—" He paused, his eyes widening on Dawes' tolerant smile.

"My God! Sabotage!" Bick blurted out.

Dawes nodded. "Sabotage on the ground and in the air. Hangars burned mysteriously; ships crashing without any plausible explanation; men vanishing; passengers attacked by thugs on the way to airports. And the personnel of Trans-Carib?" Dawes shrugged. "A honeycomb of unsung heroes and undetected spies!"

Bick was on his feet, fists clenched. "Why don't we smash them?"

Dawes blinked. "Smash who? Who has seen them—and lived to talk? Where do they operate from? How do they operate? What are they doing now, and what will they do next?"

Bick considered. "But wouldn't it be easier, cheaper for them to start a

line of their own in South America? Why should the boys do all this?"

Dawes explained. "Trans-Carib's charter specifies that they shall have exclusive rights to certain key harbors for bases, so long as they carry their passengers *safely*, and without detriment to the peaceable relations of the various South American countries with one another. Get it?"

Bick nodded slowly. "So we are being muscled out! And we can't act officially?"

"FOR two reasons, we can't act officially. First, those South American republics are very itchy over Uncle Sam's acting as Big Brother to them. Let us make one move officially, and half of them will line up against us!"\*

"And the other reason?"

"It's touch-and-go over the foreign situation down there, now! If the fear we have is even rumored, half of those countries would play safe by jumping into those babies' laps tomorrow!" Dawes chuckled. "Even now, *gauchos* and *peones* report gunfire over the Andes! Volcanoes, *of course!* That section is dotted with them, and some of them still rumble a bit."

But he sobered again. "One more disaster on Trans-Carib, and we're through. And the day that happens, the defense of South America from the air is through, too!"

"Over my dead body!" Bick growled, his hand outstretched to seal a pact with Commander Dawes.

\*Latin American relations with Uncle Sam have been greatly improved in the past seven years, but before that considerable suspicion existed because of our so-called "dollar diplomacy." As for unfriendly foreign penetration in South America, Uncle Sam's answer to that has been the establishment of a separate military area of the Caribbean, with headquarters at San Juan, Puerto Rico, and the appointment of Admiral William D. Leahy, lately Chief of Naval Operations, as Governor of Puerto Rico.—Ed.

"I hope," Dawes said slowly, "that you're wrong about that, son. I hope it isn't 'over your dead body!' But if it is, die like an officer and a gentleman!"

Without turning his head, he raised his voice and spoke at the closed door adjoining his room.

"Come in now—*Nelson!*"

The door swung and Bick gasped. There, facing him and grinning at him over a uniform with Junior Grade stripes, pilot's wings and all, was a man who was a total stranger—but Bick's exact counterpart, his double. There, for all Bick Nelson could say to the contrary, stood "Bick Nelson!"

Dawes said, "Call it luck, call it anything you will. But the minute I saw your face in the *Lucky Bag*<sup>1</sup> I was thumbing through, I had the answer. Half of the answer, anyway!" He was looking at the real Bick. "The stunt was to wait for Crash Cassidy to get knocked off, and then bring him back to life in your person. Get it? But I decided not to wait! No time to wait for the man to get himself killed. Well, here he is!"<sup>2</sup>

"Very thoughtful," the new "Bick Nelson" observed dryly. "And I like it better this way. It'll be nice, stepping out for a time and taking it easy!"

He lighted a cigarette and put his match out with a peculiar mannerism—by snuffing it between his thumb and index finger.

<sup>1</sup> The *Lucky Bag*—a Naval Academy publication; the graduates' annual Year Book.—Author.

<sup>2</sup> Bick Nelson, then, is to take the part of "Crash" Cassidy, while Cassidy is to assume the rôle of Nelson. The fact of double identity is not so strange as it might seem. Adolf Hitler and Josef Stalin, to cite two examples, have reportedly used doubles for years, apparently to escape assassination; or, on the other hand, to be relieved of tedious public appearances. Some time ago a book came out in which it was stated that Hitler had been assassinated by high Nazi officials and his place taken by a double, but there has been absolutely no proof of this assertion.—Ed.

"Safer to put them out that way, when you're flying," he grinned, when he saw Bick watching.

"I won't smoke in the air," Bick said sharply. "Against regulations!"

"Oh, yes, you will smoke in the air," Dawes corrected him. "Crash Cassidy does and you'll do just what Crash would be expected to do."

The man in Bick's uniform grinned. "I hope your petting is up to par, boy! I have a reputation to maintain."

"I'll bet," Bick murmured, but his mind was on something else. He voiced his curiosity. "What's your angle in this, Crash? Er—I mean *Bick*! How come you want to step down?"

Dawes nodded his head. "Good, son! That's what I've been asking myself. Not that I care. This lad will be under my scrutiny from now on out! But he has been acting sort of scary lately, so I finally braced him with a proposition to see he was safe—for a time!"

He faced the man. "Well?"

Bick's double shrugged. "I'm—tired," he said lamely. But his eyes didn't meet those of the master Intelligence operative. "I've been around a lot!"

"I'll say," Bick agreed, remembering the history of Crash Cassidy's past, as it had been laid out for him to memorize.

The Foreign Legion . . . Prospecting in the West . . . Flying in China and Manchuria . . . Sailing "Down to Rio" on a windjammer . . . Barnstorming through South America in an ancient Waco . . . and finally drifting to Trans-Carib. . . .

**D**AWES said, "There's a hole or two in Crash's past. An interval that I can't make quite fit." He frowned. "But don't worry, lad, I'll watch him. Closely! You've got to know who's who in this man's navy!"

"He's grounded, too," Bick pointed out. "So there's not much chance of his doing any damage in the air."

Cassidy gave a short laugh. "Where's your 'date' book, and which of the gals pet and which do not?" the adventurer asked irrelevantly.

Dawes made a grimace of distaste and said to Bick, "Of course, you are on your own. You're strictly solo in this! I warn you now that I'll deny any queries made to me about this thing, if it should come up!"

The adventurer in Bick's uniform looked at Dawes, then shifted his eyes front again. Neither of the Navy men noticed it, because Bick was looking at Dawes. Meanwhile, Cassidy pulled on white gloves unobserved.

"You're sure we'll get away with it? The two of us?" Bick asked.

"Why not?" Dawes asked reasonably. "You've only been here two weeks, at Annapolis. Nobody knows you well enough here to notice any change. As for your passing for Cassidy, the Trans-Carib outfit should be pleased at any change!"

Crash Cassidy laughed. "Mercedes Voltar might not like it," he said. "Mercedes is a little cuddle-bunny after my own heart!"

Even Dawes grinned at that. "Er—need I caution you about doing your duty, son?" he asked Bick. But he sobered quickly. "You have your orders: report to Lake Pontchartrain for duty day after tomorrow. You leave tonight by plane from Baltimore. Right?"

"Right, sir." Bick started a salute, then remembered and shook hands instead. "I'll look for instructions, sir!"

Dawes said, "I told you, *Cassidy*, that you're on your own. Solo! There will be no instructions. None! It's you alone!"

But the new "Bick Nelson" came to the door and grabbed the real Bick as he was leaving.

"Hold it, boy," he said flatly. "Haven't you forgotten something?"

That ring on your hand, pal!"

"My God!" Dawes said, his face blanching. "Your Naval Academy class ring. I'd forgotten that!"

The adventurer smirked at some private joke and took the ring that Bick passed him so reluctantly. An Annapolis class ring is a treasure next only to a Navy man's honor. But Bick stared at his hand when it came away—with a substitute ring in it! It was a signet-type, but instead of initials or emblem, it was crisscrossed by geometric lines, and for its center there was a solitary moon of plain gold.

Dawes had been turning away, but he saw Bick slipping on the new ring. He pushed past the real Crash Cassidy, gasped when he saw what it was Bick had replaced his class ring with.

"Hold it!" he snapped. And then went rigid as the false "Bick Nelson" closed in and stood right up behind him.

Bick looked, and wondered at the white lines around Dawes' mouth.

"Yes, sir?"

"Never mind, son," the Navy man said gently. "Just—happy landings, son! Glad to have—had you aboard!"

"Glad to have been aboard, sir," Bick said simply and took his leave.

\* \* \*

THE real Crash Cassidy didn't fire the automatic he held against the Navy man's back until after Bick Nelson had closed the door. Then he caught Dawes as the man toppled forward and lugged his inert body across to the bed. He listened intently, head cocked, then murmured:

"Probably sounded like a door slamming. *If* anybody heard!"

HE snapped the lights out, although the shades were lowered. It wasn't much later when he slid the window up slowly and eased out onto the fire-

escape. He went down by the same route Bick had taken to come up.

His gloved hands fluttered lightly and whitely, like some escaped soul drifting through the air away from a tortured body.

\* \* \*

BICK sat on the bed in the Grunewald Hotel at New Orleans, telephone in hand, and felt like a fool when he got the Academy at Annapolis and asked:

"Let me speak with Lieutenant Nelson. Yes, that's right—Lieutenant Bickford Nelson."

But he had thought of many things, since his eyes fell on the glaring headlines in the *Record*. Many things that were disturbing had he thought of; but he fought for sanity as he waited on the telephone.

"Hell, I can prove by fingerprints what I'm saying! Maybe he isn't the one who did it! Maybe someone else did it, and Crash—er, I mean 'Bick'—will come through and play this game with me!"

But his hopes were shattered by the voice that broke in on him, roughly.

"Listen, you," came over the wire from Annapolis, "you don't have to say a word! I know who you are, and what you are calling about. But just *you* get *this*: are ya listenin', sonny boy?"

"Spill it!" Bick said tensely.

"That room is just full of fingerprints, and not one of them is mine!" came the stunning reminder. "Me, I was wearing gloves, son—or don't I make myself clear?"

Bick's silence told him that he made himself very clear.

"Okay, then, pal—you go push your crummy crate around the sky, and me, I'll peddle my papers here at Annapolis! Now, if you don't like those arrangements, pal, maybe you'd like to interview some people about a funny lit-

tle 'crime' charge—or do you know what I mean?"

Bick felt the world tumbling about his ears but he fought grimly for sanity and tried to use Ledbetter Dawes' eyes. Tried to think with Ledbetter Dawes' brain that *had been*. Tried to see it the Navy way.

"I'm up for murder if I spill it!" he said. "And the Trans-Carib mess stays bad for all time! Dawes told me I was strictly solo on this—and solo I am, though only God knew how much Dawes meant that!"

He steadied himself and asked aloud, "And what are you going to do?"

"I'm grounded," came the reply over the telephone, "for two weeks. Just two weeks, pal! After that, it's every man for himself!" And the telephone connection clicked off with grim finality.

The operator's "*Are you waiting, sir?*" brought Bick out of his trance. He cradled the instrument and stared at the bitter headline again—the headline that had screamed:

#### NAVY INTELLIGENCE OFFICER SHOT DEAD!

Ledbetter Dawes Is Mysteriously Killed While on Leave From Duty

Bick groaned. "That's what *they* think," he said bitterly.

After a moment, he started to dress. He was still Navy, even if he was under a cloud and on his own! Duty called—the duty of a Navy espionage agent on his own against unknown enemies. The duty of a synthetic "Crash Cassidy" with no backing other than his fists and his wits. And the sure knowledge that within two weeks, a certain impostor posing as Bickford Nelson, U. S. N., would be on the loose to do—what?

\* \* \*

THE girl with the sloe eyes and the all-

but-pursed lips spoke to Bick Nelson twice, languidly, and then her voice sharpened, a voice that had a curiously lilting lisp.

"Crash, dear! I am speaking to you!"

"Oh!" He yanked himself out of his preoccupation and looked at the dusky-cheeked girl. "Hi, Mercedes! How's tricks?" He twisted his head to speak to the co-pilot standing next to her. "Skid. Hey—Skid Harris! Got the weight charts figured, and the center of gravity set?"

THE co-pilot lifted his cap to scratch his wavy hair.

"Well, spin my prop if the Big Guy isn't getting interested in his job!" But he went away to do Bick's bidding.

Another girl came along—a girl in hostess uniform, and her figure did things to her trim outfit. She had cool hazel eyes, very blond hair, a nose that turned up slightly, and fair skin. Bick blinked and racked his brain for her picture among those at Annapolis, on that table in Carvel Hall. But he couldn't. He tried to laugh it off.

"Hi, beautiful! How long is it since we flew together? It seems a lifetime!"

The girl's eyes went cold with contempt. "It is a lifetime," she said brusquely. "I've never seen you before—*Mister Cassidy!* In fact, I've never been with Trans-Carib before. In fact, I'm a new hostess, and this is my first trip on the *Gaucho Clipper*!"

Sparky Seemon, the radio man, twisted his head to stare at Bick, and then stood very still. Mercedes Voltar stared at Bick and the new girl with narrowed eyes. Bick covered his annoyance at his slip with a rasping cough and turned away. Skid came over and nudged him and said,

"How do you like those potatoes, pal? She's snubbing you!" Later, Skid vol-

unteered, "Her name is Carla Mendoza. One of those beautiful-but-arrogant Argentinians, my friend. Do not get fresh with her—unless you crave some cold steel from her relatives! Or do I need to tell a scarred-up veteran like yourself?"

Bick didn't answer, because a new and stunning thought had struck him, and driven the problem of the *Gaucho Clipper* from his mind for the moment.

"What if those Navy Intelligence men investigating Dawes' murder come across my prints, without any word from Crash?"

And the answer to it was equally baffling.

"Heck, I'm not only solo against certain Europeans and their agents! I'm pitted against the real Crash Cassidy, also—and the United States Navy on top of all that! I've got them to fight, too, if they come after me!"

### CHAPTER III

#### First Blood

BICK Nelson knew the set-up of the personnel of the *Gaucho Clipper*\* from hours of studying the regulations over.

There were ten in the crew, including himself. Skid Harris was the executive officer and co-pilot, and as such was responsible for the carrying out of Bick's orders. Then there came Art Hudson, a tall, somber man who was navigator and also a pilot. Hudson was second officer.

There was a third officer, stocky, sandy-haired Scotty McLane, who was a junior pilot. Either Bick or Skid had to stand the bridge or be at the controls, always; but otherwise, they alternated so that they handled the con-

\*This is a Boeing job, with a total horsepower of 6,000 gasoline steeds.—Author.

trols one hour, and had two hours away from them.

Sparky Seemon ranked as first radio officer, and under him was an assistant, a rotund, surprised-eyed man called "Pop" Dunkin. The flight engineers, responsible for the functioning of the four motors, were Larry Horn and "Punky" Dreems. These last two it was who calculated the power and fuel required, after the weather charts were gathered and studied for wind direction, atmospheric conditions along the route, and the altitude determined by the commander for the flight.

The two hostesses prepared the food for the entire complement of passengers and crew—74, when full up!—and otherwise looked after the needs of the passengers.

A stiff physical examination preceded everything else for the crew; and then started the complicated weighing of baggage and cargo and the proper distribution of weight of passengers and baggage and cargo. It was a hard rule, Bick realized, that the maximum gross weight of the entire flight must not exceed 82,500 pounds.

Flight 915—the flights were indicated by the number of crossings that had been made by the company—New Orleans to Valparaiso via Cartagena, Guayaquil and Iquique—Captain C. Cassidy, commanding — ticketed 34 passengers, 4000 pounds of express and 2185 pounds of mail.

This was the western leg of the air lanes that looped South America as far south as Buenos Aires, on the east coast, and Valparaiso on the west coast. And both routes had to be covered for Trans-Carib to hold its precious charter! The *Coffee Clipper*—New Orleans to Rio de Janeiro via Cartagena, Paramaribo, Pernambuco and Bahia—would weigh anchor on the following day under an old Army pilot, one

"Slats" Hollidge.

Bick had talked briefly with Hollidge at the Trans-Carib hangar, the night before. He had asked a question, almost carelessly—a question he didn't feel like asking his own crew. It was:

"What do you suppose happened to 'Sonny' Crowell, on Flight Nine-Fourteen? How come he got smeared up in the Andes?"

The ex-Army pilot stared. "Oh. I forgot. You were on leave a few days." He considered before he said slowly, "There was a storm, but still—" He broke off and looked keenly about him. "Still, the radio beam was working when we started north! So how in hell he got snarled up away *south* of Valparaiso beats me, too!"

Bick nodded, his thoughts busy with it. He waved a negligent hand when he started away.

"The beam doesn't always work," he said.

"You think so?" Hollidge stared at his hands, then up at Bick again. "Yours always works, doesn't it, kid?" And he swung and went away.

Bick was thinking about that now, when a single bell sounded and his crew stood aside at the gangplank and waited for him to board the giant boat. He stepped to the head of the line and went silently and soberly inside the *Gaucho Clipper*. He went directly to his seat, on the left of the forward control-cabin and up a ladder from the passenger compartments.

**S**PARKY SEEMON dropped down in front of his complicated radio apparatus. His assistant ganged around, getting earphones ready and testing the two-way service set, and the emergency set. Art Hudson busied himself with his navigation charts. Skid Harris plopped down into the seat alongside Bick, and Scotty McLane

came forward to watch the senior pilot handle the take-off.

The flight engineers went about taking the sixty-two readings of the idling motors—a requirement every half hour of the flight. The two hostesses should have been below deck; but they weren't. One of them was coming up behind Bick, was smiling coyly. It was Mercedes. Bick felt the scruff rise on his Navy neck at sight of a woman walking calmly on his bridge! He twisted in his seat and spoke sharply.

"Below decks, where you belong, Mercedes," he said with heat. Tension took hold of the entire working crew, and Bick felt he had made a mistake. But he wouldn't swallow the thing.

"Did you hear me, Mercedes?" he asked, as the girl came on, but more slowly.

"Crash!" the girl said, icily, spots of color staining her cheeks. "You always let me come up!"

"That's quits," Bick snapped. "From now on this boat works like any other boat. On regulations." He added lamely, "I've been taking too many chances."

The girl turned without a word, and Bick turned, too; but he lifted his eyes to the mirror in time to surprise pleasure in the faces of Pop Dunkin and Scotty McLane. Hudson merely looked stupefied. But Bick saw also the long, eloquent look that passed between Mercedes and Sparky Seemon.

Two bells sounded and the passengers started aboard. Bick had already seen them: a strangely assorted consignment of human cargo. Diplomats from Latin America; flashy super-salesmen; smug-faced playboys; quiet business men; some eager-eyed college students. There were only four women, and they were obviously Latin American, obviously the wives of the diplomats, and just as obviously bored.

The sound of the ground crew hauling in the gangplank came above the purr of the motors. The passenger hatch slammed shut with a bang. The patrol boat that snaked the big ship out to the runway barked alive and Bick rudderred after it, using the boat-rudder under the hull. The patrol boat guiding the big Clipper eased up at the buoy-marked channel.

Ready for the take-off!

Scotty McLane went down the spiral ladder gingerly, sang out:

"All watertight doors secure, sir! Passengers all in their compartments, sir!"

Bick nodded and leaned forward to flash the signal that would go on in all compartments: *Passengers fasten safety belts, please.*

Larry Horn twanged, "Motors all ready, sir."

And Sparky, unpleasantly: "Ready!"

The skipper of the patrol boat megaphoned, "Take-off channel clear!"

Skid Harris stood calmly and eyed everything. "Ready, sir!"

"Normal flap setting," Bick said evenly. "Start the motors three-quarters throttle, then ease to full-throttle when she gets her head."

"Aye, sir." But Skid looked at him queerly. Bick felt Sparky's eyes on him again, but he didn't say anything when Skid murmured:

"You are taking things gently, aren't you—*sir?*"

THE engines roared throatily and the huge boat glided, rather than jumped, forward. Slowly, the hull eased up to the water-step, lightened under Bick's expert touch. Dark water cascaded over the stubby seawings. Bick eased the wheel back, exulting as he always did to the blasting power of a great boat. The hull lifted cleanly

and the roar of the engines hit a smoother note.

The clock marked it a thirty-one-second take-off.

Skid's eyes were on Bick curiously, but all the co-pilot said was:

"Well, Crash, your little holiday certainly taught you a lot about flying!"

Their eyes met briefly, and then Bick turned front again and watched the waters of Lake Pontchartrain sweep back beneath the wings.

"Cartagena bound," he murmured, as he banked gently and dug for the delta of land that stretched from New Orleans to the Gulf of Mexico, nearly a hundred miles south. "Cartagena bound—and maybe Hell-bound, too!"

Bick thought of the careful routine of the flight, and he wondered for the first time how such a thing as sabotage was possible, with such smooth efficiency and such careful guarding on all hands. And then the thought of Ledbetter Dawes struck him harshly—of Ledbetter Dawes, the Navy's most efficient Intelligence operative lying dead in that room back in Carvel Hall. Bick leveled off high and set the gyropilot on the controls.

"It's not up to me to wonder, it's up to me to find out!" he knew.

Two hours out over the sparkling Caribbean Sea, he signed to the watchful Skid Harris.

"Take over," he said, with a studied yawn. "I gave you an hour break, as it is. I'm going to have a look around down below deck."

"Give Mercedes a kiss for me, too," Skid murmured. He patted the gyro-pilot. "Me and Iron Mike will hold the fort while you're gone."

Bick felt a bit guilty when he saw Mercedes standing in a narrow companionway.

"Crash wouldn't have treated her that way," he knew. He lighted a ciga-

rette carelessly and put the match out with his bare fingers. But his eyes never left those of the Latin-American girl, who watched him wordlessly and with pursed lips.

Slowly he went forward, slowly took the girl in his arms. He kissed her, intending to do it only lightly at first. But the full sense of his aloneness hit him with the warmth of the girl's lips on his own. He seized her roughly and held her hard to him and pressed his lips down on hers. Harder. And harder. And he held them there.

He held the kiss even when he became aware that they were no longer alone—that the girl Carla Mendoza had come upon them suddenly, was standing as if transfixed. He wondered at his motive when he only laughed and held Mercedes cradled in his arms.

Carla went away, and Bick released Mercedes with a sudden guilty feeling. But the Latin-American coquette stared at him and asked, with spirit:

"Crash? Who has taught you so much love, while you were away from me? Never, nev-air have I been kissed so!"

So Bick groaned as he went up the spiral steps to his snug office on the bridge deck.

"Even when I'm right, I manage to overdo it!"

A slight squall struck unexpectedly an hour later. Bick felt the heavy lurch of the boat, and stood to go forward. But a sudden sense of danger seized him. He stopped, frowning, and wondered what it was.

"Nerves," he judged it, and started for the door again. But again he halted, unable to overcome the feeling of danger. He walked to the porthole of his small cabin and stared out at the gray rain that streaked from the skies.

He shifted his gaze, suddenly, shifted it to where a heavier fall of liquid was

coming, apparently, across and under the starboard wing. And then it hit him with explosive force! He realized what it was!

"My God! The starboard jettison gear has been turned on. The fuel is being dumped from the right wing!"

**H**E leaped for the door, but turned for his desk. From the drawer he jerked his automatic, broke the clip out and satisfied himself that it was fully loaded. Quietly, silently, he eased the door open and stepped out onto the rear of the bridge. His eyes went first to the control room.

Skid was working hard at the controls, perplexity clear on his face in the rear-view mirror. Iron Mike was disengaged, as Skid struggled to hold the boat on an even keel in the buffeting squall. Bick came close, saw the starboard gas gauge was stationary, that it showed no sign of the heavy jettisoning of gas to the waters below.

"The gauge has been fouled," he realized. "And whoever figured this timed it nicely, timed it so the squalls would bump us around a bit and cover the fuel dumping until too late to do anything about it!"

The two at the controls didn't look up, Scotty McLane watching with fascination as Skid muscled the controls of the boat. Bick swung, concealing the gun in his hand. Sparky wasn't in sight. Pop Dunkin sat frowning at the radio board, and repeating over and over:

"Flight Nine-one-five calling New Orleans . . . Flight Nine-one-five calling New Orleans . . ." Then, "New Orleans? Nine-one-five flying Track Four, Cartagena, seven thousand altitude . . . Sou'easterly squalls, winds are —"

Bick turned his head at a movement near the navigation table. Art Hudson

was looking at him somberly.

"Funny we weren't given this information before the trip," the navigator said sharply. "How about it?"

Bick stared around him, watchful. The gas was jettisoning out; but there would be more than enough for the flight to Cartagena, with a rearrangement of the fuel load, even if all the starboard gas was lost. At the worst, they could land after the squall and radio for help if it was needed.

"What counts is to get the rat that is doing this!" Bick told himself. "If he is aboard—and I have a feeling he is!"

Larry Horn showed from an inspection trip of the port motors. Bick said: "Where's Flight Engineer Dreems?"

"Starboard wing, a minute ago," Horn said. "I saw him going in—"

"Not me, you didn't," a voice interrupted mildly. "I've been in my cabin, Larry." It was Dreems, coming from an opposite direction.

"I'll be damned!" Horn murmured. "I could have sworn you were working around in your denims. Yep, I'll swear I saw you in your denims!"

Hudson was thumbing over some charts. Bick nodded with his head to Horn and said, close to the second flight engineer's ear:

"I've got a gun here, Mister! I don't want it to go off in the wrong direction. And I don't want any noise about what I'm telling you. Do I make myself clear?"

"Let's hear it, the rest of it," Horn growled, his eyes steady.

"I'm counting you out of this work, Horn," Bick said tightly, "because you wouldn't be fool enough to be walking around the wings if you had fouled the jettison gear! Our gas is being dumped!"

"Unh!" Horn grunted, but kept his eyes mild.

"And you didn't see Dreems, in my opinion, but somebody who looked like Dreems! Somebody who, in the quiet press of business on the bridge here, sneaked into the starboard wing in Dreems' denims! You wouldn't wonder about that, would you—if you saw a man in denims step into a wing? Fix that up *now*—and leave the hatch open later!"

"Ha-ha-ha," Horn forced a laugh, as if at a funny story. "That's a hot one, Crash! Well, I'll be seein' ya!"

He walked slowly to the starboard wing hatch and climbed through. The hatch slammed after him.

**B**ICK stood very still, his eyes watchful on the others. Sparky Seemon was missing; and the two girls. He recalled Sparky's curious glances at him, his apparent silent communication with Mercedes on one occasion when Bick had acted as Crash Cassidy would never have done. Bick walked slowly away when he saw Larry Horn come through the hatch again, white-faced and grim but with the tension gone out of his eyes.

The hatch on the starboard wing was open, and the roar of the motors came loud. The men on the bridge worked quietly on. Skid and Scotty McLane, at the controls, held a whispered consultation and then stared at the fuel gauges. Pop Dunkin labored on—

*"Flight Nine-one-five . . . Flight Nine-one-five . . . calling Cartagena, Colombia . . . Flight Nine-one-five, calling Cartagena—"*

Bick went through the door into his own cabin, but he left it open the faintest of cracks. He watched, knowing that the guilty man—if the guilty man was aboard!—would become nervous, curious, even concerned for his own skin.

"Probably the stunt is just to force

us down and out of commission," Bick realized. "That way, the Trans-Carib would have another black mark on her record!" But he wondered, "Why not go whole hog, though? Why not blow us to hell out of the sky, if that's the game?"

He shut off the thought and his scalp crawled under his peaked, white-drill cap. A man was moving suspiciously, out there in the long, narrow business heart of the boat—a man who was standing now, was making his way to a starboard porthole. He was craning his neck to look out at the wing when Bick stepped out from his cabin.

"*What are you doing there?*" he rapped.

There was a guttural oath and the man whirled, his hand darting to his armpit. Bick fired from the hip, a staccato *crack!* that was all but lost in the roar of the motors through that opened hatch. Pop Dunkin didn't stir in his seat.

*"Cartagena? Flight Nine-one-five—"*

Skid and Scotty were ranging the instruments in mild concern, and Dreems stood close behind them, bent forward in concentration. Larry Horn's face was visible, watchful, in the shadows beyond the open portwing hatch.

While on the floor near the starboard porthole lay Art Hudson, his neck twisted and a stream of blood creeping from his stertorously breathing lips to the carpeted floor of the bridge. Bick held his automatic at a cautious angle and went forward.

*"Ach, mein Kopf, mein Kopf, mein Kopf!"* the man moaned, stopping his labored breathing for a moment. Then the gasping, retching sound started again, but more faintly, more fragilely. In another moment, it had ceased altogether.

*"Mein Kopf!"*—*"My head!"*—had ceased to pain Art Hudson.

Bick Nelson motioned silently to Horn, and the two of them lifted the inert corpse and carried it back to the Master's cabin. Horn scratched his head and said:

"My, my! Hudson, eh? Who'd have thought it? You can never tell what you're talking to, down in South America! Never go by a name, they say. A girl adds her mother's name on to her father's, as you know. Probably what Hudson did, too.

"His name was probably 'Arturo Schmidt', and at an early age he added the 'Hudson'. One of those Latin-American - German combinations so common in those parts."

Bick covered the man's face with a hand towel. A crimson stain pressed through the towel and spread slowly.

"First blood," the ex-Navy ace mused, "for me. But maybe next time it will be *my* blood!"

Horn was saying: "—so you never can tell from a name."

"No," Bick said, the ghost of a grin coming over his taut face, "you certainly can't tell by a name! Take mine now, Horn—take Crash Cassidy, huh?"

Horn said, "Hell, everybody knows *you*, Crash!"

THE squall died as quickly as Hudson had. The boat eased its bucking, but it rode at an uneven keel unless the ailerons were set with plenty of port flap to them. Horn worked quickly, methodically, and soon the gauge at the controls dropped rapidly to its proper place. Under the astonished gaze of Skid and Scotty, Dreems and Horn lugged equipment up through the wing hatch and took over the dangerous task of transferring fuel from port to starboard so that the balance of the great boat was equalized.

Bick ignored the searching looks the two gave him. He asked, quietly:

"How are the readings?"

"Air speed: one sixty-two m.p.h.; manifold pressure, three-naught; r.p.m.'s, nineteen-fifty; using nine-seventy-five horsepower per motor!" Skid sang out, his eyes on the instrument panel.

Bick nodded. "Nice going, lads." He kept his voice steady. "I'm navigator, for the rest of the trip."

Skid's eyes raised slowly and met Bick's in the mirror. It was the younger of the two, Scotty McLane who asked:

"Where's Art Hudson? Sick?"

"Very," Bick said simply. "Lead poisoning." His eyes met and held with Skid's for a long moment and then he turned away.

The wide Caribbean unfurled endless miles of shimmery-blue water under the wings of the big boat—while Bick wondered what the *real* Crash Cassidy was up to at the moment!

## CHAPTER IV

### Chilean Jest

AT old Cartagena, some 1350 miles *airline* from New Orleans, Bick Nelson took charge at the controls and circled the harbor, studying the waters for the wind-pylon markers and the runway channel.

The old city was a pretty picture in the long sunset, its red-tiled roofs and gray walls contrasting sharply with the green-clad hills that mounted like a rampart to 500 feet above the harbor.

There were two mouths of entry to the old port but, a sorely beset city in the days when Morgan and Drake strode the Spanish Main with iron-fisted ships and black-hearted pirates manning them, the Cartagenans had wisely filled the larger mouth of entry—*Boca Grande*—with rock, and forced the fighting to *Boca Chica*, the smaller

entry, where the defenders had a better chance.

But the straggling population of mainly blacks and mulattos was evidence enough that Cartagena still slumbered four centuries after Drake had given her a knockout punch.

Barranquilla, to the northeast, was a better city from many respects; but Bick, looking down on Cartagena's old fort of San Felipe—now the city's reservoir—realized the defense possibilities that had perhaps actuated Trans-Carib's choice.

"And it is one more port nearer the Panama Canal that won't be in the hands of any potential enemy airmen," he realized. "If I can fight this thing out and win through for Uncle Sam—and for Ledbetter Dawes!"

He turned to watch Scotty McLane make an entry in the ship's log—the all-important record book. Bick signalled him, saw the notation:

*Cartagena leg, elapsed time flight, 7 hrs. 50 min.*

Bick nodded but said, "Do you always take things for granted, Scotty? We don't log our landing until we've made that landing."

He cut the big boat down and found the patrol boat, got its signal that all was clear. Slowly, he dropped her down, flashing the warning to the passenger compartments:

*Belts on, please!*

Bick leveled off over the water and let her cut along fast, then eased her down until the hull was cutting a wedge-shaped spray. With the contact of the water, he clipped his throttle open a bit so as to bring it to a gradual, instead of a sharp, stop. The patrol boat cut in close and threw out a line.

Skid yawned and shook his head. "The Big Guy must be taking a correspondence course," he murmured. After a moment, he added: "And some les-

sons on how to be a good guy, and an—officer!"

"Sitting next to you is contagious," Bick said. He added thoughtfully, "So is lead poisoning, my friend!"

He went ashore with quick step and supervised the loading of the cargo bound from Cartagena to Guayaquil, Iquique and Valparaiso.\* Then he made his way to the American Consulate and reported "Hudson's" death.

"I should hold you for an inquiry," the official said.

"Put it down to mutiny," Bick suggested, "and I can stand my hearing when I drop anchor at New Orleans."

"Done," the man said. He stared at Bick a long time. "Funny business, what?"

"Not," Bick pointed out coolly, "from Hudson's viewpoint. Not so very funny!"

He went back to the boat and signed the manifest for cargo and passengers, then studied the weather charts. He came ashore again and spoke with a customs officer about a triviality. He lighted his cigarette Crash Cassidy-fashion, and was surprised at the startled look the customs man gave him. One of the others murmured:

"That ring of the *señor's*—it is strange, indeed!"

**B**ICK realized the peculiar ring was in bold relief of his lighted match for a long moment.

He said casually, "An old keepsake."

The others murmured flowery Spanish farewells and turned away after Bick's "*Mil gracias*"—"a thousand thanks." But something stopped him as he went his way—something soft that hit on his shoulder and fell, a ball of pale something, on the wharf.

\* Guayaquil is the chief port of Ecuador, on the Pacific Coast. Iquique and Valparaiso are both Chilean ports.—Ed.

Bick stooped low and saw it was a hastily rolled wad of paper. He palmed it swiftly and opened it when he was alone. The paper, spread out, carried two words only—but they were words that sent the blood to pounding in the ex-Navy ace's temples.

*Evidar Guayaquil*, those words were. *Avoid Guayaquil!*

Bick turned back into the wharf, remembering the customs man's look of surprise. But one of the others—Bick didn't know which—had made the remark about the ring! He shrugged and started up the gangplank but stood aside when he heard hurrying footsteps.

The two hostesses were coming aboard.

Bick frowned after them; but he noted that Carla Mendoza's face was a mask of hostility to Mercedes.

"No love lost there," he mused. He went above deck and asked Skid:

"How many passengers and what cargo for Guayaquil?"

Skid said, "Three passengers; one bag of mail; four hundred pounds of cargo."

Bick made a swift decision, even as he realized that the very warning to pass up Guayaquil might be in itself a trap!

He said, "The Guayaquil passengers and cargo stop here and go by boat, or the next plane down. Our next port of call is Iquique! We—"

"But—" Skid tried to break in, puzzled.

"—load with fuel here, and supplies," Bick went on, ignoring the attempted interruption, "and we radio— from above Guayaquil!—that the mail is to be dropped in a watertight sack, with floats attached!"

His voice left no room for argument, so Skid Harris gave him a mock salute and said:

"Aye, sir!" in perfect sailor fashion.

Involuntarily, Bick fell into his old Navy ways. He gave the youngster a correct Academy salute and said:

"Carry on, Mister!"

Skid's eyes narrowed; but all he said was: "Pretty soon, now, the only surprise I'll have will be when there are no surprises! Do you understand me—er—*sir*?"

When the boat was under way and winging down-coast in the growing dark, Bick turned the controls and the bridge over to Skid. He said,

"I'm going below, to the lounge!"

The flight across the sea had heightened his normally good appetite, and the sight of a case of pheasants being loaded aboard at New Orleans was a pleasant reminder to him. The hostesses met him as he stepped into the perfectly appointed room, and it was Mercedes who made the introductions to the passengers who were there.

Bick met them easily, although his eyes were on the two hostesses. He wondered if, perhaps, one of them had scribbled him that warning *Evidar Guayaquil*. And if so, which one of them? And why?

The passengers for Iquique and beyond were playing cards, or just sitting back and reading or talking. Many of them were in their compartments waiting for the second call to dinner. Only fourteen could be seated comfortably at one time for the elaborate eight-course menu that the *Gaucho Clipper* offered.

Bick had acknowledged the introduction to a *Señora* Eccheveria, the wife of an important Chilean diplomat, and was turning away but the woman gave a cry and clutched at his left hand.

"*Mire!*" she cried, turning to her husband. "See!"

**S**ILENCE fell over the assembled passengers, and Bick stood rockstill

while the woman explained.

"*Mi capitán*—excuse," she bubbled, in mixed Spanish and English. "But—de ring which you wear. She ees one like it I have seen but rarely before!"

*Señor* Eccheveria was frowning ominously, but the woman apparently did not notice.

"Ah, yes, it was while in Germany. But of course!" Her English improved with her regaining of composure. "That ver-ry *nai-ees* young man w'at had been around de world, de sol-daire. And again de official in *Vashington*."

The woman's eyes flew suddenly wide, and her hand leapt to her face.

"And—both are now—dead!" she whispered. "Herr Undersecretary Max von Weigstaffe—he who was murdered in Buenos Aires this past several days ago, no?—it was he who had one, too. And—"

"If *Señora* will permit?" her husband growled, but with a courtly bow.

His left elbow jammed, not accidentally, into the woman's ribs, as he offered his arm. Eccheveria bowed to the assembled company—but there was abject fear in the oily eyes which he darted at Bick Nelson,—as he strode majestically way.

One of the hostesses hovered near, and a venomous voice said in perfect English:

"*You fool! Why do you wear it!*"

Bick twisted his head and saw both girls standing there—both looking in opposite directions—and with faces sweetly innocent of guile.

He dropped down into his chair at the head of the table and unfolded his napkin.

"Nice menu," he complimented Trans-Carib's home-port chef. But what he was thinking was:

"Nice guy, that Crash Cassidy! The ring he left with me certainly means plenty. And it means it in a foreign

language, too! I'll have to nose into this further!"

To each of the girls, as they passed him things for the first time, Bick murmured:

"Thank you—for the warning. But I'm not a fool!"

Both managed genuine surprise, so far as he could make out.

**G**UAYAQUIL was a thousand miles, and the giant clipper boat turned up the beacon-marked harbor at 1:15 A. M. Sparky Seemon listened with a surly face to Bick's orders, then pushed his message through as the landing lights bloomed alive on the dark surface below.

"Flight Nine-one-five calling Guayaquil . . . Flight Nine-one-five calling Guayaquil . . . Hello, Guayaquil! . . . Not landing this trip . . . Stand by for sack of mail to be dropped in landing channel . . . That's right . . . Huh?"

The rest of the talk was spoken close to the radio mouthpiece; but Bick caught what was said, and grinned:

"—by order of His Honor—Crash Cassidy, to you!"

The boat peeled off from its flight line and circled until the patrol boat's winking lights said "Ready!"

Bick cut the throttles and Scotty McLane lugged the watertight bag and the secured floats to a port and forced them through. Bick circled again, his hand raised for the signal when to cut away. He estimated a fairly close drop to the patrol boat, then mused:

"It's like bombing," as he said, "Drop it, Scotty!"

The bag was a dark blur in the strong lights from below. It hit the water and a splash arose, a splash that ceased to be just a normal splash after a moment and became a boiling, roiling, spouting geyser of foam and of other things—of men and splintered parts of what

had once been the Guayaquil patrol boat!

The roaring detonation of a terrific explosion followed swiftly, and the *Gaucho Clipper* rocked crazily in the tortured air. The lights blanked out along the waterfront, and the rumbling echo of the giant blast came clear above the throttled motors.

**B**ICK reached for the wheel and dragged it to him, and snapped the full six thousand horsepower housed in the four motors alive. The boat speared high into the air, rocked heavily, and then settled on a normal keel again.

The harbor of Guayaquil\* showed clear in the bright mass of flames that spread rapidly from the Trans-Carib hangar-quay—

The looks that the men on the bridge exchanged were mute but eloquent.

Bick said, "Someone must have thought this was belligerent waters, and mined the runway."

Skid said dryly, "Someone *knew* these were belligerent waters—thank God!"

Bick grinned and chuckled at Sparky, "Well, well, well, that makes two of you cookies who think I am the Lord High Executioner!" He sobered suddenly at the sound of steps on the stairs.

"Back to your posts!" he snapped at his men.

Sparky was saying over and over, "Guayaquil, Guayaquil, Guayaquil! Flight Nine-one-five calling . . . Flight Nine-one-five calling!"

A voice from the rear of the bridge asked, "Is something wrong—Crash?"

Bick turned and stared full at Carla Mendoza. Mercedes was visible as to the top of her tousled head, slightly below her. Carla was in a frilly some-

thing that told Bick it was Mercedes who had been on duty when the explosion, the mine in the runway back there, had been set off.

He was amused at her calling him "Crash," after her cold treatment of that day. The amusement spread to the gang on the bridge when Bick shook his head and said to the girl, in mock seriousness:

"No, honey, nothing is wrong. Something—just backfired, that's all!" He winked at Skid. "Nighty-night, Trans-Carib's winged angels!"

The gang roared when the two girls retreated in confusion.

Bick turned front again and set the course for the 1,800-mile leg to Iquique and pondered the warning he had received—the warning that had saved the lives of all of them on board.

"Is it one of the girls, who knows something? Or was it one of that bunch at the customs' wharf?"

He wondered about the strange ring that Crash Cassidy had given him, about the ring and about Crash, himself, and Crash's reasons for wanting "out" for a time.

The memory came back to him with a jolt that Mr. Crash Cassidy—"Bick Nelson," under temporary arrest at Annapolis—would be on his own again in a few weeks.

Bick had a feeling of dark foreboding when he contemplated the real Crash Cassidy's questionable background; the sinister business of the ring he himself now wore; Crash's undoubtedly murder of the Navy's ace Intelligence operative, Ledbetter Dawes.

"I can ruin the whole game Crash might have in mind, by spilling what I know!" Bick thought. "But — that wouldn't be saving Trans-Carib; and it wouldn't be helping me any, either! No," he realized, "I've got to stick it out and hope for the best. After all,

\*Guayaquil Harbor is only 18 feet deep, inshore. Big steamers anchor well out.—Author.

we have thirteen days more! Oh boy—*thirteen!*”

But what a lot could happen in thirteen days—and “What a lot has happened in the last thirteen days!” Bick recalled, almost dazedly. “Thirteen days ago, I was just fresh into Annapolis with a ‘cushy’ job pushing that Consolidated Patrol Boat around. And with my record and my reputation safer than the U. S. Treasury. And now look at me!

“A pilot on a job that might blow up any minute; a man who might this very second be hounded for murder; a man under another man’s name, and a slightly bad name at that! And in my place back home sits as brazen and coldly scheming an adventurer as ever looted a poor-box!”

THE *Gaucho Clipper* raised Iquique, the longest leg of the trip, at noon. The passengers were testy at the long stretch, although Bick pointed out to *Señor Eccheveria*:

“You certainly wouldn’t have gone ashore at one in the morning, at Guayaquil, would you, *Señor*?”

The man regarded him darkly. “I would go shoreward,” he said stiffly, “whenever there appeared to me to be danger to myself.” He added hurriedly, “And to the *Señora Eccheveria*, also, of course!”

“Of course, the *Señora* also,” Bick agreed with a straight face.

“Of a certainty,” Eccheveria smiled. “And, of course, *mi capitán*, you will not deny that there was trouble last night, at Guayaquil?”

Bick shrugged. “No trouble for me,” he said. But he’d already had the radio reports: three killed on the patrol boat, and nearly a mile of waterfront destroyed by the fire that had followed. “Not any trouble with us.”

Eccheveria astounded him with his

next words. “No, not for you. Only for others, there is trouble, no? Do not deny, *mi capitán*, that this is a trouble ship! I have felt it, that tension of the entire crew. I have seen it in your peculiar actions, your strange decisions, your mysterious refusal to land at Guayaquil—and there was trouble at Guayaquil, of a certainty!”

Bick shrugged and excused himself.

His eyes drifted to the steep climb the Andes made from the Peruvian coastline. He wondered about the Trans-Carib boat that had been lost so far off its course—*south* of Valparaiso, when it should have been north; and of Slats Hollidge’s cryptic:

“‘Your radio beam never fails you, does it?’”

Bick glanced questioningly at Sparky, and then turned to look east at the Chilean coastline. He took the controls to set the big boat down in the harbor. The huge nitrate works for which Iquique was noted sprawled along the skyline like a grotesque skeleton.

A half-hour later—“Valparaiso right on schedule,” Bick muttered to Skid Harris, as he lifted the great boat into the air from her refueling. “We’ll be there for supper.”

Sparky came over some time later, a grin on his normally sour face.

“Look at this, Crash,” he chuckled. “Those *Chilcos* have a great sense of humor!”

He passed Bick a scribbled message that had come in over the Clipper’s set. Bick read, chuckling at first, and then came erect with a bang.

CHILE SUGGESTS MYSTERIOUS BLAST IN GUAYAQUIL HARBOR CAUSED BY A FOREIGN SUBMARINE. UNITED STATES, ALARMED, RUSHING WARSHIPS FROM CANAL ZONE TO PATROL COASTLINE.

It was the next few lines that trans-

fixed Bick, that nailed him into his chair, stunned and motionless. Sparky laughed and pointed out the joke.

"Guayaquil is in Ecuador, as we know. Well, the *Chileños* hate the inards of the Ecuadorians and the Peruvians, to the north of them. So they scare Uncle Sam into sending part of the fleet down to mess up the Peruvians and the Ecuadorians. Get it?"

But Bick was busy getting something else. The bulletin went on:

NAVY ALSO SENDING CRACK SQUADRON OF PLANES FOR DEMONSTRATION PATROL, BAN ON GROUNDED NAVY ACE, BICKFORD NELSON, LIFTED BY SPECIAL ACTION OF SECRETARY OF NAVY ON ACE'S PLEA. SQUADRON LEAVES NEWPORT NEWS VIRGINIA TOMORROW FOR ATTEMPTED NON-STOP FLIGHT IN GIANT CONSOLIDATED PATROL BOATS.

**B**ICK slumped the controls forward and then signed quickly to Skid to take over. He pushed past the surprised Sparky Seemon and signed Scotty McLane into his place. In his cabin, Bick tried to tell himself it wasn't true; but he knew it was.

"A *Chileño* joke," he groaned. "And—what a joke! But they don't know. They don't know of this foreign menace, and of Crash Cassidy, with his suspicious foreign tie-up through this ring, leading a squadron of big planes right down into their home waters! And, God help me, I can't tell them who the joke is on!"

When Bick came on watch again, he was still cheerless. Not even the sight of Valparaiso nestling in its beautiful semicircular bay—the Pearl of the Pacific—roused Bick from his gloom.

"Chilean jest," he muttered, as he looked down on the handsome suburb of Vina del Mar, twisted his head to stare at the Chilean Naval Academy high up on the hills over the city.

"Damn Ledbetter Dawes, anyway!"

he whispered huskily. "I'd be at my own Naval Academy now, if it hadn't been for him."

His face was grim when he whipped past Punta Angeles, angled back to Punta Gruesa, and slid down the skyway for a landing into the cup-shaped harbor.

"Someone will pay for all this," Bick Nelson promised himself, as he throttled the patrol boat forward.

## CHAPTER V

### Death's Gage

**O**NCE the *Gaucho Clipper* was safe in its hangar and the ground crew was swarming over the huge, 152-foot wing and grease-monkeys\* were treading the walkways inside the wings, Bick slumped wearily into a chair and contemplated his next move.

His mind slid to the strange report of the Trans-Carib radio operator who had been confined to a hospital for observation, following his insistence that he had communicated with the great plane—ten minutes *after* it had crashed in the Andes.

"No harm in asking him a few questions," Bick thought. He slipped away and soon was inside the Strangers' Hospital.

"Sure! Radioman Foster," an attendant said. He led the way along a hall and pointed to a room. Bick rapped sharply on the door.

He was still rapping when a nurse came and suggested, "Perhaps the patient is asleep." She smiled and added, "He seems completely rested, although

\* "Grease-monkey" is the correct term applied to a mechanic in overalls by airmen. And by the mechs themselves. Call the man a "greaseball" and you'd better grin! Or you'll get a sock in the schnozzola. A greaseball is—well, a greaseball. A term of derogation.—Author.

he has been very nervous. Keeps talking about that tragic wreck, you know!"

The nurse opened the door gently, and instantly her face changed. She darted a swift glance at Bick.

"You haven't been in here, have you?"

Bick felt the blood quicken in his veins and he eased the girl gently to one side. He stepped into the room. And gasped. The radioman was lying with his back to the open window, and the face that was presented to Bick and the girl was a face twisted in hideous pain. But one look at the bulging, motionless, flat eyes of him told Bick that whatever it was the man had felt, he was beyond all pain now.

Bick said rapidly, "I'll wait here. Get a doctor, quick." But he knew the doctor could do Radioman Foster no good. And he wanted a moment by himself with the man.

He glanced at the window, saw the slit in the screen, saw the hilt of a vicious dagger that protruded from the sheets—and from the man's back. Bick stared at the curiously carved handle of it and muttered.

"If that isn't an Oriental weapon, then I just don't know a thing."

The nurse hustled back with a doctor, and Bick withdrew after giving his name and agreeing to testify to the police. He went out into the pleasant, balmy air of the perfect Chilean summer\* day.

"Poor Foster," he murmured. "Killed for what he knew—and couldn't tell!"

Bick pondered the thing as he bent his steps to the hangar again.

\* Summer in South America—that portion of the continent which lies far below the equator—is, naturally, the reverse of our summers in the north of the Americas. Thus in Chile, around Valparaiso, the hot weather comes in November, December, January and February. Conversely, it is cold in June, July and August.—Author.

"I wonder. I wonder *how* Foster could have heard those poor fellows radio *after* the crack-up—and why he was killed, murdered, because he insisted he *had* heard their signals!"

The answer burst on him like a thunderbolt. "It was faked! Faked by another ship! Probably their own radio was disabled and—" Bick quickened his steps. "Another ship faked the wrecked Clipper's radio! So—why couldn't those babies, in some way, have faked a beacon-signal that pulled our Clipper off its track? Faked a beacon-signal and led them back and *beyond* Valparaiso—into the Andes—and finished them by snuffing the faked beacon off?"

It perhaps wasn't the answer, Bick knew; but he felt he was getting somewhere. There was only one way to get the rest of it. *If* he could get it—by hopping to the scene of the crash for a look around, himself!

At the hangar, he told Skid Harris his plan. And his reasons.

"I guess it sounds wacky to you, Skid, my being so excited over this thing. But there's something hidden here, and I've got to know what it is!"

"I'm curious, too," Skid said flatly. "Curious about a lot of things, Crash. But—this comes first. What is your plan?"

"To hop over that area in a small seaplane," Bick said simply. "It's tough, I know. But there are a score of lakes dotted through that section. We could make it."

"Or a damned good try at it," Bick agreed. He added pensively, "I guess you've been around a bit in your day, Crash." He stunned Bick with his next query. "Were you ever at Annapolis, fella?"

**B**ICK faltered in his stride, but he managed to keep his voice even.

"Huh?" He thought fast. "Annapolis, Nova Scotia?"

"Skip it," Skid said with a laugh. "Just a crazy idea I had. I have a buddy name of Craigman who graduated the Naval Academy. Annapolis, Maryland. I'd never noticed before, but you have a way of slinging your orders and handling yourself that reminds me exactly of him!"

Bick's grin was genuine. "I don't think Crash Cassidy would last long at the Naval Academy, Skid." But he still felt warm inside when they got to the hangar.

"We want a joyride," Bick explained. He said more slowly, "Funny sort of joyride, I guess — but we want full equipment; landing flares and all the rest of it. Also, we want the radio beacon to stay with us the full way!"

The Trans-Carib port official shrugged. "I'm used to wacky requests from you pilots," he said. "I've got a speedy little job I keep for any special patrol work that might come up. It's a Laird, a pontoon job."

Bick whistled. "That fast, eh? So much the better! Let's go!"

Twenty minutes later they were off. Skid looked at Bick and gave it up, as the Navy ace whipped the roaring bit of racing plane off the water and cork-screwed it in a graceful climb into the painted colors of the sunset.

"You hex me, pal," Skid said softly. "You beat my time! Big or little, they all sing when the Big Guy gives them his attention." He grinned. "Even the gals. Even little Carla!"

Bick whipped the crate into a steep turn and then climbed it hard against the towering Andes.

\* \* \*

THE hangar chief turned at the foot-steps and stared hard. A little brown man hissed apologetically and said:

"Missa Cassidy, you know where he live by? What address? He here now, no?"

"No," the hangar chief said roughly. "And cut out that damned hissing. I thought one of these jobs of mine had a leaky valve, when I first heard you."

"Sor-ry, so ver-ry sor-ry," the brown man said. He smiled so that his almond-shaped eyes all but disappeared in his face. He hissed again and started away.

"Who'll I tell him was here — his valet?" the hangar man asked rudely.

The hissing stopped abruptly; but the hangar chief backed an involuntary step at the venomous glitter in the little man's eyes.

"You say to Missa Cassidy," he said slowly, coming a pace forward and standing lightly on catlike feet. "you say to Missa Cassidy that brother of old friend—in Orient!—come to pay visit."

Then the little man was smiling again and the hissing seemed to reëcho lingeringly in the air of the big shed.

"He's out joy-hopping it," the hangar man said, mopping the perspiration off his face, a perspiration that had started with the savage look on the brown man's face. "I dunno when he'll be back."

"Same Missa Cassidy," the brown man murmured. "Always—hopping it. But not always—with joy! So sor-ry. So ver-ry sor-ry—"

\* \* \*

BICK clocked his flight and computed the distance traveled, and then when he knew he was about right, he circled; but carefully. Under him loomed the white-clad peaks of the Southern Andes. It was almost dark, down below; was dark, entirely, at sea level. But the altimeter showed him well over 10,000 feet, and the peaks of the Andes scarcely a thousand feet below the fleeting wings of the ship.

Bick pulled the landing-flare release, and a colorful parachute of sparkling color hung suspended in the cold air. He whipped in a hard turn and throttled down to spiral after the flare. He yelped exultantly when he saw the scarred peak where the giant Clipper had plowed in. A mass of wreckage was still there, marking the tragic spot with a pilot's memorial. He looked at Skid.

"Now to get a lake to set down on!"

They found it, not two miles away, but around on the other side of the peak. Bick released another flare, and another; then swifited down and skimmed his pontoons on the water before the light had died. He taxied to shallow water and stared down at the footing they would have to walk over.

"It'll be colder than hell, even with our Sidcott suits," he told Skid. "Even with our boots, we'll nearly freeze our feet off!"

But he dropped down from the small plane and Skid came after him. They found the wreckage, and in another moment Bick's flashlight was playing over it.

"Just another wreck," he was saying, as he probed the twisted metal and the charred woodwork that had once been the proud cabin. "I guess I was—"

"Hey!" Skid cut in on him. "What's this?" He held up a splinter of blue-black metal—heavy and sinister in appearance.

Bick's knowledge of ordnance, of guns and shells, was enough to tell him what it was, at a glance.

"A piece of shell," he said flatly. "A sliver of—of—" He paused. "No! No, it's not an archie fragment. It's—by God!"

"What?"

"It's a piece of shell fired by one of those new thirty-seven or forty millimeter cannons! The type the new combat planes are using. It's—" Bick

stopped, again shaking his head. "But it can't be! The *Chileños* aren't using them, yet. And we have no planes of this type down here. So—"

"Listen," Skid asked patiently, "what is it all about, Crash?" He came closer. "And if this is a sliver of shell, why didn't the others find it when they picked up the bodies and examined the wreck?"

"Because," Bick said slowly, "they weren't looking for anything like this. Because they knew they'd find hunks of metal in all sizes—stuff that they couldn't carry back down the Andes! —so they didn't examine it closely!"

Skid said, "But Crash—how could this Clipper have been shot down? Who did it? Where did they operate from? From a battleship, out at sea?"

"No. That's out," Bick judged swiftly. "The Chilean Navy would spot anything of that kind. Or the British patrol. I can't make it out—quite. If—"

He shook his head in annoyance at the angry buzzing that was coming into his ears, a buzzing that grew persistently louder with each passing second.

"If there was any chance of their having a port, some place—"

"But who?"

"Hold it! Listen!"

From far away the buzzing noise came louder—louder—*louder!* And then it was a distinct *rhoom-rhoom-rhoom-rhoom-rhoom* that beat at the air, bore down on the two men there, got steadily louder. Bick stood transfixed.

"Foreign motors!" he whispered. "Foreign motors are the only motors in hell's broad acres that feature that uneven beat!"

**S**KID gasped and pointed. In the dying light of the skies a swarm of planes was drilling close over the white-clad peaks, drilling steadily on toward

where the two American pilots stood. Bick didn't realize for a full minute what it might be. And then it was too late.

"Skid! Down, Skid! They're headed for us, headed right this way! My God, there must be a hundred of them!"

"But cripes!" Skid sputtered. "Do you think they saw us?"

"No; maybe they haven't seen us! Maybe someone has been thinking about this, the way I have! Or—maybe someone has told them that we are snooping around—we, the U. S. Navy Intelligence Service!"

He silenced Skid's gaping mouth with: "My guess is they are afraid we might find something just like we found. My guess is they're coming over to blast this spot to kingdom come!"

As if in answer to his words, a dark form dipped suddenly and screamed down in a dive. Flares launched themselves in the air, to send the two Yanks cowering back away from the wreckage there; but they were caught squarely in the glare of those floating flares.

A whistling shriek grew in the motor-tortured air and punctuated itself in a crashing explosion. Dust flew up and blinded the Yanks. Before they could move in their tracks, another roaring motor thundered loud, and another detonation—nearer this time—crashed out. And then all hell cut loose!

*Wham-boom! Wham-boom! Wham-boom-boom-boom-boom-boom!*

Bick and Skid lay still as death, and they continued to lie still for minutes after the crashing died in the air. It still lived in their ears. Then the faraway *rhoom-rhoom-rhoom-rhoom* of the receding motors told them the raid of obliteration—the raid to erase the marks of the unbelievable attack on an American Clipper plane—was over.

"Let's get that plane and get out of here," Skid said. "Hell, I still can't be-

lieve it!"

"Let's get to that plane and see where those monkeys are heading for," Bick corrected him. "Hell, man, that's the angle! We know *what* they are now! And we know they must be nested around here. But—where? How?"

"*If* that Laird is still okay," Skid amended.

In their anxiety, they ran the full way back to where the speedy little ship was snuggled close to the shoreline of the lake. They nearly screamed their relief when they saw the plane was in good condition.

"They missed it by a few yards!" Skid said, pointing to some craters nearby with his flashlight. "What a close call that was!"

"Still is close, Skid," Bick told him tightly, as they piled into the small plane. "But I can't tell you about it now. We've got to get up and after those fellows while we can still see their exhaust flames. Get going!"

The Laird roared into the dark in a reckless take-off, and zoomed high. The bright moon looked down on them from opposite the peak they soared over, and far in the distance was the cherry-red glow of a mass of exhaust stacks.

And then those firefly streaks flecked out!

Bick flew in a straight line toward where he had last seen them. He said to Skid:

"Listen, they can't be outdistancing us with that heavy stuff they're flying. They must be—*Skid!*" he interrupted himself with a shout. "Those lights! Look!"

**H**E wrenched the Laird in a tight turn and held it. Far in the distance, but only slightly below their own level, glowed the ringed lights of an airport, turned on for landing ships!

Bick held to his tight turn, hugging

close to a high peak so he wouldn't be seen from that area of light. He held it long after even those lights faded, held it while the moon climbed higher and higher. His eyes ached with the strain of watching that one area; but he managed it.

And then the moon was shining on that area—on that flat, shiny, water-covered area where only a short time ago had been lights and warplanes. Understanding kindled then in Bick's brain, and he sighed with relief.

"Got it!" he said slowly. "*I got it!*" He whipped the plane in a short arc and hurled it back across the Andes for the seacoast and faraway Valparaiso. "Now to do something about it!"

Skid sat in silent thought for some time, then stirred and put a hand on Bick's arm.

"Listen, Crash. You said something about the —the U. S. Navy Intelligence Service, back there. Are you in the Navy Intelligence, Crash?"

Bick said, "Not exactly, Skid. In fact, I'm not exactly even Crash Cassidy. Now, bend your ear to my tale, while we head back for Valparaiso. There'll be no time to waste in talking once we get there."

\* \* \*

**B**UT Bick was wrong.

The hangar chief talked with him, when he slammed down to a landing.

"Some Oriental guy wuz here askin' for you," he said. He scratched his head and thought. "Said he knew your brother in Asia some place. I *think* that's what he said. Or maybe he said *you* knew *his* brother, come to think of it."

The port superintendent came from his lighted office and motioned the two pilots inside. He closed the door carefully, then faced them.

"Bad news," he said succinctly.

"Spill it," Bick said. He thought there wasn't any bad news left to hear, after what he'd been through in the past few days. But he was wrong.

"'Slats' Hollidge and his gang were killed," the super said slowly. He sucked on his cigarette and looked at them woodenly. "*The Coffee Clipper* exploded in Bahia\*, after discharging its passengers."

"So they got Hollidge!" Bick scowled, his eyes bitter. "The lousy skunks!"

"Yeah," the super said, his eyes tragic. "But that's only part of it. The rest is, our charter is through. Trans-Carib is no more. The Big Boss himself had me on the telephone, with the bad news. Just ten minutes ago."

"Like hell!" Bick roared. "They can't do that!"

The super shrugged. "Maybe you'd like to argue about it, Cassidy? Help yourself to the telephone. Those wires stretch a long way! The name," he said, still flatly, "is Norton Phillips, and the name lives as you know, in New Orleans. The Trans-Carib's Big Boss!"

But for all the man's hard, flat talk, there were tears standing out in his eyes. He turned his head away and dropped down in a chair.

Bick was stunned. He pulled Skid aside and said, "Well, that seems to do it! Remember what I told you—one more disaster and we were through?"

Skid nodded. "And there are our European friends, all ready to step in! And you can't move without opening yourself up to murder charges, and maybe worse! And that heel, Crash Cassidy, coming closer every hour!"

Bick nodded; but a new thought struck him. "Hey! Hollidge being wiped out with the crew was no disaster in the sense that is usually meant. Sure,

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\*Bahia, Brazil (whose port is Salvador adjoining this city of 350,000 people.—Ed.

it's a terrible thing—and especially for Hollidge's family. But—no passengers killed!"

He swung to the super. "I'm taking you up. I'm calling the Big Boss!"

"Luck to you," the man said without turning.

Bick slid down on a chair and grabbed the phone.

\* \* \*

**I**T was a tight knot of men who ganged into the office and listened to Bick's orders—and tight in more than one sense of the word. It was three o'clock in the morning, and the crew of the *Gaucho Clipper* had been relaxing at Valparaiso's justly praised night-spots. But Bick's words snapped them to attention, and they listened.

"—so the Big Boss says we can take a crack at it! How about it?"

Sparky said, "Nuts! If the charter calls for mail to be delivered by the Clipper to Rio, then we're out. Be sensible, Crash!"

Bick said, "A technicality that the Brazilians are being forced to use."

"Yeah? Who is forcing them?"

"Who do you think?"

"Little Bo Peep!" Scotty McLane said.

"Sober up!" Bick snapped. He stared at Sparky. "That stuff about the mail is a technicality; but we've got one to get around it with. Know what we're going to do?"

"Write to Mister Farley?" Sparky asked derisively.\*

"Get this—the charter says: 'Mail must be delivered to Rio by Trans-Carib.' Yes; it says that. But it doesn't say mail from *where!* Get it? *It doesn't say from where!*"

Bick looked around defiantly. "It

specifies the crew. It specifies the type ship. And it says 'mail'. But it doesn't say where that mail must come from. That mail is going to be delivered," he said slowly, "this morning. It's going to come from *here*. It's going to be carried by us!"

Sparky was on his feet, his eyes wide. "By us? Around Cape Horn? Count me out!"

"By us—over the Andes!" Bick told him steadily. "And you'll be counted out—permanently—if you act up."

A gun was somehow in Bick's hand. Skid Harris hauled out his own automatic and ranged up at Bick's side.

"Well?" said Bick Nelson.

"Blow me down if I can see the choice," Sparky said. "Death in this hangar—clean, quick, easy death by a gun. Or a trip over the Andes in a giant flying boat, with the chances favorable for starvation and freezing!"

"Make your choice," Bick snapped. "But fast!"

"I'm your Sparks," the radioman said simply.

Bick turned to Skid. "Just for fun, I'll hold the gang here. You get out and tour the town for the girls. They go, too."

"Not on your life!" Sparky snarled savagely. "Mercedes doesn't come on a wacky jaunt like this. That's out, and I'm not kidding!"

"I don't like making war on women any more than you do, Sparky," Bick said patiently. "Not a bit. Maybe less, even, than you do. But war is being waged on us—and I have a strong hunch that women are being used to do it. France had its Mata Hari. Maybe the Trans-Carib Clippers have their editions of women spies—as well as men *wreckers*."

His eyes ranged them all—Dreems, Horn, McLane, Sparky Seemon. "Do

\* Sparky Seemon is referring to the Hon. James A. Farley, Postmaster General of the United States.—Ed.

I make myself clear?"

Horn shifted in his chair and said, "Like arrest, huh?"

"Not *like* arrest," Bick corrected him gently. "It *is* arrest. It's arrest by Skid Harris and me, until further notice. Skid or I will ride herd on the mob of you, through this whole trip. And with drawn guns. One move out of any of you—*just one move*—and you'll be playing tickets in Hell's Sweepstakes before sunset!"

The super came in and said, "She's fueled and ready, Crash. Waiting on the line."

"Wait for Skid to come back," Bick said, his eyes never leaving the men in front of him. "Next—rip out the telephone wires. I don't want to chance any telephone calls to—interested parties!"

"Right, Crash."

The big clock on the wall ticked loudly in the silence of the room. Death had hurled its gage—and Bick Nelson had accepted the challenge!

## CHAPTER VI

### Navy Born

**B**ICK'S face was heavy with care as the big boat hurtled for the pale cones that were the Andes. He stood in the rear of the bridge deck, where he could watch the prisoner-crew. At the controls, alone, Skid Harris looked apprehensively into the south—the south, where that swarm of planes had so magically materialized to bomb them those short hours ago; and as mysteriously disappeared into the mirror-clear waters of an Andean lake.

A cloud formation drifted a shapeless, pale mass at them, and suddenly Skid went into a terrific zoom. Bick's knees buckled and he went forward heavily, a new fear in his heart. But the crew

were as helpless as Bick, fought only to hold to their chairs and keep from spilling across the cabin like upset chips.

A sharper, higher peak drifted yards from the portholes of the *Gaucho Clipper*, and Bick understood. They had all but crashed into a cone that lay hidden in that cloud formation! The flying boat thundered on through the growing dawn.

Bick had taken care to block the ladder from the empty passenger compartments: he was taking no chances on stowaways! But he stood so he could command a view of every door and every man and woman in the plane. On the floor at his side were two tommy guns, and the service belt strapped to his slim waist was heavy with two additional service automatics. Another gun was in his hand, ready for action.

Scotty McLane stirred and looked again at Bick. "Listen, Crash, how about letting me help at the controls? It's nearly four hours to Buenos Aires, at top speed!"

"Yeah," Larry Horn seconded it. "And Dreems and me can nurse the motors. How about it, Crash?"

Bick's quarter-deck manner was as inflexible as his voice was low and determined.

"Steady on, all of you! This is my party, and I'm calling the turns. Skid pilots the boat to Buenos Aires, and I take over for the other twelve hundred miles. Just one wrong move—and I let this toy cannon go *boom!*" He shifted his eyes to the girls. "Any of you!"

Sparky licked his lips, and then Mercedes was screaming as a dark form hurtled through the space separating Bick from the crew. There was a swift arc of gleaming metal in the bridge's light, a solid, thwacking sound that came from blunt, heavy metal on a hu-

man skull, and then Sparky was lying at Bick's feet, breathing stertorously.

The girl Mercedes continued to scream, and now there were words with it. She was screaming:

"Sparky, you fool! I told you to let me handle this! Oh, Sparky, you fool!"

Bick shot her a quizzical glance. Then he motioned to Scotty and Dreems.

"Drag Sparky back there where he belongs. And sit tight, all of you!"

Sparky's breathing eased when Mercedes cradled the unconscious man's bleeding head in her arms and rocked him gently. Bick's eyes widened on the scene; but he didn't speak again. The sun came up round and brassy and the giant boat thundered on.

Silence fell over the group in the cabin, a silence broken only by Skid's nervous cough as he steered the dangerous course through the hungry cones that stretched up for the wings of the clipper. A strained, taut silence broken by Sparky's incoherent mumblings and Mercedes' soothing whispers to the unconscious man.

**W**HEN the fabled Rio de Janeiro showed in the distance, Bick Nelson let his eyes touch over it all: the circular harbor, with its "Sleeping Giant" of ramparts that made an impressive background; the rough outline formed by *Pao de Assucar*, *Corcovado* and the farther *Gavea*.

"*Pao de Assucar*," Bick murmured, as he nosed the great boat down and let her have her speed. "Sugar Loaf! And *Corcovado*—the hunchback! What an expressive language." His eyes raised to the rear-view mirror and he met the steady gaze of Carla Mendoza. "And what beautiful people!" he finished, to himself.

The girl rose in her chair as if she

had heard him. A slight smile softened the weary lines around her mouth.

"Please," she said, her voice softly husky. "Please, Crash, may I sit beside you?"

Bick heard a signal gong ring in his brain, a signal of danger; but Carla was so frail looking, so tired. He looked at Skid, nodded slightly, and bent his eyes down to the harbor in the distance. Botafogo Bay is one of the most beautiful ports in the world—

The girl slid into the chair alongside him and touched over Bick's profile with her eyes. After a moment, she said almost in a whisper.

"Do not go back, please." She waited for a long moment, then tilted her head closer. "Did you hear me—*Bick Nelson*?"

Bick gasped and twisted his head; but he held the boat steady on her course. After a moment, he was able to say: "What? What name did you call me?" The girl smiled and turned her eyes away.

Rio de Janeiro's suburbs and parks and beautifully paved avenues were roaring up under their wings.

Carla said, "There are many, many beautiful spots in Rio—*Bick*. Many of them. You would love them. Perhaps as I do, even. Perhaps even, we could love them together!"

Bick wondered how this strange girl knew his name; but he felt the powerful attraction of her, and he loathed the thought of breaking the spell of her soft-spoken words, of shattering the dreamy visions that she was building up inside his head. He sat silent, this time, as she talked on.

"Do not deny that you like me, Bick. I know it; because I liked you, too, that first instant I saw you."

Bick grunted. "You certainly didn't act it!"

"Not," the girl told him, "at Lake

Pontchartrain. Not then. At the Azores, two years ago, when you were on your flight around the world with the Navy squadron!" She smiled again at Bick's start. "Oh, yes; I knew you at Pontchartrain. But I had a sadness, that very day—a sadness, and I also thought you were—too fresh!"

Bick felt Mercedes' eyes on him in the mirror, but he didn't care. His loneliness of the past days, his sense of being one man pitted against a hostile world, came over him. And the sweet voice and the soft words and fragile fragrance of this girl's skin and hair got into his blood.

"I—I guess I like you, too, Carla," he said unevenly. "More than I care to admit. I'd enjoy Rio, with you. I'd enjoy—almost any place, with you!" Then he looked at her curiously. "What were you doing in the Azores?"

"Visiting my brother," Carla said slowly. "My brother who is now—dead!"

Bick murmured the conventional thing, then started at a low whistle from behind him. Skid was eying him with disapproval.

"Listen—*Crash*," Bick's co-pilot said bitingly, "do we land here? Or do we go on a gabfest clear to Bahia?"

**B**ICK colored when he saw he had overshot the harbor. The girl Carla was smiling at him and saying:

"We could have such good times—Bick. You know it. *If* only you stay at Rio."

"Later," Bick stipulated, "when my job is done. Later we can have those good times. We'll fly. We'll swim. We'll dance, laugh, play, shout together. But first I must do my job!"

"If you leave Rio today," the girl said calmly, "there will not be any good times, Bick. If you leave today, Bick—or ever again, in a Trans-Carib

plane!—you will die, Bick! You—or I!"

"You're lying, Carla," Bick told her. "Say you lie! Say you don't mean that!"

"I'll say I—love you," the girl said, her heart all in her eyes. "I would not lie to the man I love."

And she came to her feet and walked slowly back to join the crew.

Bick's head was swimming with it all when he slithered in a fast bank and hammered in for the landing, settled in a cloud of white spray.

"So she knows me—but hasn't spilled anything. Why?" He made the guess himself. "Because she can't tell how she knows! She can't admit anything like that!"

A patrol boat skimmed the waters and drew up alongside. Bick stepped to an open port and grinned down at the surprised faces. He singled out the Trans-Carib port superintendent.

"Mail," he said evenly. "Trans-Carib's mail—to keep that charter!"

The super winked and looked at the astounded Brazilians in his boat. "Yeah," he said. "The Big Boss called me on the telephone. Nice flying, Crash! You're not getting down?"

"Sure we're getting down. I just wanted to let you know the good news. So you can sprint to the Embassy and put the squeeze on the proper parties to hold our charter!"

The super chuckled and cast a line aboard. "Great flight the Navy made, eh?" he added. "Bick Nelson and his gang just pulled into Valparaiso two hours ago. They leave again tonight."

Bick was very still. "Why tonight?" he asked.

"Danger over, I guess," the super said. "Nelson's idea, they say, anyway. Seems he's sold the government on a Valparaiso-Honolulu demonstration flight. Starting tonight!"

It hit Bick like lightning, and his mind grappled with the hidden significance of the thing.

"Crash is in there working! He has made his contacts, has sold us out, sold the Navy out! But maybe I can still get back there and stop him—stop him before those foreign warplanes hop off with dawn tomorrow morning and—muscle the Trans-Carib charter away from us!"

Skid guessed what was in the other's mind, for he came nearer and said, "Remember, kid—you're headed for trouble if you go back and try to get Crash! Crash has the drop on you! He'll be away, anyway, after you are cooped in jail on a murder charge. And there isn't any way you can stop it!"

"But he's selling the Navy out, man!" Bick whispered hoarsely. "You see the play, don't you? He's contacted the right people and is calling the Navy off! He's selling the Navy out, do you hear?" Bick stormed.

"Yes, but—" Skid started.

"And when he sells the Navy," Bick told him, "he's selling me—and you—and the United States. And the independence of these South American republics!"

"But you—" Skid tried.

"Me, I'm Navy born! I was born for the Navy, and by God, I'm ready to die for the Navy!" Bick roared at the port super: "We fuel now and hit the air! Step on it!"

"Huh?" The surprised superintendent frowned. "Listen, Crash—"

"Step on it!"

He stepped.

THE big boat was lifting clear of Botafogo Bay when there was a sudden flurry near the open port. Mercedes was tearing and clawing at Carla's face; and the Mendoza girl was fighting

back like a fury—while something white fluttered and fell through the air near a waiting speedboat.

Skid slammed the two apart, and Bick snapped, "Tie her up! Tie Mercedes up, Skid! I'll cover you through the rear-view mirror!"

"You fool! You blind, blithering fool!" Mercedes was screaming. "Can't you see what's happened? You fool!"

"Gag her!" Bick roared, as he screwed around in a fast bank. "Gag that hell-cat so she can't talk!"

Later, Carla slid down into the seat next to Bick, and Mercedes watched with murderous eyes.

"Bick," Carla said, "it's the last chance. Turn back, please!"

"No."

"I'm — sorry, Bick. It could have been so—so very nice. Just we too, and the world for us to roam in and play in and work in!"

Bick sat silent.

"And—love in!" Carla whispered.

Bick's hands tightened on the wheel until the knuckles showed white. He turned his head so he wouldn't be looking at her smiling mouth and her clear, hazel eyes.

"No!"

Carla sighed and stood up. With a quick motion, she stooped and kissed him lightly on the cheek.

"It would have been so very nice—Bick!" And she was gone back to the others.

## CHAPTER VII

### Guns Over the Andes

DAK had fallen over Valparaiso, Chile, but the waterfront was seething with activity. Lights along the quay brought the day back and outlined the hundreds of American Bluejackets who paced waterfront on guard, their

bayonet-tipped rifles alert.

In the roadstead, a squadron of destroyers crouched watchfully near two cruisers. Nearer in, a battleship sprawled its bulk in the water and fingered the dark skies with piercing searchlights. Riding at anchor alongside the Trans-Carib hangar was a huge 25-ton Consolidated U. S. Navy flying battleship, its wing lights winking intermittently as the crew raced the last-minute check-up for the Honolulu flight. A tight flock of Navy Curtiss SBC-4's huddled close nearby.

Flight officers hurried along the quay, swarmed over the pits, walked the wings of the warplanes. Fuel was rushed to the waterfront and swiftly transferred to the hungry tanks of the planes. Gunner's mates checked ordnance, examining thousands of rounds of ammunition and inspected machine guns and small-caliber cannon.

Suddenly, everything went still as a faraway drone lay over the subdued bustle. Louder and clear, it came, and the warships came to life with a bang and shot their lights into the eastern sky. They probed deep into the black, limned the near cones of the Andes in a bright glare, and stopped abruptly on a single plane that hurtled out of the black and drilled hard for the harbor of Valparaiso.

Inside Trans-Carib's boat-shed, a hard-boiled superintendent screamed his relief and roared:

"He's done it! But God, man, who else *could* do it other than Crash Cassidy! He's done it! They're back!"

One of the Navy pilots looked over his shoulder at a lank, red-headed, spare man who stood watching with tight eyes.

"The boy isn't bad, Nelson," he said. "The boy isn't bad at all!"

Crash Cassidy grunted something unintelligible and eased out of the door.

He was heard yelling:

"Get a move on, you punks! Hell, you're slower than syrup in winter!"

Sparks Malone eyed Gunner's Mates O'Kelley and Oshinsky.

"How do you like it?" he asked flatly.

"I don't," Oshinsky answered roughly. "I don't like any heel, and that's what Nelson has been lately."

"Ever since they grounded him for blasting the waterfront at Annapolis!" O'Kelley put in. He sighed. "Oh, well—he was a good guy, once!"

A muffled roar of sound came from the massed gobs and officers when the giant *Gaucho Clipper* came down fast and kicked over into a dive. It hurtled across the brilliantly lighted water and swayed recklessly in a fishtail landing.

"He's crashing!" someone yelled.

And just then the Clipper straightened and touched the water in a baby's-kiss landing. A roar of appreciation went up. But it was lost in the thunder of the Clipper's four motors as the giant plant careened over to the boatshed at a dangerously fast pace.

**I**NSIDE the cabin, Bick said over his shoulder to Skid:

"Here's the dope, fella. We try and talk that other bird—you know?—into sense. But if he gets tough, we jump him and try to get his flying battleship. Complete with crew!"

"Why?"

"Maybe we can't stop the take-off for Honolulu. But one thing is certain—and that is, we can do a little rough-house work back in the Andes for as long as we can steal that boat. Get it?"

Skid said, "I got it!" without turning his face from the *Gaucho Clipper's* crew. He raised his voice and spoke sharply when he said:

"Get back there. I say to get back! You, Carla! Don't come any closer!"

"I just want tell—er—*Crash* something," the girl murmured.

"It'll save. You look more like you are trying to butt in on our talk! Trying to interrupt. Or to listen!"

Carla ignored him. Her face was drawn. "Bick," she said gently. "Bick! It's our last chance—yours and mine! It will be too late, in another minute."

"Back, Carla," Bick said, as he swung the boat neatly alongside the shed. "You hold these birds, Skid, while I take a look around!" And he was scrambling down the spiral ladder.

He came out of the shadows into the shed and the super roared:

"You did it, boy! You did it!" And then he stopped. "Look, Crash—that heel, Bick Nelson, wants to see you. In my office." He said, "You know, that guy is a ringer for you, son."

"You're telling me!" Bick murmured, as he stepped past the man and went into the office.

Crash Cassidy waited for him behind the door, and locked it swiftly when Bick had come in. Crash shook his automatic like a warning finger and asked:

"You going to behave yourself?"

Bick stared at the man and tried to control his breathing.

"What's your game, Cassidy?" he asked coldly. "You're selling out the Navy!"

"Oh, no," Crash said. "I'm just fattening my bank account, sonny boy. I know the set-up down here—and I know our European pals are going to win out anyway." He grinned. "Looking at it the right way, I'm a patriot. I'm saving our government money and lives. That's a lot of Who-Struck-John about those guys wanting to establish military bases, now. Sure, they want the Trans-Carib airline. But that's all!"

Bick laughed mirthlessly. "And the

secret base in the Andes, with all those war planes ready to strike at dawn! That's a lot of hot air, too, eh?" He waved Crash's surprise down. "Cut the act, Cassidy. I've *seen* them, even been bombed by them!"

Crash's gun wavered. "Huh?" And then he grinned. "You nearly got me that time, pal. I'm after money, sure; but—well, I still got a little love for the old U. S. A. ticking in my heart!" He laughed outright. "Especially after my very illuminating last few days in the Navy!"

"I'm telling you," Bick said gravely, "that they have a secret base up in the Andes. In a lake! Figure that one out! And that when you leave here, you leave South America wide open to an attack by these babies; wide open to the destruction of the Panama Canal, even!"

"You'd better shut your face, now," Crash told him icily. "I've found out that your rep for being a smart hombre isn't all bilge water. I'm not taking chances on being talked out of my hard-earned dough, and into any Navy frame-ups. Shut up—and don't move until I have you tied hand and foot." He chuckled. "And then you can't move, until it's too late!"

**A** HISSING sound interrupted his movement toward Bick, and Crash Cassidy stood stock-still, unbelievingly widening his eyes. The hissing came from behind a packing case, and the snout of a tommy gun followed the hissing and came into view. Over the ugly barrel of it, a smiling little brown man said:

"So ver-ry sor-ry, gentlemen, to disturb. I must ask you to put your hands very quietly up—so ver-ry sor-ry to ask, gentlemen!"

Bick stared in stunned wonder. "And just who the hell are you?" he gasped.

Crash dropped the gun he was holding and raised his hands. On his face was genuine stupefaction. The Oriental moved to where the gun was and kicked it clear. He pocketed it without moving his eyes from the all-but-twin men.

"So ver-ry sor-ry," he hissed again. "I look for Crash Cassidy. I find not one Crash Cassidy, but two. So I must kill both!"

In the silence, his eyes came slightly open and then dropped to the men's ringhands—the left hands. He blinked when he saw two almost identifical rings on the ring-fingers of those hands.

"So ver-ry sor-ry," he hissed. "But—I do not understand! Two—rings! So sor-ry, but must ask you to hold hands near, so I can see rings—Yes, thank you, like that—"

The almond-shaped eyes hardened when they lit on the curious design of the ring Bick wore—the ring that Crash had switched for Bick's own, back there in Carvel Hall. He hissed his pleasure, and bowed at the same time to Crash Cassidy.

"I salute honorable Navy ring," he said politely to the adventurer. He slid his hand into his jacket and brought out a wicked-looking, ivory-handled dagger.

"Navy ring so much like that of my late friend, Ledbetter Daw', I salute!"

Then he said to Bick, "Turn head, please, so that neck show. So ver-ry sor-ry. I wish not noise, please. Knife kill quick—like it kill radio man at hospital. So ver-ry sor-ry, gentlemen. So sor-ry for you, Crash Cassidy—" he said, his hand coming up and his eyes measuring the distance to Bick's jugular vein.

It was then Crash Cassidy made the mistake of his life. The last mistake of his entire, mistaken life, and the greatest one.

"Get him proper, Katsiburo," he said with a grin.

Realization dawned in the brown man's eyes and in Crash Cassidy's mind at one and the same instant. They moved simultaneously, but the blade of the dagger sped true and hard in the room's light. Crash gasped and tried to tear the thing from where it was quivering in his neck. Blood gushed down inside his tunic and soaked into his shirt and underclothes. He sank down to his knees.

Ito Katsiburo turned to Bick Nelson with a low bow. "So ver-ry sor-ry," he said. "My honorable brother's spirit rests with this revenge. The last of his murderers—" the man hissed—"the last one is dead!"

The little man didn't see Crash get the dagger loose from his torn throat, didn't see the man struggle to his feet with the last of his life's blood ebbing from his torn jugular vein, the blade held outward in his fist.

He didn't see nor even feel the slide of the dagger as Crash Cassidy ripped it into his side and his heart at one and the same instant.

Crash Cassidy and the brown avenger fell dead at Bick Nelson's feet.

**B**ICK stepped from the darkened office, back in his old uniform again. It hadn't been much fun, stripping it off Crash Cassidy's blood-soaked corpse. He walked quickly to the Clipper boat and called to the co-pilot.

"Skid? Skid? Come down here, fella! I want to show you something." He went up a step or two into the well of the bridge and winked at Skid Harris's goggling eyes. "Easy, Mister! Don't give it away! I'm Navy again! Everything depends on these last few minutes!"

"What about the crew?"

"We'll chance it," he said. "It'll

only be a minute. Step on it, over to that big Consolidated flying battleship. We're going—*joy-hopping!*"

As they went out on the wing, there was a splash on the port side of the big Clipper, and a woman's scream from the bridge. The sound of someone swimming frantically came to them both—someone swimming for the Consolidated, desperately.

"What the—" Bick started to say. And stopped as suddenly. One of the sentries on duty at the boatshed had his rifle poised, was yelling:

"Halt!" Once he called it, and a chill of apprehension went over the whole waterfront. "Halt!" came the warning again. Then: "Halt! Or I fire!"

The swimmer strove on for two more strokes, was reaching for the step of the great Consolidated boat loaded with torpedoes and bombs and ammunition. Bick stood transfixed, unable to move or speak. A hand came out of the water—and the other hand jumped to join it. A figure started out of the water.

*Crack! Crack! Crack-crack!*

The figure stiffened, slid back into the water. The sentry lowered his smoking rifle. A roar broke across the bay and sirens screamed out in wailing chorus. Signal lights leaped alive on the warships. But Bick, his face set and his eyes agonized, was speeding to a Navy crash-boat. He pulled Skid after him and barked:

"That Consolidated. And hurry!" A bugler stood in the stern-sheets. Bick motioned to him. "Sound formation call," he snapped. "The entire squadron!"

"Aye, sir!"

The sweet notes of the bugle lay over the uproar. Another and another bugle picked it up. Lights winked on wingtips, motors smashed alive, hatches slammed in the big flying battleship,

and the squadron of warplanes leaped ahead over the water after the racing shape of the big Consolidated.

Skid Harris stared at O'Kelley, Oshinsky and Malone and back again at Bick Nelson. Oshinsky blinked and asked:

"What th' hell goes on?"

"I don't know," O'Kelley said, his face a study.

"Hell," Malone spoke suddenly. "Did Nelson get hurt? His eyes? Look! You'd almost swear he was crying!"

It was a weird sight the squadron made, as it fled on ghostly wings of incredible speed through the moonlight. Like a sight from distant Mars, it was, with the pale, buttery moon looking down on the white, conical peaks of the Andes.

Bick peered below, turned once and stared at Skid. The co-pilot squinted his eyes and shook his head.

"Not yet, fella. Not yet!"

A watery crater slid by, glassy-black in the revealing moonlight. Then, suddenly, an ugly gap of black showed against the snow of a higher peak. Bick snapped to Malone:

"Sparks! Signal the squadron: drop flares, circle after me, stand by for orders—when I give you the signal!"

"Aye, sir!"

**T**ENSION came over them as Sparks spoke into the mouthpiece of his set:

"Attention all planes—Attention, all planes! Orders! At a given signal, parachute flares are to be released—"

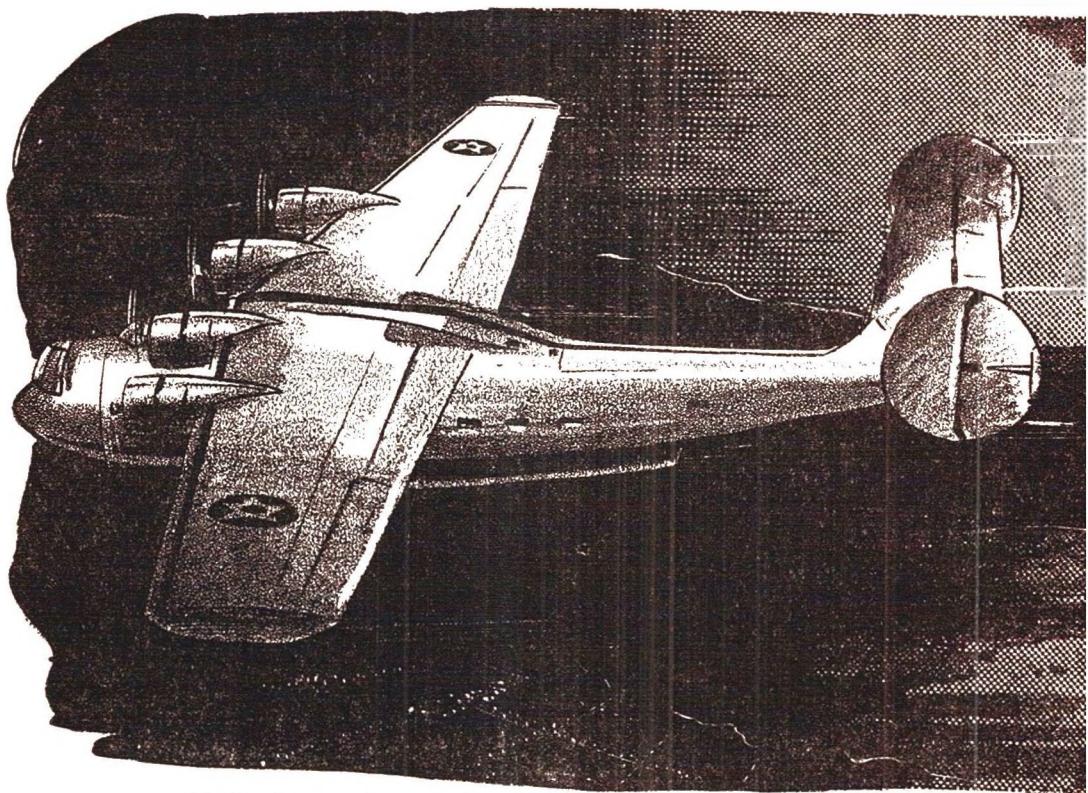
He droned on with it, got the winked lights for acknowledgment, saluted Bick.

"Orders received and acknowledged, sir."

"Stand by for orders," Bick said.

"Aye, sir!"

"Oshinsky! Man the after gun!"



The bomber roared on as a sheet of flame leaped from the lake

"Aye, sir!"

"Sparks? O'Kelley? Man the bomb releases!"

Both men blinked, but moved at lightning speed. "Aye, aye, sir!"

"You, Skid — drop down alongside me. I may want help!"

Skid couldn't help the instinctive "Aye, sir!" that he answered.

For another tense minute, the formation flew in an echelon of echelons; and then a larger crater lake loomed. From above, it was a bit of long-forgotten water at peace with itself and with the surrounding peaks of the Andes. But Bick knew better!

He sighed at Skid's nod of agreement and moved his hand forward to his instrument panel. His lights blinked knowingly and the lonely peaks bloomed in the birth of half a hundred flares. But still the surface of that lake remained calm, peaceful.

Bick called, "All ready?"

"Aye!"

"Back to your post, Sparks! Orders: Stand by to observe. Bombers ready for any sign of attack! All guns to be manned."

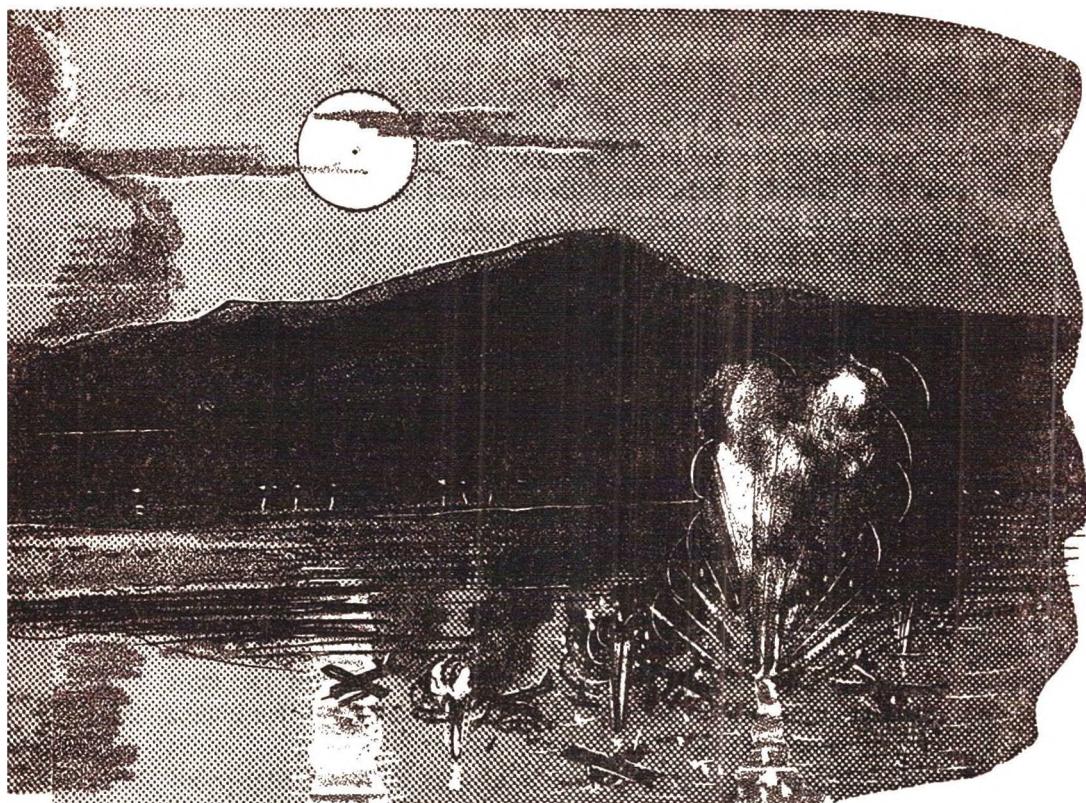
He explained to Skid: "I'll try that water out with a bomb and see what I can stir up, fella. Maybe, after all, I am guessing wrong. Maybe!"

O'Kelley's face mirrored the amazed blinks of wing-lights with which the orders were acknowledged.

"Balmy!" he whispered. "Clean balmy, looking in the Andes for an attack!"

But in the Navy, orders were orders, and you didn't question them even if you thought the superior officer who dealt them out was ready for the goofy-house.

Bick understood; but he said nothing. Instead, he watched the echelon



of echelons climb high, then banked the big Consolidated in a smart peel-off and screamed down for that lake below.

"O'Kelley," he called calmly, "release one 500 lb. bomb. We'll hit that crater lake dead center!"

"Aye, sir!"

O'Kelley tripped a toggle and the Consolidated exulted in the relieved weight with a rocking jump. In the light of the flares, the bomb was a black tear-drop plummeting toward the blacker, shiny waters. Then it disappeared *without a splash!* A sheet of flame leaped skyward and then subsided.

For a long minute, nothing happened; a long minute in which Bick's strained face grew tauter, more lined. Then the whole surface of the lake seemed to rise—*was rising!*—and with it came a ring of lights and the stab of powerful beams searching the sky above.

Orange-red flame belched from two spots and the shattering roar of it lay over the Andes loud above the drone of motors. Antiaircraft guns!

"Got it!" Bick screamed in triumph. "That's no lake! It's a false top-construction, built to look like a lake—a false top, and under it is a fully-manned warport!"

He swung in a slewing turn and yelped: "Sparks! Orders: *Drop all flares; bomb objective in echelon of sections! First section, peel away and start firing!*"

"Aye, sir!"

A FLIGHT of European-made planes scudded through the eerie light and rose against the conical backdrop of snow. A section of Navy dive-bombers nosed in and peeled off in rapid succession. Flame rippled from wings and after-pits and fore-turrets as the Navy

fighters poured a rain of destruction down on the surprised invaders from across the Atlantic.

The flight that was taking off broke in confusion, some planes crashing hard into the peak dead ahead, others fluttering to the ground, to burst into lurid flames as the bombs rained down and geysered up again in torrents of screaming, piercing metal.

The big Consolidated became a diving maniac of a plane, dipping low to loose shattering bombs, which, in their vicious explosive power, churned the water into a raging turmoil that blasted the foundations of the cunningly rigged airdrome. Then it dived recklessly through the turmoil of smaller planes, wing and fore-turret guns yammering a threnody of vengeance.

*Rat-tat-tat-tat-tat!* chattered the machine guns through the hell of noise. Bulky archie fire joined it, heavy at first, then spasmodically, as the life's blood spilled out of those men down below. The place was a chaos of smashed ships and burning pyres, with mangled bodies of men strewn through it all.

For another ten minutes, guns roared over the Andes as the Navy's ace pilot led his men in a war of extermination—that Peace, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness might live on in the Americas!

Then finally, all was still below—Still in the death that was the burial ground of the Andes—Still as the silent, high-peaked cones that had long since ceased to pulse and to smoke and fume hatred and despair on those who lived in their shadows—Still and dead and motionless for the damning judgment of Eternity—

Bick turned and gave wordless orders to Sparks Malone.

"Aye, sir!"

"Cease firing!" went out over the air to the rest of the squadron.

The guns over the Andes stilled, and only a faint spiral of smoke marked what had once been the warport of an aggressive European nation. The steady drone of the motors faded in the distance and became one with the cold, high peaks.

## CHAPTER VIII

### The Big Guy

BICK NELSON stopped in his tracks outside the room where the body lay. He stared at the sallow, somber, taciturn man who faced him.

"You!"

Commander Ledbetter Dawes nodded his head slightly. There was contrition and apology in his eyes, and more. There was a plea for understanding.

"I always wear a bullet-proof shirt next to my skin, Nelson," he said gently. "I had to play 'dead' when Crash Cassidy tried to kill me. I had to, before he got wise and aimed for my head!"

"But you didn't have to *stay* dead!" Bick said coldly. His eyes swung to the door, as if trying to see that still form that lay beyond the door, and beyond everything mortal. "You didn't have to *stay* dead!"

"I did," the Navy's ace Intelligence operative told him gravely. "I had to let Crash Cassidy have his head, or he would have spoiled the whole game. He could have given you away in a minute! And that would have spoiled the show! You, Nelson, were America's one and only hope. I had to let you take your chances and play it alone."

Bick nodded wearily. "That Oriental? And the ring?"

"My mistake," Dawes admitted. "I told you there was one interval in Cas-

sidy's life I couldn't make fit? That was it! Look!"

Dawes pulled the ring from his pocket, gave it to Bick to hold, while he took a vial from another pocket and poured a bit of the liquid in it on the surface of the ring.

The plain gold moon of the ring turned red—red as the red of that Oriental emblem—the Full Moon. And from the network of lines that surrounded it, some stood out clearly, in solid black.

"A secret European-Asiatic spy ring," Dawes said. "There were ten of those agents working in Mongolia. Two Orientals, and seven Europeans. And Crash Cassidy! The Europeans made a secret deal with the Russians,\* and the gang was in a tight spot. Crash and the Europeans saved themselves, at the expense of the boys from Asia. They framed the Asiatics to get rounded up, and left them holding the bag. Those poor suckers were tortured to death by Mongolian bandits!"

"My God!"

"One of them was Saumi Katsiburo. Saumi was Ito's brother—the brother of the man who killed Crash Cassidy. Ito had sworn vengeance, and he got it."

"And died himself."

"We," Dawes said patiently, "are born to die, Nelson."

Bick's face went tragic again. "You've got the others? You have Mercedes under arrest?"

\* There is a certain similarity between this fictional situation and the actual deal that Nazi Germany made with Soviet Russia a few days before Hitler invaded Poland. Prior to this deal, Nazi Germany, Italy, Japan, Hungary and Spain were all partners in the "anti-Comintern front"—a kind of political alliance directed against the Soviet Union. But as soon as Hitler and Stalin made their peace, the anti-Communist front blew up. The Japanese cabinet fell, to be succeeded by a more moderate regime, and Japanese openly charged that Hitler had double-crossed them.—Ed.

Dawes said, "Well, hardly. Mercedes is one of my best little workers. It was she who came across Cassidy, and I figured out the deal to slide you into his place. Only I didn't realize that Crash had got wind of Katsiburo's *Blitzkrieg* and was trying to get an out! I didn't know he was setting you up for Katsiburo to knock down until it was too late to act."

"And—and—" Bick looked at the closed door again. "Carla?"

"One of the best, son! Though she was on the wrong side. Carla von Weigstaffe Mendoza, to give her the full of her name. Her brother was *Herr* Undersecretary Max von Weigstaffe—killed by Katsiburo at a certain foreign Embassy in Buenos Aires."

Bick said, "Hell, but she put it over on me, too! Until I saw her swimming for that Consolidated—and realized that she was out to stop me that way if she couldn't any other."

"Carla," Dawes said slowly, "is one of those proud European aristocrats. She would rather be dead, son, than live to see what her people are coming to."

HE looked at Bick quizzically. "Be that as it may, Mercedes tells me you did a fair job of winning her over. It was Carla, you know, who warned you that time at Cartagena. *Evidar Guayaquil*—but it was Carla, too, who dropped a note as the Clipper pulled out of Rio—a note that we got, or you wouldn't be here!"

"What was it?" Bick asked.

"A request that this European air-fleet blast you *all* out of the sky, as you fought your way back here from Rio! We got it, Nelson. That's how close you came to not getting here. But even so, I have a hunch that kid liked you!"

Bick turned away and went into the  
(Continued on page 122)

# SPITFIRE SQUADRON

## By Arch Whitehouse

ILLUSTRATION BY JULIAN S. KRUPA

"HERE we go again!" said Whitey Trail, standing beside his own Spitfire. "Always a madhouse of noise, then no enemy!"

The Spitfires of No. 65 Squadron, with their brand-new squadron crests emblazoned on their cowlings, stood in line on the tarmac at Arbroth a few miles northeast of Edinburgh. The squadron crest was a circular garter design, surmounted with a royal crown. In the center a black lion stood in a challenging attitude before a palisade of flared-out broadswords. Below on

the ribbon were boldly lettered the words: "*Vi Et Armis*."

Ever since he had joined this strange outfit, Whitford "Whitey" Trail had wondered what that "*Vi Et Armis*" could mean. He had no intention of asking these Englishmen. Most of them had been to Oxford or Cambridge, whereas Whitey Trail had never gone much further than

**What was this strange fear that made Whitey Trail shirk his duty just because of a bridge pylon?**





The Spitfire zoomed around hard as Whitey Trail snapped a wing down, just clearing the bridge

his Freshman year in high school. He'd forgotten the most elementary rules of Latin. (*Vi Et Armis*—With force of arms. See page 50.)

Somehow he hated that squadron crest. The flared-out broadswords reminded him of a row of racing pylons. Anything that stuck up in the air reminded him of racing pylons, and he cursed every pylon in the world to perdition. There was a reason for that, too.

But they were tightening their high-speed belts<sup>1</sup> and snapping 'chute harness snaffles. A scrawncing siren raged and ranted over the brick building that was serving as a Recording Office. Spitfire props were snarling as they snapped into glinting rhythm. Men in white coveralls with the squadron crest embroidered on their breast pockets, threw long legs over the cockpit coamings and dropped inside, their arms and hands held high as they wriggled their rumps into the confined quarters.

Squadron Leader "Chunk" Hartney, a guy with a monocle who had a row of ribbons nine inches long across his chest, was running along the tarmac with his batman attempting to fasten his coverall at the gallop. Hartney had won those ribbons more than twenty years before with the same outfit, when it was flying Camels outside Baieulle. He was still in there punching—and flying Spitfires,<sup>2</sup> and everyone wondered how he did it.

<sup>1</sup> All pilots in British high-speed squadrons are compelled to wear a broad belt to support their stomach muscles in fast dives and tight maneuvers.  
—Author.

<sup>2</sup> The Supermarine "Spitfire I," manufactured by Vickers-Armstrongs, Ltd., at Southampton, England, is said to be the fastest military airplane in the world. It is by and large the outcome of the Schneider Trophy Contests held for a number of years in England, the lessons from these races having been incorporated in this particular warplane.  
—Ed.

The siren scrawnced and Flight Lieutenant Meredith Pawl, the skipper of "C" Flight, raised himself on his elbows and glanced along the third row of Spitfires and got the signal.

Whitey Trail, the only American in the outfit, gave his impression of a salute as he got the office from his flight leader. Already Squadron Leader Hartney was clambering up a small ladder to get aboard as he blazed out orders over his shoulder.

"A madhouse," repeated Trail as he made himself comfortable and waited. "Well, I hope we see some action this time. I'm getting sick of air raid warnings."

A flight sergeant, braving the whip of the slipstream, climbed up on the wing and wrenched the cockpit cowling back.

"'C' Flight will take the southern tangent, sir. From Arbroth to Fife Ness and down as far as Berwick."

He pronounced "Berwick" as though it had been spelled "Berrick," which was just another reason Whitey Trail felt uncomfortable here—at least when he was on the ground. Chunk Hartney, the squadron leader, the guy with the monocle, seemed like the only bird he could talk to, and there was a reason for that.

The flight sergeant disappeared while Whitey Trail glanced at the strip map. He plugged in his earphone jack and snapped the radio switch, caught the test sentences coming from Pawl, leader of his flight.

"—stay together all the time. You can't risk being lost out there," Pawl was saying crisply. "Some of you new men are not acquainted with this area, so stick together. Reports are that a scouting formation has passed over Dogger Bank. That's all."

TRAIL snapped the cockpit hatch above and the small fold-down door

at his left elbow. He checked the oxygen bottle, saw that "A" Flight was already whanging away down the field that a few months before had been a golf course fairway. Three weeks before Whitey Trail had hardly known there was a war on, and yet here he was in the sky-blue uniform of the British Royal Air Force, a single ring of silver braid on his sleeve and the embroidered wings of a pilot officer on his breast.

"All because of that damned pylon at Cleveland," Trail said at least ten times a day.

"B" Flight was rolling away to take position now. These Spitfire birds simply planted their ships out there on the grass as tight as they could get them; then, on signal from the leader, who had narrow red wingtips, all let the Rolls-Royce engines out and stood on each other's propwash and raced away.

"And I used to think those High Hat guys at the races used to put on a show," Whitey Trail husked every time he watched this mad performance. "But here I am doing it too, and somehow I like it. I like this guy Hartney too, even though he does wear a monocle. The guy sure can fly."

And that was all that mattered in Whitey Trail's book. He didn't care who they were, where they went to school, what accent they seemed to affect or how many rings they had on their sleeves—as long as they could fly. That was his creed, morning, noon and night.

There was only one thing wrong with flying—but that was all past now. It was those damned pylons at Cleveland, Ohio, back in the States. Every time Trail looked up at the wind-sock, it reminded him of a pylon. A radio mast back of the little village two miles away gave him the willies, too.

But there was no time for further reflection. Skipper Pawl was fanning his

rudder around and they were rolling out for position. "A" and "B" were already away and hammering through the skies for their areas to stop the raiders.

The six Spitfires wheeled into position on the tarmac and stood there, panting and anxious for action. Their pilots got a questioning order from the leader, and one by one they reported as ready for flight. Pawl's hand went up and six hands began to move the throttles up gently. The recognition light behind Pawl's head blinked twice, held it and then snapped again. The brakes came off, the throttles went up again and the Spitfire tails stiffened out. They trembled a trifle at the trailing edges and then they were away.

#### *Spitfire Squadron!*

They turned in blanket formation as they approached the leaden coastline, turned back for the field and one by one retracted their landing gears. Then they huddled back and warped in closer as they turned again and began their climb for position, before carrying out their patrol over the specified territory.

Presently—"All guns loaded and oxygen gear handy?" demanded Pawl from up front.

The order rasped through Whitey Trail's head-set, and he always cringed somehow at inter-plane radio communication. It seemed to cut off all privacy and the dignity of single-seater flight. Always, when he was glorying in flight and the soul-satisfying beauty of command, that damned radio would blare out and bring him back to earthly things again.

But Whitey Trail checked his eight Browning machine guns, ran his eyes over the bank of instruments again and tried to become accustomed to reading the word "Petrol" for fuel. It was all so different and screwy at times, and yet—there was no pylon business connected with it.

The Spitfires of "C" Flight turned south and huddled together at 8,000 feet and raced toward the tip of Fife Ness. Below them rimmed the Scottish coastline, the Firth of Tay, Bell Rock Light; Carnoustie, the birthplace of many Scottish golfers; Leuchars, training station for the Fleet Air Arm, where Navy fighters were taught to take the thud of catapult effect. The great St. Andrews golf course, and then the grim spire of the light on the Isle of May.

Then they got what they'd come out to intercept.

## CHAPTER II

### Pylon Fright

OUT of nowhere came a formation of black Heinkel 111s,\* their nose turrets twinkling with gunfire. A Spitfire to the left of Whitey Trail twisted hard and almost swerved into him. The American gasped, reacted like a bull-fighter and yanked his mount away. The swerving Spitfire shook its head, nosed up and blew itself apart.

Whitey Trail let out a wholesome scream and lost position. There were Heinkels all around them now. Pawl was screeching into the radio somewhere but his words meant nothing to Trail. He was trying to discover a manner of staying alive. That explosion had burned a hole clean through him, and he felt that someone had jabbed a long icicle into his vitals.

But some of the Spitfires were in the thick of it now. Trail saw Pawl calmly lead two others smack into the center of the turning Heinkels. The three Spitfires together released their spume of death, and a Heinkel disintegrated in mid-air. It threw a motor nacelle clean across the sky. Its tail came up and

\* Heinkel 111s are light German fighter-bombers, capable of about 261 m.p.h.—Author.

over, to beat a mad drumfire on the metal fuselage.

It swirled savagely and rammed itself full into another Heinkel and the two locked wings, hung there with a tangle of dural fluttering away and then, nodding their metal heads in resignation, they fell away. Before Whitey Trail realized what had happened, Pawl had swung the rest of the Spitfires back into position and had "picked up" the squadron's only Yank with as neat a bit of maneuvering as one would care to witness.

Trail fell into position sheepishly. The rest of the Heinkels were somewhere below and ahead. They were heading for the wide mouth of the Firth of Forth.

The American started down after them, but a scream from Pawl up front yanked him back.

"Stay with us, Trail," barked the Englishman over the radio. "The others are upstairs, man!"

Whitey Trail drew his stick back and glanced up through the glare on top of his windscreen. There he could see another formation of German bombers—the real thing, this time. Big Dornier Do. 17s\*—the "Flying Pencil" outfit. The suckers could do 292 m.p.h., if it got tough.

"What a dope I must look like," Trail muttered, forgetting his microphone set just below his chin.

"Don't worry about it. Forget it," answered Pawl from up front. "This is the first time you've seen the enemy. Take it easy and stay with us."

Whitey Trail frowned and glanced down at the mike. He started to swear at it, but he held his tongue this time.

"A guy can't even think in these

\* Dornier Do. 17s are high-speed medium-type bombers of fairly long range. They are mid-wing cantilever monoplanes with twin 950 h.p. Daimler-Benz liquid-cooled engines.—Author.

boilers," he reflected. "I forgot that mike."

Then he turned back and watched the two Heinkels and the wreckage of the Spitfire hit the water a mile east of the Isle of May light.

He wondered who had gone down in that mess, but he didn't say it aloud this time. He wondered what they would do; what they would say when they got back. He tried to picture the scene, even though Squadron Leader Pawl was fighting to get up at the Dorniers above and stop them from reaching the bridge.

Now the guns of the Ack-Ack batteries were blazing away. The bracketing shells etched their four-spot designs on the blue sky, and the fifth shell cranged smack in the middle of the Dorniers. One bomber drew away gingerly and left the formation.

The Heinkels below were being set upon by the two-seater Demon<sup>1</sup> squadron, manned by the City of Edinburgh Squadron, an Auxiliary Air Force mob—Saturday afternoon pilots, the Spitfire guys called them. But they were breaking up the Heinkels with their rear turret fire and splitting them wide.

Then the Spitfires were in the thick of it. The Dorniers were nosing down the chute and heading for the Firth of Forth bridge.<sup>2</sup> The old city of Edinburgh lay on the southern side of the Firth. The antiaircraft guns from the castle below were spatting, and more guns from Hollyrood Hill joined the mad chorus.

ALL hell broke loose now. Spitfires tangled with Dorniers. Demons went headlong into the Heinkels. Guns chattered from the leading edges of the winged fighters. Vickers-K<sup>3</sup> guns cracked from the Thompson-Nash turrets aboard the two-seaters. Parabolums wailed and thumped their uneven tango, and the Knott-Bremse weapons

coughed and hurled their 7.9-mm. stuff all over the sky.

Whitey Trail lost all sense of time, all sense of speed, all sense of safety. He bashed in and out and sought black Germans. His guns fanged and raged. Machines crashed together in mid-air. Wings came away and became menaces to navigation. Chunks of dural flopped and floated about, hammered at tail sections and left great dents in slithering fuselages.

They were down low now. The raiders had passed the bridge and were hammering for the vessels anchored off Rosyth. Trail cut one off, and it turned and faltered on back toward the bridge. The American hammered after it and set himself for a killing burst. He steadied himself in his seat, hitched the belt tighter and looked around.

Pawl and another Spitfire guy were off to his left, hammering death into a faltering Dornier. They had it in flames now, and Trail decided to emulate their show, single-handed.

He went after the floundering bomber, checked his guns again—but champed on the memory of the exploding Spitfire. Then he revolted against it all. The memory of the Spitfire, the explosion, the terrible tangle of it—and pylons!

The German bomber swerved dangerously close to the northern tower of

<sup>1</sup> Demons are almost obsolete two-seater fighters, now being used mainly by Auxiliary Air Force Squadrons.—Author.

<sup>2</sup> The Firth of Forth Bridge, over which much present-day air fighting has taken place, is a mile and a half in length and 450 feet high. All the stunts pulled in the story can be done here. The writer has flown under this bridge several times himself.—Author.

<sup>3</sup> The Vickers-K gun is the new movable weapon now being used by the British in place of the old Lewis gun. This Vickers-K uses .303 ammunition, is fed from a drum and has a very high rate of fire.—Author.

the Firth of Forth bridge. Below, across the suspended runway, steamed a scarlet train. There was a gleaming festoon of suspension latticework—and that damned tower standing up like a pylon.

Something drained out of Whitey Trail. He leaned hard into his belt and held his stomach down. He took one glance into the Aldis sight, caught the girder lines in the structure of the bridge tower—and funk'd it!

The German bomber leap-frogged across the dangling suspension span and tried to release its load. Whitey Trail closed his eyes and let the stick go over, and the bomber cleared.

There were no frantic heroics. He said nothing. Not even a sob came to release the tension on his constricted throat. He simply quit cold and he knew it.

The bomber was across the bridge now and her bombs were fanging deep into the Firth below. So the bridge was safe—the floundering Dornier had missed. But Whitey Trail had let her get away.

"Damn those pylons to hell!" he screamed, and then clapped his hand over the microphone that hung from his neck.

He peered about. Flight Lieutenant Pawl was flying alongside of him, his face tense and drawn as he stared wildly at the Spitfire flown by the American. He could have said something over the inter-plane radio—but he didn't.

Somehow, the Dorniers and Heinkels were driven off. The cocky Demons with their Saturday afternoon pilots at the sticks harassed them all the way out to sea and then turned back, bleeding and battered, but triumphant.

Somehow, four Spitfires of "C" Flight returned to Arbroth. One had gone down into the sea; a second had plowed up a fairway at Kirkcaldy.

Pawl led the flight in. Whitey Trail almost forgot to drop his landing gear until the undercarriage siren\* behind his head began to wail. He snapped the lever down low near his feet and waited for the light on the dash to go green, and then went in again.

But there was no triumph for Whitey Trail. He simply put her down, checked his flaps, rolled her up to the cab-rank and followed the rest across the apron to the Flight Office, where they were to make out their reports.

**N**OT even "Bagpipe" McBride, his Scottish fitter, seemed pleased at his return. That worthy surveyed the Spitfire with a wary eye, checked it from prop to rudder. Then he gave Trail a guilty glance.

"Ye'll no hae ony bullet holes, Muster Trail, sor," he said.

"Say it again, in English," growled Trail.

"Ah mean tae say, ye ha no damage, sor. Nae bullet holes. Ye were no i' the fight, sor?"

"Of course I was in the fight! Where the deuce do you think I was?"

"Ah dinna ken, sor. But Muster Pawl said ye no shot at the Jarmin who were trying tae bomb the bridge, sor."

"He said that, Bagpipe?" asked Trail, as he loosened his belt.

"Ay, sor. An' ye see, ye hae no bullet holes, sor."

"No. Well, that's your luck. You won't have to work on her long. You can practice on that damned squeal-bag of yours instead."

"The pipes, sor, are the true Highland instrument, sor. The pipes hae lead Scottish so'jers fra centuries, sor. Ye canna larn the pipes i' a few months, sor."

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\* The undercarriage gear siren sounds when the throttle is brought back a certain distance, or when the flaps are lowered for a landing.—Author.

"And who the hell wants to?" Trail exploded. "Those damned screaming ear-piercers!"

"I do, sor," explained the mutton-faced McBride, his pride cut to the quick. He stood there and watched his pilot stalk off. Then the Scot ran his hands over the smooth surfaces of the Spitfire, in the hope that he too could boast of a few bullet holes *his pilot* had collected in defense of the Firth.

There wasn't a scratch anywhere—and "Muster Trail" had said unkind things about the bagpipes, to add insult to injury.

"Ah, weel," reflected Bagpipe McBride, "yon lad's an Amurrican, an' ye canna figure the Amurricans. They say they be neutral, and then they come over here and join the Air Force. Vurra strange people, the Amurricans!"

Trail knew nothing of all this, of course, but he sensed a new tinge of hostility when he thumped into the Flight Office, his parachute pack slapping at his thighs.

Pawl was there, tired and oil-streaked. Johnny Murchison, who was supposed to be some Earl's son, but who never mentioned it, was squatting on an ammo box, scrawling away on a sheet of buff paper. Flying Officer Wagstaff, a former Schneider Cup pilot, sat on the corner of the deal table that went for a desk. He was thoughtfully sucking on a short end of pencil.

A fluttery corporal with two stripes on his arm skated about, trying to hand out report forms and pencils. He shoved one rudely at Trail and handed two message flimsies to young Pawl.

"What's this for?" demanded Whitey Trail.

"Your action report. You fill it out and tell what happened—in your own words," explained Pawl. "You've made them out before. What's the matter?"

"Nothing. I just thought—"

"Look here, Trail," said Pawl, turning back to the American. "Why did you let that Dornier get over the bridge like that? He might have blasted that main tower of the bridge out. You didn't fire a shot at him."

"I know. You see," faltered Trail, "I—I was afraid—"

"You were *what*?" barked Pawl.

"He said he was afraid," laughed Johnny Murchison. "Well, at least he'll have it all over the rest of us. We were all afraid, but none of us will admit it. I was scared pink when I saw old Grumbler go down. But I shan't put that in my report."

Wagstaff was still sucking on his pencil and staring strangely at Trail.

"I've been afraid ever since I first saw an airplane," he said. "The damn things scare hell out of me. Any airplane."

**P**AWL turned and stared at the Schneider Cup star, and then put it down to a damned nice gesture to make Trail feel better. That was Wagstaff all over. But the man *had* set a record in the Schneider Cup.

"I—I didn't mean it that way," floundered Trail again.

"So you weren't afraid?"

"Well, yes. But I mean, I was afraid I'd shoot him down smack on the bridge. He was right over it, you know."

"Yes, I know. He got away from you by skating around the main buttress, didn't he?"

"Well—er—yes, he did. But I was afraid he'd fall on the bridge and blow up. That would have done as much damage as a bomb, wouldn't it?"

"I don't know," replied Pawl, turning back to his report. "But that was damned fast thinking—if that's the way you thought."

"I wouldn't have thought of it," ad-

mitted Murchison. "I simply can't think with you bellowing at me all the time, Pawl. Always bellowing over the radio. I don't get half you say. Why don't you try singing some time?" wagged young Murchison with a grin.

"Well, you at least nailed one blighter, whether you can think or not. Don't forget to put that down, too," said Pawl, scrawling away at his own sheet.

Whitey Trail felt like an outcast. He knew he had failed in his first actual combat patrol, but he couldn't tell them why. He held the buff form between his fingers and stared about the room.

"If you can't write," suggested Johnny Murchison, "draw pictures on it and let the Intelligence blokes at the Group headquarters try to figure that out."

Suddenly Trail remembered the Spitfire that had exploded and the man they had called the Grumbler. The fellow wouldn't grumble any more. He'd be down in the casualty list tomorrow in the London *Times*—just like that guy out at Cleveland—and the pylon. Trail winced at the thought of that again.

"What about that—that Grumbler chap?" he asked faintly.

"What about him?" demanded Pawl, swinging around hard.

"Yes, what about him, Trail?" repeated Murchison.

"Well, I mean—about him going down. He acted as though he didn't see that Heinkel. I saw it in time."

"That's just it. Law of compensation, Trail," snapped Pawl. "You saw it in time. Grumbler didn't—so he got it."

Whitey Trail gulped.

"But, is that all? Is that all we say about it?"

Trail was on thorny ground now. This was all new to him. He had heard of the lack of emotion among the Brit-

ish, but he had never expected to face it like this. The room was charged with an electric tension. He could feel his heart thumping; wondered if these Englishmen could hear it, too.

The buff report crinkled in his fingers. Somewhere outside another Spitfire came in, snorting and fighting the check of the throttle. Whitey Trail tried to think fast and unearth a statement that would get him out of this pickle. He didn't want to run away again. He was afraid now, but in a different way.

He stared from face to face, but they were all the same—like a lot of masks in a theatrical costumer's shop. There was no particular Johnny Murchison, no Flying Officer Wagstaff, no Flight Lieutenant Pawl. Just faces staring at him. He wished to hell now that it had been he who had hit that pylon back there in Cleveland on that Labor Day.

### CHAPTER III

#### Pylon Polisher

TRAIL tried again. "But do we just let it go at that? I mean—do we just accept the Grumbler thing and say nothing?"

Pawl got up. He was white. His hands trembled and he swallowed hard before he spoke.

"Just what do you want us to do, Trail? Give the full details of how he stopped a packet in the belly? How his legs were drawn up and then how they straightened out? One foot hit the rudder and rammed it over. One hand clutched at something. All that, and then hell blowing up in your face at twelve thousand feet? Do you want all that?"

"All the details—the break-up, the slow spin and finally the crash that throws a geyser of water two hundred

feet high—like a depth charge? Do you want to write all that? God, man, don't we know what happened? Do we have to all live those few seconds over again? Do we have to write it down here?"

"Steady, Skipper," warned Johnny Murchison.

Pawl turned, regained his control. "Thanks, Johnny. Remind me to buy you a drink." He sat down and continued his writing.

But Whitey Trail said nothing. He wished someone would offer to buy him a drink. If only someone would offer him even a cigarette— He hadn't meant to cause all this. Damn that buttress pier of the Firth of Forth!

None of them heard the door open. They were all too busy trying to strangle their nerves. Pawl turned around again and asked:

"What about that pylon business, Trail? I heard you yell something about a pylon when that bomber got away. What about it?"

Trail stood there dumb. His hands were shaking and there was no saliva in his mouth. Someone behind him spoke out quietly, but distinctly.

"I think you should know about that, Pawl. I think we ought to get that straightened out—right here. It's a very interesting story."

That was Squadron Leader Chunk Hartney, D.S.O., D.F.C., M.C. (and bar), Legion of Honor, Croix de Guerre (*avec palms*), and a few more as the reward of service too active to mention.

They all stood to attention, but the squadron leader waved them down and threw his helmet on the table.

"I've just been talking to that mechanic of yours—what do you call him, Trail?"

"Bagpipe, sir?"

"Ah, that's it. Bagpipe McBride, I believe. You know, gentlemen, if you

ever want a straight story on any subject in this squadron, go to your mechanic. He'll give it to you straight. Bagpipe was sitting in Mr. Trail's Spitfire just now, producing some of the most awful bloody sounds imaginable. He told me he was practicing to play a Clan Forbes battle cry skirl on the pipes for Mr. Trail, his pilot."

"Bagpipes—a skirl, sir?"

"That's right. He said that he was afraid that Mr. Trail was afraid of something, and he was going to try to pick up the Clan Forbes battle march and play it for him every time he went on a show, just to give him courage. It seems that his Mr. Trail came back from battle without any bullet holes in his plane."

"What the devil?" demanded Pawl.

"That's his story, at least, and I decided that something ought to be done about it. So first off, we'll get Mr. Trail's story about the pylon business straight. By the way, is this a temperance office, Pawl?"

"No, sir. I have a bottle here in this file cabinet."

"The right place to keep it, too. Tot it out, will you?"

The reports were forgotten, the drinks were totted out, as Chunk Hartney wanted it; and explanations were in order. Only Whitey Trail felt uncomfortable now.

"I should be in my office doing paper work," Hartney began, "but it can keep. I know now that many of you are wondering how Mr. Trail, an American, managed to get into the Royal Air Force so soon after war broke out. There are a thousand more Trails over there in America who want to get in too, just as they did in the last war. Drink up, Trail. You'll need it, later on."

THE American's face was pale.

"I got Mr. Trail into Number

Sixty-five Squadron, gentlemen," the squadron leader went on, lighting a monstrous briar pipe. "I ran into him one rainy night on Tilbury Docks in London. Strange meeting, that," Hartney reflected as he stared up into the blue plume of smoke. "He was about to commit suicide. About to jump into the river, when I came upon him."

The others stared at the American and were more puzzled than ever.

"He had just come off a boat at Tilbury. 'Getting away from it'; all that sort of thing. He had come over to try to join up, but he had discovered that he was not eligible at the time. And so, discouraged and — well, let's say thwarted, he decided to end it all, there on the docks. I got there just in time —and after hearing his story, I decided that we needed him in this squadron."

"What were you doing there, sir?" demanded young Johnny Murchison.

"A fair enough question, young fellow. A fair enough question," Hartney agreed. "I was looking for a man who used to be my batman, out there in France in the old days. I decided that if he were still alive I could use him. He was the greatest scrounger on the Western Front.

"He once scrounged a grand piano, a marble fountain, a footbath, a complete set of chorus girls' tights and a diving suit, all of which we needed for a Christmas show we were putting on at the old squadron. You can always use a good scrounger, gentlemen, in any war."

There was a short silence after the laughter, and then the squadron leader went on.

"I never found my old batman, though I found Mr. Trail here. But he'll turn up, if he is still alive."

Johnny Murchison was unimpressed. "But the pylon business, sir?"

"Ah yes, the pylon business. I think this is where Mr. Trail takes up."

Trail finished his drink and gave Chunk Hartney a glance of thanks.

"When I've told it, you'll want me to chuck in my papers—my commission, I suppose, but here it is," the American said.

"Mr. Trail was an air racer. A very good air racer, I might add," the squadron leader broke in.

"I was. Which is how I got into this squadron," said Trail. "I was until Labor Day—that's a national holiday in the United States. It happened to come on the fourth of September last year—the day after Great Britain declared war, if you remember. Whether that had anything to do with it, I don't know; but we were running off the Thompson Trophy race at Cleveland, a closed course affair where everything goes.

"I was in there with a souped-up Marco Comet. I was not a favorite. A pal of mine, Paul Sweeney, tooling a Blitzen Special, something he cooked up himself, was a sure winner. He went into the hole about twenty thousand bucks for it, too, and he really needed to win."

The Yank seemed embarrassed. "Go on, Trail," encouraged the squadron leader.

"Well, the field was pretty hot this year, and I figured to win second money, at any rate. But at the last minute, a guy named Hugh Krouse put in an entry that seemed just the thing to put Sweeney out of the big dough. It was a German racing version of the Messerschmitt fighter; the same plane, I believe, which had put up that phony speed record some time before.

"You all know that story—how they phonied up the pictures in the electro-timing device. Naturally we were all pretty sore when Krouse's ship was shoved in as something of a post-entry. I felt sorry for Paul Sweeney more than

anything else. After Krouse's crate turned in a time-trial that indicated that it was the best ship on the run, I decided something needed to be done about it."

"Did Krouse win?" young Murchison exclaimed.

"No. I'll explain so that you will all understand."

Trail took the bottle from Chunk Hartney and downed a healthy swig.

"I used to be known as a 'Pylon Polisher' out there. That means, I used to play the pylon close to my chest on the turns. I figured that if I could out-game Krouse on the turns, I might drive him wide enough to let Paul sneak through—and save some of the dough he had sunk in his plane.

**W**ELL, to cut a long story short, we took off and for about seven laps it was a pretty race, I guess. Both Paul and I drove Krouse out on the turns, with me riding well inside. Then, on the ninth lap, this guy Krouse started to get gay and tried to ride both of us out. I don't know; maybe it was the war, maybe it was that Messerschmitt, maybe it was just that I was sorry for Paul.

"Anyway, I decided to do something drastic. On the home pylon on the ninth lap—that was right in front of the grandstand, remember—Krouse had a slight lead. I learned later that Paul had approached high for a dive around the pylon. I didn't see him, honest to God I didn't—but that's how it happened."

Trail wiped the perspiration from his forehead and stopped.

"What happened?" young Murchison demanded.

"Well, Krouse was coming in tight on the pylon. I slammed in to beat him to it and didn't see Paul, who was below me, until I was actually in the turn. God, I wish I had never seen it!"

"What happened?" came the chorus.

"I cut in between Krouse and the pylon, all right. I had him beat, and I figured Paul was behind me. Believe me, I was hoping he would sneak through. I would have let him pass me in the last stretch, just to get him the money. But instead, Paul came up from below, not knowing that I would take the chance between Krouse and the pylon.

"Then it was too late. Paul had to make a quick decision. It was either me—or the pylon. He took the pylon."

"Good Lord!" Murchison gasped.

"Well, I saw him hit as I went around it. He went clean through it and ripped his wings away."

"Right in front of the grandstand?"

"His wife and kid saw it all. Saw him burn, trying to get out."

"And you won?"

"No. I never finished. I folded up, then and there, and landed. Krouse won hands down."

"This chap Sweeney was killed?" Pawl demanded.

"Yes. And they blamed me for it. They said I was too yellow to go on and win after I had rubbed out my best friend. So I beat it to New York and made my way here, to England, and decided to try to get rubbed out myself in the war."

"But it wasn't your fault, Trail," Pawl argued, his tone of voice changed. "You tried to help him win. You didn't even go on to win after he—after he piled up."

"I know! I know! That's what made it tougher. They said I could have won, that I could have given part of the money to Paul's wife and kid, but that I had—well, as you birds say, 'funked it.' They were certain then that I had rubbed him off on the pylon, and then hadn't the guts to go through with it."

They all sat there silent for many

minutes, until Pawl cleared his throat.

"So now you—you're afraid of anything that reminds you of a pylon? Is that what you are trying to say?"

"Well, every time I see something like that, naturally I am reminded of it all. It was the same way with that German bomber this afternoon. I wanted more than anything in the world to shoot that baby down, just to justify the squadron leader here, who believed in me.

"But when that German wabbled toward that high bridge buttress, all I could see was a checkered pylon and poor Paul Sweeney crashing into it. I simply *had* to pull away. I had to let them get away, because I was afraid myself to go near that buttress. It was a racing pylon to me. Understand?"

The room seemed to take a deep breath.

"We understand, all right," agreed Squadron Leader Hartney, getting up. "What we're worrying about is how you can get over it. You *can* fly, Trail. You must have had good training in the U. S. Army Air Corps before you quit to take up racing. But what the deuce can we do about that pylon business?"

There was no answer to that, so they left it there, hoping that it would settle itself. They went back to their reports and left Whitey Trail to his own reflections.

"But don't think you can get out of this mob by resigning," warned the squadron leader as he left. "You may resign and you may quit and leave, but you've had a taste of Spitfire fighting, and it will do something to you. It can never be purged from the blood. You'll be back in a week, banging on the door to be taken back again. I know. Look at me. I was in the other war and I'm still trying to overcome one great fear."

"What is that, sir?" asked Trail, amazed.

"I'll tell you, when you become a pylon polisher again. See you at dinner, Trail."

## CHAPTER IV

### The Color of Blood

IT was all very perplexing to Whitey Trail after they had all left. He was grateful to them for leaving, now that he had said his piece; for he felt not unlike a man who has been stripped of his all, to display his wounds and weaknesses before a morbidly curious, unsympathetic gathering.

He wondered, too, why he had so unburdened his soul. After all, he could have quit, asked for his papers, since he was a commissioned officer and not a ranker. He could have quit and—gone back to Tilbury Docks.

But he remembered the squadron leader and his warning. There was something about this business. It got into men's souls, a virus for which no scientist could discover a serum.

"That's the worst of it. I can't quit now. I've got to keep on—keep on until I find a way of overcoming the pylon business. I can't let these guys down. Why, they believed every word I said! They all saw it clearly, and they were not in that grandstand, either. They were with me, right from the start. They didn't blame me. They believed every word I said!"

He scrawled out a report, being careful not to make more than a superficial mention of the Grumbler episode. He gave the number of his plane, the take-off time and the return. The rest was very military and very cold-blooded. It would suit Flight Lieutenant Pawl—and it would suit the men at Group Headquarters.

After that, Whitey Trail wandered over to what had been the golf club-

house, and stowed his coverall and parachute in his locker. He washed up and straightened out his tunic, changed his short-length flying boots for a pair of brogan golf shoes and went back to the hangar, a temporary canvas affair reminiscent of World War days.

He wanted to talk to this bloke, Bagpipe McBride. Maybe the Scot would have some idea. Not that the man ever had an idea that stretched far beyond the limits of the Tweed. But still, he might be easier to talk to than the others, who were probably scoffing brandy and sodas in the Officers' Mess and dragging their Yankee comrade through the harrow teeth of mess room gossip.

Whitey Trail entered through the small framework doorway at the back of the hangar, listened. There could be no question about it. Bagpipe was in there. The mournful wail and lament of the pipes was evident in the far corner. Trail worked his way through the staggered Spitfires and eventually came upon McBride.

The Scot was stoically fingering his chanter and pressing the bag with his elbows, thus producing a combination of pig-squeal concerto combined with drones which added a most unsuitable fixed-note obbligato. Upon his hairy face was the expression of a man who has taken on a task far beyond his physical or mental talents.

Whitey Trail watched the Scot in silence for some minutes, until Bagpipe's wind gave out and he had to give in for a few minutes. The man looked up with a pained expression and finally said:

"Ay, an' ut's you, sor!"

"What the deuce are you trying to do—give yourself a heart attack?" demanded Trail, glancing at the soggy instrument.

"Ah'm tryin' tae remember the *Cath Ghlinn Eurainn*; that's the Clan Forbes

pipe march, sor. I was a theenkin', sor, that perhaps if ye had a little Clan courage i' ye bones, ye could shoot doon the Jarmins, sor. Ye ken ye're a great flyer, sor, but ye need a little Highland courage tae help ye oot at the richt time, sor."

"So you figure that if you could think of the Clan Forbes war march and play it on that thing there, you could work me up to a beautiful lather, eh? Well, maybe it's an idea, McBride," grinned Whitey Trail not a bit upset by the insinuation. "Still, since this is only a single-seater, and I can't take you along with me to pipe me into action, I don't quite see how it could work."

"Ay," agreed the worried Scot, scratching his thin thatch with a horny forefinger. "Ah hadna thocht o' that, sor."

"No? Well, you'd better start thinking about servicing this boiler. We may have to buzz off again any minute, you know, and you can't tell—there might be some bullet holes in her somewhere."

"Ay, but the *Cath Ghlinn Eurainn* is a beautiful thing, sor. A beautiful thing. It makes a mon o' a mon, sor!"

"Okay. When you think of it, you let me know and I'll come down and get an injection, McBride. But in the meantime, a little juice in the tanks and a spot of oil in the crankcase won't do a bit of harm."

"Ay, sor," agreed the Scot, who turned away and stuffed the bagpipes in the nearest toolbox.

WHITEY TRAIL wandered out again and worked his way along the front of the hangars, mainly for the want of something to do, but actually to think. His mind was a turmoil of clashing conclusions. He wondered what Hartney, Pawl and the rest of them *really* thought about him.

They had declared that he was not

to blame for that Cleveland affair. But these Englishmen were so damned clever with their words. They are all natural actors, Trail told himself; always manage to say the right thing at the right time, no matter what they are really thinking.

The Yank airman pondered all this as he turned off the tarmac and cut across the open ground of what had been the golf course. It was a typical Scottish afternoon, a trifle cool, but the air was mellow and felt good to the lungs. Trail decided to take a long walk and see if the exercise would do him any good.

He strode out now, taking the gorse and dunes, shoulders and head back and his arms swinging like an infantryman. He gloried in it because he was in the physical pink.

He soon came to the limits of the course and finally cut over a low stile. There he found a narrow roadway which had been used by the wheeled carts of the farmers and their plodding, long-horned cattle. He continued on now, aglow with enthusiasm, and strode along for a mile or more until he came out in a small common.

A few thatched cottages met his eye, one or two timber and stucco buildings with storefronts and, of course, the ever-present village ale house, which appeared to be held together by the judicious distribution of metal advertisements for Scotch whisky.

A few children and a couple of Scottish shepherd dogs romped on the grass. A kilted ghillie\* stalked across the common with a hefty walking stick, followed by a stern-faced collie. He headed for the ale house, and that gave Whitey Trail an idea.

“I might as well pull in there and get

a glass of ale and some of this famous Scotch bread and cheese,” he reflected.

The doorway of the ale house was low and somewhat out of plumb, but the interior was cosy and inviting. The floor was of stone, over which a light sprinkling of white sand had been dusted. There was a massive fireplace, a churchwarden’s bench on each side and a small bar in one corner.

The ghillie took one side of the fire, grunted contentedly and sat down. The collie curled up at his feet and eyed Whitey from between his paws. The landlord, a full-paunched fellow with a twinkle in his eye, came from around the bar, nodding at the ghillie as if he knew his order in advance, and then greeted Trail.

“I’ll have a tankard of ale and some bread and cheese,” said the American.

“Would ye be wan o’ the flying gentlemen who fought the Jarmins o’er the Firth ta’day, sor?” the landlord asked with respect.

“Well, I was there and had a shot at them, but I didn’t get any down. It was my first try.”

“They’ll coom again,” the ghillie muttered without being asked.

“Ay, weel, ye’ll get wan next time, na’ doubt,” the landlord said, with a grimace at the ghillie.

“I hope so. I’ll try, anyway,” said Trail. “Now, may I have something to eat?”

“Ay, ye can and tae drink too, sor. Ut’s oot o’ hours, sor, but Ah’ll serve ye just the same. But there’s wan thing. Ye canna pay fra it.”

“I can’t pay for it? Why not?”

“No fightin’ so’jer can pay fra drinks or food in my establishment, sor. Ye take ut free, or ye get none.”

“McKenzie’s a bit daft on so’jers,” the ghillie explained from the other side of the fireplace without changing his expression. “Ye canna pay fra ony-

\* A ghillie is a Scotch estate worker, one usually connected with the beaters for shooting and hunting.—Author.

thing here. Ha, he's daft!"

"Daft or no daft," stormed the landlord, "he'll no pay fra food or drinks here, Ranald. I'll be gettin' ye ale, sor."

"McKenzie ha' three sons at the front," explained the ghillie when the landlord had gone. "He thinks only o' them. He sees hi'self giving it tae Angus, or Bruce or young Douglas. He no sees ye fra a flying so'jer. Ye could be a stoker, a gunner or a chap i' the Tanks. Ye'll still be wan o' his sons."

"But he'll go broke doing that if the war lasts very long."

"Trust a McKenzie, sor," the ghillie said shrewdly.

THE landlord came back with a gigantic platter of cold ham, bread and butter and some chunks of cheese that would have staggered a stevedore. A brimming tankard of ale was clapped down beside it.

"But look here," argued Trail. "I can't accept this. I want to pay for it." He didn't like the way that collie was eying him, either.

"Ye can pay fra ut wie a Jarmin, sor. Ye shoot the Jarmins doon, sor, an' ye can come here an' pour yer own ony time."

Trail sat back and contemplated the meal. He took a deep swig of the ale while the Scotch tavern keeper watched benignly. It was excellent Scotch ale, too. Without another word, Trail went to work on the platter.

"I'll get you a 'Jarmin,' McKenzie," he was muttering to himself, as the ghillie watched him between glances at the old clock as the man waited for official "opening" time.

By the time Trail had finished, the light outside was beginning to fade. The Yank glanced out of the window toward the airdrome. Slashes of white light carved across the sky. Some-

where in the distance guns boomed. The rumble of motors came in waves from the hazy distance.

"What's up?" demanded Trail.

The tavern keeper glanced outside anxiously and then snapped on a very ancient wireless set. It crackled and spluttered, and then they caught the crisp words of the Daventry announcer.

"—enemy aircraft approaching the Scottish coastline again. The public is warned to take air raid precautions in that area. We shall be off the air except for further warnings until further notice."

Trail gulped the last of his ale and sat up.

A covey of Spitfires screamed out from the airdrome and curled around over the little village common.

"Jees!" gasped Trail. "They're going without me!"

He sat there for some minutes pondering what to do. The ghillie eyed him suspiciously. The collie raised its head and peered up into the eyes of the man who was his master. Trail took all that in and reached for his cap.

"Ye could ha'e got ye a Jarmin, sor," McKenzie said coldly. "If ye had been there, eh?"

"Maybe I can still get one," growled Trail, getting up and looking out of the window.

Another swarm of Spitfires screeched away and climbed up over the village.

"Thanks for the meal, McKenzie. I'll try to get you a German—complete with all the trimmings."

"We'll be awaitin' on ye," the ghillie answered, still staring ahead.

Trail halted, devoured the significance of the statement and darted out. He hurried at a lopethrough the village and found the narrow roadway. He had to slow up there because of the cart tracks. Once he stopped to listen to the gunfire a few miles off to the east.

The Ack-Ack batteries flamed away. There was a chatter of .303 stuff and the roar of engines as planes banked and twisted through the maelstrom.

The Yank found the village fence wall, clambered over it and went into his dog-trot again. At times shrubs tripped him up and he went sprawling, but he got up and staggered on. Then something caught his ear—the telltale wail of a plane coming in from somewhere. He stopped and stared up. Finally he caught the knifelike wings of a Spitfire, wabbling in toward the open stretch nearby.

There were two scarlet stripes across the wingtips. Whitey Trail sucked in his breath—and waited.

"Get your wheels down, sir. Get your wheels down!" he cried.

But the Spitfire still wavered in, half-stalled and let one wing go down.

"Jees! They got Hartney," gasped Trail. "They got the C.O.—the stinkin' Jarmins!"

**H**E had no idea why he had lapsed into the Scottish vernacular, but he kept cursing at the "Jarmins" for no reason at all. The Spitfire fluttered over his head and Whitey Trail screamed up at it.

"Get your wheels down! Get your wheels down!"

But the Spitfire hit, threw away her prop blades and skated along on her belly. The tail went up once, and she pivoted on her nose and almost went over on her back. Trail sprinted after her and wrenched at the cockpit hatch. He ripped it back and then tore down the short section of the cockpit wall and reached inside.

"Who's that?" asked a faint voice from within.

"It's me, sir. Trail. I was out for a walk."

"Fine. Good old Trail. You all right

now, Trail?"

It was Squadron Leader Hartney. He was very white, very haggard but very game.

"It happened, Trail. The very thing I was afraid of. It happened to me, Trail. Now I'm not afraid of it any more."

"Are you badly hurt, sir? Can I get you out?"

"I'm badly hurt, yes. My feelings are sorely tried, Trail. But I'm not afraid of it any more."

"But you'd better get out, sir!" Trail pleaded. "Maybe I can help a little."

"No. You can't help. I've got to sit here until they can get me out properly. I'm a little tired too, Trail. But I'm not afraid of it any more."

"But you'll bleed to death, sir!"

"I don't think so. You see, I got nicked in the leg. Quite a sizable little nick, too. I'm afraid the bullet severed an artery. But as long as I keep my handkerchief tourniquet above the wound, I'll be all right."

Trail stared at his squadron leader in amazement. "But if I could get you out of that plane and to a surgeon, he'd sew it up in no time. Then there'd be no danger."

Hartney seemed to shudder at the thought. "My God, no, man! If anything should make that tourniquet come loose, I'd—I'd bleed to death."

"Nonsense!" snapped Trail, nervously impatient. "I'll handle you very carefully. It won't come loose—and if it does, I'll tighten it right up again. Come, now." He made as if to assist Hartney out of the wrecked ship.

"Go away! Leave me alone!" shouted the squadron leader. Then, catching Whitey Trail's altogether incredulous look:

"I'm afraid of blood! I've always been afraid of bleeding to death! I can't stand the sight of my own blood,

do you understand?" Hartney blurted out. "There, now I've told you! You can't stand pylons—and I can't stand blood!"

Whitey Trail looked bereft of his senses. "Well, ye Gods, man, what do you want me to do?" he gasped.

Squadron Leader Hartney relaxed visibly. "Now, that's better. That's sense. Trail, since I was a little boy I've been afraid of blood. One day when I was a little shaver, I went in swimming with a crowd of my schoolmates in an old abandoned stone quarry—a makeshift swimming pool. Well, in playing about underwater I cut my foot and nearly bled to death. Ever since—"

The man looked appealingly at the Yank. And Whitey Trail smiled back sympathetically.

"I understand, sir. But we've still got to get you out of that ship."

Chunk Hartney became himself once more. "That's right. Have to be practical. Well, now run off, like a good fellow, and get old Swabs and Bandages and an orderly to come out here. Tell the doctor to bring along a hypo, to put me to sleep. Then, when they take me out of this wreck, I shan't know about it."

**T**RAIL stood there on the wing root, biting his nails. Beyond to the east, the battle was still in progress. He had to go. His squadron leader had stopped a bullet in the leg and was obsessed with the remote possibility of bleeding to death. A collie dog had given the American a glance that almost left him limp.

Bagpipe McBride was trying to remember a Highland war march to dribble through his drones. Tavern keeper McKenzie, with three sons in France, had given him free beer and a meal, because the Scot expected that some

day his guest would shoot down a "Jarmen" for him. And there were other guys in the outfit who believed the American's story about Paul Sweeney.

What the hell was he doing, standing there like a dope?

There were no pylons in Scotland—only the Firth of Forth bridge, and perhaps a few ship masts. That was all. That, and that damned collie dog which had looked at him as though he had taken its best and slimiest bone.

"Shove off, Trail," the squadron leader said, extending his hand to slap him on the shoulder.

And Whitey Trail did exactly that.

## CHAPTER V

### Hell on Wings

**W**HEN the Yank got to the field, panting like a cross-country runner, he found Bagpipe McBride still wheezing into the bladder of his wailing instrument. The Scot was leaning against the leading edge of Trail's Spitfire, his great face a mask of blubbery frustration. He pulled the pipe out of his mouth with a plop and stared at the American.

"Where were ye, Muster Trail?" he demanded.

"Never mind. Wind that boiler up while I get the ambulance out. The squadron leader is down over there, shot through the leg."

Trail bellowed the report into the Recording Office, saw a flight sergeant leap for a telephone, and tore off again.

A half minute later he was in the squadron's field hospital. Without preliminary he barged into the chief medical officer's private office.

"I say—" exclaimed that gentleman, who had been busily writing out in long-hand a dissertation on machine gun wounds.

"Dr. Raycross," Whitey Trail piled

in, "I'm afraid I have no time for explanations now. The point is, Squadron Leader Hartney is down in a smashed plane—I've told the Recording Office where—with a bullet through his leg. He's afraid he'll bleed to death."

"Dammit, man, why didn't you say so in the first place!" the chief medico demanded, rising hurriedly. Hartney was a favorite of his.

"Fine, fine!" Trail panted, still out of breath. "Now, when you go for him, bring a hypodermic with you. You've got to knock him unconscious before he'll leave that wreck, understand?"

"No, I don't understand!" Dr. Raycross snapped.

"Well, I do, and that's sufficient!" Trail called, hurrying to the door. "And don't forget that hypo!"

"I'll save some of it for you, you—you interloper!" the medico burbled. And Whitey Trail, catching the words as he ran, smiled fleetingly at a deed well done.

Still out of breath, he headed back to the tarmac. As he approached he could hear the thunder of the Rolls-Royce engine which McBride had started up. Ignoring the requirements concerning flying equipment, Trail clambered up on the root.

"Ye hae no parachute, sor!" bellowed McBride.

"I won't need one. Get the hell out of the way!"

"Ye hae no helmet, sor," McBride stubbornly persisted.

"Who cares? I'll shut all the windows and keep the draft out. Get those chocks away, McBride!"

"Ye canna go that way, sor."

"Who says so?"

McBride never had time to puzzle out an answer to that, so he yanked the chock ropes and let the Spitfire roll away. Trail glanced up at the wind sock, set the prop blades, checked his

manifold pressure and rolled her around, just as the ambulance with the chief medical officer clattered across the sparse gorse in search of Squadron Leader Hartney and his wreck. Trail waited and let it get into the clear, and then gave the thermometer another glance. It was risky, but he had to risk it now.

The Spitfire slammed away with a retch of prop blast. It climbed National Air Race fashion and thundered off into the lowering dusk.

Once in the clear the Yank turned southwest and headed straight for Edinburgh. The distance was about 45 miles. The Spitfire clipped it off in exactly eight and one-half minutes, which brought Trail smack bang into the middle of a mad melee staged over Rosyth.

Screeching Heinkels were still slamming up and down the Forth, trying to get bombs on the decks of the Naval craft anchored there. The pom-pom gunners aboard the cruisers were filling the air with .303 stuff. The Ack-guns were firing pointblank over open sights, so low down were the raiders. A Dornier came out of nowhere and tried to get through a lineup of Albacore\* fighters from a two-seater outfit.

BUT Whitey Trail hurtled in and practically buried the needle nose of the Spitfire dead into the Dornier's port engine nacelle. His guns barked and the longerons rang with the vibration. He yanked out just in time to avoid the explosion, for the big Dornier blew lengthwise and hurled her tail away like a broad-finned projectile. What was left, tied itself up into a ball and dropped near a cruiser in the Firth.

Trail grinned and yelled: "That's one for Grumbler!"

\* Albacore fighters are new armored two-seater fighters built by the Fairey Company for the British Fleet Air Arm. They can also be used for long-range reconnaissance and light bombing.—Author.

He whanged over again and tore through a formation of Demons, to let fly at a Henschel. The German two-seater whipped up to clear but faltered. Again the mad Trail poured slugs at her. A big wing ripped up, screeched in unbearable pain and fell over flat against the rear turret. The blow flattened the gunner down like a piledriver sinking a shaft.

The Spitfire just managed to clear that, and Trail bawled: "That's one for mussing the squadron leader's boots!"

At that moment a great black Heinkel bomber lunged at him, and a gunner slapped a packet into his port aileron. Trail swore. He fingered the stick and got a fair response, rammed the wingtip down and dragged the stick back into his stomach and reversed the controls.

The Spitfire came around with its nose almost poking out a Heinkel window. Trail pressed the gun gear. His lower weapons sliced a dural fuselage clean in two as he hedgehopped over what was left.

All around him were planes in various degrees of dismemberment. There were Heinkels without tails, Spitfires struggling into spins with one wing dragging back. There were Dorniers with their outer wing panels drooping from the engine nacelles. A Demon rolled over on its back and vomited forth two men. A Henschel,\* trailing a scarf of flame and smoke, spiraled down from somewhere above and lunged with a frightful roar into an Albacore.

There was the stench of powder and burned oil. The pungent smell of cordite and guncotton. The acid tang of burned dural and the choking odor of gelignite.

But Whitey Trail saw none of this.

He banged through a storm of debris and pecked at a Dornier that was steadyng for a dive on a cruiser below. The Dornier cleared and swung around hard. It came with all turrets screaming at Trail, who swished hard to get clear. He came out level—and screamed!

Directly in front of him was the upper structure of the Firth of Forth bridge. The old ghost of the pylon galloped back, but Whitey Trail somehow steadied, held her hard and then snapped a wing down again and drew the stick back. The Spitfire zoomed around and just cleared.

Trail saw a crazy kaleidoscopic slide of faces through the metal framework of the bridge latticework. He saw the face of Bagpipe McBride; saw a collie with big droopy eyes. There was Tavern Keeper McKenzie, and Ranald, the ghillie, quaffing his ale. There came into the framework the white and drawn face of Chunk Hartney and his bloody leg, the proud profile of Pawl and the lean countenance of Wagstaff—and then a terrible crash.

Trail looked back. The Dornier had smacked the top of the Firth of Forth bridge. It had stopped cold and dropped its wreckage into the leaden water below.

"Swell! It's an idea," yelled Trail, ramming after a Henschel. "Come on, boys, follow the leader!"

The German took up the challenge and raced after the Spitfire. Trail rammed up in a climb, stalled, fell off and went into a power dive. The enraged Henschel followed and tried to pepper its antagonist from the front guns. Trail glanced back once, nosed down steeper and then slammed at the narrow space between the first two piles that supported the approaches to the bridge.

"'Pylon polisher!'" he raged, tip-

\* Henschel is a German two-seater reconnaissance plane.—Author.

ping a wing down and going through on his elevators.

The Spitfire screamed, went down, came around like an enraged hawk and completed the turn around the tall pilings. It came out into the clear on the other side just as the Henschel slammed with a roar into the lattice girders at the top. The pilot had pulled out too late to clear, and he went into the iron structure without ever knowing what he hit.

"That's for Mr. McKenzie and his three sons," growled Trail. "Now for one more—just for me!"

**H**E charged across the Firth again and singled out a Heinkel that was picking on a laboring Spitfire. It had a single bar of scarlet across its wingtip.

Trail's guns opened up and the Heinkel turned. Trail turned, too, and enticed the big bomber away. Gunfire spattered all around him from the Heinkel's turrets, but he had to draw it off to pull his pylon-polishing trick again. He faked a faltering ship, wabbled, and the Heinkel came in again. Trail nosed down and went scooting across the water, and the Heinkel came after him.

"Now, then. Get ready to have your back teeth picked with a bridge piling!" raged Whitey Trail.

The Spitfire let the Heinkel draw up closer. It fish-tailed to avoid the fire of the enemy gunner and then nosed down some more, to shoot under the center span of the bridge. The Heinkel followed. Trail ripped the stick back and flew the Spitfire up and over the main span. There was a stalled railroad train there on the tracks, and the Yank could have spat down its funnel as he went over.

The Heinkel never saw what became of Whitey Trail. The German pilot was so intent on pursuing him that he had his ship up on its tail and stalling

dead, before ever he realized that the Spitfire had completed half a loop and had rolled at the top to come out clean. The Heinkel slipped back, caught its tail on the edge of the main span, choked itself completely with its own telescoped fuselage and dropped with a splashy thud into the Firth.

**T**HE rest was just a matter of mopping up.

Trail went back and picked up Pawl and Johnny Murchison, and together they chased what was left of the raiders well out to sea. Young Johnny got a Henschel before they quit, but it was not necessary, for three more went down into the sea with punctured tanks soon after they'd limped past the Isle of May.

The Spitfire swung into three-ship element formation again and started back. For the first time Whitey Trail realized that he didn't have earphones over which to take orders. But he could see Johnny Murchison making bawdy gestures at him, and Whitey Trail knew then that he was "in."

They swarmed back to Arbroth and landed, and it was obvious at once that something unusual was up. The squadron was breaking all the blackout rules with bonfires. Véry lights were curling up toward the smoke-streaked sky in all colors.

So they landed and were swarmed all over by aircraftsmen and mechanics. More Véry lights were fired and the place was in an uproar. Pawl crawled out through the mess and grabbed for Whitey Trail. He was astonished to see the Yank in his ordinary uniform. Bagpipe McBride was yelling:

"Ah've got ut, sor. Ah've got ut!"

"Where the deuce did you come from?" Pawl demanded of the Yank. "You nearly cleaned the lot up. They were giving us hell till you came along."

"I just followed you," said the puzzled Trail.

"Followed us? Well, don't ever expect anyone to follow you! I thought you said you were afraid of pylons!"

"I am—" And then Whitey Trail gasped. "Jees! That's right! That's what I *was* doing, wasn't I? I was cutting pylons and making the Germans crash. Hell, that's right! I was cutting pylons, wasn't I?"

They yanked him down, and at the same time an ear-splitting wail was struck up.

"Ah've got ut, Muster Trail! Ah've got ut—the *Cath Ghlinn Eurainn*, the Clan Forbes fightin' song—on ma' bagpipes, sor!"

And Bagpipe McBride, wheezing and droning, led them back to the Officers' Mess to the wail of *Cath Ghlinn Eurainn*, which simply means: "We'll Battle at the Bridge."

That night the Yank took Pawl and Johnny Murchison to McKenzie's ale house, where the ghillie was still sitting with a collie at his feet.

"We heered ut on the wireless," explained McKenzie, who came up with a bottle. "Ye said ye'd do ut, sor, an' here's the bottle as promised."

"Don't tell me you did all that just for a free drink?" laughed Pawl.

"No, not quite," admitted Whitey Trail, putting down his hand to pat the collie's head. "Not quite. Too bad about Chunk Hartney, isn't it?" he added offhandedly as the dog stood up.

"Whut manner o' mon is this?" growled the ghillie. "Niver before ha' any mon but me been able to stroke yon dog's haid."

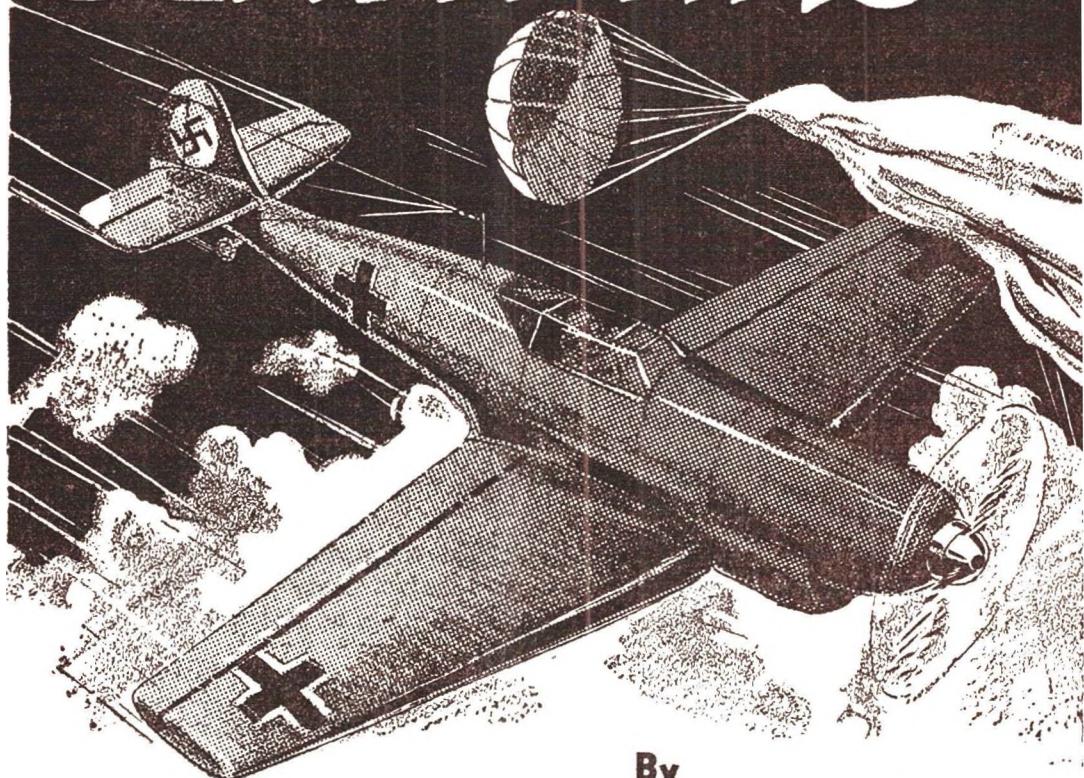
"Trail's quite a lad," explained Pawl. "He can stroke anything. You ought to see him stroke bridge buttresses with the belly of a Spitfire."

**DON'T OFFEND... USE SEN-SEN**

BREATH SWEETENER... DELIGHTFUL CONFECTION



# DEATH HAS



By

**ALEXANDER BLADE**

**O**NE DOWN!" Releasing the pressure on the gun lever, Lt. Jim Holzer watched the point Messerschmitt flutter into a flaming dive that nearly disrupted the entire Nazi formation.

Tightening his stomach muscles against the high-speed belt, he ripped around in a 180-turn that temporarily blacked out the vivid blue sky. As the haze cleared from his eyes, Jim Holzer suddenly saw something which caused him to sit up very straight in the cockpit. Across from him, flying No. 7 position, a British plane was slanting off, cutting back toward the Maginot

**Not even his Nazi mates would interfere when Lt. Holzer drew von Stapp, the butcher, down to fight it out.**

Line. He took the hand mike off the prong and spoke into it.

"What's wrong, Brown?" he asked.

"Looks like I'd better start carrying a rifle," came Brown's disgusted voice. "Firing gear gone dead on me, again, just when I need it."

The C. O. cut in. "Right-o, Brown. Back to the drome."

The nine Messerschmitts were circling some distance away, preparing for

# RED WINGS



A hail of bullets swept out of nowhere,  
and Brown's body jerked convulsively

another dive-thrust. Holzer looked around the sky, suddenly let out an oath. Flashing down out of the sun, like a bullet, was a lone Nazi plane! And it was headed straight for Brown's plane!

"Look out, Brown! Above you!"

But the warning came too late. The Nazi struck with the speed of light. The Messerschmitt, with the full outline of the British plane as a target, opened up with its hub cannon. A shell caught the doomed Brown, exploding the tail to bits.

Holzer saw Brown slide back his hatch enclosure and fling himself out of the plane. The white blob of his pilot-chute blossomed out, dragging the big chute from its pack. But in the split second that Jim Holzer had to see the desperate leap of the Britisher, he caught one horrible fact. Brown's body was being riddled by bullets! Bullets from somewhere in that swirling hell of Messerschmitts and Spitfires. Whose bullets? Nazi or British; purposeful or accidental? Holzer knew suddenly they weren't accidental.

Jim Holzer ground his teeth. A rat flew for the Nazi squadron. A rat whom even his mates avoided. Was this Nazi plane that of Von Stapp?

The attacking formation of Nazis were back upon them now, but Jim Holzer was not conscious of it. He had but one thought! *Get that cowardly murderer, whoever he was, who picked on cripples.* The German was circling some distance below, and Holzer cut down to intercept him.

His lips were pressed back against his teeth in a snarl of hate. Suddenly his eyes narrowed in blazing slits. The crossed-sword insignia on the fuselage of the other plane was plainly visible now. It was Von Stapp! The bloody butcher who revolted even his own command. He rarely fought in the open

but always hung back, waiting for cripples, for cold meat. No wonder the carrion had run up a string of victories. That kind of a fiend would shoot his own mother in the back for a couple of medals.

Apparently Von Stapp had not seen the avenging Holzer slicing down on him. The Messerschmitt bloomed in Holzer's sights. Steady fingers tripped the guns. A blast of leaden slugs crashed almost into the leather-coated Nazi. But though the tracer showed fiery streaks licking straight into the cockpit, somehow the German escaped their lethal sting, as the diving Spitfire zoomed past.

The Messerschmitt's nose swung around as if going into a vertical, and then shot upward in a prop-clawing climb. Eyes narrowed, tensed, Jim Holzer matched the maneuver, waiting for the flashing target to settle down in his rings.

His fingers tightened. The Spitfire bucked with the rattle and recoil of eight Brownings. Out from the wings came eight streams of converged death.

He held the stick in his stomach. His fingers loosened. The Nazi was going up like an express elevator. He pressed down again. The guns took up their deadly chatter for a moment, and then abruptly the pounding weapons went silent. His electrical firing gear had gone wacky too. He was in the same spot as Brown!

**H**E edged back the throttle, allowing the Nazi to pull away. But apparently the wily von Stapp had had too much experience at spotting ships in difficulty. The bright-colored Messerschmitt dime-turned, came roaring back for Holzer.

But instead of allowing himself to be drawn into one of these dangerous,

head on contests, the Nazi came in a wide circle, sniffing at the Spitfire suspiciously, making sure of its plight.

Giving up all pretense of fight, Holzer watched the approaching Nazi warily, waiting until his enemy was in an awkward position before making his play. His hand tightened on the stick. Then suddenly, instead of slapping it over, the fingers around the stick clenched, froze. Jim Holzer's blue eyes widened behind his goggles, then narrowed into two needlepoints of icy flame.

Never before had he engaged the despised von Stapp in personal combat, never before had he seen him at such close range. Even across the air space he saw it. *The scar!* A livid, disfiguring scar that shone like an evil star. And now Lt. Jim Holzer came out of his trance, went into action. The Spitfire's wing went up, it came around sharply. But instead of diving toward safety, it was heading straight for the Nazi crate!

*Hauptmann* von Stapp seemed paralyzed for a moment by the crazy, raving maneuver of the mad pilot of the Spitfire. Perhaps he feared the Brownings weren't dead after all, that it was a ruse. Or perhaps he guessed the truth, that the Spitfire was attempting to ram him, ignoring personal consequence. At any rate, the Nazi suddenly yanked the Messerschmitt into a screaming zoom that finally ended in an *Immelmann*, reversing his direction, carrying him away from the vengeful Spitfire.

Holzer went through the same maneuver, but his action came seconds after those of the Nazi, and he found himself hopelessly left behind by the more powerful Messerschmitt. The Hun was even out of firing range now, much less "ramming" range. But Holzer wasn't giving up, even though it

looked hopeless. Savagely he flung his crate after the fleeing von Stapp, his face working in rage.

Suddenly a shadow flitted across his nose, and from out of the sky above a plane slashed down in his path, blocking him off from the crossed-sword Messerschmitt. Holzer waved frantically, wildly. The plane bore the insignia of the 89th, and a pennant stripe was painted on the nose. The pilot of the newcomer was Major Fordney Barlow, C. O. of the outfit.

"Back in formation, Holzer!" came the crisp order.

Wearily, dejectedly, he brought the nose of his Spitfire around, rejoined the formation. The scrap seemed over with von Stapp's abrupt departure.

The flight had lost one ship in the air battle. Young Brown. But Holzer's smoldering, hate-brimmed blue eyes were seeing something else. Those burning eyes were seeing something that had happened on a September Sunday three months ago. *September 10th!* He would never forget the date.

HE and his twin brother, Sam, had been visiting their uncle in Berlin on the fateful day. They had crossed the Atlantic to test some American planes for the French General Staff, and upon conclusion of their tests had decided on a holiday with their kinsman, a brother of their father.

Jim and Sam Holzer had been born in the United States, were American citizens, but their father and mother had come from Germany only the year before their birth. As a result, German was often spoken in their home, and both youths used the tongue without accent. After their second week in Berlin they might easily have been mistaken for Germans.

The last week of their stay had seen the German capital transformed into

seething activity. Hitler's invasion of Poland had actually come.

"England won't fight," everyone said complacently. But then came September 3rd, that eventful Sunday, and the British declared war on Hitler!

The jammed exodus of passengers from Europe caused the Holzer boys to delay their sailing ten days past the date originally planned. They decided to remain in Germany rather than take refuge in Holland or Belgium. It was a great lark. Danger? They were Americans. America wasn't in the war.

But then on this day, exactly seven days after war had been declared, Jim and Sam Holzer had been passing by a *biergarten* when suddenly a Nazi air officer, resplendent in the new uniform of a *hauptmann*, had staggered out onto the sidewalk and accosted them. He had spoken in German, and they, quite naturally, responded in the same language.

Not many words had passed before the boys realized they were dealing with an arrogant, drunken man who might prove dangerous. He was insisting on them accompanying him to the nearest recruiting post and joining their class. Either he refused to accept their explanation, or else he was too drunk to hear their words.

Sam did most of the talking. "But you don't understand," he repeated for about the fourth time. "My brother and I aren't German citizens, we're Americans."

"Ja, the *vaterland* needs boys like you," went on the Nazi. "We must strike with every ounce of our strength, destroy the pigs of British and French."

Several bystanders had gathered and seemed sympathetic toward the two youths, however they dared not interfere. A soldier in Nazi Germany, especially a soldier of Hermann Goring's air force, was comparable to a sacred

cow of India.\*

The Nazi reached out suddenly, grabbing Sam's arm. "Come on with me," he growled. "I'm going to see that you report."

Sam Holzer jerked from the man's grip. "Keep your hands off me," he said evenly. "I'm an American citizen, not one of your vassels."

The Nazi reached for him again, catching his arm in a firm grip. Jim moved forward to help his brother, but Sam struck out savagely, cracked the drunken officer squarely on the chin and sending him reeling to the pavement.

Then he turned with his brother and the two started walking away.

They had not taken a dozen steps, however, when there was a sharp cry of warning followed by the report of a pistol. Jim Holzer started to turn around, but suddenly he was horrified to see his brother stumble and clutch wildly at thin air. He took several tottering steps, then pitched forward on his face. When Jim bent over, twisted his brother about, the eyes were staring straight into the sun, unblinkingly.

Before Jim Holzer could force his way through the surging mass of people, the Nazi had been swallowed up, had disappeared. Frantically, wildly, he searched faces, but the German was gone.

**T**HE authorities promised the American Consul that the Nazi officer would be severely punished—if caught. But he was never caught. Somehow

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\* Aviators in Germany today are a privileged class. They have been given a special social caste by Goring. They are gentlemen, much to the disgust of Prussian officers of the old school. Even the mechanics and workers in airplane plants get special consideration. The plant workers live in underground dormitories like college boys, and are given the best of food and clothing. These men make the highest wages of any skilled labor class in Nazi Germany.—Author.

no one seemed to remember the Nazi officer, what he looked like, his organization.

Ten days later, James Holzer, American citizen, temporarily renounced his citizenship, swore allegiance to the Crown for duration of the war, and was fitted with the trim, blue uniform of the Royal Air Force.

Prominent in his memory was the livid scar that stood out on the Nazi's face. A scar that ran down the cheek and cross the chin.

Von Stapp had been opposite the Moselle sector during all the weeks Jim Holzer had been up. But he hadn't known that "the butcher" and the man who had murdered his brother in cold blood were one and the same. Now that he knew, it was certainly not surprising. Von Stapp fought exactly like the cowardly air officer in Berlin, a stabber-in-the-back.

The look on Holzer's face as he sliced through the air toward the 89th's tarmac had frozen into one of grim determination. The bitter regret of von Stapp's temporary escape was gone. After all, the real thing, the important thing, was the fact that the murderer of his brother was now known to him by name, could never escape him. War or no war, the time would come. In fact, considering it calmly, Jim Holzer was actually glad the Nazi had escaped him today. He would inform the German of his identity, why he was to be killed. Then drop a challenge to a personal duel. And when his bullets struck down the cowardly assassin, von Stapp would know just why he was dying.

The 89th's tarmac was in a narrow valley, tricky by reason of bad down currents. For that reason the flights usually landed in single file, and on this occasion, Holzer was the last to hit the iron-matted runway.

He taxied up on the apron, legged

down from the pit. Turning away from the crate, he found himself confronted by Major Barlow. The C. O. looked at him a moment, then brushed past and mounted the stirrup.

"I thought so," he announced, stepping down. "Dead."

"Why, yes," admitted Holzer, "my guns quit."

"And you were trying to ram von Stapp," accused Barlow. "What the hell's eating you, old chap? I know how you felt. We all felt the same way. No one likes to see a man go out like Brown did, but—well, it's no reason to deliberately commit suicide."

"No," replied Holzer, "I realize that—now. That yellow rat's carcass isn't worth it. But I'm going to get him," he added evenly. "And live to hoist a drink to his death."

"What are you driving at?" probed Barlow.

"I mean as soon as my guns have been cleared, I'm going over and challenge von Stapp to a personal duel."

Barlow's eyes narrowed. "No you're not," he replied. "This is war, not a dueling ground for personal grudges. We fly in formation only!"

Jim Holzer did not reply, but something about the set of his square jaw spoke louder than words.

"You heard me," repeated Barlow, warningly; "you're not to challenge von Stapp."

Next morning Holzer was up before dawn and when Larry Elliott, the air-craftsman walked into the hangar, he halted in surprise, his jaw agape.

"What's going on?" he questioned, eyeing Holzer's ship in astonishment. "Why'd you paint the bloody thing red all over? Bless me if it doesn't look like an extra-alarm fire!"

Holzer grinned. "I want von Stapp to recognize me — after I deliver that challenge today."

"Challenge?" Elliott shook his head. "You can't do that," he protested.

"I can, and I will," announced Holzer calmly. "And now get those tanks filled and see that new ammo belts are fitted."

"But—the major—?"

"Never mind the major," growled Holzer. "You do as *I* said."

"Right, lieutenant," said the aircraftsman. "But you'd better watch your step. This isn't the Home Guard, you know. The major is a holy terrier when it comes to direct orders."

"You let me worry about that," replied Holzer gruffly. Then, his tone softening. "Sorry, Larry; I didn't mean to be nasty.\* But this is something personal and I've got to settle it my own way. Von Stapp shot my brother, killed him. Not in wartime, but back in Berlin. It was pure murder."

Larry Elliott's eyes widened. "Oh! That sort of makes things different!"

Holzer nodded. "Yes, it makes things different. Getting von Stapp is more important to me than anything in the world. I'll gladly risk a court-martial for that chance."

**I**N the air, Jim Holzer inserted the message he had penned into the metal container of the Message Streamer, replaced it in the socket. If there was one ounce of red blood in von Stapp he would respond to the taunting challenge expressed by the words in the note.

The altimeter fluttered on five thousand as he squirmed across the West-

\* While the reader will probably understand the informal manner of an American with an enlisted man, it might be of interest to know that the British have rescinded certain stiff-backed restrictions of the last war. Officers and enlisted men are allowed to fraternize after hours, and officers are being promoted from the ranks, something not practiced in the last war.—Author.

wall. He twisted methodically, throwing off Archie's aim. It would be too bad to die *now*.

He had never flown over the German drome, however he had located it carefully on the map and now he began orientating his position with the landmarks.<sup>1</sup> According to the scale, it was very close now.

Staring down, he located the two hills bordering the Nazi drome. He slapped the stick over, cut this throttle out for speed.<sup>2</sup>

He flung the Spitfire almost to the ground before the Nazis were fully aware of his presence and intentions. And certainly before the crews had time to man their guns.

Zooming for altitude, Holzer glanced back over his shoulder and saw men running across the ground below. They had seen his streamer! Von Stapp would get his challenge! And when they met, he'd recognize Holzer's red plane.

Streaks of tracer fire were now etching the air. He could see flashes of fire from spewing, upturned muzzles. But although the m.g. fire would carry past 2500 feet, none came close. He banked toward his own drome.

"This afternoon. I'll be waiting for you," he had written in the note.

Back at the drome, Holzer stared in astonishment. There on the tarmac were the ships of the 89th—and every

<sup>1</sup> Hunting for an air field in France or Germany today is hardly the same as during the last war. Instead of the conventional military air field with its well-defined boundaries, easy-to-see runways and clearly exposed hangars, the Nazis have carefully built most of their dromes beside highways and the runways resemble feeder roads. Hangars are usually some distance from actual runways, nestled in clump of trees with a barnyard complex. Sidewalls of hangars are built inward to avoid revealing sun glint, the roof being domed.—Author.

<sup>2</sup> The Supermarine Spitfire is so well streamlined that it will gain a greater speed without the motor.—Author.

one of them was painted a brilliant crimson!

Bewildered, he climbed from his plane, to be greeted by Larry Elliott.

"What's the idea, Larry?" he questioned, indicating the fiery ships.

Elliott grinned. "The rest of the flight decided you weren't alone on this, and just so the major couldn't ground you, they painted the whole squadron. Now he'll just have to stew in his boots until the flight gets back from today's work."

Holzer tingled with a queer sensation of pride and emotion.

"What a bunch!" he breathed.

Major Barlow came striding up. "Get ready for a take-off," he said, his face rigid. "We're going up at noon—paint and all!"

Then he strode away. Holzer stared at his retreating back and grinned suddenly. There went a man who wasn't a bad sort either!

THE roar of his motor dinned in Holzer's ears, adding its song to the symphony of noise from the rest of the squadron. He scanned the blue anxiously. After hovering over the rendezvous for nearly thirty minutes, Jim Holzer felt misgivings. Was the Nazi coming? Or had he funked it? Shown the yellow streak in his back at the prospect of meeting the brother of the man he had murdered? But von Stapp could hardly ignore the challenge and keep face with his mates. He would come.

Suddenly, a thousand feet up, he saw them! The Messerschmitt squadron!

"Up after 'em boys," sang out Major Barlow's voice.

With furious joy in his heart, Holzer rifled up the blue with the rest of the squadron. Above them the Nazi's climbed like express elevators to remain above their enemies. Holzer frowned. This wasn't the usual technique of air

battle. The man who had the height dove down, guns flaming, then came back up for another try. The Nazis weren't attacking. They were just maintaining height advantage. They couldn't be attacked this way. What was von Stapp's game?

"Von Stapp obeys formation orders better than you fellows," came Major Barlow's voice in his phones. Holzer detected an ironic note in the tones.

The Messerschmitts maintained their aloofness and Holzer stared down. Wasn't there some way to make those Nazis come down and fight? His eyes narrowed as far below he saw a column of Nazi tanks proceeding along a road.

Spitfires weren't ground strafers, but if they dove—and how could the Nazi planes ignore an attack on their ground forces? They'd *have* to defend them!

He snatched his phone from its prong and shouted into it.

"Down on those tanks, boys," he said swiftly. "Give 'em hell and the Nazis will come down alright!"

Suiting the action to the word, Holzer dropped his plane in a terrific dive. Three other red planes broke formation and lanced down after him.

Up rushed the ground, the tanks looming in his sights. He tripped the eight Brownings in the wings and hell broke loose on that German road. Marching columns of men beside the tanks broke and ran.

Off to the left there was a terrific crash. One of the red planes hadn't come out of its dive! Holzer felt sick inside. A brave lad had followed him down to death.

Bringing his Spitfire up again, Holzer threw it savagely into the sky. And his heart leaped in exultance. Von Stapp and his flight were flashing down to the attack! Von Stapp, the butcher, the coward, was coming down too, unable this time to remain safely aloft. He had

to keep face with his mates, even if he couldn't command their respect for his tactics.

Flinging the Spitfire into a roll, Holzer feinted a dive and zoomed. The treacherous Nazi slithered past, vainly top-ruddering in an attempt to hold his target. But he failed. Holzer had eluded that first attack, the battle was on even terms. Von Stapp had lost the advantage of his dive.

As the Nazi swept past, Holzer slammed after him, centering the murderer squarely in the rings. With throttle full out, he dived down. The Brownings poured out their molten streams of death. The wavering fingers of tracer showed the fire going into the wings below von Stapp. Holzer corrected stick, released the Brownings again.

But the Nazi was too quick. He came over in a flattened loop, and before Holzer quite realized what was happening, he was staring over his shoulder into the muzzles of von Stapp's guns. The nozzles dripped crimson, a neat little row of curlecs ran along the Spitfire wing, creeping ever-nearer the fuselage. For a moment Holzer just stared at the design of death, then with a quick motion he flung the crate up, prop-clawing for altitude.

But von Stapp rode with him, the lead coming closer and closer. The man could fly!\* Suddenly a torrent of the blazing slugs passed through the hatch, rattling and crashing through the instruments in the office. Throwing the Spitfire into a quick whipstall, Holzer tried to catch the wily Nazi napping, but before he could get the shuddering nose over, into position, the Nazi had

dime-turned and was coming around in a short circle, and once more Holzer was close to death.

THE Yank, his face a grim mask of hate and determination, took the long chance of hanging himself on a peg, jerked the crate over in a lightning *Immelmann*, cut down and around in a steep bank. The two planes, one manned by an American, and one manned by a Nazi, found themselves hurtling headon, roaring straight at each other. But only for a moment.

The yellow von Stapp cut off suddenly. He didn't have the nerve to stay with the Yank.

But this apparently saving maneuver was the Nazi's actual undoing. Quick as a cat, Holzer twisted into position. Once more his finger tripped the guns, and this time the tracer stitched right through the hatch, right through the squirming, twisting figure crouched there. Once von Stapp looked back and the sight of Holzer's avenging presence, the fiery streams of vitrified death that leaped down from the wings of the Spitfire, were too much. His mouth seemed open as if he were shouting to Holzer to stop, to spare him. And then it was that the converged .303 pounded against its human target with the impact of a thousand sledgehammers.

The Messerschmitt continued along an even keel for a moment, then settled over slowly into a steep glide. Jim Holzer followed, his Brownings still chattering out their song of death. Down, down, went Holzer. And it was not until flame enveloped the doomed craft, transformed it into a fiery mass that he pulled off.

He continued to drop down in shallow circles, watching. But von Stapp never jumped, never came from the holocaust. The burning plane crashed against the ground and a rioting, fiery mass of em-

\* The Messerschmitt, the fastest military plane in the world in the straightaway, has given definite indications of being mushy when it comes to the quick, lightning maneuvers so essential to aerial combat.—Author.

bers geysered into the air. There was a livid wall of flame as the tanks let go in a deafening explosion.

Banking, zooming back up, his hand came up in a little gesture he and Sam always greeted each other with. "Okay, Sam," he said aloud.

**A**S Jim Holzer swooped in over the treetops, he was aware that his return was not exactly going unnoticed. The entire squadron, in fact, seemed grouped around below. The Spitfire hit the runway, and roared up to the line.

Holzer leaped from the pit. He was brimming with his glorious victory, his glorious triumph. But as he touched earth again, he felt a sharp regret over what he knew was coming. He saw Larry gripping the wing. The aircraftsman was making remarkably good effort at being sadly happy.

"Congratulations, Lieutenant! I knew you'd get him! An HQ observer radioed back." Then his face fell. "The major wants you to report at Operations," he said.

Others crowded up now, slapping Holzer on the back, offering their congratulations. The pilot shouldered his way through, gripping hands here and there.

Then all of a sudden he was standing before the battered desk inside the Operations office. Major Barlow, his countenance bleak and cold, glared at him.

"I sent a report to Group by radio."

Lt. Holzer licked his lips. "Yes, sir."

Barlow waited a moment, apparently expecting the young American to offer excuses. "I'll admit you had some reason for going" said the C. O. finally,

"but it's time this squadron realized that orders must be obeyed."

He was holding a flimsy message in his hand. "This came straight down from Group," he said gruffly. "I'm—I'm sorry for you, Holzer; but someone had to be the example. You stuck your neck out."

"I understand, sir," said Holzer. He took the flimsy, started for the door. Suddenly he halted in his tracks. The order wasn't a summons for a court-martial. It—It was a ten-day leave in Paris!

He spun around. "This—this is a leave," he said in a squeaky voice.

"A leave!" exploded Barlow. "Well, I'll be damned! Those bloody bunglers at Group have mixed things again!"

"But—but it says for downing von Stapp while on routine patrol!" blurred Holzer.

Major Fordney Barlow's granite features relaxed slightly. "Routine patrol?" he repeated, making rumbling noises in his throat. "Now how the blazes did I ever make that mistake?"

For an instant Holzer stared, then he strode back and gripped the Major's hand. "Thanks, Major," he said huskily. "You're a great guy!"

Major Barlow's face reddened. "Great guy, am I," he roared suddenly. "Well here's a song for you! Before you go on that leave, you're going to scrub every one of those planes clean—and if I see a single blot of red paint on any of 'em, you'll be grounded for the duration of the war! Now get the hell out of here!"

Holzer exited hastily, but he was grinning.

"I'd scrub paint off a hundred ships for this day," he whispered to himself.



# TREACHERY in



**Sometimes demonstrating with a flying coffin is a good way to sell the customer a safe plane!**

by ROY M. JOHNSON

**S**o you're Dick Matthews," the wizened lawyer smirked across his flat-top desk. "The flyer who's ferrying a Sampson air-freighter to the radium mines in northern Canada? I expected you'd be an older man."

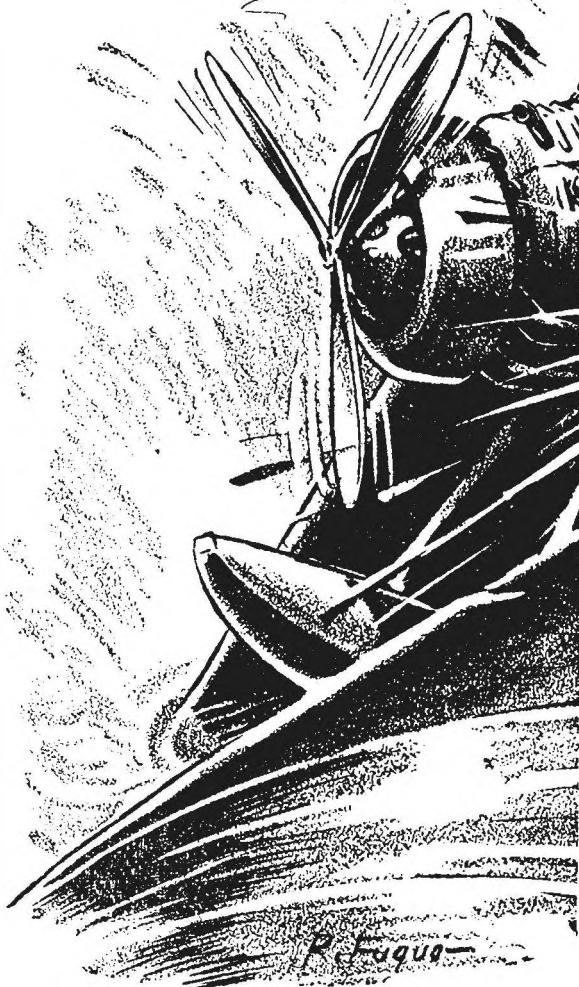
"Yes," Matthews nodded impatiently. "And I'd have been on my way three hours ago except for your summons. What's so important that I had to hold up my flight?"

Ignoring the question, the lawyer studied the young aviator's clean-cut features over cupped hands, while he held a match to the end of a cigar.

"Sampson's taking no chances, are they?" he said. "Sending their chief pilot to demonstrate their new air-freighter."

"You're evading the issue," Matthews said irritably. "Break down, Cheethem. What's on your mind?"

"Well," the lawyer said, toying with his cigar, "a sale involving six air-freighters is a nice stroke of business in any man's language. The Hercules people have got their eyes on that radium mine contract, too. Six Hercules



# ARCTIC SKIES



The Hercules came on like a hurtling projectile

air-freighters are anchored off Harbor Island airport right now, ready to hop off for the mines."

"Hercules!" Dick Matthews' lips curled with scorn. The name revived a bitter memory of his friend, Phil Harris, crashing with a buckled wing.

"Listen, Cheethem," Matthews said. "Freighting pitchblende\* in the Arctic Circle is a mighty tough flying job. Those radium flyers are entitled to the best equipment there is. Not junk. Not a jalopy with crippled wings! Hercules hasn't got a chance against Sampson, with her thousand horsepower motor, slots and flaps. They'll appreciate those modern features—"

"Say, young fellow," the lawyer cut in. "What salary are you drawing from Sampson?"

Matthews bridled, his eyes smoky with resentment.

"Never mind." Cheethem waved a deprecating hand. "I've got a contract here—"

He opened the desk drawer, took out a paper and laid it on the desk. In the brief instant that the paper flashed from drawer to desk, Dick Matthews got a glimpse of a gun lying in the drawer, saw the butt of an automatic pistol.

"There," Cheethem said, pushing the paper across the desk. "There's a two-year contract to fly for Hercules, with the space for stipulated salary left blank. You take charge of our flight of air-freighters to the mines, and you can fill in those blank spaces with a figure double your present salary."

"And doublecross Sampson Aircraft! The people I work for! What kind of a heel do you think I am, Cheethem?" Matthews demanded.

"It's nothing to be squeamish about," the lawyer said. "It's dog eat dog, you

know, when big money's at stake."

"It isn't my services you want," Matthews charged. "You figure you'd be buying off Sampson competition. Isn't that your idea, Cheethem?"

**T**HE lawyer seemed to weigh this aspersion while he relit his cigar. Preferring to disregard it, he said,

"You know as well as I do, Matthews, that the deadline for bids on that contract is June 25, day after tomorrow. And it's a two days' flight to the mines. Look that contract over. There's a clause giving you a thousand-dollar bonus if you sell those Hercules jobs to the mine owners."

Dick Matthews shoved the contract aside. "You're barking up the wrong tree, Cheethem!" he snapped, getting to his feet. "Hercules can't sell those ships in the States. The Civil Air Authority won't license them. Their wings are weak—a structural weakness. You want *me* to do the dirty work for you, dump them on the unsuspecting radium flyers—"

Cheethem flushed. "You're taking the wrong attitude, Matthews. Hercules has to sell those ships before they can build better ones. It's a matter of finances."

"I'm not interested in Hercules' financial status!" Dick Matthews blurted out, an angry flush kindling under his tan. "And another thing!"

Wrath edged his words. "When I get to the mines the boys'll hear about my friend, Phil Harris. They'll hear how a Hercules low-wing folded on him in a dive. How it folded back and over the cabin, sealing the cabin door so that he didn't have a chance to use his 'chute! Phil was my chum since flying school days. And I had to see him die!"

Cheethem chewed viciously on his cigar, while his fingers tapped a dirge

\* Pitchblende is a black or brown uranium oxide, has a luster like pitch. It is the chief source of radium.—Ed.

on the desk top.

"It's no soap, Cheethem!" The young aviator snatched his hat from the desk. "You're stooging for the undertaker, selling those ships. They're—they're nothing but flying coffins!"

Then it happened. The inter-office door was thrown open, and a man filled the doorway. The man had a gun in his hand. He was holding the gun belly-high, pointing it directly at Dick Matthews' stomach.

Dominick Sharp! Free-lance flyer. Jack-of-all-trades, all of them shady. Matthews recognized him from pictures in the local papers. Small black mustache on swarthy skin, whipcords, and brown puttees. Always his name was linked with sensational crimes. Always he managed to elude conviction. A dangerous adversary, this Sharp. Notorious for his strange habit of associating with "big money" one day, thugs the next.

"So the monkey wouldn't play ball!" Sharp addressed Cheethem over Dick Matthews' shoulder.

"No," the lawyer said. "He's got some screwy ideas about ethics, and loyalty to his company."

"Well, he ain't flying that Sampson north!" Sharp rasped. "Nobody's flying it to the radium mines. I'll see to that!"

"So that's how it is!" Matthews said grimly. "You eliminate your competition, if you can't buy it off!"

"You learn fast," Sharp snarled, prodding with the gun. "Sit down in that chair!"

CHEETHEM had his gun out now, leveled across the desk. His face was a harsh mask.

The young aviator sat down. He was, as it were, between two fires. His gaze went over Cheethem's shoulder to the half-open window, where beads of

rain glistened on the fire-escape grating, and through which came the melancholy voice of a foghorn in Seattle's Elliot Bay.

"—and I'll take that flight of Hercules ships north myself," Sharp was saying. "Like we intended to do before this monkey showed up and gummed the works. And it'll be just too bad for anybody that gets in my way! But first I'll get hold of Nick, and have him fix that Sampson."

Sharp went to the wall telephone, dialed a number.

Dick Matthews looked at Cheethem across the desk, then over the lawyer's shoulder. Mentally he gauged his chances, measured the distance to the window. It was five, maybe six long steps. Would they dare to shoot in this office building? With the windows open?

"Hello—Nick?" Sharp said into the phone. "This is Dominick. I've got a job for you. Now listen careful, Nick. There's a red Sampson seaplane moored to the Lake Adams airport dock. I want you to take the speedboat over there and ram the pontoons of that seaplane, see? It's gotta sink! Get me? You'll have to make out that your boat's outa control—broken rudder or something."

Matthews had heard enough. That was *his* ship they were going to sink! It was now or never. He glanced again at the window. He knew it was the lawyer across the desk he'd have to handle, whose bullets he'd have to dodge.

He slid his feet back on the floor till one foot was on either side of the chair, till he could rest his weight on the balls of his feet. He glanced from Sharp at the phone to Lawyer Cheethem across the desk. The lawyer's gun was sagging, his interest taken up with Sharp's conversation.

Dick Matthews chose that second to spring, to heave his side of the desk up and over, dumping it in Cheethem's lap. His last glimpse of the lawyer showed Cheethem toppling backward in the swivel-chair. As the young aviator rounded the falling desk, the small room filled with a deafening roar.

But he felt no pain. He did not turn to look at the furor behind him, where one man sprawled on the floor as the other stood transfixed at the phone. To get through the window before a bullet got him in the back was all that mattered.

The last five feet Matthews made in one terrific lunge which carried him half through the opening. From there he rolled to the platform of the fire-escape.

Flying feet beat a tattoo on steel steps as the Sampson pilot zigzagged down the fire-escape. At the second landing the window stood open. He clambered through. A stenographer's hand flew to her mouth, stifling a scream. Others gaped in open-mouthed astonishment as he tore through the office and into the corridor. From there it was three floors to the street level. He raced down the stairs.

**O**UTDOORS, the rain had turned to a light drizzle. Dick Matthews was disheveled, gasping for breath, when he slapped a banknote on the desk before a bewildered hotel clerk.

"I'm checking out," he panted. "Call a cab! Call Lake Adams airport. Hurry! Tell them to warm up the Sampson. My orders—"

Then he flung himself away from the clerk's desk, and bounded up the newel stairway.

The cab was waiting. Traffic was moving sluggishly on the wet pavement of Seattle's business section. Matthews' driver clipped four traffic signals before a red light forced him to brake to

a full stop. Once clear of the changing lights and clanging bells, the cabbie demonstrated to his passenger the possibility of banking on two wheels around turns and corners without benefit of ailerons or rudder.

As the cab neared Lake Adams, Matthews identified the sound of an unmuffled motor as that of his own thousand horsepower Sampson. The sound increased in pitch from the low, throaty growl of a cougar, to the roar of a lion—to a crescendo of thundering reverberations that, it seemed, would split the very heavens. Here was power! Speed! Life! Somehow, the thunder of this motor struck a responsive chord in Dick Matthews' innermost being.

As the roar of the big radial subsided, Matthews ears picked up the whine of another unmuffled motor. Then the cab turned the last corner, and there stood the airport hangar. Tension gave way to a surge of pride as the young flyer's anxious eyes swept the sleek lines of his Sampson, found her intact.

Motor cowling and cabin streamlined neatly into her high-lift wing. Her big twin-row radial was idling, snoring like a sleeping giant. From drawing board to where she stood like a living creature poised for flight, Dick Matthews had had a hand in her construction.

Out on the lake a speedboat was skipping over the high spots. Its motor was winding up as though it would tear its heart out. Two men were in the boat. The bow was coming fast toward the airport, splitting the waves into Vs of spray like white gull's wings.

Matthews leaped from the cab, ran toward the Sampson.

"Here!" he bellowed to a greaseball, who stood on the dock watching the boat. "Here, you! Quick! Throw off these lines!"

The speedboat was closer now. Its

varnished sides and slanting windshield flashed intermittently. Daylight showed under its keel at times.

The greaseball came running to where Matthews was frantically untying a rope.

"Cast off!" the young flyer yelled, pointing to the remaining rope. Then he climbed into the Sampson's cabin.

He had to taxi toward the charging speedboat to get away from the dock. There was perhaps five hundred feet of open water between them.

"Okay!" the greaseball called, waving his hand.

**M**ATTHEWS pushed the throttle forward. The Sampson started to move. Now there was only three hundred feet of open water.

Dick Matthews realized now that he was helpless to avoid the collision. The Sampson hadn't enough forward speed for her controls to be effective. But he had accomplished one thing. The boat could no longer ram his pontoons. It would have to be a head-on collision.

The speedboat was closer now, so close that Matthews saw it through the blur of his metal propeller. He knew how terrifying, how like a huge buzzsaw those churning blades must look to the pilot of the speedboat. The man had guts, at least.

Nearer the boat churned with every second. A crash seemed inevitable. Matthews' body stiffened for the impact, his eyes squinted against possible flying debris. Suddenly the speedboat veered, flashed under the Sampson's high wing and disappeared behind, leaving the Sampson rocking in its wake.

Sweat beaded Dick Matthews' brow. In the moment while he relaxed from tension, the speedboat turned, came charging back. Matthews full-gunned the throttle. With a lurch and a bellow, the Sampson forged ahead.

At first the red pontoons sent up showers of spray. Then as she gathered speed, and the high-lift wing took hold, the Sampson pulled up on her step, spanked the surface of Lake Adams—and was off!

Matthews held his ship in a climbing turn, which brought him back over the lake at nine hundred feet. Below, on the airport dock the greaseball waved his arm. The speedboat was stationary now. The young flyer looked down into the white, upturned faces of the men below and laughed a little shrilly.

Off his right wingtip was Harbor Island, where six Hercules planes, Cheethem had said, were ready to take off for the pitchblende mines. Why six, Matthews wondered, when the mine owners' letter to Sampson Aircraft asked merely for a demonstration and a bid on six ships? Could it be that Cheethem was bluffing? Without conscious intent the Sampson pilot widened his turn to bring Harbor Island under his wings.

Cheethem wasn't bluffing! There was frenzied activity around the six Hercules moored near the dock. Their motors were revving up. One of them was streaking across Elliot Bay, leaving twin furrows of foam in its wake. That would be Dominick Sharp, Matthews reasoned. Sharp had said he'd lead the flight north himself.

"And it'll be just too bad for anybody that gets in my way." That's another thing Sharp had said.

As Matthews watched, gaining altitude, the scene gradually dissolved in a sea of murky fog, creeping inland from the Pacific. Then he was alone in an opaque world, a world of invisibility, where he could scarcely see his wingtips. Banking the Sampson around, he laid a compass course for Sioux Lake, the first stop of his flight to the radium mines in the Canadian Arctic.

He was eating supper with the factor of the trading post at Sioux Lake when Sharp's flight of low-wing Hercules thundered over the settlement at dusk. Matthews watched their dark forms bank against the red-streaked Canadian sunset, glide to the lake and taxi to the refueling wharf. His Sampson had beaten the Hercules by two hours.

Refusing the factor's invitation, Dick Matthews spent the night in the cabin of his Sampson. Sharp's presence on the lake was too great a threat to leave his ship unguarded. This thought, and the eerie wailing of loons, kept him awake most of the night. But travel-weary senses finally succumbed to the rhythmic lapping of water, and he dozed the last few hours.

Axes, ringing in the forest, wakened him to find early sun tinting the uppermost branches of spruce trees close to the water's edge. He was eager to be off for the mines. But first he'd get a bite to eat at the post, and some food to take along. There was a long day's flying ahead. Tomorrow was the last day for the bids. Swinging along the forest trail, Matthews pulled long draughts of pungent spruce into his lungs.

On the veranda of the post, he met Dominick Sharp face to face. Just as he stepped onto the rustic porch of the log building, the other pilot came out of the commissary.

Sharp straightened, a look of genuine surprise creeping over his swarthy features. His expression told Matthews that in the dusk of last evening, Sharp hadn't seen the Sampson moored in the sheltered cove where it had been taxied out of the wind.

"So, it's you!" Sharp's face clouded with rabid fury. He took a step closer to the young pilot, raised clenched fists and clamped them on his hips.

"Yes, it's me!" Matthews snapped.

He saw Henri Laval, French-Canadian factor of the post, come to the doorway at this altercation. He saw Sharp's black mustache twist in a sneer.

"Things didn't work out like you figured, Sharp!" Dick Matthews bristled. "Your lousy gangster tricks didn't—"

A deadly gleam came into Sharp's eyes. His right fist left his hip. Matthews saw the motion start. In a flashing arc, those hard knuckles whipped into an overhand drive, straight for the younger man's chin. The blow had all the weight of Sharp's stocky body behind it.

Matthews jerked sideways, but a little late. Sharp's knuckles seared a furrow along his jawbone from chin to ear. Matthews staggered, recovered.

Sharp's fist came again in a sizzling uppercut, starting from his knees. The young pilot weaved out of range, lashed a stinging left to the other's jaw. The blow glazed Sharp's eyes. And the next punch, a straight - from - the - shoulder right, smashed squarely into Sharp's mouth and nose.

The stocky man reeled backward, groggy. But his reflexes did not fail him. Instinctively, it seemed, his right hand snaked under his coat to the left armpit.

**M**ATTHEWS hurled himself in a flying tackle. The impact knocked Sharp flat to the veranda floor. His arms flailed as he fell, but he had reached the gun and it was now clutched in his hand. Matthews fell on top of him, straddled his gun arm. He was wrenching the gun from Sharp's fingers when it exploded.

Henri Laval grabbed at his side, staggered against the building and caved in. From the doorway Fay Laval, the factor's twenty-year-old daughter, let out a scream. She dropped

to her knees beside her father, half frantic.

Natives came running then from every direction. The veranda quickly filled with men and women: Indians, whites, half-breeds. Some of Sharp's pilots were there in flying togs, also.

"Shot in the hip!" Dick Matthews announced, straightening from a hasty examination. "The bullet's still there. It didn't go through, thank God. Someone go for a doctor!"

"*C'est triste, m'sieu!*" a woman with a flat nose, colored shawl and moosehide moccasins said. "'Tis sad, but no doctor ees een Sioux Lak'."

Matthews looked to Fay Laval for confirmation.

"The nearest doctor is at Strubbard—a hundred and fifty miles from here!" she said abjectly, moisture rimming her eyes.

Somewhere, the young pilot had heard that a bullet wound should bleed freely. This one wasn't doing that. He knew that the bullet would have to be removed. Hence Laval must be flown to the nearest doctor.

Matthews swung to Sharp, surrounded now by his pilots.

"You're responsible for this, Sharp. This man's got to be flown to Strubbard, to the doctor there. Bring one of your ships to the beach, and we'll put him aboard."

"Who'n hell are *you* to be giving *me* orders?" Sharp demanded, glowering. "I ain't playing nursemaid to no damn Canuck! You fly him yourself, Matthews. I got a date with the radium mine operators tomorrow, and Strubbard's off my course to North Fork."

Turning to his brood of flyers, Sharp said, "Let's go, men. We ain't got a minute to waste!"

As Sharp and his pilots stalked away, Dick Matthews laid a hand on Fay Laval's shoulder till she looked up.

"Have someone help get your father ready," he said quietly. "I'll get my Sampson, and we'll fly him to the doctor."

"But—what about your getting to the mines? The contract?"

"The bullet's got to be removed," Matthews replied. But he didn't want to alarm this girl. "Oh, I guess a few hours won't make much difference."

"Thank you!" the girl breathed, her eyes filled with emotion. Matthews straightened up and walked slowly away.

The Sampson was just as he'd left it. But he saw that three Hercules were already in the air. The others were sledding, full-gunned, over the choppy water. Then they, too, were in the air, climbing to join the circus. One of the Hercules leveled off, wagged its wings and headed north.

That would be Sharp, Dick Matthews reasoned. And he'd be gloating over the predicament he was leaving behind. As the young flyer watched, the other ships lined up behind their leader in a ragged V formation.

Fay Laval and a group of solemn-faced natives were waiting on the wharf when Matthews taxied the Sampson alongside. A tall half-breed with the bulging muscles of an axeman and a plaid hunting shirt helped to carry Laval aboard. His daughter arranged a comfortable bed on the cabin floor.

TO warm the motor thoroughly, Dick Matthews taxied the full length of the lake. At the far end, he blasted the tail around and gunned into the choppy waves. Above, the sky was deep blue, except for a bank of sheep's wool drifting lazily along the eastern horizon. Below, the lake fell away, leaving the natives standing bare-headed on the wharf, shading their eyes against the slanting sun.

Matthews looked at Fay Laval, sitting on stacked dunnage beside her father. She had plenty of "oomph," he thought. Then he realized how incongruous this term was, when applied to her. Her appeal was unaffected loveliness, not sophisticated glamour.

"Like flying?" the young pilot asked when she looked up.

"I love it!"

"Ever been up before?"

"Oh yes. Twice. Last year I flew to North Fork to visit my brother Andre and his family."

"Oh," Matthews said, feeling vaguely disappointed. He knew that a first airplane ride is never forgotten, no matter how many come after. Somehow, he had wanted to be identified with the girl's first ride in the air.

"It's *my* first airplane ride," Henri Laval volunteered a little weakly from his improvised bed. "I can't tell whether I like it or not from here."

"You'll be able to enjoy the scenery on the return trip," Fay promised him. "How do you feel now, Papa?"

"Don't worry about me. I feel all right—lying still like this."

Throttle wide open, the big radial thundered defiance at the god of space. This was one time, Dick Matthews decided, that he wouldn't spare the horses. This motor had had plenty of hours at cruising speed. It wouldn't hurt to let her out for a while.

The Sampson seemed to revel in her new-found power, seemed to reach out for the landmarks and hurl them, reverberating, at the receding horizon.

An hour later they landed at Strubbard. The hospital there was white, quiet. Matthews marveled at Fay's valiant poise during the ten-minute eternity while her father was in the operating room. Neither of them heard the door open or saw the doctor till he stood before them.

"Your dad'll be as good as ever in a few weeks," the surgeon smiled, shaking something in his fist. "But he'll have to stay here, where I can watch him for awhile." Then he reached for Fay's hand and put the bullet in it. "Here's the cause of all the trouble, my dear."

A stern-faced nurse in white cap and starched uniform permitted them a brief stay with Fay's father, then ordered them out of the sick room.

"He's got to have absolute quiet for a while," she said. And that was what it would have to be.

"But you can't fly all day on an empty stomach," Fay protested as they came down the hospital steps. "Let's find a place to eat." She placed her hand lightly in the crook of Matthews' arm as they went down the street.

OVER the coffee, Fay said, "What would you think if I asked you to take me with you as far as North Fork?"

"Think? Why — why, it'd be the best break I've had for—"

"That's not what I mean," Fay said, coloring. "I mean, about leaving Papa here while I get Andre to come back with us to take care of the post. Papa will be laid up for weeks, you know, and it takes a man to—"

"Let's see what your dad thinks about it," Matthews said. "I'd sure like to have you come along."

Fifteen minutes later they were aloft in the Sampson over a vast range of jagged peaks.

"That was a swell tip your dad gave us about taking this short-cut over the mountains," Dick Matthews said. "It'll save at least two hours. And with the Sampson's extra speed, we'll catch Sharp yet. I wonder why the established air route goes the long way around."

"To reach the settlements," Fay explained in her throaty voice. "All large settlements are on the waterways. This country was first developed by canoe, you know."

Gathering up the miles in bundles of ten, the motor droned on and on without a skip to distract the young pilot's ears from Canadian history, legend and tradition. Under the wingtips, white crags and glaciers gave way to rolling foothills, and these in turn to a vast expanse of country where prehistoric glaciers had gouged the earth, leaving a land of myriad rivers, muskegs and lakes.

"Look!" Fay exclaimed, pointing directly ahead.

Dick Matthews saw that a body of water, larger than the rest, had separated itself from the horizon, leaving between it and the skyline an ever-widening strip of land.

"That's Big Hand Lake!" Fay pointed out. "North Fork is on the far shore."

North Fork proved to be a large settlement from which two piers jutted into the lake, alongside of which airplanes were warped. Just off-shore, more airplanes and several boats heaved easily at anchor ropes. Beyond North Fork, the hills were shrouded in stratus clouds.

"It's a bigger air base than I expected," Matthews said, easing the Sampson into a landing glide. "More activity, better facilities."

Fay nodded. "It's a terminus for the big cross-country airline, as well as for the radium flyers. A lot of flying prospectors use it for their base, too. Aren't those Hercules ships along the left pier?" she asked excitedly.

But Dick Matthews couldn't look just then. He had too much flying speed, too close to the water. He had to fishtail. Then the Sampson squatted,

plowing furrows in the heaving water.

"Yes," Matthews nodded belatedly, taxiing toward the pier. "Those *are* Hercules. They're being refueled at the moment."

Dominick Sharp and one of his pilots were standing by the first ship in the line, watching the Sampson's approach.

A MAN in greasy overalls came to the end of the pier, holding up his hand, palm outward. It was the signal for Dick Matthews to stand off with the Sampson. He cut the switch. While he watched, the first Hercules taxied away from the pier. And a man with a gasoline hose in his hand motioned for the next ship in line to move up. Matthews guessed he'd be ordered to fall in behind this lineup and await his turn for gas.

He looked out on the lake toward the point where the pilot of the ship that had left the pier was jazzing the throttle. The ship was skipping about erratically. Then, in full-throated roar, the Hercules headed straight for the Sampson!

Matthews froze in his seat, as though he were in a loop so tight that he couldn't lift his arm from his lap. His mind was a television screen, flashing pictures of past events at dizzy speed. The last of these was a snapshot of the Hercules charging down upon him. It seemed to release him from his trance, to demand instant action.

Throttle wide open, the Hercules came on like a projectile, unerringly guided by a fiendish hand. It was so close that a crash was inevitable. Helpless, Matthews knew those metal propeller blades would hack their way into the Sampson's cabin. He hadn't time to start his motor, to pull away. He had only time to jerk the latch of his safety belt, to hurl himself as a protective shield in front of Fay Laval.

Then came the crash!

**D**ICK MATTHEWS didn't know what happened after that. He knew only that he was sitting on the pier, and that someone behind him was bandaging his head. He knew, too, that his head hurt like hell, and that his shirtfront was a bloody mess. Then the fog cleared a little, and he looked behind and saw that it was Fay.

"Gee!" he said. "I'm glad you're not hurt. What happened?"

"There was an accident," Fay said. "And you were thrown against the cabin so hard that it split your head open. They came with a boat and brought us here."

At Matthews right, the Hercules pilot was explaining how he had lost control of his rudder, how the throttle had jammed at the same time. But the young flyer knew better than that. He knew that the man had orders to ram the Sampson head-on. Else why hadn't he cut the switch when the throttle froze?

But it seemed the others believed the liar. They were congratulating him for his quick wit in avoiding a fatal collision. All but Dominick Sharp. He wasn't congratulating his man. He was scowling disapproval. It was plain that Sharp had wanted a complete washout, but at the last second the pilot had lost his nerve.

Out in the bay, Matthews saw the Sampson, its right wingtip mangled, listing to port. It looked sadly like a huge red bird holding out a crippled wing. Closer to shore was the Hercules, standing on its nose in shallow water. It must have careened, Matthews thought, or cartwheeled after the crash. Its right wing was mangled even worse than the Sampson's.

Well, the Hercules came out second best at that, Dick Matthews exulted. And that was fine—just ducky! Its motor was submerged. It wouldn't fly

again until, until— Then that all-gone feeling came to the pit of his stomach. That Hercules out there with its crippled wing and submerged motor was symbolic of himself. He had come out second best, too. And Dominick Sharp was the winner!

As a last resort, Sharp had crashed one ship to sabotage another. He'd have everything his own way at the radium mines now. And tomorrow was the last day for the bids to be in. Yes, Sharp was the winner; he was the go-getter!

Dick Matthews winced, remembering the superintendent's words when he left the Sampson factory:

"We're all behind you, boy. And we're depending on you for that order."

Then, jokingly and with a slap on the shoulder, the factory man had added, "So you'd better make that sale, or keep moving." Those words, uttered in good fellowship, were now a bitter irony.

Dick Matthews forced a weak smile to his lips as he turned to look up at Fay Laval. But Fay was gone! Anxiously, his eyes searched the pier. And then he saw her. She was the center of attraction over at the big hangar doors. Six or seven young fellows were grouped around her. Some of them were Sharp's pilots. One fellow with black curly hair and corduroy breeches had a possessive arm linked through hers.

The sight of Fay smiling at this fellow invoked a strange passion within Dick Matthews. He wanted to bash the fellow's head in. He'd like to get Sharp's whole damn clique together, too. He'd beat their brains out, damned if he wouldn't! Savage hatred gleamed in his eyes, in the rigid set of his jaws.

**W**HETHER it was the Hercules, standing beside the pier with its prop ticking over, that prompted him

to action; whether new courage, born of desperation and despair, it was immaterial. In that moment of surging rage Dick Matthews leaped to his feet. Sharp had used gangster tactics to gain his advantage. You can't fight fire with water pistols. Sharp had done all the dirty work thus far. Now let him have the dirty end of the stick!

In a few leaps Matthews was inside the Hercules cabin, had the throttle shoved clear out.

There'd been no reflective delay in his action, no counting to ten. Matthews was acting solely on impulse. What his plan was, outside of flying off with this Hercules, he couldn't say. Vaguely, it had to do with beating Sharp to the radium mines, Sampson or no Sampson. Maybe, if he had a chance to explain the situation to the mine owners, they'd postpone the closing of the bids till the Sampson could be repaired.

But Dick Matthews hadn't counted on Sharp's acumen. Before he could lift the Hercules off Big Hand Lake, another plane had pulled away from the pier, to come streaking after him. This other flyer had the advantage over Matthews. He was familiar with his ship.

This Hercules was to the young flyer like an automobile to a new driver. Matthews didn't know what the Hercules could do; what it couldn't do. He did know that its motor was two hundred and fifty horsepower less than the Sampson's.

He was reminded of this now, as he felt for the ship's best angle of climb. He had to get through those overhanging clouds.

The other ship was up there first. Matthews saw it circling in the sunshine like a huge bird of prey as he broke through the upper layer of clouds. It came at him in a screaming dive.

Sharp! Dick Matthews recognized his sinister features behind the black automatic pistol that was sticking through the sliding panel of his windshield. The automatic was jumping in Sharp's hand. Matthews rolled away in a twisting wingover, but not before two bullets had ripped through the windshield beside his head.

When he recovered from this maneuver, Sharp was on his tail, pumping slugs into the cabin. Dick Matthews could almost hear the staccato clatter of the automatic. He did hear the bullets hit the cabin. It was like someone driving rivets next to his head. Matthews zoomed to avoid this hail of death.

After that it was a milling dogfight. It was dive and zoom, loop and roll. Whichever way he turned, Sharp was there. Sometimes they were close to the clouds, again far above them. Twice, through rifts, Dick Matthews saw blue water below. Once he glimpsed the piers of North Fork.

He was on his back at the top of a whipstall, when Sharp got him in the left arm. It came at the exact moment when inertia was giving way to gravity, when his ship was hanging helpless, belly-up—like a stunned fish floating in water. Sharp managed to be there at that precise moment, a little above him. He pumped a full clip of bullets into the belly of the helpless ship. Warm blood began to trickle down the young flyer's arm.

Dick Matthews gritted his teeth. Another one like that, and he'd be cold meat. Sharp had the only gun. All his victim could do was to escape. Hot blood pounded in Matthews' temples with the rage that possessed him. His eyes narrowed then with cold decision.

IT was Sharp who had that vicious urge to ram the other fellow. Well,

he'd get some of his own medicine now! If this was to be the end, he'd take Sharp with him. He'd ram Sharp so hard, they'd both go down, locked together!

Sharp was still above him when he leveled off. Unaware of the younger man's decision, Sharp dropped the nose of his Hercules and came tearing in for the *coup de grace*. Matthews flippered around in a tight, vertical turn. He was facing his adversary now, charging him.

With only five hundred feet separating them, they rocketed at each other like two locomotives on a single track. Sharp's face was a mask of satanic fury. Split seconds narrowed the distance. Sharp's eyes widened; his mouth opened. And then he broke under the strain. Downward he dived, screeching in terror. It was Sharp who couldn't face death! The last flash Matthews had of his face, Sharp's pig-like eyes were bulging in stark horror.

Dick Matthews zoomed up in a flashing Immelmann then, came charging back. He had the feel of his ship now. He was dominated by a single, frenzied urge—to smash Sharp! The other swerved frantically to avoid Matthews' dive. Another tight flipper turn, and the younger man was after him. Sharp had his tail down now. He was clawing for the ceiling like a pearl-diver coming up for air.

High above the clouds Matthews caught him. Sharp nosed his ship into a vertical dive to avoid a slashing wing. Matthews followed grimly. They were close together now, so close together as to seem that the young pilot was riding the other's back.

Down they plummeted. Backward crept the altimeter, like a speedometer when brakes are applied. Seven thousand, six thousand, five thousand feet! Sharp didn't dare pull out of the dive.

And Dick Matthews didn't intend to let Sharp get away.

Glued together, they plunged into the clouds. The sudden change of visibility sobered Matthews like a plunge into cold water. In a flash he remembered Phil Harris and the Hercules' weakness. He was diving at terminal velocity now. He didn't dare pull out too fast. Overcontrol now would mean a buckled wing. Spinning death!

With a vision of the Grim Reaper before him, Dick Matthews nursed the Hercules out of the hurtling dive as gently as he'd lay a sleeping baby in its cradle. Even so, tremendous forces twisted the ship's structure, squeezed Matthews into his seat with the unrelenting force of a hydraulic press. He wondered how far Sharp would dive before realizing that he was all alone now.

Then Dick Matthews shot through the lower layer of clouds. Dominick Sharp was less than a quarter of a mile away, spinning like the winged pod of a maple leaf. His left wing was wrapped back over the cabin. Dick remembered Sharp's bulging eyes. Bail out, Sharp! Jump! No—impossible! The jammed door!

**M**ATTHEWS tensed as though he were fighting that spin instead of his enemy. But with a wing gone, it was useless. Sharp was trapped, just as Phil Harris had been. It was the end. Vicariously, the young pilot's body stiffened for the impact. Another half turn, and—

It was a tremendous splash. Water mushroomed skyward, hiding the scene, then fell away, to reveal Sharp's Hercules as a mass of mangled wreckage, splattered miserably on the surface of Big Hand Lake.

Matthews saw an airplane on the surface taxiing toward the wreck. Farther

*(Continued on page 112)*

# AIR ODDITIES



# **MURDER:**

## **VIA AIR MAIL**

**By ROBERT  
SIDNEY BOWEN**

**There was plenty of mystery about Jeff Randall's crashed plane. Both Jeff and \$30,000 in registered mail were missing**

IT was a swell morning for cloud hopping, and although yours truly was dog tired, the old heart was singing a song of joy. And should you ask me "why," I can give you the answer easy. I had just completed a three-weeks' inspection tour of the major airlines, it being a part of my job as an inspector of the Civil Aeronautics Authority, and I was on my way back to Washington, D. C., to hand in my report—and then take a ten-day leave.

So naturally I was happy. Just three more hours in the air to Washington, and then—

And then, as I swung a few points northeast toward St. Louis, I happened to glance down over the side—and saw it. No, not St. Louis. I saw a crashed ship in an emergency landing field. There was a crowd of people around it, and two or three planes that had obviously brought them to the crash. I

could see the Union Airlines markings on that crashed ship, and I could also tell that it was one of their fast night mail jobs.

Even at that, I was tempted to go right along on my way. What a lousy break—with me three hours from a vacation! Anyway, I killed the throttle and slid down to have a look at what was what. Nobody seemed to notice that I had landed until I started pushing my way through the crowd. Then came a nasty voice from my left.

"Well, well!" it clipped. "The big shot, in person. Going to take charge, sonny boy?"

I jerked my head around and saw a chunky, mean-eyed pilot with a sneer this long stretched across his mug. I didn't recognize him for a second, and then it came to me with a jolt. This guy's name was Calvin Ryan, and two years ago he had got the idea that he



Something caught my eye and I spun around—a fraction of a second too late!

could do any damn thing with an airplane, and to hell with the rules. I'd got his license suspended for eighteen months.

Well, I just gave him a look and pushed on through the crowd to the wreck. There I bumped into Marcus Spaulding, the operations manager of Union Airlines. His eyes widened when he saw me.

"Just passing over," I grunted, and stared at the wrecked ship with no corpse or even a live pilot in the pit. "What happened?"

"Plenty!" Spaulding said bitterly. "It looks like I hired a rat. Last night Jeff Randall took off west on his usual run. When he was two hours overdue at Wichita, the boys went looking for him. Cal Ryan spotted this wreck from the air, came low enough to see that Randall wasn't in the pit, and high-balled back to the field.

"I was off last night, but they phoned me at my place. We all got here about two hours ago. Randall isn't here—and neither is a mail sack with thirty thousand dollars' worth of registered mail. God, and to think—"

"Stop thinking!" I cracked at him. "It wouldn't be the first time that a mail pilot crashed and walked to the nearest town with the mail."

Spaulding gave me a funny look and snorted.

"That's right, you once flew with Randall, didn't you?" he grunted. "Well, Thurston is the nearest town, and it's only three miles away. This wreck has been here for a good six hours."

**I**GOT sore and started to say something when I was cut off.

"But Jeff was a good pilot!" I recognized the protesting man as Joe Harmon, one of Union's veteran pilots. "He could land on a dime in the dark. But

this is an emergency field—and with lights!"

"They were on?" I asked him sharply.

"How the hell do I know?" he barked, as though I had accused him of something. "I never knew of them to be out. At least, not on any of my runs."

"Anybody checked?" I asked, and got no answer.

Nobody had, so we did that little thing right then and there. And we made a hell of a funny discovery. I mean, that field was usually lighted on all four sides. The lights on the lee end, close to the wreck, and those on the two sides worked well enough. But the string of lights across the windward end of the field didn't work—because the cable had been cut at the control box!

"Which means," I mused aloud, "that when Jeff had to force-land, he saw that only the lights on three sides were on. So he landed close to the lee-end lights, so that he wouldn't over-shoot the field."

"And crashed with thirty thousand in registered mail!" Spaulding snapped.

"Act your age!" I told him, but I began to feel sick inside.

I felt worse about half an hour later when the chief of the Thurston police showed up.

When Jeff and the registered mail had first been found missing, the cops and State troopers had been notified. They'd immediately gone on a hunt—and found no trace. Every road within twenty miles had been covered.

"We'll still keep hunting," the police chief said to Spaulding, because Spaulding hadn't bothered to introduce me. "And we'll find him, too. He can't get far in this State."

"I hope you're right," Spaulding grunted. "Let us know the very mo-

ment, though."

The cops went away, and I took over then.

"Get the crash truck out here and cart this plane back to the field," I ordered. "I want to look it over and find out why Jeff Randall had to force-land."

"And what good will that do?" Spaulding groaned. "He's gone, and the registered mail with him."

"But a C. A. A. inspector has got to do *something*, Spaulding!"

No, I didn't make that crack. It was playboy Cal Ryan. I swung around and made a remark myself.

"So you found the crash, huh?" I grated. "How come none of the others were with you?"

Ryan's eyes got ugly; then he laughed.

"Because I was first off," he said. "I was the reserve pilot on duty. And in case you're wondering, I thought it a good idea to fly the route Jeff was to fly, instead of doing it by way of the North Pole."

So I gave him a tough look and let it slide. A couple of mechanics had arrived with the other planes, so I detailed them to stay with me, and ordered the rest of the boys back to the St. Louis field to send out the crash truck. They took off; and when they had gone, I had a couple of cops shove the bystanders back a ways.

THEN I made as good an examination of the ship as I could, under the circumstances. And I found—nothing. The throttle was all the way back, and the switch was off. That seemed to mean that the engine had gone blooey in the air, and Jeff had taken no chances with fire in the event he did crash bad.

Along about nightfall the crash and the greaseballs and I arrived back at

the St. Louis field. Skipping supper, I ordered the engine to be completely dismantled and everything checked.

But it was no dice. We couldn't find a single thing wrong with the engine or the ship. While I carefully checked the ignition, Operations Manager Spaulding straightened out all the gasoline feed pipes and poured water through them to make sure they weren't clogged. He did that because the tank in the center section of the top wing was dry, whereas the main tank was still full.\* But that didn't prove anything.

"Well?" Spaulding breathed sadly at me when we were all through. "I guess you'll have to agree, now, Inspector Jackson. But I'm awfully sorry. I liked Randall, too."

"I damn well won't believe it!" I snapped, because I couldn't think of anything else to say.

"And he had at least a six-hour start," Cal Ryan spoke up, but avoided my eyes.

"Have it your way!" I snarled at them. "But you're overlooking one important item."

"What's that?" a startled voice cried in back of me.

It was Joe Harmon, Union's veteran pilot, and when I turned to him his face was strained with eagerness, though at the moment you could have called it anxiety, too.

"Jeff Randall," I said to him. "If Jeff planned it all out so's he could get away with thirty thousand smackers, don't you suppose it would occur to him that a check would be made to find out why he had to force-land? And wouldn't he realize that would spoil the picture?"

"Maybe you've got something there,

\*In this particular type of ship, the gas was drawn from the main tank up into the top center-section tank by means of a wind-driven fuel pump. Gravity feeds the gas from the top center-section tank down to the carburetor.—Author.

big shot," Ryan grunted, but he said it with a damn funny tone to his voice.

And at that moment one of Union's employes came dashing into the repair hangar. His face was white, and his eyes bugged out. He ignored us all and went straight up to Spaulding.

"Mr. Spaulding, the Thurston police!" he gasped. "They just phoned. They found Pilot Randall in a swamp near that emergency field. He's dead! The police say he was murdered. They didn't find the mail sack!"

**W**ELL, I can skip quickly over the next six hours, because it was all routine checking. Jeff Randall was dead, right enough. And he had been murdered. The back of his skull had been caved in by some blunt instrument. It hadn't been done by the crash, either.

So what? So when we got back to St. Louis again, I still stayed in charge. The cops resented that, and so did most of the personnel of Union Airlines. But I didn't give a damn what they thought. I was going to find Jeff Randall's killer if it was the last thing I ever did.

One thing was certain. The killer was an employe of Union Airlines. Why? Because only the killer knew that Jeff carried thirty thousand dollars in registered mail. Because he knew the route Jeff would fly. Because he knew how the emergency fields were lighted. And because, finally, he knew what time Jeff would be passing over that particular field.

Yeah, I was ready to swear on any stack of bibles that the killer belonged to Union Airlines. And when I got Spaulding, Ryan, Harmon and all the others into the office and started questioning them, they got the idea of what I felt without my telling them.

"I know what you're thinking, big shot," Ryan said when I got through

asking some questions I had in mind. "But figure *this* out, first. How was a man on the ground able to make a pilot in the air come down? And how was he able to make that pilot crash—and knock himself out in the bargain?"

"Right!" Spaulding nodded, and scowled at me. "Even grant that Jeff Randall did answer some ground signal, how in hell could anybody make him crash? Jeff was the best night-flying pilot on the line."

The answers to some of my other questions? Well everybody vowed they could prove where they'd been all night. And no two or three people alone knew that Jeff Randall was carrying the equivalent of thirty thousand bucks. That is, it could have been easy for anybody to check the mail cargo manifest and find out. Also, Jeff had had no quarrels with any of them. They were all his friends. The kid had been liked.

"But one of them liked him enough to kill him!" I muttered aloud savagely. "Somebody who could fix it so's he'd come down at the field!"

I cut off the rest as the idea I'd had inside my brain came rushing forth. That top center-section tank had been bone dry. How many gallons did it hold? As I asked myself that question, I started running over to the repair office. Inside I got hold of the fuel log books and took a look.

Check and double check! The top center-section tank held just enough gas to take Jeff's type of mail ship from the St. Louis field to the emergency field at normal cruising speed. In short, somebody must have done something to prevent that gas tank from receiving more fuel once it was dry—thus starving the engine and killing it so that Jeff would have to land.

**S**URE, I know! We'd inspected that engine from A to Z and found—

nothing. But I wanted another look, and this time I wanted it alone. Well, I hung around for awhile until only the night shift was on duty, the others having gone home. Then I borrowed a flashlight from one of the mechanics, scooted around the main hangars and slipped into the darkened hangar where Jeff's crash was laid out like a corpse.

Funny, but as I walked across the cement floor I suddenly saw something I hadn't noticed before. The undercarriage struts were split and buckled back under the belly of the ship, but they were split at a point where there was a deep groove in each strut. A deep groove, as though they'd been smacked with a steel bar about the thickness of, say, half your little finger.

I studied those gash grooves for a couple of minutes, but could make nothing out of them. Then I straightened up and started inspecting every section of copper fuel lead that had been disassembled hours before. Length after length of it was okay, though still somewhat bent and twisted by the crash. And then, suddenly, as I started to put down a piece I'd finished inspecting, something about it caught my eye.

I leaned forward, brought my light closer, then dropped everything and spun around. No, I couldn't swear I heard a step. Couldn't swear I heard a single sound. I guess I can only put it down to this thing that science calls your "sixth sense". Anyway, I spun around—and spun around just the ten millionth of a split second too late.

The hangar roof fell down on top of me, exploded inside my brain in a beautiful conglomeration of spinning stars and comets. I fell down a great big black hole, but on the way I flung out my hands and managed to clutch hold of something. In a crazy, abstract sort of way I knew it was a man's wrist I held. Then I didn't know anything

more, because I got clipped again, and this time there was no fooling about it . . .

I woke up with the sun in my eyes. Only it wasn't the sun. It was the lights of the repair hangar. I was on the tool bench, stretched out. One of Union's medicos was patching up a head that ached so badly, I figured it must be connected to a vibrating machine. And standing around, watching anxious-eyed, were Spaulding, Ryan, Harmon and two or three others.

"What happened?" Spaulding asked when he saw that I was awake. "And what were you doing in here? Ryan heard a groan as he passed by and came in to find you in a heap, out cold."

"Finding things must be a habit with him," I grunted, and gave Ryan a look that said plenty.

"Thanks," he snapped in a tight voice. "You forgot to hang out your 'don't disturb' sign, or I wouldn't have bothered. Besides, I didn't make sure who it was."

"Cut the wisecracks, Ryan!" Spaulding barked at him. Then, to me, "But what did happen, Inspector Jackson?"

That's me, George Jackson, only they usually call me "Inspector."

MY head felt like a rotten tomato, but I sat up, against the medico's protest, pushed him to one side and reeled over to the fuel pipes I'd been checking. I didn't want any of them to see that last piece I'd been going over.

And—the last piece I'd handled was *gone!* There was another piece in its place. Yeah, the same length, and twisted and bent. But it wasn't the *same* piece. Score one for Mr. Lousy Killer, and ye gods, how my head hurt! So I leaned against the bench and looked dumb and confused—which wasn't hard at the moment.

"I don't know," I mumble d. "Couldn't sleep and decided to have another look at the crash. Something smacked me, and I woke up to find you guys here. No, Doc, I'm okay. I'm going to bed."

I left them, and did just that.

Well, next day I took a hop out to that emergency field and hunted for something I was damn sure I'd find. I did, and that made it positive that I knew *why* Jeff Randall had crashed. All that remained was to be positive about the killer.

So for a couple of days I hung around the St. Louis field, acting like I was still conducting an investigation but in reality doing nothing. Then I breezed down to Washington, reported everything to the boss and got his okay and coöperation. And then, early one evening about ten days after poor old Jeff had died, I returned to St. Louis by train, and went out to the field in a cab.

The one thing that would make my plan work, if it was going to work, would be for no one at the field to recognize me. So I eased around a bit and, to my relief, found out that neither Spaulding, Ryan, nor Harmon were on deck. At least, I didn't see any of them.

Next I found out who was to fly the mail west. It was a young fellow named Cox. I located him about an hour before he was to take off. He recognized me, all right, but I put on my hard face, cut short anything he wanted to say and took him over to the far side of the field.

I guess he must have violated some rule recently and thought I'd found out and was going to put him on the carpet, because he acted a little scared.

Once we were alone and out of sight, I acted the louse myself. Maybe somebody else could have accomplished the same thing in a much smoother way,

but I was thinking more of the future than of the present. Sure, you've guessed it, eh? I wanted to take the mail out that night.

So I clipped young Cox on the button, put him to sleep, tied him up and stuck him in a little shack where he'd be safe for quite awhile—at least long enough until I could get in the air. I'd hated like hell to sock him—but you know how it is.

Well, I slipped into Cox's flying stuff, pulled down the goggles to hide my big baby blue eyes and went back to the tarmac. For twenty minutes I had the jim-jams for fear somebody would spot that I wasn't Cox. Anyhow, nobody did. Right on the dot I got my take-off all-clear signal from the night dispatcher on duty.

I EASED that mail load up into the night sky, banked west and throttled her to cruising speed—with the old heart just busting against my ribs, and sweat pouring off my forehead to trickle down into the fur piece of my goggles.

Yeah, I knew that everything was going to be okay for two hours. It would be just a nice two-hour joyride with the stars for company. But it was what would happen at the end of those two hours that made my dinner feel like a load of buckshot in the old belly.

Anyway, the hour hand finally went around twice. I sighted the lights of the emergency field, and my liver did an outside loop. The windward end lights were *out!* I had just about spotted them when the engine in the nose coughed, sputtered, said "to hell with it" and quit cold. I jiggled the throttle and fussed around instinctively, but it was no soap. The engine had stopped, and it stayed stopped.

How did I feel? Don't ask me, son, because I can't remember. Yet I do have a hazy recollection that I told my-

self to try a night landing any place else but on that three-quarters lighted field. However, I pulled the old nerves together, cut the ignition, hauled back the throttle and started gliding down, so that I'd land close to the string of ground lights along the lee end of the field.

It took me maybe a couple of minutes to slide down through the night, and in that time I remembered everything I'd ever done since the time the doctor told my folks it was a boy. And in between thoughts I did plenty of praying to Lady Luck. And the last thing I did, when I was leveling off about ten feet up, was to brace myself rigid in the pit with my free hand.

And then it happened!

An invisible giant threw the red light against me! I smacked something that tried to sling me all the way back to St. Louis. The plane bucked like a steer, reeled this way and that. It plunged, dipped, skidded, did everything to try and hurl me forward against the instrument board.

But I'd braced myself, and though I felt as though my arm was going to snap in the middle, I managed to avoid a terrific belt on the forehead. However, before the wreck finally called it a day, I'd taken plenty of beating on other parts of my body.

The instant the ship settled for the last time, with its nose in the ground and its tail slanting toward the stars, I unsnapped my safety belt, set myself and waited, with all kinds of screwy ideas raging through my brain. Then suddenly came the sound of somebody running. The next second a shape loomed up beside the wrecked plane. I saw an upraised arm and a wrench clutched in the hand. It sliced down for my head.

No, I didn't wait. The instant that wrench went to town I ducked, twisted

and leaped, all in one continuous movement. A sharp pain in my shoulder told me that the damn thing had landed, but I hardly felt it. I was clear of the ship and locking my arms about a man's body, and the flames of all hell were exploding in my brain.

WE hit the ground hard, but with me on top. The wrench hit me again, but my right fist drove deep into a belly. Then I twisted, ripped up my hands, caught hold of the hand that clutched that wrist and wrenched sharply. I felt the bone snap, and my ears rang with a scream of pain.

Then the scream was cut off short, because I had crashed my left up under the guy's right ear. I can still feel the tingle that raced up my arm, across my shoulders and down my other arm to the fingertips.

Panting and gasping for breath, I got up on my feet and stared down into the unconscious, blood-smeared face of Marcus Spaulding, Union's operations manager. And then I froze stiff as a voice grunted off to my left.

"Not bad, but not neat, either."

I whirled and stared at Cal Ryan, walking toward me. He was putting a gun back into his pocket.

"What the hell are *you* doing here?" I demanded as a sudden fear leaped through me.

"The same as you, Hawkshaw," Ryan said, and pointed at Spaulding. "To get him. Been here every night I could, just hoping. But maybe you figured more answers than I, eh?"

"Meaning just what?" I asked.

"We both figured what made Jeff Randall do a forced landing," Ryan said. "He had no other way out, because no gas could come from the main tank. Why? Because our killer here had crimped the length of fuel line from

*(Concluded on page 120)*

# The IRON PILOT

By  
Orlando Rigoni

**Captain Golightly wasn't going to let  
his star student throw his future away, even  
at the risk of losing his new invention**

CAPTAIN Omar Golightly could boot 'em up, and bring 'em down alive—planes. Though his title of "captain" was an honorary one, he had earned it a hundred times over by his experiments and coöperation with the War Department.

His greatest love was his flying school, where he taught young men the art of aviation.

Today he walked around his operations office with that loose gait of his that was almost a shamble. He jerked stiff as he saw two men talking near the west crateshack. The slim, blond man was Jerry Cole, one of Golightly's honor pupils. The tough to whom he was talking was a plug-ugly named "Spud" Harris.

Golightly had ordered Harris to stay off the drome, and now his presence there, talking to Jerry Cole, was a bad sign. Cole looked scared.

In a guttural voice that wouldn't carry to Golightly, Harris was saying,

"Listen, kid, that's straight dope. She's in a bad fix and the only way you

can help her is to help me."

"I can't go back on the captain," Cole said desperately.

"Then you don't care much for the dame. I'm not the brains of this business—just the cluck who takes the chances. There's a million dollars at stake, an' it's worth a risk. If you don't come through, you won't see her again. If we pull this without a hitch I'll see you get a soft berth with the B and M."

Golightly strode close, then, and Harris turned away with a last warning.

"Tonight at midnight, kid," he said in parting.

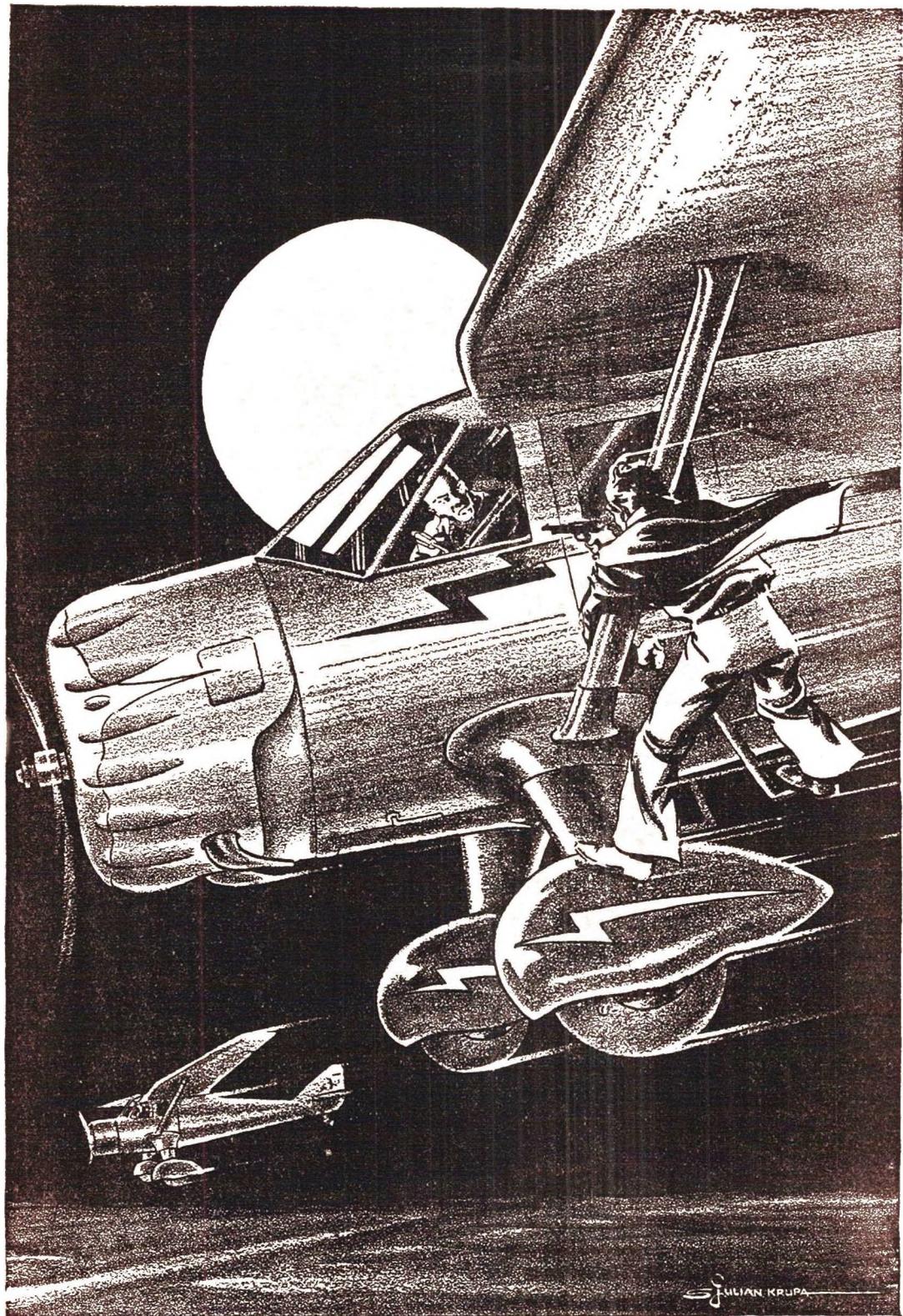
Cole remained rooted to the earth, as though he was a little stunned and confused. His lean hand was closed tightly as though it clung onto life itself.

Golightly cleared his throat. "What did Harris want with you, Jerry?"

Cole looked away, spots of red rising to his cheeks.

"Noth—nothing, Captain," he said hesitantly.

Golightly scowled, and his big hand



Captain Omar Golightly raised his gun and fired at Harris  
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plucked at his collar.

"He isn't a special friend of yours, Jerry. He wouldn't drop in to pass the time of day after I'd ordered him to stay off my drome."

Jerry Cole seemed to stiffen. His head came up, and defiance blazed in his eyes.

"He offered me a job—with the B and M Airlines."

Golightly grinned. "Kind of rushing the business, aren't you? You've had only forty solo hours. The B and M are a boomer outfit, cutting throats right and left, but they aren't dumb enough to turn over a fifty thousand dollar beetle to a short-feather turkey like you. Come clean, buddy."

**C**OLE snapped, "He offered me a job, that's all."

Golightly had a temper that sometimes got away from him. The kid's stubbornness riled him.

"You're lying!" he snapped.

Cole's face went white at Golightly's charge of lying. He raised his voice above the grumble of the engine that was ticking over on a crate just to the left of him.

"I resent that, Captain!" Cole cried.

Golightly knew the kid was scared, but he meant to force the information out of him. His hand shot out for the kid's shoulder in the grip he used when in deadly earnest. The kid jerked back. At the same time, Golightly felt a big hand grab his arm, and jerk him around. He spun, to stare into the greasy, beetle-browed face of "Clip" Pinder.

Pinder was a gorilla of a man with a buffalo's shoulders. He was cranky, quick-tempered and didn't like to be bossed. Golightly put up with him, because he was a good man with a plane and a wizard on engines. Pinder took the kid's part, just out of orneriness.

"Mebbe you're not the little tin god you figure you are, Captain," he snarled. "The kid might not want to tell you all his secret sins."

Golightly jerked his arm free. "Stay out of this, Pinder. It doesn't concern you—it's none of your business."

"I might make it my business. You try to ride everybody. The hero stuff has gone to your head."

Pinder was blocking the space in front of Golightly.

"Get out of my way," Golightly said tensely, and went to push Pinder aside.

"Keep your hands off me—I ain't no glassy-eyed kiwi."

Golightly barged ahead. Then he crouched as Pinder's hairy fist slammed for his jaw. Golightly caught the vicious blow on his neck, shook it off, and darted in with the speed of light. A left and a right! Pinder tried to cover up, stumbled back. Golightly rocked over a left hook that keeled Pinder off his skids.

Pinder was falling back into the prop of the idling ship. The blond kid, Jerry Cole, cried,

"Lookout! the spinner—"

Cole acted as quick as his shout. Risking his own life, he dived toward the idling prop, struck Pinder in the middle and hurled him away from the danger. The steel blades missed them by inches.

Pinder's face was white as he scrambled up. He shot out a hand toward the kid.

"Thanks, buddy! You—you saved my life. I won't forget it."

Cole didn't bat an eye. "It was nothing, Pinder. Lucky I could knock you off the egg-beater before it scrambled you."

**G**OLIGHTLY scowled as he watched them. He disliked losing Pinder, but now he had to fire him.

"You can call—" he began.

"Save your breath," Pinder growled. "I'll get my time as soon as I get out of these grease-hog rags."

As the two men walked away, Golightly saw a folded paper the kid must have dropped when he had tackled Pinder. He snatched it up and legged to his office. When he was seated at his battered desk, he scanned the note, and his eyes burned at what he read.

Jerry: I'm being held prisoner. If you love me, do as the bearer says.

Elaine.

That night Golightly sat in his darkened office, and waited. Cole was in a mixup, and Golightly meant to get to the bottom of it. There were a dozen airlines that would give their eyeteeth to learn of the captain's inventions. Could those B and M blowflies have gotten at the kid in some way?

Golightly snuffed out his cigarette, rose to his lean height. He looked like a hungry bear in his flying suit. He hitched his shoulders into the 'chute pack and legged out across the dark tarmac. Behind the east hangar, he halted at the side of his slick Tobias Special racing plane. The ship had a long cockpit with tandem seats. The rear seat had been removed to make room for an extra gas tank, and had never been replaced.

Golightly climbed into the front seat. From around the corner of the crate-shack, he could see the door of the test hangar. He waited, hidden by the darkness. Near midnight, two forms eased over to the test hangar. Golightly saw the door open; saw the Zephyr all-metal with the 420 Wasp Junior motor, which he used for his test ship, rolled out on the go-cart.

Still Golightly didn't move. He had a scheme for gathering in the whole swarm of stinger wasps who hoped to benefit by this robbery. Golightly lis-

tened intently. He couldn't identify the men in the other ship. One thing he was sure of—that unless Jerry Cole was one of those men, they could never get the Zephyr to kick over. Golightly had a special airlock on the supercharger that had to be released before the engine would start.

Suddenly the Wasp roared into life. Golightly bit his lip. The kid was in that plane!

**A**s the Zephyr lifted, Golightly kicked in the starter on the Tobias. The seven-hundred horse engine on the racing plane boomed into life. Its deep-throated roar rocketed across the field, slammed back in reverberation.

Golightly taxied onto the runway, jabbed the throttle up the brass and tore a hole through the dark. He left the ground in a great leap that hurled him up a thousand feet at a sixty-degree angle. He circled once, then flattened.

The captain caught a glimpse of the Zephyr's tail-light slashing through the sky, and headed for it. It seemed to coast toward him. Suddenly it went out, and he could see the dark blotch of the big ship rising, rising. The men in the Zephyr had discovered that Golightly was following them. They must have caught the glint of his wings in the moonlight, for he was flying without lights.

Golightly looked at his compass and directional gyro and frowned. They were heading outside the beams, heading toward the hills to the south and a little east. He pushed his air speed to 260, revved the twin-banked engine up to twenty-four hundred and kicked the Tobias into a climb.

Anxiously he watched the altimeter needle. Twelve — fourteen — sixteen thousand! He jerked his head up, saw the Zephyr still climbing. Golightly had prepared for this. He broke open

his oxygen bottle and bit on the tube. Eighteen thousand!

At last the Zephyr started to lose altitude. She was coming down as lightly as the name she carried. He jerked a look down and tensed. A green light was showing on the ground, and farther on a red light. Here was a secret landing field!

Golightly made a sudden decision. He would beat the Zephyr down and meet the two men with a gun when they rolled up. He shoved the stick away from him, spilled the Tobias into a screaming dive. And at the same instant, a small, round object jabbed into his back!

"Belly-up on the pole, Captain!" a thick voice growled into his ear.

Golightly cursed and felt his skin crawl. He recognized that voice.

"Pinder!" he gasped. "How in hell—"

"Never mind that," Pinder growled. "Head down easy, say about fifty feet to the left of the green light."

Golightly obeyed. There was too much at stake to take chances. His mind raced for ways of gaining control of the situation. As he struck ground, close to the trees, he reached under the dashboard and jerked the gas pressure line loose. That would keep the ship on the ground.

Golightly legged out at the point of Pinder's gun. He looked up to see the big Zephyr killing altitude in a series of slips. It flattened off over the green light, and the retractable gear slid down. The Zephyr struck hard, bounced awkwardly under Cole's unsteady hand, struck again and corked down as the brakes grabbed.

And at that moment Golightly turned suddenly on Pinder, to make a fight for the gun before the others could get to him. He dropped to one knee, spun as Pinder's gun lashed down, grabbed Pin-

der's leg and jerked with all his strength.

Pinder went down, cursing. His gun flew into a thicket of brush. Before Golightly could release his hold and dive for the weapon, a voice from behind them snapped:

"Hold it, *amigos!*"

Golightly crouched to his feet. He was facing another gun, held by a skeleton of a man who looked weird in the moonlight. The captain noticed other things, too. He could see a small ship hidden in the trees—an open pit Waco.

The thin man growled, "All right, shake your hardware."

"It's gone—in the brush," Pinder said flatly.

Golightly was a little confused. It appeared that Pinder wasn't a friend of this new man. If Pinder wasn't in with the crooks, they had a chance to get clear of this mixup. The captain was about to signal the surly mechanic for a concerted attack upon the thin man, when he heard the crunch of boots on gravel. He was aware that the engine on the Zephyr had stopped throbbing.

Harris's guttural, ugly voice came from behind Golightly.

"How's this for bringin' 'em in alive, Bart?" he rumbled a laugh.

The thin man said flatly, "You brought too many of 'em in, Harris. This ain't no zoo. We were going to work this thing out simple. You know that nobody will touch the booty if we cause a ruckus."

**H**ARRIS snorted, "I had to bring the kid because he understood the motor gadgets. Golightly came of his own curiosity, which is just too bad for him. Remember what a long nose did for the cat?"

"Cut the riddles," Bart broke in. "What about this other bird?"

"Him? That's Pinder, first-class mech. Hard to get on with. Mebbe we could sell him the idea of wrappin' a wrench around a few nuts for the B and M if he gives us a hand here."

Pinder growled, "I'm open for offers, gents. The captain kicked me out today."

"Stick 'em in the shack," Harris said bluntly, "while we take a gander at his mystery ship."

"Frisk 'em for guns, first," Bart insisted cautiously.

Golightly was relieved of his automatic, and his lips drew tight. Any fight just then would be foolish. Then he heard Jerry Cole's voice say in a broken half-sob:

"Where—where is she, Harris? I've done your dirty work—"

"Pipe down. You'll see her."

They were herded up to a small building built of stone, with windows that were boarded up. Harris unlocked the door, while Bart herded them inside. Golightly heard a movement as he entered the shack.

Harris turned to Bart. "You guard this bird and the dame. I'll take the kid and Pinder back to the ship with me. The kid savvies the do-hickies, and Pinder is a wise Willie if he'll play our game."

Golightly said evenly, "What the hell is all this?"

"You'll learn soon enough, smart guy," Harris growled.

Golightly heard the door slam and click as the lock caught. He was alone in the opaque darkness. He had hoped for a chance to talk to Pinder and the kid. In his own mind he decided that Harris was working for some higher-ups and by a cowardly trick had forced Jerry Cole to help him steal the inventions. In addition to the supercharger, the Zephyr was fitted with a special automatic robot control that would take

over in case the pilot was suddenly stricken ill.

Again Golightly heard a movement in the dark room. His matches had been removed with his gun, and the boarded windows shut out even the moonlight. He called, but received no answer. The movement became louder, as of someone struggling, and he remembered Harris' mention of a "dame."

His groping hands found the girl. He felt her face and discovered a gag tied in her bruised mouth. He removed the gag, and a sobbing gasp issued from the bruised lips. He tore the ropes from her hands and feet.

"Who are you?" Golightly asked quickly, keeping his voice low.

"I—I'm Elaine Saunders."

"You—you mean Jerry's Elaine? His girl—"

"Yes! Yes! You're Captain Golightly, aren't you?"

"Sure, but what—"

"Oh, it's awful! They abducted me—made me write a note to Jerry. They've used me to force him to betray you, Captain. He was afraid to say anything, and had to do what they demanded."

GOLIGHTLY remembered that note. Rage boiled through his lean frame.

"Poor kid—are you hurt?" he said through tight lips.

"Not—not much. You've got to stop them, Captain. Jerry couldn't help it—"

There was a dull explosion out on the hidden flying field—a gunshot. Golightly heard excited voices. Harris was yelling at Bart, and Bart was yelling back:

"I can't stop him!"

Golightly acted on a hunch. While Bart's attention was directed elsewhere, now was the time to make a break. He

felt for the boarded window at the front of the room. The glass had been broken from it. Golightly gritted his teeth, launched himself at the boards nailed across the outside.

The boards gave under his weight. He struck the ground rolling, caught his feet like a great cat and turned on the surprised Bart. Bart was raising his gun, but he didn't have a chance to fire. Golightly piled into him, struck out viciously with lefts, rights, lefts! Bart went down under a whistling uppercut to the button that laid him out cold.

Golightly snatched up the fallen gun and rammed it into the belt of his pants. He heard a plane starting—his Tobias! Footsteps drummed across the gravel. Golightly glared through the moonlight, saw Pinder's bulky figure lumbering toward him.

"The kid—he's gettin' away in the Tobias!" Pinder cried.

Golightly tensed. "No—for God's sake! That ship is crippled. It can't go far. It'll burn just as sure as hell! You tie this bird up, Pinder, and help the girl!"

Golightly lit out across the field. As he legged out upon the runway, he heard the Zephyr roar into life. Harris was taking a chance on flying the mystery ship and heading the kid off before he could bring help and ruin his crooked plans.

In the moonlight, Golightly saw the Zephyr start down the field like a silver shadow. He flung himself at the tail, managed to catch the edge of the stabilizer. The Zephyr gathered speed. The wind whipped back like a wall from the twin props as the captain drew himself up to the turtleback.

The Zephyr roared full out, slanted up under the Tobias. Golightly knew the Tobias couldn't go far, and he had to stop Harris from attacking the kid if he could, without injuring the Zephyr

at the same time. The dreams of his life were built into the big ship.

Golightly caught the radio mast, steadied himself. He wriggled his shoulders to get his 'chute pack up high, and clung to the top of the slick fuselage. The gleaming metal was like ice under him. He edged forward—forward. With one hand clinging to the aerial wire, he reached a spot over the cabin windows.

He stopped a moment to get his bearings. Glaring ahead, he caught his breath as he saw the Zephyr flatten alongside the Tobias. Golightly waited for the Tobias to explode. He had jerked the pressure line loose, and the gas was pumping from the tanks through the broken line, most of it slopping over the hot engine.

He shot a look at Jerry Cole hunched in the pit of the Tobias. The kid was staring forward. Then Golightly saw a streak of flame knife from the window of the Zephyr. Harris, the fool, was shooting at Jerry Cole! In the moonlight, the kid made a poor target.

**C**APTAIN GOLIGHTLY felt the sweat stand out on his face even in that icy wind, as he made his next move. He slid down the off-side of the Zephyr, groped blindly for the edge of the window. His fingers caught hold. He heard Harris shooting again. Harris knew that if the kid got away, his plans would be ruined.

Golightly's heart stopped as he eased up his hold on the aerial and slid down over the side of the Zephyr cabin. He took a desperate chance, but landed on the step-board of the low wing. He crouched at the window and tore the celluloid out with the butt of his gun. But before he could get a bead on Harris, the crook saw him.

Things were a little jumbled after that. Golightly saw Harris take an-

other wild shot at the kid, but the Tobias was bucking badly. Golightly knew the gasoline was draining out, that the kid was doomed. He tried to get in a shot at Harris, at the same time hoping to squeeze his big body through the window he had broken out. It was impossible to reach the door which was behind the wing, and which locked from the inside.

To get through the window, he would have to drop his 'chute pack. If he did that, he'd have one chance in a hundred of getting down alive.

Harris was looking back at him, leering like a madman. The crook had the advantage, and he knew it. He raised his gun, pointed it back toward Golightly. The captain had just started to jerk his 'chute strap loose, and as Harris shot, Golightly dodged down on the wing and the shot screamed over his head.

Before he could straighten up, the Zephyr jerked into a vertical, and slammed over a wing! Golightly clung on dizzily, tried to get a look at the Tobias. The racing ship was bucking to the uneven zoom of the big engine. Harris was heading around on the tail of the Tobias, and now the man aimed his gun down the groove at the hunched head of the kid, who was fighting the stick of the racing plane.

Golightly knew he alone could save Jerry Cole's life, though it might cost him his own in the attempt. He had no time to discard his 'chute. He raised his gun, rammed it through the window and squeezed trigger. The slug creased Harris' arm and threw the crook's aim off.

With a curse Harris slammed the wheel over, kicked the stirrup boot and tore the Zephyr into a whip-roll. Golightly was unprepared for the movement. His feet skidded out from under him. For one tense moment of eternity

he clung on with his fingers, but as the big ship whipped over, the force of the maneuver hurled the captain through the air!

For a moment he was stunned. A hundred thoughts slapped against his brain. The kid would be doomed, now. Harris was a madman and would make sure of the Tobias—

It was then Golightly heard the other ship zooming past him as he fell. The sound of the engine seemed to clear his mind, and he realized he was falling through the icy moonlight. He jerked the ripcord. The 'chute mushroomed out. Above to his left he caught a glimpse of two other ships. Against the sky they were sharply outlined. The ship he had heard zoom past him was the Waco that had been hidden in the trees. If Bart was in that ship, then the kid's life wasn't worth a nickel.

Golightly tensed, and a curse ripped from his lips. The Zephyr was closing in upon Jerry Cole again. The Tobias was beginning to spin as the big engine conked out. It would only be a minute now. The Waco was tearing in from the side. Then Golightly saw it happen.

**T**HE Waco headed for the narrow groove between the Zephyr and the Tobias. It tore in with its engine roaring full out. There was one way to stop Harris from killing the kid, and the man in the Waco was taking that way.

Golightly knew that man must be Pinder—surly Pinder, who owed the kid a debt for saving his life, was writing off that debt in a desperate try against death!

Even from where he was oscillating below them, the captain saw every detail of the crash. The Waco rammed in. Its wingtip fouled the prop on the Zephyr's motor. The prop exploded in chunks of metal! The motor, relieved

*(Continued on page 125)*

## Treachery In Arctic Skies

*(Continued from page 94)*

away a motorboat was speeding to the rescue. Instinctively, Matthews knew that was impossible. No human being could live through such a crash.

Spiraling lower, he saw "Radium Express" painted on the sides of the rescue plane. Then he leveled off and let the Hercules settle on the water.

The radium ship was at the wreckage first. When Matthews got there, two men had already climbed out on the pontoons. One was dressed in pilot's togs. The other, an older man, wore a business suit with the air of an executive. Dick Matthews taxied closer before cutting his switch.

"He's done for!" the older man said in a stentorian voice as the young flyer opened the sliding panel of his windshield. "We saw him crash! He came diving through the clouds with his motor wide open. When he tried to pull out, that wing—" the man shuddered, nodding at the wreckage—"wrapped itself around the cabin. He couldn't bail out. He—"

Then the motorboat came between the speaker and the radium plane, blanketing the man's words.

Dick Matthews started his motor again, taxied to North Fork. Somehow, he felt no elation over Sharp's demise, only engulfing weariness. Besides, his arm was throbbing. It had stopped bleeding now.

Matthews beached the Hercules between the piers. On shore he was immediately surrounded by excited people who clamored for information about the accident. It was Fay Laval who first noticed his bloody hand.

"You're hurt!" she cried, reaching for his injured arm.

Matthews pulled his hand away. "I'm all right," he lied. "Anyway, it isn't much."

"How did it happen! Where— But never mind that now!" Fay amended quickly. "You come with me, young man!"

Fay took his good arm, leading him inside the hangar. There she dispatched a man in overalls for warm water, another for the first-aid kit. While she was bathing his wound, she said,

"Why'd you run off like that with a Hercules? Where'd you go? And who shot you?"

Before he could answer, a familiar voice at the hangar door bellowed,

"Is Mr. Matthews in here?"

"Yes," Fay called. "He's here."

Matthews saw two men come across the hangar floor. One was the fellow he'd seen at the wreckage. The other was the curly-headed chap with corduroy breeches.

"Here comes my brother Andre," Fay said, straightening up. "And he's got Mr. Morey, the mine superintendent, with him."

A WHIMSICAL grin lit up Dick Matthews' face as he acknowledged introductions. So this curly-headed fellow was Fay's brother. No wonder she had permitted that possessive arm! It was a good thing he hadn't said anything about it.

"Why, you're the flyer I saw at the wreck," Mr. Morey greeted him, shaking Matthews' good hand. "Being in a Hercules, I thought you were one of Sharp's men."

"No, I'm with Sampson Aircraft. That's my Sampson out there." The young pilot nodded toward the hangar door. "What's left of it, that is!"

"So I understand, Matthews. It's a nice-looking job you've got there. Too bad about that wing."

"But the bids!" Dick Matthews protested. "They close tomorrow, don't

*(Concluded on page 119)*

# STORY CONTEST



Each issue, until further notice, AIR ADVENTURES will pay to the author of the leading story in that issue, as determined by readers' vote of popularity, a bonus of \$75.00. An additional award of \$25.00 will be paid to the author of the second best story in the issue. In this way we will reward authors of exceptional stories and provide an additional incentive to create top-notch fiction for our readers.

Now we haven't left the readers out of this. We will pay to the reader who lists the stories in this issue in the nearest to the final correct order, and who writes the best letter of 20 words or more on "Why I selected story number one for that position" a prize of \$10.00. Here's your chance to tell the editor a thing or two and get paid for it!

With our first issue, we began this prize award policy and here's the results of the first contest:

**First prize:** Charles S. Verral, author of "The Boy Who Couldn't Fly" ..... \$75.00  
**Second prize:** Orlando Rigoni, author of "The Coward" ..... 25.00  
**Reader prize:** Allen McNechr, Box 63, San Ysidro, Calif. ..... 10.00

Congratulations, you prize winners! Your yarns certainly rang the bell. And you, Mr. McNechr, our admiration for selecting stories in most nearly correct order and telling us why you picked story number one. You showed the editor you knew a thing or two about air fiction and we hope you'll keep on coming at us. You know your stuff!

Now, you other readers, give Mr. McNechr some competition. Clip the coupon and fill it out. List the stories in the order you believe they ought to appear, best story number one and so on, and write us a letter of 20 words or more telling us why you selected story number one for that position. It's easy money, and we want your opinion.

## CLIP THIS COUPON AND MAIL

AIR ADVENTURES

Ziff-Davis Publishing Company  
 608 South Dearborn Street  
 Chicago, Illinois

In my opinion the stories in the February issue of AIR ADVENTURES rank as follows:

SPY SHIP OVER THE ANDES .....  
 SPITFIRE SQUADRON .....  
 DEATH HAS RED WINGS .....  
 MURDER: VIA AIRMAIL .....  
 TREACHERY IN ARCTIC SKIES .....  
 THE IRON PILOT .....

Attached is my letter of 20 words or more giving my reason for selecting story number one for that position. Check here.

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

CITY ..... STATE .....

# He's Coming Back!



the author of the most famous character in science fiction!



10 years ago BUCK ROGERS made his bow to the world! This character was destined to become almost an idol in the eyes of young and old alike!

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# Contact with the Authors

ALEXANDER BLADE Author of  
DEATH HAS RED WINGS

**S**O you kiwis want to know how come I've taken up fictioneering to earn my Scotch-and-sodas? Well, it all started back in 1912, when the doctor said it was a boy, and my Dad promptly wrote away to Amherst to register me for the class of 1930.

Well, 1930 came around and Amherst was still there, but somehow the family hope chest had ducked around the corner, and it was either get out and work, or else.

We were in Atlantic City at the time, and a friend of mine knew the editor of a local weekly newspaper. So he got me a job as copy boy, leg man and general stooge.

It wasn't much money, but it was a hell of a lot of fun. Week-ends I spent at the Municipal Airport, where my old friend Bevan Baldwin presided over the doings of local air fans. Bev introduced me to some of the boys, and pretty soon I was taking plenty of hops and helping to service those old crates for my reward.

It wasn't very long before I had my pilot's license. And then I began to get ideas. About that time there were a bunch of revolutions popping off down in Latin America, so I bought myself an old Waco and scooted off for the wars—in easy stages.

Anyway, I wound up in Asuncion, the capital of Paraguay, in September, 1934, with a head this big. The boys promptly seized my Waco, stuck some Browning guns on it, painted it up, and I was a captain in the Paraguayan Air Corps—fighting Bolivia in that little Gran Chaco fracas which lasted until a year later.

When peace broke out in 1935, I stuck myself on a tramp ship with some of my pals, and we wound up a couple months later flying for Marshal Chang in China—the guy who later kidnaped Chiang Kai-shek and then released him.

However, the Japs don't exactly play a gentlemen's game at war. Besides, they're lousy flyers, much worse than the Chinese. So when the Spanish civil war broke out, I ducked out for Madrid.

The Loyalists gave me an old French Breguet to play with, but Franco had it all his own way till the Russians showed up with their Moscas. I shot down three fascists and scared hell out of plenty Heinkel bombers. But internal dissension and a sell-out by France and Britain doomed the Spanish republic, and I came back to the U. S. with the last of the Lincoln Brigade boys.

I've been here ever since and am now living in Reno, Nevada, where I chase around and dig up

clients for a couple of divorce lawyers. I also do a little writing, of which *Death Has Red Wings* is my first published air short.

WILLIAM O'SULLIVAN Author of  
SPY SHIPS OVER THE ANDES

**T**HE records have it that I was born August 26, 1898, but I have no recollection of that catastrophe.

My father was a respected Vermont Democrat, moved the family to New York in the '80's and eventually became an important State judge.

After a family tour of Europe, during which I rattled the crowns on several uneasy royal heads, I settled down at De Witt Clinton High School. On graduation, Princeton U. stared me in the face, and I don't know what I would have done had not the war come along.

But the O'Sullivan luck still held good. I fought for democracy and the munition makers out in Memphis, Tenn., as an aviation instructor, and they say I was a damn good one, too!

Comes July 5, 1919, and I am somehow chief pilot of the Memphis Aerial Company, distributing Curtiss ships.

So I barnstorm, I teach flying, I go in for parachute jumping, wing-walking, crack-ups—and wind up behind the counter in an Alabama store.

The second time I busted my skull, I called quits and went to work. Started out at \$35 a week, wound up at \$125—and quit!

So I begin all over again as a pulp magazine editor, but I wind up by being fired. I take up writing as a profession, I've got a farm down in Maryland, and I've been at 'em ever since.

ROBERT SIDNEY BOWEN Author of  
MURDER VIA AIR MAIL

**I**FIRST saw the light of day on Oct. 4, 1900, and after various teachers managed to push a little knowledge into my head, it suddenly became 1916. So I left school, went to France, and drove an ambulance in the French Army.

When the U. S. entered the war I returned home, but not being a college graduate could not enlist in the Air Service or Naval Aviation, so I joined the Royal Flying Corps, learned to fly and went out to France as a scout pilot.

After the Armistice I went with my squadron to Egypt and served there until 1920. Returned to England and became a newspaper man. Came home in 1922 and worked on Boston papers.

Been writing and selling stories since 1925 . . . and certainly hope I shall be able to continue to do so for many moons to come.

# Questions & Answers

This department will be conducted each issue as a source of information for our readers. Address your letters to Question and Answer Department, AIR ADVENTURES, 608 S. Dearborn St., Chicago, Ill.

*Q. How would an American go about enlisting in the Royal Air Force or the Royal Canadian Air Force?—E. W. Redding, Jr., Box 786, Sapulpa, Okla.*

**A.** The State Department in Washington, D.C., frowns upon American enlistment in the military services of France and Britain. "Officially," only British subjects may join up with the colors. However, there are said to be ways and means of evading this ban, but what they are AIR ADVENTURES does not pretend to know.

To join the Royal Air Force, the recruit must be a British subject and present documentary proof of his birth under the Union Jack.

The French, however, are said not to be so rigid. To enlist under the Tricolor, the recruit must present himself on French soil. The French are accepting volunteers from other lands—Poles, Czechs, etc.

From time to time, characters in AIR ADVENTURES stories may be Americans enlisted with the British or their allies. How they enlisted, of course, will doubtless be an unexplained detail, because after all stories are fictional, despite their having a factual basis in relation to modern war.

Ambitious young men should understand, however, that war is no cinch, even though at the moment hostilities are on the passive side. The nation's flying services today are wide open for promising youngsters. Vacancies exist in the Army Air Corps, and the Naval and Marine Corps flying services.

See America first!

*Q. Would you please list the various types of aircraft used for military purposes and their speeds in your next issue?—Dick Snyder, 612 Westcott St., Syracuse, N.Y.*

**A.** This would be a task for a separate book, as there are literally thousands of warplanes in use and in production at the present time. In our stories, AIR ADVENTURES makes a point, in footnotes, of describing the types of warcraft which participate in the action. Also, in future issues we will stack an Allied plane up against its Nazi counterpart, and let the facts speak for themselves.

*Q. What kind of ship is the Brown B-3?—Lee Gelwasser, 406-A Isquith St., Baltimore, Md.*

**A.** The B-3 is a de luxe touring version of the Brown company's "Miss Los Angeles." This B-3 is a single-seater (by special arrangement), has a 250 hp. Menasco C-6S engine, and its maximum speed is 205 m.p.h.—cruising speed 190 m.p.h. A monoplane, its service ceiling is 18,000 feet, with a range of 600 miles.

Further, the possibilities of using this type of ship for military purposes are being investigated.

*Q. I am a Tennessee Polytechnic Institute freshman, majoring in mechanical engineering. I plan to enter the Army Air Corps after finishing my four years.*

*Is mechanical engineering the best course I could take under these circumstances, and what subjects should I take in particular?—Dan Williams, T.P.I., Cookeville, Tenn.*

**A.** An applicant for training in the Army Air Corps must be not more than 26—and must have had not less than two years of college training. This should consist preferably in engineering. The applicant also must pass any examinations in education as are put before him.

Therefore, it is not necessary to go four years to college for admission into the Air Corps. The only thing is, health must be perfect, eyesight flawless, and in addition the applicant must be psychologically of the "right stuff."

*Q. What are the aviation lessons of the Second World War, at this time?—Harold Murphy, 22 W. 52nd St., New York.*

**A.** At this writing, there has been no real test of strength between Nazi and Allied air forces. The only real fight thus far has been a dogfight between 27 Nazis and 9 British ships.

The British knocked down 9 Nazis, according to official dispatches, but escaped unscathed themselves—a remarkable achievement in any man's language.

Thus far, the British have been able to chase away any and all Nazi bombers over Scotland. British pursuit ships and interceptors, apparently, are of the best.

# AIR QUIZ

The following quiz has been prepared as a pleasant means of testing your knowledge of aeronautics. We offer it solely for the pleasure it gives you and with the hope that it will provide you with many bits of information that will help you to enjoy the stories in this magazine. If you can answer 23 questions correctly (there are 37 altogether) you are way above average.

## TRUE OR FALSE

1. The age qualification for appointment as an aviation cadet in the U. S. Marine Corps Reserve is 20 years. True.... False....
2. A monocoque fuselage is one that is composed of a great number of longerons, and that has no cross braces or bulkheads. True.... False....
3. The first man to fly solo around the world was Wiley Post. True.... False....
4. The Parabellum was a popular fixed machine-gun widely used by the Allies. True.... False....
5. The Fokker D-23 has three three-bladed propellers. True.... False....
6. Some early propellers were made of canvas. True.... False....
7. The Beardmore "Adriatic" had a four-wheeled landing gear. True.... False....
8. The early Wright planes landed on skids. True.... False....
9. When two aeroplanes meet head on, each must alter his course to the left. True.... False....
10. The Boeing XF6B-1 is being widely used by the U. S. Navy. True.... False....
11. Cumulus clouds are found usually at 35,000 ft. True.... False....
12. The stabilizer is the movable control surface that is used for up and down control. True.... False....
13. With increasing tip speed the efficiency of the propeller drops very fast. True.... False....
14. The military version of the Lockheed "12" is the "212." True.... False....
15. Canadian Airlines carried three times as much freight and express as all the United States airlines in 1937. True.... False....

## PLANE TALK

1. Does the Stratoliner actually fly in the stratosphere?

2. Have ornithopters been successful?
3. What 'plane did Alcock and Brown use on their trans-Atlantic flight?
4. What was the outstanding European aeroplane of 1909?
5. What plane is standard equipment on the TCA?

## METEOROLOGY

1. Name four types of clouds.
2. Is Meteorology the science devoted to the study of meteors?
3. Are cyclones vast spiral movements of the air from 1,000 to 2,000 miles in diameter?
4. State Ferrel's law.
5. Name the clouds found at the greatest altitude.

## SCRAMBLED WORDS

1. Part of an aeroplane. RANILOE.....
2. British fighter. TRISPIFE.....
3. German World War bomber. HAGOT....
4. Well-known light plane. FORAYCALRTT
5. Type of fuselage. CONQUOMEO.....
6. An instrument. SOPCASM.....

## STRIKE OUT THE WORD THAT DOES NOT CONFORM

1. Fokker, Spad, Albatros, Halberstadt, Junkers.
2. Argon, aileron, longeron, ignition, rudder.
3. Lewis, Marlin, Vickers, Hotchkiss, Span-dau.
4. Cyclone, hurricane, thunderstorm, tornado.

## MEN IN AVIATION

1. Who is America's leading War Ace?
2. Who is the "Viking of the Skies"?
3. Who is Canada's leading War Ace?
4. Who won the Pulitzer prize race in 1923?
5. Who introduced aviation to American?

(Answers on page 126)



# Reader's Page

## CORRECTIONS

Sirs:

I have just read AIR ADVENTURES for Dec., which I enjoyed very much, including the article *Forgotten Heroes* by David Robinson George.

However, I feel that the names of Joe Weiner and Jerry Vasconcelles, who were with the 27th Aero Squadron in the First Pursuit Group, should not have been omitted.

I am sure Jerry Vasconcelles was credited with at least six victories, and I thought Joe Weiner had as many.

At the bottom of the official list of American Aviation Aces who were in the Lafayette Escadrille, who died since returning to the States, I notice you have mentioned the names of Frank Luke and Major Raoul Lufbery. Both of these men died valiantly in line of duty.

E. P. McGEEHEE,  
2400 Barton Ave.,  
Richmond, Va.

(Former member 27th Aero Squadron, 1917-18.)

*Well, we've had considerable correspondence on this article, and about a year from now it might be a good idea to run it over again, with corrections brought up to date to account for the Grim Reaper's toll, and other factors.*

## FROM AUTHOR GEORGE

Sirs:

Was pleased to see the first issue of the mag, and it looks swell. I thought you presented the article nicely, although there were some minor errors.

For one thing, that list of American aces you ran included Lufbery. Lufbery was in the Escadrille. The reason I didn't include him in my list is that he was killed in action, and my list was only about those who came back alive.

Second, Thomas Hewitt died recently, as the article recounts, and should have been slugged with an asterisk in the list.

Incidentally, Charles Johnson, the ace with an incurable throat disease, died in Johns Hopkins Hospital, Baltimore, the day the article came out.

DAVID ROBINSON GEORGE,  
*Brooklyn Eagle*,  
Brooklyn, N. Y.

*So that's that. We'll have to get together with Mr. George when we run future articles like this.—Ed.*

## 80-YEAR-OLD EDITORS

Sirs:

Sure got a big kick out of the first number of AIR ADVENTURES. You know, there are some air pulps on the market that read as though some 80-year-old bachelor edited them. They aren't even worth a dime. Keep up the good work, and I'm your pal for life.

CLEMENT REIMAN,  
New Milford, Conn.

*Clement, you said a mouthful. We not only want folks and young fellers to read our mag, we want 'em to enjoy the book all the way through. Any time you ever think we're getting ancient, drop me a line and give me both barrels.—Ed.*

## PRAISE INDEED

Sirs:

AIR ADVENTURES is swell!! I have read your *Popular Aviation* for a number of years, and have often wondered why you hadn't put out a mag devoted more to fiction. Well, you have and it is a beaut. (Thanks, friend, thanks!—Ed.)

I like your idea of utilizing the back cover for full color drawings. I guess I'm not the only one who likes to collect them.

F. CARL WALLACE, JR.,  
9 Parker Road,  
Wakefield, Mass.

*Carl, you ain't seen nothin' yet! How'd you like that natural color photo of Col. Roscoe Turner on this issue's back cover? Pretty neat, isn't it?—Ed.*

## NO AGE LIMIT, HARRY

Sirs:

I've given preference to "A Nazi Shall Die!" in the first issue because it tries to reveal the true character of the enemy. That they are not so heartless and ruthless as they are assumed to be.

HARRY TURKEL,  
2755 Reservoir Ave.,  
New York City.

P.S.—Though I am only thirteen, I feel myself eligible for the *Story Contest*, because nothing is mentioned about any age limit.

*Harry, you hit the nail right on the head. You're just as eligible to participate in the voting as any reader from nine to 90. Just because you're a youngster doesn't bar you from participating. In fact, a whole lot of our readers are boys just around your own age; perhaps a year or two older.—Ed.*

## TREACHERY IN ARCTIC SKIES

(Continued from page 112)

they? It'll take days to repair that wing!"

"Andre Laval, here—" Morey indicated Fay's brother with a nod—"can have that wing fixed for you. I'm going back to the mines tomorrow. I'll hold the bids open till you get there."

As Morey and young Laval left the hangar, Fay finished dressing Matthews' arm. The Canadian sun was painting its last scene on the underside of clouds when they went to the hangar door to watch Andre Laval direct the operation of a big crane. A crew of men, who had lifted the Sampson from the water, were easing the plane onto the dock. When this was done, Andre joined Dick Matthews and Fay at the hangar door.

"First thing in the morning," he grinned, "we'll get after that wing. But let's go home now, see what we've got for supper."

As they turned away from the hangar, Fay linked one arm through Dick Matthews', the other through her brother's.

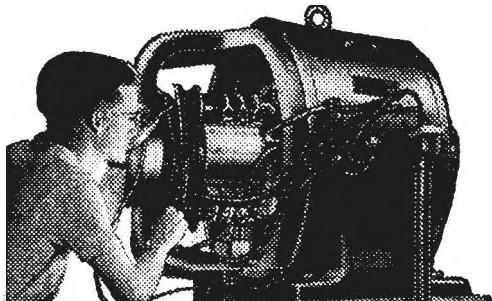
Trudging up a path leading to a low bungalow, Andre said:

"Mr. Morey thinks you've got a sale coming up, Matthews, if your Sampson performs as well as it looks."

"Does it?" Fay said impishly, hugging the young flyer's arm a little closer to her side.

"If that's what he said," Dick Matthews chuckled, "the sale's in the bag! Why, that thousand horsepower motor talks for itself. And the way she gathers up the miles, these radium flyers'll think they're riding a comet!"

Andre Laval nodded his head. "Your only real competition was the Hercules," he said. "Mr. Morey told me that they offered six ships at a pretty



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low figure. But he wouldn't ask any of his men to fly them, he said, after the way that fellow's wing buckled on him today—and no chance to use his 'chute, either. 'Flying Coffins', that's what Mr. Morey called them."

"I wouldn't say he was wrong," Dick Matthews observed a little tightly.

THE END

## MURDER: VIA AIRMAIL

(Continued from page 103)

the main tank to the fuel pump. But we didn't notice that at first."

"Yeah," I muttered. "I'll say we didn't. That so-and-so was clever as hell."

"But not clever enough," Ryan said. "They never are. Well, we didn't notice who had monkeyed with that fuel line, because it was Mr. Marcus Spaulding who checked the fuel lines—while you checked the ignition. And that night you took a second look, one of his hired thugs belted you and switched fuel lines just to make sure."

"As a matter of fact, I was heading for that hangar to have a look myself when I saw someone dash out on the run. I couldn't be sure in the darkness who it was. But of course I had an idea."

"That always helps," I added a bit testily.

"No wisecracks, pal," Ryan growled. "Well, when you left I decided to come out here as often as I could and wait. And dammit, I still don't know why you and Jeff crashed!"

"Simple," I said and felt better. "On each side of this field you'll find a tree; lots of 'em, in fact. The day after Jeff died, I came out here for a look. I saw marks on a tree on each side where a heavy cable had been looped around. That cable made the grooves in Jeff's landing gear struts. In short,

Jeff and I, in landing close to the leenend lights—because the others were out—hit a cable stretched across the field no more than a couple of feet off the ground, so you'd never spot it until too late.

"The crash knocked Jeff out. Then Spaulding, who was waiting—he pulled it on his night off, of course—finished Jeff with a wrench and made off with the mail in his car; probably after hiding Jeff's body and the severed cable. But, how come you played detective, and why in hell didn't you give me a hand with him just now?"

"DIDN'T I say I just got here?"

Ryan snapped. "And besides, should I worry what happened to your neck? But about the detective part. I came to Union Airlines on the request of the vice-president, who happens to be an uncle of mine. Things have been going funny at Union, and he asked me to keep an eye open. He suspected Spaulding of some funny stuff, but didn't have a shred of proof. I didn't even get a hunch myself until Jeff Randall died."

"But Spaulding must have got wise that he was headed for trouble," I mused aloud. "So he decided to get two birds with one stone. Put the company in a jam, and get some heavy dough before he got the gate. The dirty stinking louse!"

"And he came plenty close!" Ryan breathed. "There's fifty thousand in registered mail right there in your plane. I saw it on the manifest. I wasn't coming out here tonight, but when I saw that manifest, I— Hey, then you must have seen it, too!"

"Nope." I shook my head and grinned at him. "But I knew it was there. I arranged with the Post Office Department to make you birds at Union *think* you were carrying fifty

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## AIR ADVENTURES

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thousand west tonight. I figured Spaulding wouldn't pass up one last big haul. There isn't a bent dime in that mail sack, Ryan.

"Now, help me turn this louse over to the Thurston police, and you might also lend a hand in inducing him to turn back that thirty thousand he did get. I've got to get back to St. Louis, myself. I owe young Cox a couple of drinks, and—well, would you like to join us, Ryan?"

So we got Professor Spaulding back to St. Louis and stuck him in the cooler. The cops, we figured, would do the rest. Then we picked up young Cox, but before I could get around to explaining things, we had all had one drink too many.

THE END.

## SPY SHIPS OVER THE ANDES

(Continued from page 49)

room with the dead—his dead. When he came out again, he was resigned, clear-eyed. He looked at Dawes.

"And Sparky Seemon?"

"Mercedes' husband," Dawes said. "And, Lord, is he jealous!"

"And crazy about Mercedes, too," Bick said, remembering the man's desperate attempt to stop the flight to Rio. "They're married," Dawes pointed out.

"Yes," Bick said. "They're married." He looked at the closed door again. "And—and other people might have been married, too. If—"

Dawes said gruffly, "You're married to the Navy, son! Now, get out there and do your job!" He stuck out his hand. "Glad to have you aboard! And like the others, you're sworn to secrecy in this thing!"

Peace dawned again in Bick's face. He said simply:

"Glad to be aboard, sir."

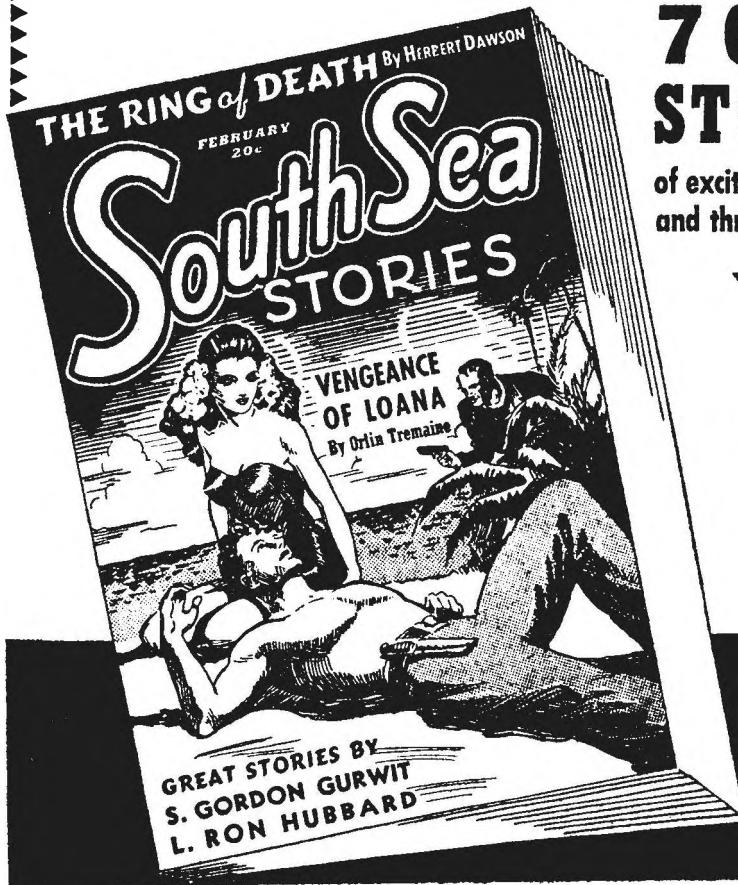
(Concluded on page 125)

# "IF IT'S WAR YOU WANT..."

... no time now to lose! He was in the water like a seal... swimming below the surface toward the powerful Messerschmitt! Barney swung lightly in the surface swell, then cautiously climbed the pontoon, and was in the pilot's cockpit in a flash... crouching so he could not be seen by his enemies aboard the *Posen*! Suddenly there was a sharp cry aboard the ship: "The plane! She's broken loose!" A shiver raced through Barney... his heart pumped like a trip-hammer! He was risking everything on this one bold play... and if that failed... then once again lovely Pahua would be the base for ruthless war pirates... and the sunken treasure of 1918 would be used to turn the peaceful South Seas into a new theatre of naval warfare! Here is a glamorous, exciting novel of the South Seas! Don't fail to read this dynamic story of modern raiders and sunken treasure...

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# ◀ FALLING FREE ▶

By LYLE D. GUNN

Perhaps everyone who has ever witnessed a parachute jump has wondered how it actually feels to fall from such a great height, and plummet down in a free fall.

You've asked yourself: "What if I jumped out from high up and didn't pull the ripcord for some time, until my falling speed grew so great that . . . ?"

You leave the question unfinished because you wonder then: "Just how fast *would* I fall? Would my speed increase constantly, until I was dropping at a tremendous rate? And what would happen to me? Would I lose consciousness, and be unable to pull the ripcord at all, to open the parachute?"

These are all good questions, and the kind that everyone asks, and no one seems to be able to answer definitely.

However, the fact is, the answer has been supplied by a medical officer of the United States Army Air Corps, who, in an effort to solve the question for once and for all, stepped out of a plane at an altitude of 2,200 feet and *let himself plummet straight down* for a distance equivalent to two city blocks, or more than half the distance of his total fall!

Which is quite a way to tumble through empty space.

He got himself a real thrill, and reached some definite conclusions. Briefly, they are:

Speed of fall. We know that wind resistance to a falling body builds up with the increase in speed. That is to say, that the air pressure increases with the velocity until it equals in pounds, the weight of the body. When this point is reached, the speed of the falling body is constant; it no longer increases. Our knowledge on this point was supported by the experiment, because the Army

officer *didn't* keep falling faster—not after he had reached a speed of 120 miles per hour!

Now, since this experiment, others have measured the speed, and we have several different figures, one as high as 180 miles per hour. But as an average, we find a constant speed of about 120 m.p.h. is the constant in normal atmospheric pressure.

Considering the question of loss of consciousness, this officer stated he felt absolutely no sensation of "blackout" at all. He retained full possession of his senses. But there were plenty of other surprises on the way down.

In the first place, though there were twelve planes flying near him, he couldn't hear a sound! At least he recalled no noise, and it wasn't because of the rush of air past his ears, because at no time was he aware of that!

Also, in the first second or two his eyes closed involuntarily, and all sense of motion ceased at once. He felt suspended at rest in midair.

Only after his eyes were open was there any sense of falling. It increased rapidly after that, but there was no unpleasant sensation.

It took no effort to breathe, and he had no sick, empty feeling.

Immediately after jumping, the forward motion of the plane turned his body over. But that leisurely somersault in space was a pleasant contribution.

Long before he pulled the ripcord at 1,200 feet, he could feel the air resistance. It felt like soft pressure on the lower parts of his body. He felt as though he were being lowered into a bed of softest down! And that's how it really feels. If you don't believe it, try it yourself some time!

## SPY SHIPS OVER THE ANDES

(Concluded from page 122)

IN THE big cabin, Oshinsky murmured, "Notice anything different about the Big Guy?"

"Naw!" O'Kelley said scornfully. "Nelson's always been the same."

Sparks said, "Well, now, I don't know. I tell you—"

"Sparks!" Bick Nelson cut in.

"Aye, sir?"

The huge motors roared an even note of peace as the flight winged over the broad Pacific for Honolulu.

*"Orders: Entire squadron getting ten days' leave at Honolulu."*

"Aye, sir!" Sparks flashed a scornful look at Oshinsky. "The Big Guy will never change. He'll always be—the Big Guy!"

## THE IRON PILOT

(Continued from page 111)

of the drag, screamed into a frenzy of power and then cut out!

Pinder was fighting the Waco, trying to pull it out of a spin, but the shattered wing was against him.

Golightly, suspended in his 'chute, saw the ground rush at him and bent his knees to break the impact. He braced himself as he struck, spilled his 'chute. Looking up, he saw that Pinder was in a bad fix. He couldn't break the spin of the Waco. Jerry Cole, in the Tobias, was safe from fire, for he had cut the switch. The Zephyr was circling down gently under half-throttle. Golightly decided that Harris had had all the fight taken out of him.

Pinder struck first. Golightly slipped his 'chute and raced to the wreck as the flames mushroomed over it when the gasoline tank burst. He fought his way in, grabbed Pinder and heaved him out of the Waco.

(Concluded on page 130)

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6.5-17	2.90	1.85					
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## AIR QUIZ ANSWERS

(Quiz on page 117)

## TRUE OR FALSE

1. True.
2. False.
3. True.
4. False.
5. False.
6. True.
7. True.
8. True.
9. False.
10. False.
11. False.
12. False—the elevator is used. The stabilizer is a fixed surface.
13. True.
14. True.
15. True.

## PLANE TALK

1. No.
2. No.
3. Vickers "Vimy."
4. The "Goupy I."
5. Lockheed "14."

## METEOROLOGY

1. Cirrus, stratus, nimbus, cumulus, alto-cumulus, and combinations of the four main types.
2. No. It is the science of atmospheric phenomena.
3. Yes.
4. All winds in the northern hemisphere are deflected to the right of their course by the rotation of the Earth, and all the winds in the southern hemisphere are deflected to the left of their course.
5. Cirrus.

## SCRAMBLED WORDS

1. Aileron; 2. Spitfire; 3. Gotha; 4. Taylor-craft; 5. Monocoque; 6. Compass.

## STRIKE OUT THE WORD THAT DOES NOT CONFORM

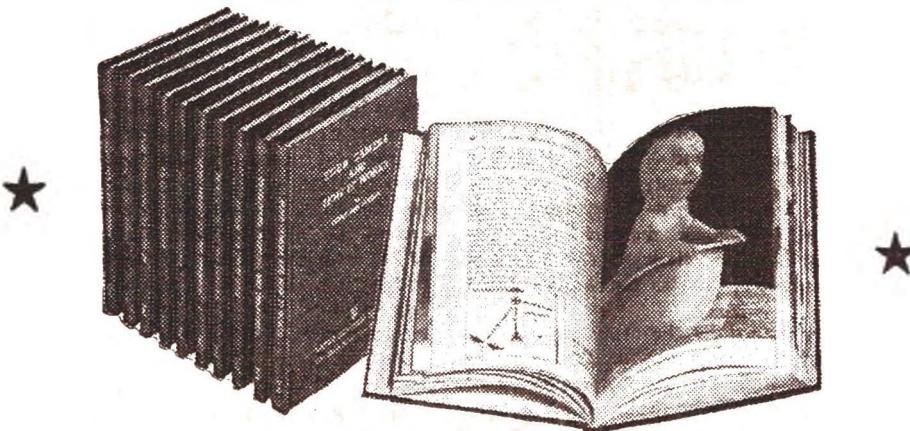
1. Spad—the rest are German planes.
2. Argon—the rest are parts of an aeroplane.
3. Spandau—the rest are machine-guns used by the Allies.
4. Thunderstorm—the rest are cyclonic atmospheric phenomena.

## MEN IN AVIATION

1. Edward Vernon Rickenbacker—25 victories.
2. Bernt Balchen.
3. Lieut.-Col. William Avery Bishop—72 victories.
4. Alford Joseph Williams (Major Al Williams).
5. Blanchard, 1793.

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# FAMOUS FLYERS

## *Colonel Roscoe Turner*

**The fastest man in the world! No one has ever approached this flyer's achievements in speed.**

(AIR ADVENTURES COLOR-PHOTO ON BACK COVER)

ON September 5, 1939, Roscoe Turner whipped his silver bullet Turner-Laird Special through the 300 mile Thompson trophy race to win that event for the third time, the only man who has won the grueling grind more than once. Then he announced his retirement for air speed racing, closing a ten-year career that easily established him as the world's No. 1 speed flyer.

Turner was trained by the army air corps in 1917, a twenty-three-year-old kid. Since then he has always been in the air. He operated an airline along the southern Atlantic Seaboard for a time, and for another period was a one man airline himself between Los Angeles and Winslow, Arizona. In 1928 he failed in an attempt to break the endurance record, but the bug of competition had bitten him.

The first of his long series of record breaking performances came in 1930, when he flew from New York to Glendale, California, in 18 hours and 43 minutes, beating the transcontinental mark set up the year before by Frank Hawks. A few weeks later he demonstrated the feasibility of a daylight transcontinental passenger service by taking three passengers from Glendale to New York in a little less than 20 hours.

By arriving in New York an hour too late, Turner disqualified himself for the \$10,000 prize offered for a west-east nonstop flight, but he went on to set a new border-to-border record by screaming down from Vancouver to Agua Caliente at the terrific speed of 150 mph.

In 1932 he got together with Jimmy Wedell and built three special racing jobs, stubby low-winged monoplanes capable of 300 mph. Then the records really began to topple, although the west-east transcontinental record continued to ride high as a Turner jinx.

On the first leg of an attempted round trip record, in November, 1932, he blew out a tire and damaged his landing gear at Columbus, Ohio. After repairs he went on to New York, turned around, and streaked across the continent in 12½ hours, beating the old record by more than two hours. Then he smashed the round trip time between Los Angeles and San Francisco by maintaining an average of 275 mph.

In the summer of 1933 storms and trouble balked four efforts to set a new west-east record, but he

broke his own west-east record by winning the cross country dash of the National Air Races with a time of 11 hours and 30 minutes, an average from coast to coast of 212 mph. Then he won the 100 mile Thompson Trophy race by streaking around the ten mile closed course at an average of 241 mph. and the straightaway race at a speed of 281 mph. However, it was not to be all sweetness and light. During the race he skipped one pylon to avoid a collision with Jimmy Wedell. Although he made it up by circling the pylon a second time on the next lap, he was disqualified.

In September, 1933, he broke the jinx that had balked his attempts at a west-east record, and flew from Los Angeles to New York in 10 hours, 5½ minutes, breaking the previous record held by Jimmy Haizlip.

In 1934, Turner had his first Thompson Trophy win that stood up, averaging 253 mph. Then he entered the London-Melbourne race, and his troubles began. On July 10 he was barred as a competitor by some technicality; three days later he was reinstated.

With Clyde Pangborn as a partner he selected a Boeing 247-D, a low wing twin motored transport plane. While waiting for the ship, he dashed east again, breaking his former record by several minutes. Then he returned to the coast, and flew the Boeing east for shipment abroad.

In France he had his headaches with officialdom. They refused to let him uncrate the airplane and hop for London until Turner and Pangborn raised 500,000 francs, but finally the United States lines arranged a satisfactory bond.

The race was a steady series of bad breaks for the Americans. They were, like the leading Dutch entry, flying a stock model American transport in competition with special racing jobs entered by the British. A British ship won hands down, but it was neck and neck between the Dutch and Americans. Motor trouble all the way across Australia cut Turner's speed, and a broken oil line delayed him enough at Darwin, Charleville, and Bourke to permit the Dutch team to take second place. By the rules this gave them first place in the handicap, while Turner and Pangborn placed second in the speed event.

The jinx hung on. In 1935, with a 1 minute 32 second lead and less than a lap to go, a super-charger blade let go, and wrecked the motor. It

caught fire, but Turner rode the ship and barely managed to land it safely on the field. To sympathetic friends he remarked,

"I don't think it was hard luck. I think it's good luck every time you can walk away from airplanes like that."

The race was won by Harold Neuman, with an average 30 miles slower than Turner's best previous record.

He was also jinxed in the Bendix race that year; refueling difficulties in Albuquerque grounded him for the extra minutes that lost the race.

Things went the same way in 1936. This time he crashed because of a broken throttle, again in New Mexico. It was Turner's first crash in nineteen years of flying, and he felt lucky to walk away with no more damage than two broken ribs.

In 1937 he got his famous No. 29, a stubby mid-wing monoplane powered with a twin-row, 14 cylinder Wasp, capable of 1,400 hp. Its wingspread is only 24 feet; its length, 31 feet. It has hit speeds as high as 375 mph.

But the jinx hung on. He was forced out of  
(Continued on page 130)

## SPECIFICATIONS OF LAIRD L-RT RACER

by RAOUL J. HOFFMAN, co-designer.

**TYPE:**—Single seater racer monoplane.

**PERFORMANCE:**—Maximum speed 350 m.p.h., climb 7,000 ft. per min. at sea level, landing speed 85 m.p.h.

**POWER PLANT:**—One 1,200 h.p. Pratt & Whitney Twin Row Wasp, fourteen cylinder radial air-cooled engine, driving a three-bladed constant speed propeller. Four fuel tanks containing 220 gals. of fuel at the forward section of the fuselage.

**WINGS:**—All-wood mid-wing cantilever monoplane has a 12 per cent streamline airfoil section, except at the tips. Wing spars of 14 laminations take the normal loads, compression ribs and plywood covering the drag loads; no internal bracings.

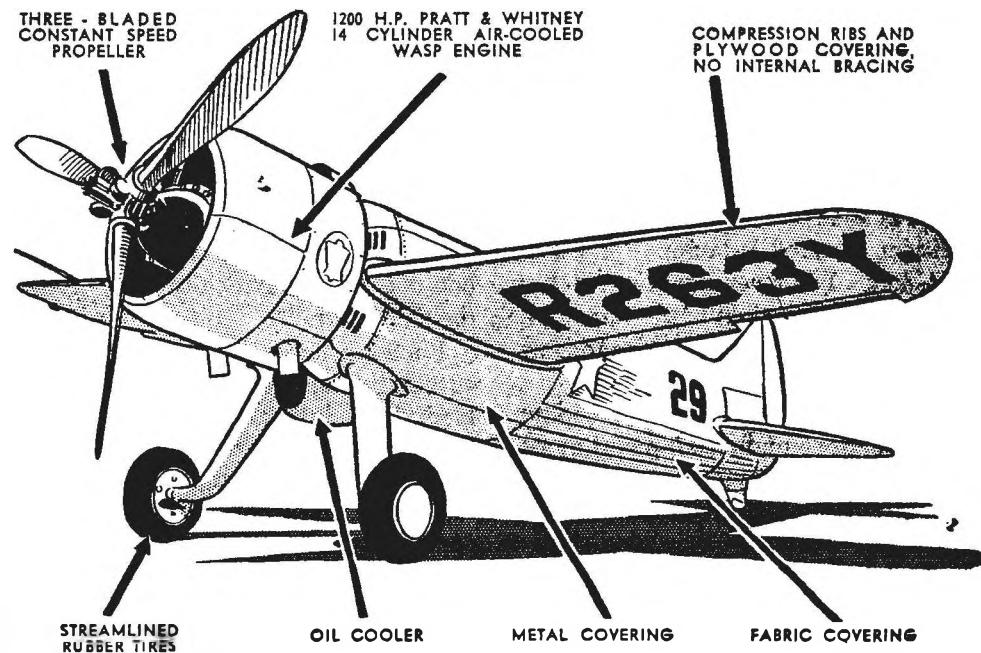
**TAIL SURFACES:**—Stabilizer, similar to the wing design, is adjustable. The rudder and all other controls are dynamically balanced with lead weights to prevent flutter.

**FUSELAGE:**—Rectangular structure of welded steel alloy tubings rear portion forming the fin. The forward portion is metal-covered and the rearward portion fabric-covered.

**UNDERCARRIAGE:**—Hinged cantilever landing gear with rubber disc shock-absorbers located inside the fuselage; wheels with streamline tires are faired.

**DIMENSIONS:**—Span 25 ft. 2 in., length 23 ft. 6 in., height 10 ft., wing area 117.6 sq. ft.

**WEIGHTS:**—Loaded 4,900 lbs., empty 3,300 lbs.



the Bendix race when a gasoline tank exploded, but got the ship repaired in time for the Thompson Trophy Race. Flying at a steady 345 mph to make an average of around 280 while sweeping in great circles around the pylons, he was leading in the final lap, but thought he missed a pylon. Remembering 1933, he circled it again, and dropped back to third place.

Lady Luck changed her mind in 1938. With everything clicking perfectly, Turner slowly increased his speed from the first lap average of 224 mph. and lapped the entire field, just diving past

second place Earl Ortman as he crossed the finish line. Then he went on to fly a second lap for luck, put the ship on its tail, and climbed 5,000 feet in sheer exuberance. That was the first time in history that the Thompson Trophy, the world's No. 1 air contest, had been won for a second time by the same man. The new record was 283 mph.

In 1939 he did it again, averaging 282 miles an hour, and lapping the field just as easily as the year before. It was getting monotonous; perhaps that is why Turner has retired to give somebody else a chance to win.

### THE IRON PILOT

*(Concluded from page 125)*

"No—no," Pinder gasped. "I—I don't deserve this! You'll get killed—"

"Shut up!" Golightly cried. Gasping, choking, he got Pinder clear of the flames. "You made up for your rotten temper, Pinder, the way you saved the kid up there."

Pinder grabbed Golightly's hand. "I didn't have anything to do with Harris and this robbery. I knew the kid was in a jam, and was afraid you might go off half-cocked before the whole story came out. That's why I hid in your plane—to look out for the kid."

The Tobias had landed, and Jerry Cole was limping over, his face white and tense. In the course of that wild fight, they had flown out of the hills and were in flat farming country.

"He—he tried to kill me!" the kid gasped. "I didn't want to sell you out, Captain—but God, he had Elaine! Where is she?"

Pinder grunted a laugh. "She's all right, kid. I left her holding a rod on Bart in case I didn't tie him tight enough. I figure he can give us the low-down on this steal—"

Golightly was watching the Zephyr, and the actions of that all-metal monoplane puzzled him.

"Harris is taking it damned easy," he muttered. "Guess he's decided to give up his helling around."

Pinder cried suddenly, "Look, he's not dropping the wheels!"

Golightly started to run toward the spot where the Zephyr was squashing down. The retractable gear hadn't been let out. Golightly shouted.

"Kick 'em out, Harris!"

The Zephyr ironed off on her guts, skidding across the grass and fouled a fence with her left wingtip. She skewered around and stopped, trembling under the throb of the idling engine. Golightly drew his gun, which he had managed to hold on to, and ran to the cabin door. He jerked it open and jumped inside. Then he drew back. He was conscious of Pinder and Jerry Cole looking over his shoulder.

There was a jagged hole in the left side of the Zephyr cabin near the nose. A chunk of the shattered prop had torn through that hole—and had almost completely decapitated Spud Harris, who had sprawled forward over the instrument panel, dead.

**G**OLIGHTLY said softly, "My inventions worked, anyway. The robot cut in automatically and brought the ship down."

Pinder grunted. "You even got an automatic crook killer there, Captain." He indicated the chunk of the steel prop lying against the opposite wall.

Jerry Cole broke in, "I've got to get to Elaine, Captain. There must be something I can do for her."

"Sure," Golightly grinned, "you can marry her. Then you'll know where to find her when you want her!"

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# FAMOUS FLYERS

## *Colonel Roscoe Turner*

**World's No. 1 Speed Flyer...** That's the title this ace of the airways holds... the only man to win the Thompson Trophy three times. (See page 128 for details.)

