

Brigand Beacons

By Arch Whitehouse

A Thrilling "Buzz" Benson Adventure

THE clicking keys of a teletype machine roused the drowsy reporter, as he slumbered over a dusty, oil-grimed typewriter. A red light over the telegraph room blinked at him mockingly. A bell jangled somewhere. The fleeting spectre of a pasty-faced copy-boy slithered through the gloom of the empty city room and completed the rousing. The reporter instinctively slipped a sheet of harsh copy paper in the machine and listened, attempting to tune his ears to the chatter of metallic sounds that came over the wire.

Then he suddenly realized that he was not listening to a box. It was the Associated Press machine in the telegraph "cell" that had awakened him. For a minute more he sat and listened intently, to assure himself that it was true—the A.P. had run a special through for the Mercury "off time." They were an afternoon sheet. Why should the A. P. open their wire at this ungodly hour of night? Their line was supposed to close at 6 P. M. It was now a few minutes after midnight!

"Whew!" he breathed huskily. "I must have dozed off. My God, I'm tired."

And no wonder. Billy "Buzz" Benson, flying reporter of the Los Angeles Mercury, had been in and out of the air for more than fifteen hours, covering his "beat" from San Diego to Seattle. For more than four hours more, he had been pounding out his column.

He jerked himself to his feet, and instinctively grabbed for his helmet and goggles. That rat-tat-tat of the teletype told him that something unusual was up. Then, as the rattle increased in intensity, he turned to the "cell" and peered in. The two machines were battering away in the darkness, as if begging for attention. He slipped his hand around the doorway and pressed the switch. Instantly the room, which had been carefully insulated to muffle the battery of teletypes, became a glaring cave of brilliancy, with the glass-fronted boxes of the teletypes reflecting

the glare back at him. Beneath the glass, he could see the flickering keys sending off their silver sparks as they pounded their metal hammers against the white paper.

"What the devil?" he muttered. "What they got this wire open for tonight?"

He stepped inside and reached for the strip of paper that was crawling up out of the roller. A paragraph or two caught his eye first and he growled

"Fool kid didn't take out the last story before he knocked off," he mumbled, remembering that the copy boy was supposed to clear the roll from the machines before he left for the night. The item was timed 5:56 and had evidently come through just before the machines had been "cut out" for the night. Interested, he read it:

"CHICAGO, Dec. 1—(AP)—Fire of unknown origin destroyed the Municipal Warehouse early this afternoon. Many exhibits and much equipment displayed at the World's Fair Century of Progress, which were awaiting shipment to their owners, were destroyed. The building was a total wreck, and it is impossible at this time to ascertain how much damage was done, or just what was devoured in the conflagration. It is understood that many exhibits from the Hall of Transportation, including many airplanes, were destroyed. Firemen were still fighting the flames at a late hour this afternoon."

Buzz read the item and pored over it dully. Then the paper continued to crawl out of the rollers and entangle itself in his fingers, and he realized that there was still more coming over the wire. The steely keys battered away at the paper roll.

He glanced down and caught a new line that was being repeated.

"Hello! Special for us?"

The yellow sheet came up clear of the glass guard now, and he could read the opening lines.

*“Special and reserved for L. A. Mercury:
Benson report at once to Sunkist Airport. P-26
waiting. Take orders from Lieut. Allsop who will
deliver. Urgent!*

NORTON, Washington.”

Buzz ripped the sheet out and read it again.

“What does the old buzzard want now?” he snarled. “I’m in no shape to go kiting about on some fool stunt at this time of night.”

As he grumbled, Buzz snatched up a sheet of paper and slipped it into the sending machine, threw a switch and started to type.

*“Special for Washington Blade. Attention of
Maj. Norton. 12:13 A. M. Message received.
Reporting to S. A. at once. Can you assign some
one else? No sleep for 24 hours. On duty since . . .
.”*

But that was as far as Buzz got.

A shadow crept across the room and appeared on the wall before him. Buzz glanced up and caught the telltale outline of a gleaming barrel and a round metal container. He knew the outline well. A Tommy gun!

For the fraction of a second Benson sat still; then his hand shot out and grasped a roll of teletype paper. There was a muffled roar somewhere outside of the telegraph cell. Buzz wheeled and let fly with the roll.

The long, yellow strip came streaking off its roll like the wild fantastic streamer of some war god. It went trickling through the door and caught a man full in the chest. Then the gun spoke—a cruel, blistering challenge that swept through the teletype cell, blasting everything before it.

As he threw the roll, Buzz leaped forward and nailed the switch. The gun spoke as he plunged the button down, and the cell was in darkness except for the streaking slugs that were battering into the machines.

How long this kept up, Buzz never knew. Something caught him across the head and he went down in a heap, clutching at nothing as he felt himself falling over a yawning chasm.

AN ambulance intern brought him to, amid the ashen faces that had crowded in from the composing room. Behind them ran a ring of blue uniforms that sparkled with brass buttons. And over someone’s shoulder Buzz could see the Western Union clock. It read 1:03.

“Look at the time!” he let out, the minute his eyes began to focus again. “I’ve got to get out of here.”

But they made him wait until a bandage was placed over a scarlet welt that had been opened up just over the ear by a Tommy slug.

“You’re crazy!” whispered the intern. “You’re in no shape to go home, let alone chasing this egg—the Fiend of Fujiyama, whoever the hell he is.”

“What’s that?” snapped Buzz. “Where’d you get that line?”

“Look here. They found this stuffed in your collar. It’s a piece of Jap rice paper. Look at it.”

Buzz took the crinkled sheet of tissue and stared at the letters that had been printed crudely with a scarlet crayon. There it was, as plain as day:

The Fiend of Fujiyama

“They must have thought they’d conked you, Mr. Benson,” said a thick-necked cop who was kneeling beside him, taking notes on the back of an envelope. “Some more of your Jap pals, eh?”

“Hello, Mike!” greeted Buzz. “How’d you get here? Your stink-bike outside?”

“Yeah. But I gotta stay here, Buzz. Flock of dicks from the D. A.’s office coming down. I can’t leave. This is something hot. These bimbos—there was two of ‘em—blew the whole works out. All the machines you guys got here. There’ll be hell to pay.”

Buzz struggled to his feet, glanced around and steadied himself on the desk edge. The cell was a mechanical shambles. Wires, metal covers, banks of keys, rolls of paper and tottering-tickers lay all over the place. Glass was blown out. The walls were hammered to plastered wreckage. Dust still floated about, making men sneeze and cough.

“They leave that message that came over?” inquired Buzz, heading for the cell on unsteady legs.

“Nothing, Buzz,” said someone. Benson faintly remembered seeing him somewhere before. “They ripped out all typed copy.”

“Okay,” nodded the flying reporter. “I’ve got to hurry. Who’ll take me to Sunkist right away?”

The intern shook his head sadly. They all took their cue and refused to answer. It was like taking a man to his finish. Buzz looked from one to the other, crinkling the sheet of rice paper in his

pocket. It crackled ominously, but no one answered.

“All right,” grinned Buzz. “I get it. Well, there’s nothing I can do about it, eh? I’m off. See you later.”

“That’s right, Buzz. You go home. You’ll have a swell head when you wake up. You go home, boy,” advised Mike, patting him gently on the shoulder.

“Yeah, that’s the idea,” smiled Buzz weakly. “I’ll get a taxi downstairs. They’ll know where I am if they want me in the morning.”

With that he staggered across the city room, guided himself through the locker room and disappeared into the gloom that marked the main floor hallway.

The intern began to gather his medical kit quietly. The night staff stood wondering what to do next. Suddenly the cop wheeled around and stared at the man in white.

“Say, I knew something was wrong. He went off too quietly. The son-of-a-gun will swipe my ‘cycle. Quick, let’s stop him!”

But before Mike could take a step toward the door, the pop-pop-pop of a motorcycle blasted out in the midnight, and with a roar of power went screeching up Wilshire Boulevard—heading east for Sunkist Airport.

THE anxious night activity of Sunkist Airport was rudely broken when Benson went churning down the broad expanse of concrete that fronted the long line of hangars and finally drew up with a rasping of brakes before his own hangar.

Buzz tottered forward and almost fell inside the big shed. A man in service blue caught him and helped him to a chair, shooting a barrage of questions as he stared at the chalky features and the red-tinged bandage.

“Just a minute,” gasped Buzz. “Tired! Tired as hell! Almost stopped one—down in the office. What the devil’s up?”

“Charlie, get him a drink, quick. In my first-aid kit.”

Buzz watched Charlie McGurk fumble for a flask. In a minute he was back, and the Navy Officer poured a drink into a silver drinking cup. Handing it to Benson, he watched him drink it.

“Gosh!” burst out Buzz. “That’s better. Now what’s up?”

“All right, Charlie. Get on with that refueling,” snapped the Navy man.

McGurk stood still a second, but a glance from Buzz assured him and he turned away reluctantly and went across the gloomy hangar, where a grim little Boeing P-26 low-wing fighter seemed to be glaring across at them.

“Charlie’s all right,” began Buzz. “What’s the dope?”

“No one’s all right in this mess,” replied Lieutenant Allsop. “Where’d you get all this?”

“From a guy who, according to his calling card, is known to the trade as the Fiend of Fujiyama,” answered Buzz with a wry grin.

“What—already?” gasped Allsop. “How do you know?”

“He left this stuffed in my collar, after busting up the city room and blowing out all of our A. P. machines with a Tommy gun. I’m supposed to have conked.”

Allsop took the sheet of rice paper and glanced at it quickly.

“No, Buzz. You read this wrong. It’s plural. ‘Fiends of Fujiyama,’ not just ‘Fiend.’ Look, see the ‘s’ there. This is a new gang.”

“More than one, eh? Better than ever, eh?”

“Know who they are?” asked the Navy man.

“No, who is it—another Japanese acrobat act?”

“Far from it. Remember the fifteen Jap cadets who assassinated the Japanese war premier a few months ago because of his pacifist attitude toward a war against the United States?”

“Yeah. They got a few years in jail, just as a warning, or something, didn’t they?”

“In the papers, they did. What actually happened, was that they conveniently ‘escaped’ and went into the hills somewhere near the noted Mount Fujiyama. There they banded together with the Blood Brotherhood and our old friends, the Nippon Kokumin Shakaito, or the State Socialist Party, which is doing its best to create war between Japan and the United States. From what we can make out they are now in this country, and it had to be you who ran into them. They must love you.”

“Oh, well, anything for a change. I’ve had the Shinto Shark, the Kris of Kobe and a few more of them after me. What’s an odd Fiend of Fujiyama or two in my life?” grinned Buzz.

"I know, Buzz, but this is a real gang this time. Every one of them is a real devil. You'll have to watch your step, this time."

Buzz jerked up, as if something had caught him between the shoulder blades. "That's right. Norton sent for me. I was reading his message on the A.P. machine when I got all this. What's the game?"

"The new Powerton gun. A case of them has been stolen!"

"WHAT is a Powerton gun?" snapped Buzz. "I never heard of it."

"You wouldn't. They have only just been perfected. Powerton is the under-cover man for Browning. He has invented a new light machine gun that can fire 1,000 rounds a minute. They can be carried as easily as an ordinary rifle, and they hope to equip every infantry man with one for the next war. They have a special bullet that will pierce half-inch armor plate at 200 yards. Tanks will be helpless against them. It will put the United States, in the most powerful position in the world, as long as we can keep them under cover."

"And one has been stolen?" asked Buzz.

"One? A whole case of twelve! They were being shipped out to Fort Bencia via an Army Douglas Dolphin. Somewhere over Mondovi, Wisconsin, this Army ship was attacked and shot down shortly after taking off from Lake St. Clair. The guns had been picked up at Detroit and were on their way to Bencia for a thorough test."

"Shot down from what?" snapped Buzz.

"We can't tell yet. The crew—those who are still alive—are not too sure. One of them, a gunner, declares that it was a Polish P-11."

"Gripes! That boiler, if I recall, does about 198 with no trouble at all. They picked a swell crate to do it."

"One of the pilots is equally sure that it was not a Polish job at all, but a low-wing, something like the P-26 I brought for you, only it had a stationary engine and a queer head-rest. It was a single-seater, anyway."

"Golly, this is queer," mused Buzz. "But look here. If they took a case of twelve machine guns, where would they have put it? You can't put a box weighing about three or four hundred pounds in the cockpit or on the wing of a single-seater fighter."

"Now the brain cells are functioning," grinned Allsop. "That's where you come in. They didn't. The minute the Dolphin hit, a truck—a high-speed thing—came up from nowhere, a gang got out, covered the crew, calmly took the case and marched off with it."

"Then the guns are somewhere on the ground aboard a high-speed truck," said Buzz, "What's the matter with tipping off every cop in the country to look for it?"

"Slipping again, Buzz," replied Allsop. "How can a cop, on a motorcycle and armed with nothing but a Colt, stop a truck loaded to the gills with guys packing machine guns? It would be murder! Besides, the last we heard of them, they were heading west from this joint called Mondovi. They can get to the coast or the Mexican border by a thousand different routes. The trick is to find this phony fighter in the air. He'll be around them somewhere, acting as their scout,"

"Well, what's the Army and Navy doing? All on furlough, as usual?"

"Don't be silly! You know we can't do anything in an official way without risking a diplomatic break. If we catch them, the Japs have two courses open. They can take it nasty and, declare war—for which we are not ready, particularly in the Pacific; or else they can deny all knowledge of this gang, and blame it on some crazy patriotic society. We've gone through all this before, Buzz. You've got to do it yourself—under cover. But we must get those guns back, or the Japs will manufacture a million of them before we can yelp Jack Robinson."

"And," fenced Buzz, "just what am I supposed to do?"

"I don't know, frankly speaking," replied Allsop. "Get those guns back somehow, or—"

"Or what?" prodded Buzz again.

"Figure it out for yourself."

BUZZ arose and steadied himself on his feet for a minute. He felt much better now, but he knew that he was hanging on by a slim margin of nerves. He was actually all in, and the shock of the Tommy slug had not helped any. Here was a real fight, though, and he had to get into it.

Outside, the dawn was peeping up out of the east. Already the jangle of tools, cans and drums was beginning to ease down over there where the

Boeing P-26 stood, Charlie McGurk was finishing up, and the little fighter would soon be ready for another adventure.

“Any ideas as to where to start?” asked Allsop.

“Not one. How can a guy figure a thing like this? The best thing for me is to head north toward ‘Frisco and patrol about until something turns up. You’d better stay here and make this your base. If you hear anything, you had better send it on through to me at—let’s say Sacramento. I’ll work out of there. If they’re coming west, they’re sure to head for somewhere around ‘Frisco, where the coastline is chopped up, and where they may possibly have someone waiting for them. What was the truck like, anyway?”

“All we can make out of it is that it’s big, green and fast. I assumed that it was something along the moving van order, all closed in. That’s all you have to work on.”

“Swell! Well, let’s go. How is she, Charlie?”

“A damn sight better than you are. Bet you can’t even climb aboard,”

“Never mind me. Slap me in that cockpit and let me get a breath of decent air,” retorted Buzz. “I’m off for Sacramento.”

Why he had selected that portion of the country, he never knew. As Allsop had said, there were a dozen different ways this band who called themselves the Fiends of Fujiyama could have left upper-central Wisconsin. But something told Buzz that they would head in just the manner no one would, expect them to—that is, carry out the remainder of the trip toward Fort Bencia. There was another reason somewhere in his weary brain, but for the life of him he could not unravel the tangled skein and explain.

“Just a hunch, this Sacramento thing,” he explained to the Navy man as he climbed into the stiff webbing of a parachute harness. “For a fraction of a second, while you were explaining to me about those guns, it came to me, but I guess I’m tired, for I can’t think what the angle was. It will probably come to me when I get upstairs.”

Actually, it was the most important thing connected with a machine gun or any gun, for that matter. But because it was so big, so apparent, and so evident, they both missed it entirely. As the sage has said, there are times when you can’t see the woods for the trees.

It’s 340 miles from Sunkist to ‘Frisco, and only a few more to Sacramento. Buzz figured on doing the trip in something just over ninety minutes. The new Boeing P-26 he had been given had a top speed of 232 once she reached the altitude that most suited her supercharged power plant. But as he rolled out and reflected on the possible top speed of the Polish P-11, which was rated at 207 m.p.h. at 10,000 feet, he realized that he would have to set the battle at his own height to get any real advantage. Low down, the Polish job did only 192, and his own about five miles better. If the high gull-wing foreigner could out-stunt him, there might be a bitter finish for him, for the low-wing job was not highly rated at acrobatics.

“I’ll wire through for you,” bellowed Allsop, attempting to break through the roar of the slipstream. “Get them ready for you up there.”

With that, the raging little Boeing low-wing danced around into the wind and went roaring into the eastern gloom.

STRAIGHT for the glowering pile of Mount Wilson Buzz Benson shot, climbing the tiny scout steeply as if clutching for the height that would mean so much to the whirling mechanical lung that was fitted to the “Wasp.” On northward he raced, following the beacons, that shot up and gave him the on-course signal for twenty miles ahead. A big T.W.A. transport flashed by him in the gloom and went pounding on toward Los Angeles. Then the blinkers began to melt and lose their brilliancy, and gradually the silver gleam of the rail-road tracks came up to guide him on.

Bakersfield came and went, and Buzz sensed that he was feeling slightly refreshed again. Possibly it was the fresh air from the screaming steel prop blades. Perhaps it was because he was on the trail again. Fresno and San Jose flickered into view, and the first golden lances of the morning slashed through the Sierra Nevadas where they had been notched, by centuries of erosion and wounded in their jousts with the elements.

But by now a new feeling of weariness had begun to creep over Buzz and clutch at his muscles and limbs. He knew that the relaxation he had sensed before was only false, a feeling of temporary anticipation caused mainly by emotional excitement.

“Gosh, I’m falling asleep here in the pit,” he growled to himself as the dials on the board began to dance. “Can hardly sense the feel of the stick. Maybe it’s the altitude. I’m at 12,000. No wonder! I’d better drop down.”

He shrugged his cold shoulders and tried to ease his position in the tiny cockpit. He inspected the guns and made certain that they were loaded; not because he expected to use them, but to do something to keep his mind occupied. He watched the dials again and then checked his strip map and discovered that he had edged farther inland and was now roaring along over the east bank of the San Joaquin River. He would soon be in sight of the Mokelumne, which coursed out of the upper portion of the Pardee Reservation and wound its way into San Pablo Bay; an arm of San Francisco Bay. He smiled as he checked again and noticed that the Mokelumne ran past Bencia where the stolen machine guns were to have been tested.

“I’ll turn east along that river,” he mumbled to himself. “There might be something at the other end. If not, I can cut back toward Sacramento and not lose much time.”

The Boeing was turned and he ran smack into the glare of the morning sun, that shot blinding rays into his already bloodshot eyes.

“I’m tired,” he half-moaned, sensing that the delicately strung Boeing was dancing about like a cat on hot bricks. He was fast losing all sense of touch and feel. “Crazy, sitting up here. Better go down while I can see to pull the stick back.”

He squirmed wearily again and tried to read the dials, but the needles were only dancing black devils who thumbed their impudent noses at him.

“Take gloves off,” he murmured, his head rolling about on his shoulders, “get a better feel of the stick.”

But the expected feel did not come. The stick seemed like an icy-iron rod, that either had all the rigidity of a crowbar or the flexibility of a rapier. The ship was snarling and fighting his hand like a ringed bull on the end of a rope.

Bang! Rattle! Brat-at-tat-tat!

The enraged Boeing, tormented by the heavy-handed mauling Benson was giving it, received a new torture—a lead-tipped scourge from the flaming barrels of two Vickers guns.

Drunken with weariness. Buzz sat for a second or so and watched this new menace that was

sinking its unseen claws into the shiny metal covering of his wings. He jerked out of his semi-coma and whipped the stick over. Then as he slid out of the sheen of the morning sunlight, he caught the outline of a gull-winged single-seater that was coming down at him like a streak out of Hades.

“Good Lord, a PZL-P-11!” he gasped. “The Polish job—and out for gore, too.”

THE stiffness left Benson’s fingers, wrists and elbows. His eyelids drew back in a tight steely line. His feet assumed their usual pedal-pressing sensitivity and he was all set again. Remarkable what a few shots—in the right place—can do to a man!

The man in the Polish fighter was, as Benson expressed it, out for gore. The gull-wing job flaunted its spectacular insignia of blue and white squares and darted about like an infuriated vulture. The Bristol “Mercury” motor bellowed in an even roar and the ship shot down again. Another hurricane of lead splashed into the trembling Boeing as Benson fought to guide her out of the torrent.

“Well,” mused Buzz as he flew mechanically and tried to figure it all out. “She’s certainly got speed at this height. What had I better do, go down low and make him crash, or climb higher and hope to get him beyond his altitude?”

But the man in the Polish job had no time for thinkers. He was a man of action. Screwing around, he made a feint at hurtling headlong at Benson’s tail. He dipped sharply, and came up and under, with two spinning barbs of death forking at the Boeing belly. Again Buzz felt her leap under the flail, and he steadied himself again for anything. But the gallant little fighter could stand plenty, and she whirled out of the path just in time to give Buzz a chance to open his Browning for the first time.

The two guns blasted and rattled boldly. The Boeing danced again to the wild chorus of bouncing steel. A dazzling streak of fire whipped forward and drenched the Polish job with 30-calibre hail. For an instant the foreigner squirmed under the fire, but gradually regained control and tried to skirt away, as if pondering on how to get at this hornet.

Buzz was in the game now, and he followed up his advantage with a curling swish in which the Boeing stood on one wing tip and pivoted amazingly. The pilot of the Polish job seemed to hesitate for the fraction of a second, possibly wondering what Buzz was up to. Then it was too late—after he found out—for the Yankee low-winger came around, almost upside down, and again those two wicked high-speed guns spat.

At the instant of impact, the Polish ship was wheeling to get a new bead on the Boeing, which seemed to be staging a mad race around an unseen pylon. The two streams laced into the slim gull-joints of the wing roots, and before the burst had been completed, two wings came away, flapped wildly from the struts that ran up from the lower longerons, and then, with a belching of three-ply, fabric and strips of dural, came away with a crack that sounded like the smack of a field-gun. The fish-shaped body, propelled by the whirling prop, came through the debris like a blunt-nosed torpedo.

Buzz whipped around as his fingers left the gun trips and watched the body struggle to hold itself in the air. The weight was too much, however, and she nosed down, slashed her tail through the wreckage of the wings and began the death whirl to earth. No movement came from the cockpit, no billowing of white silk—nothing but the low, whining howl of a falling warrior, going to his doom.

The fluttering wreckage hit with a crash, and a belch of dust and smoke in the bend of the American River. A plateau was its final resting place, and Buzz took in the layout, before deciding to go down.

“That’s that,” he announced to himself. “That gull-wing doesn’t seem to be able to take it. Wonder who that was, anyway.”

But now that it was all over, the old weary feeling began to crawl back into his limbs. His hands trembled on throttle and stick. There was a new blanket of drowsiness settling over him.

“Got to go down—got to,” he mumbled through dry lips. “Good idea, too—Take a look at that bimbo—see who he is.”

The throttle came back with a jerk and the Boeing fell off into a slow, curling glide. The wind howled through the three taut wires that

came up from the main spars. A new devil’s dirge was being played.

The Boeing went down, practically on her own, and Buzz just pulled out of his stupor in time to let her wobble in to a sloppy landing. Weary, bleary and wan. Buzz taxied her up to the pile of wreckage that had once been a trim fighter. Now it lay in a tangled heap of flaked dope, twisted metal and crumpled dural sheet.

BUZZ crawled out of his cockpit, shut off the motor and tried to steady himself on the wing-root. He swayed a second and then rolled away, clutching wildly to grip the padded edge of the cockpit. Bracing himself against the sleek sides of the fuselage, he stared across at the pile of wreckage. He could see a leather-helmeted head, partially covered with what was left of the tail-group. Shaking his head like a stunned bull, he started across for the Polish ship.

“Poor devil,” he muttered, pawing at the wreckage. “What did he want to get into a mess like this for?”

As he expected, the dead pilot was a Jap, a wry-faced individual who had apparently died in agony, from the distorted features that faced Buzz when he had pulled, the man clear.

“No chute,” observed Buzz, as he loosened the fine chamois skin flying coat. “Game to the end, these Japs, when they go on a toot. Let’s have a look through his pockets.”

He had to kneel to steady himself. His eyes were again playing tricks. His hands fumbled through the man’s pockets, but found nothing beyond a little change, a pocket-knife, a handkerchief and a strange Oriental pocket piece, evidently something from the early Ming dynasties.

“Nothing cheery, here,” he growled. “What’s in his map-pocket?”

He fumbled for some time in the slanting breast pocket and finally brought out a Geodetic Survey strip map. For a minute he stared at it, puzzled. Then he noticed that it was a regular map, showing the Federal-lighted airway line between Salt Lake City and San Francisco. But what was more interesting was a series of red circles marked on the main highway that streaked through Utah, Nevada and northern California.

“What the devil?” he fumed. “What’s he got this strip marked up like that for?”

He studied it more closely and noticed that in spots the red circle was placed several miles off to the north or south of the highway. Far enough away, to make it appear that something was to be found, or to be expected, at these points.

“I got it,” he grunted, flopping down in a sitting position. “This is the route of the truck. They’re coming all the way through to the coast via No. 50 Highway, and this egg has been doing their upstairs scouting for them.”

He spread the map out before him and glared at it again.

“But look here!” he argued aloud. “If these points are stopping places, or contact points, what the devil do these circles away up here in the hills mean? No truck could get up there at Mount Austin. They certainly can’t expect to run into the hills there at the base of Mount Grant. What’s the game, anyway?”

But Buzz was in no shape for thought. Dame Nature has a way of claiming her own. Thirty hours of work and a glancing slug from a Tommy gun were too much. Without realizing it, Buzz slumped forward across the map and was lost to the world.

MEANTIME a gigantic vehicle, sleek-lined, snorting with power and displaying traction mechanism that would have done credit to a pneumatic-tired Twentieth Century Limited, was hurtling over the silver-yellow ribbon of paved highway that ran out of Sand Springs, Nevada, toward Salt Wells. The monster, hissing and hacking out a slip-stream that seemed to draw the fence-posts out of their sockets, sped on at an amazing rate.

The front was shovel-nosed, like a monstrous reptile. There was no windshield, but in place glinted three narrow slits that were slashed across the front of a narrow driver’s seat. From above this cab-like compartment curled the top of the great body which, at first glance, appeared to be the body of a moving van. Had you been able to climb up its smooth sides, you would have seen a square aperture, and down inside was the smooth gleaming head of what appeared to be a giant ornament of the Victorian era.

Mile after mile it roared on, its 750-h.p. motor driving four sets of double-treaded steel wheels at speeds between 60 and 110 miles per hour. Ordinary traffic, meeting this screeching demon, had to swing wide, slipping into ditches, crashing through barbed wire fences, and in many cases cars were forced so far off the road that they went screeching across bumpy fields, ripping tires from the rims and battering steering gears to shreds.

Hour after hour this had been going on, and the mysterious vehicle had left a trail of dust, smoke, broken fences, battered cars, bolting horses, wrecked trucks and a number of demolished service stations.

Overhead, a sleek, unmarked plane S-turned back and forth like a haunting eagle, dipping low now and again to inspect some portion of the highway. Beneath its wings glinted the coppery strands of an aerial. In the cockpit, a Japanese pilot spoke into a muzzle-mike to the speeding dreadnaught on the ground, guiding it on, advising it of sharp turns and giving warnings of traffic blocks. Once the plane swooped down with a bellow. Its guns opened up and blasted the life out of a lurking State Trooper who huddled astride his machine in a narrow roadway that crept down out of the Carson Sink. The policeman had been waiting for twenty minutes, as the result of a teletype report that had come out of Carson City. He never knew what hit him.

Two miles further on, the men in the speeding vehicle caught a new signal from the strange single-seater above. They slowed down and surged with a roar into the sandy cleanliness of a service station. Two Japs in breeches and leather coats got out, bearing Tommy guns. Two more reached for the supply hoses of the two nearest pumps. The flow levers were raised, and gallons of high-test gas began to flow into two large orifices in the side of the body.

Bang! Per-ip-pip-pip-pip-pip! Tommy guns sounded, and the third service-station keeper that day was cut down with a hosing of slugs. Another Jap, slipping out of the control seat, tore into the service station with an axe. One blow battered the wall phone to bits. Another broke the front out of a cash register, and the takings of the day were scooped out and stuffed into his pockets.

While the pumps surged and ticked away, other Japs, all dressed alike, caught up black drums of

motor oil and rolled them into the back. Everything worth taking in the fuel line was snatched up, and then a gallon of gasoline was poured all over the the station. A match was thrown in; the slant-eyed crew clambered aboard again, and the mysterious vehicle tore on.

For another mile or two it raced on, and then suddenly stopped. A new message had come from the bellowing single-seater above. Again the crew leaped out, dragging two broad metal tractor belts. A set of hydraulic jacks crunched somewhere underneath, and the driving wheels were hoisted clear of the roadway. In less than three minutes the metal tractor treads were threaded over the double driving wheels and drawn tight with a ratchet pin. The jacks creaked, clanked and lowered the machine to the ground once more. A new clutch slipped in, the throttle was eased forward and the great land-juggernaut went crashing across a low stone wall, gathering speed, bit into the uneven turf ground and hurtled on at more than fifty miles an hour.

Within half an hour it had clambered up the wooded slopes of some foothills that surged away from the outskirts of Hazen and lay hidden in a wooded valley that provided a fairly reasonable landing ground for the single-seater.

The ship, a strange job with a camel-hump behind the pilot's cockpit, that looked like a large pommel of a western saddle, came in with a daring sideslip. It came in fast, but seemed to lose its flying speed quickly and dropped to a delicate landing not twenty yards away from where the mysterious vehicle was hidden. It rolled up closer, and before the pilot was out of the cockpit, a crew of men were clambering all over it, filling the tanks, checking the oil and replenishing the ammunition belts.

For two hours they hid away, while the constabulary, State Police, swarms of National Guardsmen and flying squads of militia scoured the country for them.

IT was well after noon when Buzz came to, assisted by the prodding foot of a puzzled Forest Ranger who had come upon the strange grouping of wreckage, a low-wing monoplane and two recumbent airmen—one dead.

“What’s been goin’ on here?” growled the Ranger. “Who are you and where did you come from?”

Buzz sat up and stared about him. Gone was his weariness. He was sleepy, but his movements were those of a refreshed athlete. He grinned up at the Ranger, turned back and looked over the wreckage. The heap was still there, as was the body of the dead Jap.

“Put the hardware away,” he opened. “I’m okay. I must have fallen asleep. Well, I’ve still got his map, anyway.”

The map he had taken from the Jap’s pocket lay under his hip where it had fallen when he tumbled over.

“Who are you, and what’s the game?” beat on the Ranger. “Queer layout here, ain’t it?”

“Funnier than you think,” replied Buzz, getting to his feet. “I had to pop this bird off. He came down on me with guns.”

“Who is he?”

“Don’t know. Some Jap,” answered Buzz, stretching his legs.

At the word “Jap” the Ranger suddenly changed his tone.

“He tried to shoot you? Why, you’re a Government man, ain’t you?” he barked, staring across at the Boeing, that still carried the service insignia.

“Yeah. Secret Service, to you. I’ll leave this with you. Can you make a report somewhere and have someone come out and get it? I’ve got to be off.”

“I can call from the Ranger post two miles up the trail there. What’s it all about? I just got a buzz to look out for a stolen Army tank a few minutes ago. Seems to be heading west toward ‘Frisco, Seems to be raisin’ hell all the way, too. Know anything about that?”

“Stolen tank? No. I’m looking for a truck that is probably in this vicinity with a case of stolen machine guns aboard. Government secret list stuff. A plane, too. Seen any beside these?”

“Plenty. Going over all the time. Mostly mail and T.W.A. ships, though. A nice mess, eh?”

“Beautiful!” growled Buzz. “Well, I’ll leave this to you, eh? I’m heading for Sacramento. Benson’s the name, if you have to make a report. But get this guy into ‘Frisco, somehow, and all the wreckage, too. They’ll want to look it over. We

can't figure where this bus came from. What's the time?"

"About 2:30, I'd say," answered the Ranger, dragging out a silver turnip of massive proportions from his pocket. "Yep, that's right. Jest 2:34, to be exact. I'll take keer of this for ye."

So with that settled, Buzz prepared to take off again for Sacramento.

"Stolen tank, eh?" he mused as he whipped the Boeing into the air again. "What the devil is the tie-up now? Machine guns swiped, Polish fighter has a whack at me, and now they report a stolen tank. This is dizzier than ever."

There was no answer to all the tangle. The tank angle was a new twist, but from where Buzz sat, he could not fit it anywhere into this jig-saw puzzle of stolen munitions and armament.

He dropped down at the T.W.A. hangar at Sacramento and was greeted by an ashen-faced Field Manager, Ted Waring. Buzz knew the minute he landed that there was plenty to worry about, but he ran his ship up to the fuel platform before he got out and made inquiries.

"My God, Benson!" gasped Waring. "Where have you been? Had every pilot on the line and every office on the route looking for you. They're raising hell from Washington. A guy named Norton!"

"Been taking a sleep," replied Buzz coldly. "Needed it. What's up?"

"Everything!" Waring retorted. "Our Boeing transport 24, 397 was shot down, blown up or something, just this side of Minden, south of Lake Tahoe."

"Where?" snapped Buzz,

"It fell about four miles south of the southern tip of the lake. What Glendon was doing that far off the route, I can't say. But it's down in a bad crash, and one of the passengers, the only one left alive, swears that they were chased and shot down by a tiny single-seater of some sort."

Buzz stood staring at the nose of his ship. "Well," he finally observed, "he won't chase any more, I think I got him a few miles west of that spot. He tried to tap me, too."

In a few words he explained what had happened, and why he had been held up.

"But I feel better now. I certainly needed that sleep, even though I got it without having much to

say about it," he grinned. "What's Norton screaming about?"

"This tank thing. It all sounded dizzy to me. One of the new Christie tanks being tried out at Fort Snelling, somewhere in Minnesota, was swiped a couple of days ago, and they figure we ought to know something about it. He said you'll be able to figure the tie-up. What's he talking about?"

"I don't know," replied Buzz, in a tone that really said "Mind your own business." Then he turned back to his Boeing and satisfied himself that his ship was being refueled and given a check.

"I'm going inside and get in touch with Washington," he added. "Better let old Norton know what's going on. I still can't figure these trick foreign ships."

THE call was soon put through, and Buzz found Major Norton in a stew.

"Asleep!" barked the major. "What do you mean by going to sleep when these devils are picking up tanks, machine guns and all the rest of it, just as they like? Think you're covering an air meet, or the P.T.A.? This is serious, Benson. We've got to get those guns and we've got to stop that tank!"

"What tank?" growled Buzz, figuring that the major had a new angle to this part of the case.

"Why, they're running the damn thing across country to the coast. For a time we figured that truck was just a blind, but it must be our Christie tank, fixed up with a trick body. It goes along the highway for a few miles, knocks off a few State Troopers who try to stop it, wrecks a few service stations to get the gas it wants and then charges off into the hills somewhere. Then we lose all trace of it. You'd better get in the air at once.

It must be somewhere along that No. 50 Highway."

"I don't know about any tank or a truck. How the hell can I tell a disguised tank from the air? Your ground guys ought to get it. I have popped off a Polish P-11 fighter that had just knocked that Boeing airliner down. Yes, it had a Jap pilot. One of these Fujiyama guys, I suppose. Nothing hot on him, except a trick strip map, on which the highway was marked out in red pencil."

“Probably meant the Federal beacon line,” snapped Norton.

“Say, wait a minute,” gurgled Buzz, “what a dumb donkey I am! That map and the—golly, hang up, major. I have an idea!”

“Listen! Hey, Benson! What are you going to do?” barked Norton into the mouthpiece. But there was a click on the western end and Buzz had slapped the instrument down and was plodding out to the tarmac.

The Boeing low-wing presented a weird appearance when he got back. The prop was off, the anti-drag cowling had been removed and one of the mechanics was prodding away at the machine-gun cover. An Army man was climbing into a pair of overalls.

“What’s up now?” demanded Buzz, looking over the layout.

“You got a burst in your prop boss. It’s split, and has damaged one of the blades. Have to change it before you can get off again. Probably put the gun gear off time, too.”

“How long will it take?” asked Buzz.

“Plenty. Have to send down to ‘Frisco for another blade first. None that size around here. Better sit down and take things easy.”

“Damn!” growled Buzz. “I can’t wait that long. Where can I get another?”

The Army man stared at Benson’s civilian make-up, as if questioning his right to use government materials. He was not quite certain about all this Boeing business.

“The nearest I know is down at Crissy Field, outside ‘Frisco. But if you want to wait, we can get this boiler going- for you in an hour or so. What’s the hurry?”

“If we don’t hurry,” snapped Buzz, “there won’t be any props to fix or any m.g. to time. Get me to Crissy, quick!” he snapped to Waring.

The Army mechanic stood staring at the Field Manager, who prepared to get a small cabin job out and take Buzz to San Francisco.

“That guy seems to carry a lot of heft around here,” growled the mechanic. “Who is he, anyway?”

“Don’t you know?” gagged a commercial mechanic, amazed. “Why, that’s Buzz Benson!”

“Holy catfish!” spluttered the Army mech. “And I was asking him what his hurry was. I’ll be

slammed down to a fourth-class wrench-hound for that.”

But the Army man never came up on the carpet. Ten minutes after Buzz Benson left for Crissy Field, a whale-nosed single-seater dropped out of the sky and battered the little Boeing to shreds. The bloody burst of fire put the Army man in a hospital cot; two airport mechanics were killed outright, and a tracer found the tanks of a nearby transport and torched it to a blackened heap of twisted metal. All they knew was that the attacker was a single-seater with a water-cooled engine and had a strange camel-hump that looked startlingly like the pommel, of a western saddle.

ALL the way into Crissy Field, Buzz was able to ponder on the whole situation. The tank angle was a puzzler in a way, until he took out the map on which he had noticed the circular markings, which every hundred miles or so seemed to go off the highway and settle in the hills.

“That’s the idea,” he mused, while Waring piloted the ship. “They have planned to get to the coast by sneaking off the highway every so often. With this tank thing they can break into service stations, get the fuel they want and then fight their way out.”

He continued to ponder on the situation, and then sat frowning out of the cabin window.

“I wish I could remember what I was thinking about when Allsop told me about those guns,” he went on to himself. “There’s an angle there somewhere that made me come up in this direction. As a hunch, it was all right, but it was more than a hunch. There was a reason then, but I was too bleary-eyed to tie it up at the time. It’s something about those machine guns, I know. I wish I could straighten it out.”

But there was still no answer. Waring piloted the cabin job on, and their route took them over Fort Bencia. Buzz was interested and took the whole layout in from the air. There was a main road directly up to the main buildings, a wide area that probably was the parade ground and a free outlet back to the main road again.

“I wish I could remember what that twist was,” he growled again, staring down at the Fort grounds. Had he been able to read the stenciled markings on a number of smooth wooden cases stacked outside the “Stores” shed, he might have

picked up a clue to the point that was puzzling him.

There were several service ships at Crissy, but only one low-wing Boeing. The Commandant of the field was pleased to see Buzz and to learn about what was going on, but it was some time before he could wire through to Corps Headquarters and get permission to turn this ship over to him. By this time it was getting late again, and the afternoon haze was beginning to stalk through the hangars and hutments. Buzz fumed and fretted, but it was no use; he could not get the ship until the word came through.

Meanwhile they received word of the attack on the Sacramento field, and Buzz swore as he read the official report, sent in to the Commandant.

“Damn it, sir,” he growled, “can’t you hurry this thing? I’ve got to get into the air somehow, and pretty quick!”

“You can’t get away quick enough for me,” grinned the C.O., who was pretty well fed up with Buzz and his anxiety.

“Do you realize what this thing means?” went on the flying reporter. “If this baby gets through, you might have to take to the air yourself, and all your gang with you. We may have to call out the troops from Fort Bencia.”

“That would be interesting, if you could do it!” laughed the field Commandant. “It so happens that the Bencia garrison is away on tactical maneuvers somewhere up in Oregon. There’s only a skeleton guard there now.”

There was something in that remark that made Buzz wince, but again he was not sure what it was that was banging away at the back of his mind. He roared away off Crissy Field, facing a weird game of hide-and-seek in the dark.

BUZZ was somewhat over his weary spell by now. He had slept gloriously alongside the wrecked ship, and on top of that he had rested quietly on the 100-mile trip from Sacramento to ‘Frisco. Now he was set for anything. Fate had played into the hands of the Fiends of Fujiyama, however, for night was coming on.

“If they are still looking for me,” Buzz muttered to his reflection, “there’s a chance that I may run into this baby, yet.”

He tore along over the beacon line for Sacramento, wondering just what would happen

next. He ran his mind over the varying incidents of the adventure and tried to piece them together. He wondered whether the fact that they had destroyed what appeared to be his ship would cause them to relax their vigilance. He took another look at the map he had taken from the dead Jap and pondered over it again under the dim gleam of his instrument board light.

He saw now that it had followed the No. 50 Highway all the way to the coast. It meandered through Placerville and then slithered off into the hills at Folsom City, coming back for a few miles until it reached a point about five miles outside Sacramento. Then it skirted north again, avoiding the city, and came back by devious third-class roads to a junction three miles west of Davis on Highway No. 40. From that point on, it appeared to leave the highway only once again until it reached almost to Bencia.

That, evidently, was the end of the trail.

Then, like a flash, it all came to Buzz. Bencia was the focal point of the whole plan.

“Good Lord!” gasped Buzz. “That’s the whole secret. Fort Bencia! The ammunition! Those guns are no good without the ammunition designed for them! They’ve got to go to Bencia! They’re on their way there now to capture the stuff that lies there awaiting the test. Why didn’t we think of that before?”

At last Buzz had caught on to the whole idea. The stolen guns were of no use to any one without the special ammunition that was designed for the unusual rifling of the barrel—the real secret of the new Powerton gun.

Buzz was flying well over the beacon trail now, and heading for Sacramento like a winged bullet. He decided to call the T.W.A. hangar there and have them send a warning through to the Fort. Then he remembered the information dropped by the Commandant of Crissy Field. There was no one at Bencia—only a skeleton garrison, a handful of men. The rest were off on tactical maneuvers.

“Wonder whether I ought to turn back now and beat them to it, or should I go on to Sacramento and take a chance from there? If the ship that blasted hell out of my Boeing was in advance of the tank, or the truck, that means they should be somewhere—Hello! What’s that?”

Something below had caught his eye.

“That blinker is certainly off line,” he observed, peering down and inspecting a flashing lamp that was coming up fully two miles out of the regular line of beacons that flashed out on the route between Sacramento and Frisco.

“That’s a new one on me. Why, the damn thing is so far out of line that it couldn’t have been placed that way. There’s something queer there. I’m going down to have a squint.”

He stared down again and checked his eyesight by putting the regular line of beacons in a direct line. Front and behind, they were all reasonably true, but the one off beyond Vacaville was certainly off line. As he approached closer he realized that it was between two regular beacons that were placed about ten miles apart.

“Maybe there’s something to this,” he hissed to himself. “Let’s have a look!”

He gave the dials a quick glance over, checked his guns, and saw that they were loaded and the interrupter gear set. Then, squirming around in his seat, he prepared for action—but not quite the kind that came.

IT was only a matter of minutes before Buzz was directly over the strange beacon. He curled around at about 4,000 feet and tried to pierce the gloom across an open space by a heavy area of California forestry. There was no question about the beam of light or from what it was being directed, but just what this base consisted of was a puzzler.

“It’s a Westinghouse lamp, all right,” said Buzz. “But where’s it working from? I can’t see a tower or a shed base of any kind. I don’t like this at all. This is a come-on of some sort, I’ll bet—”

But Buzz Benson didn’t get any further. Something, a hissing something, caught his ear, and he whipped the Boeing over like a flash. A blast of fire whistled past his wing tips, and the secret of the extra beacon was disclosed. The strange single-seater with the western-saddle head-rest came down the chute like a streak of thunderbolt. Only by a hair had Buzz missed taking a full burst in his shoulder blades.

With a crash of guns above, the light below went out.

Buzz wheeled his single-seater and tried to adjust his sight to fighting a black ghost that was screeching back and forth above him. The

newcomer had the edge on height, and from what Buzz could make out, it had a wealth of speed.

“What the devil is that crate?” he gagged as he slapped her around again to avoid another burst. “A new boiler on me, and yet—it does look familiar, somehow. I’ve seen that horn-thing on a ship somewhere. Now where the devil was it?”

But the unknown was after him again. Once, the beacon went on again and flashed anxiously. Buzz went down lower, darting back and forth hoping to get a look at this strange light. The mysterious single-seater, which was a low-wing job too, came after him, guns screeching and flailing the sky with their leaden whips. Buzz screwed back and forth, keeping well clear and deciding to make a low-altitude action of it. At any rate, he wanted to get a look at this light thing before anything happened. After that, he’d take care of the boy in the black ship behind him.

Down went the Boeing in a slow, easy spin. Buzz held her steady and watched the whirling design of black shadows leap up for him. Then he pulled her out with about 200 feet to spare and finished the dive with a bellowing roar that took him past the mysterious light.

The instant he caught the outline, Buzz knew what it was—the stolen tank, carrying a fake body and displaying an airway beacon that evidently could be raised above the body through the square aperture in the roof.

The whole secret was out now. All he had to do was to destroy the phony single-seater and capture the tank—or at least, the precious case of Powerton guns.

Whatever Buzz thought by now had nothing to do with the ferocious charges the strange single-seater was directing at him. And that was not all. The light base below immediately became a hornet’s nest of nickel-covered slugs. Two guns opened up on him as he roared past a second time.

With a snarl, he curled over, almost slicing his wing tip through the lush turf.

Then the whale-nosed ship above crashed through with another screaming burst, and then hoiked up just in time to avoid Benson’s sudden return to the fray.

“I’ve seen that thing somewhere,” he growled.

The beacon below flashed out again, and the sweeping beam caught the invader full for the

fraction of a second. At once Buzz recognized the ship.

“Why, it’s that Romanian I.A.R.-12. They had one on view at the World’s Fair in Chicago. Golly, that’s right. They had a Polish P-11, too. This boiler is said to do 204 miles an hour. It has a 500 Hisso. What am I doing, fooling around with this baby?”

With that. Buzz went to work with a vengeance, and the man in the foreign-ship realized that he was up against a master pilot. He soon blew a red signal light, and in response, the guns from the ground opened up again.

But Buzz was flying like a madman.

“Say!” he panted, letting another burst go. “This ship was in that lot which was burned up in that warehouse in Chicago. How do they figure that?”

But beneath it all, and amid the heat of the scrap. Buzz knew that there was something queer about that fire. These ships had been stolen; the warehouse had been fired and there was no trace left of them. That was the real story to the latest Chicago fire.

“The dirty rats!” he bellowed. “That would make a few more diplomatic tangles for us, if this got out.”

The guns from below opened hard again, and the sky was traced with tracer. New and more insane designs were etched on the sky. Buzz flashed over, nailed the Romanian bus dead under his wheels and dived on it tight, almost biting the tail-assembly off with his prop. He held on, keeping his fingers steady on the trigger-releases until he was certain that there was no escape for the enemy.

His guns spoke once more, and another streak of spitting silver slashed by the pilot’s left ear. He jerked her back. Around and around they went, for what seemed like an hour, but actually took about thirty seconds. Then, when Buzz was satisfied, he glanced up from his sight, saw the belching tank just ahead and then let drive.

His guns chattered again. The burst caught the pilot full in the back and he was driven forward on his stick as though he had been hit with the end of a logging boom. The roaring I.A.R.-12 went down with a crash—smack in front of the lurking tank, and burst into flames.

FOR an instant Buzz wanted to let out a war-whoop of joy at his success, but the realization that he was far from through hit him almost at the instant the Romanian ship struck the ground.

“The tank!” he snorted. “I’ve got to stop it.”

The tank below spat out again venomously. A charge of shot splashed into his little ship, and his lap was showered with dull splinters of black bakelite. The minute he saw it, he knew what had happened. There would be no radio message back anywhere now. That last burst had battered the insides out of the precious little black box mounted under the dash.

The big black mass below, spitting and snorting fire, suddenly moved out of the blinding glare of the burning I.A.R. It was preparing to move.

With a snort of rage, Buzz rammed his stick forward and went down at the wobbling tank. His guns hissed, rattled and spat. Two streams of leaden hail clanked into the false sides of the tank-truck, but its real armor deflected the slugs as though they were mere gum-drops. Buzz knew at once that it was hopeless.

The tank below was wobbling and backing, as though struggling with something. Then Buzz caught the idea. They had loosened the main false body and were now driving the tank from under it.

The glistening steel body of this wonderful fighting weapon came out of its cocoon like a grim giant insect that was set to overcome the world.

Buzz dived again to take another splash at them, and zoomed up as the Japs answered with a bitter fire from the rear turret guns.

The tank was heading across an open field. The main highway was only about three hundred yards away. Buzz saw that they were heading straight for a cattle runway that crossed a single-track railroad line. He suddenly leaped in his seat. Here was the chance of a lifetime.

The tank ran up to the heavy-beamed runway. Slowly it waddled up and rammed its nose against the gateway and chugged. The posts, rails and supports of the cattle runway toppled away, and the tank waddled over.

The tank waddled clear of the run-way wreckage and halted. It was just what Buzz wanted. Two men slipped out while two guns opened up to keep the flying reporter away.

But Buzz was not watching the men who were unhooking the two tractor treads, so that they could ride on the wheels. He was putting his sights on four gleaming high-tension cables of the hydro line that ran directly over the standing tank, running between two lattice-work steel towers.

His guns spoke, with a screech. Two trails of bullets slashed out, and a display of coppery fireworks sparkled out. Then, with a twang that could be heard above the roar of the "Wasp," a long, snaky, copper cable parted and fell, twisting and hissing, smack on top of the steel tank.

There was a crash, a blinding curtain of steely blue flame, and the snaky cable rolled off the beautiful steel weapon that had not run off its steel traction treads.

Metal fused, tubes melted, bolts curled up in their sockets—and men died in hideous rigidity. The motor conked, spluttered once and felt all its electric arteries dry up. The tank would never move again—under its own powder.

THEY found Buzz a few hours later, curled up in his cockpit. The Boeing low-wing was on the ground, not twenty yards away from the tank and the fused cable that hung down from the tall tower. The guns were found intact in their case, but the members of the crew were found in the stark stiffness of electrocution. The next day a cryptic A.P. despatch went out over the wires:

CHICAGO, Dec. 2—(AP)—The fire which swept the Municipal Warehouse early yesterday has been fully investigated. A number of airplanes, particularly those of the foreign exhibit, were destroyed. This information was given out by a member of the U. S. Secret Service, who came on from Washington to inspect the ruins. The World's Fair Corporation will make restitution for the loss to the Polish and Romanian governments.

"Oh, well," grinned Buzz when he read it, "that's old Norton. Always salving things over. Now he can come out here and salve these electric power companies for the juice I used last night. I must have wasted a few million volts on those babies."