

# Channel Skimmers

By Joe Archibald

*There's no stopping a pair of daring explorers like Elmer of the Air Corpse and Pokey Cook. This time they find themselves in England—but Pokey wants a bridge built across the Channel before he'll go back. No stopping them? Well, not much!*

*A swell hotel acrost the Channel In Dover, England.*

DEAR PETE:

I guess the above address of me and Pokey Cook at the instants will knock you loose from the old slum wagon, hey? Well, you should not be surprised if by my next billy doo I am stealing vodka from the Russians in Moscow as if I stick much longer with Pokey, the fathead, I will have Sindbad the sailor looking like a hermit or worst.

You should see Pokey, Pete. He is still green around the chops and is layin' horse due combat on a bed, and he would look twict as good, I bet, if he was imbalmed. We been through a awful blood-curdling experience as usual, and Pokey just said, "Well, I won't go back to the U.S. unless they build me a bridge to walk over."

"Well, Pokey," I retorts with scorn, "it don't take no prodigal to see that you ain't got no Norst blood in you and are not maybe decended from Vikings like the Hubbards. Huh, I can't wait until I get started back."

Pokey groans, Pete, and says, "Shut up remindin' me, as I still got enough strength left to bat you one, Elmer."

But I am drivin' the wagon out of the barn without hitchin' the horses to same, so wait. Let me tell you what happened as it is a panick, and at the presents I ain't sure whether I am a orfiser in the Army, Navy or the Marines. This time it is mostly Mulligan the C. O.'s fault, as what do you think? Wait.

It happened one day when Rickenberry, the swell-headed ace, and me and Pokey and three other bums come back from licking von Pabst's

bell-brewers, the same of which is something to brag about in any language. We was all puffed up like pups the same of which has et maybe a carload of corned willy loaded with arsenic, and we gets out of our Spads and walks over to the Operations shack. Mulligan looks at us like we was some guys he had maybe met some time but forgot where.

"Well," Pokey says before Rickenberry can open his big mouth, "we sure blew the foam off them brewery barrels today. I got two myself an'—"

"I am running this outfit, Mr. Cook," the ace says nasty. "I will do the talking. Sir, we met van Pabst's Circus today and gave them a great shellacking. We—"

"Hm-m-m," says Mulligan, and Pokey and me looks at each other as you would think we had all just been to Blah and arrived back. "You don't say!" He leans back in his chair, sticks his chest out all over the place and acts like he was a Astorbilt that just heard his chauffer say, "Well, the limerzine with the purple stripes is ready and waitin' without."

"Huh," says Pokey, "maybe you got word you're a father, hey? Onct my uncle acted just like that. Well, where's the cigars?"

PETE, Pokey Cook's fresh mouth would make the sphinx wake up and fight. Mulligan falls off his high horse and gets up and shoves his chin way out until it was half outdoors.

"Crackin' wise as usual, eh. Cook?" he yaps. "Well, listen to me, you missin' link! I've got some swell news for you. I hope your lips are chapped as are you goin' to laff!"

"Well, when do we start?" Pokey says. "Me and Elmer—what city in Germany do we bomb? We're always ready like the Merriwell boys and don't question the orders of our dear old C. O. an'—"

Mulligan had to take time out to stop a attack of apoplexy and then he keeps on where he left off, Pete.

“Beginning tomorrow morning, the—nth Squadron will be under the command of Captain Rickenberry. I am off to Ireland to claim a ten thousand acre estate for myself. Ha!” He stops to get the results and I had to hold Pokey up as if a gust of wind had come in at the instants, Pokey would of nose-dived.

“H-How long you goin’ to be gone?” Pokey gulps out.

“Two weeks,” Mulligan says, “an’ maybe for good. Maybe I’ll resign or get me another squadron as now I am somebody. When I come back, I’ll be the Lord of Kilcolman as I’ve found out I’m a descendant of Spenser, the poet that was drove out by Cromwell, and I’ve got proof as I sent for my family tree and—”

Pete, he may be Irish but he was talkin’ Greek to me, and Pokey says, “Maybe if you go and lay down for a while, you will sleep it off.

“Onct my Uncle Loomis got brain fever,” Pokey goes on. “an’ he thought he was a general for the Knights of Pithias. We give him a shot of—” But it was no use as we found out that Mulligan was sane, and Pokey just looks at Rickenberry and says, “Well, I will hire me a lawyer right away as I know I’m goin’ to commit a murder.”

“Captain,” Mulligan says to the fatheaded ace, “If I do not choose to return, your commission as major will go through. I leave in the morning and I’ll want you to spend most of the day with me brushing up on what you ought to know.”

“It should take a year,” growls Pokey. “The bum could not run a laundry. Well, I’ll resign or get captured as the gare is not big enough for me and the fathead. I—”

“Oh, is that so, Cook?” hoots the ace. “We’ll see about that. I have you where I want you, you and that thick-headed Hubbard. I—”

“Well, before you are the C. O. of the—nth Squadron,” yips Pokey, “I’m going to smack you around. Put up your dukes, you—”

I tries to stop the bum, Pete, but it was like you run out with a burnt match to prop up the side of a house the same of which is falling over. Rickenberry stops the punch with his right eye and he just grunts and goes into Mulligan’s lap.

The C. O. unloads the ace and gets up and shoves a finger at Pokey.

“Rickenberry has been in command of this squadron for two minutes already,” he yells. “It’s up to him what is goin’ to happen to you.”

“The worst would not be as bad as takin’ orders from that crackpot,” Pokey says. “Ha! Well, colonel, you have to crost the Channel on a boat, huh? I hope that Boche raider is hangin’ around as usual and has put maybe eight more guns on the tub. Bum voyage, and I hope you miss all the lifeboats!” Pokey walks out and I trails behind and my eyes was glued on the ground as I was lookin’ for a rock or a club to bat the fathead as look how we stand with Rickenberry, hey, Pete?

PRETTY soon me and Pokey and some more democrats went out to earn the dough the U. S. pays us, and if we had had twict as much gas, we would of ended the war as Pokey was in high dungeons and smacks everything down the same of which we seen even one of our own balloons.

We come back to the drome and as Pokey slides in, Rickenberry was struttin’ acrost the tarmac givin’ orders, and Pokey points the Spad right at the bum and chases him all the way to the Operations office. Rickenberry dives in and slams the door, and Pokey just stops the bus and gets out and the stick was in his hand. Rickenberry sticks his head and a arm out of the shack and says, “Cook, you are under arrest for assault with intent to kill. I—”

“That’s funny,” Pokey says to me when I come up. “Elmer, the stick come loose when I hit. Did ya ever hear the like? It is a miracle we have got a C.O. on the place. Well, accidents will happen.”

What was the use, hey, Pete? You can see that the—nth Squadron was in for a awful fate. When we goes into mess, Mulligan was there and he was all stuck up and looking over some papers like he was a Wall Street magnet figgerin’ how much he made on Parsnips Preferred.

“Good evenin,’ me lord,” Pokey says, and everybody holds onto the table and gets ready to run.

Mulligan looks at Pokey like he was something that ought to of been swept up and put in a G.I. can.

“After the war, Cook,” he says, “if you are still among the quick and also still an orfiser, I want you to come over to Ireland and shoot grouse on my estate. Harumph!” He rifles the papers again and puffs at a cigar.

“Reawully?” pipes up Pokey. “I will have to look in my book as first I have to visit Windsor Castle and shoot pool with the Prince of Wales. After that—”

Rickenberry comes in at the instant and hollers for attention, “How much?” Pokey says, before I could kick him in the shins.

“I’ll have discipline around here!” the ace hollers. “I’ll see to you later, Cook. I’m in command here, You’ve been getting’ away with too much, you two halfwits. You Cook and you Hubbard! I’ll show you!”

Mulligan lets out a howl and kicks back his chair. “What’s that?” he roars at Rickenberry. “Too soft was I? Couldn’t handle these imitation flyers, huh? Look out what you say! I’m still your superior.”

“Ah—er—sorry, sir,” says Rickenberry. “I didn’t—er—mean—er—that is—I—er—well—”

“I could die happy at the instants,” Pokey butts in.

Mulligan tells him to shut up and Rickenberry to sit down and then he starts bragging about the estate he was goin’ to get and how many hounds he would buy to chaste foxes all over Ireland. He also says as how he’s got to get to County Cork within three days to present his claim or elst the ten thousand acres would go to the Crown or get sold under the hammer like your Aunt Mamie’s place was two years ago, Pete, when she didn’t pay the taxes.

It goes on worst than a sermon, and Pokey begins to snore, so after a while Mulligan swears and folds up the papers he had. Right after that come more punishment as Rickenberry gets up and says he wants to read what G.H.Q. says about the —nth Squadron as we have been mentioned in despatches, and then the fathead must of wisht he hadn’t of started, Pete, because it was mostly about what me and Pokey done about bringin’ back a Handley-Page the same of which got in Dutch.

“Always me and Elmer, hey?” Pokey says and Rickenberry folds up the paper like it was a summons and slams it down beside his plate.

Mulligan unfolds his papers again and Pokey says, “Well, it is all I can stand and maybe I should get me somethin’ to read to you bums, too, like Longslot and Elain,” He gets up to go out when what do you think happens? Outside there come a awful noise like prisoners was escapin’ from Sing Sing, and it was the siren and then we hears a lot of props go-in’ over fast and they was not jobs made in Alleyed countries.

*BLAMITY Blam! Crash! Blooey!* It was the Heinies, Pete, comin’ over to get hunk for the pastin’ we give ‘em early in the day, and I run out just in time to see the roof go off the petrol shed, and some ackemmas was tryin’ to get from under a tree the same of which fell on them.

Pokey bats two guys that tries to get in a dugout before him, and one was Rickenberry and the ace says I will bust you, Cook, this time, and then he shuts up as a big hunk of dirt slams him in the mouth. We was in there wishtin’ we was back in the U. S. attendin’ a clambake or some-thin’ when another buzzard sticks in his head and it was Mulligan. He had a bump on his dome as big as a eggplant and his eyes looks like some that stares at you from out of a cradle.

“Welcome!” says Pokey. “What hit you?”

“I got his number,” Mulligan says. “I was turnin’ into a side street when he smacks me with the ice truck. I’ll sue him. You wait an’—”

“Maybe everything was in his wife’s name,” Pokey grins, and then a bomb almost digs us out and we had to uncover Rickenberry when it was over, A big hunk of timber was on his neck and we had to cuff him maybe six times before he could speak.

Well, Pete, we crawls out and looks at the ruins and they was plenty. It looked like we would have to send to Seers and Rowbuck for a new hangar and the drome looked like the Forty-Nine miners had come back and was diggin’ for gold. I staggers around until I hears a yelp from Mulligan and he points to the mess shack and the whole front was blowed out, Pete. The CO. makes a dive for what was left, and then he comes out wavin’ the papers he left on the table.

“You almost was not a lord, hey?” Pokey laffs, the nitwit. He would die from spasms of joy watchin’ them work in a slaughterhouse.

“I am taking no more chances,” Mulligan says, and he still had a far-away look in his eyes like a bank teller that is underpaid and is count-in hundred dollar bills. “I’m goin’ to sew this into my shirt.” And he weaves across the field to get some needle and thread from his work basket. Is it a panick?

We didn’t get much sleep that night as Rickenberry makes all us orfisers work with the greaseballs like common laborers, and that’ll make a whole chapter in my war memories.

Well, early the next a.m., Mulligan was drove away in the squadron car and he had his dome tied up and at the instants he didn’t look like he had collected all his marbles. Before he shoved off, he makes a speech and says, “Well, buzzards, I hope when I get back we can get together on the new stadium and ought to have a swell team that would beat the Yales easy.”

Rickenberry is now the boss, Pete, and does the bum know it! He drives us all upstairs and says, “I don’t want no alibies but plenty of results, see?”

“Now that you are not workin’,” Pokey says, “can I borry your addin’ machine, as will I be the biggest ace in the alleys, oh boys!” Rickenberry says he would prefer more charges against Pokey but I don’t know how, as they is not that many on the A.E.F. books.

We goes up and meets von Pabst, as usual and things don’t go so good, so when we come back, Rickenberry says, “Well, I will try another flight as they could not do worst.”

It goes on until way into the p.m., and then while me and Pokey strolls about the drome, Pokey lets out a howl and stoops to pickup somethin’. It was some papers, Pete, the same of which had blowed under a piece of elephant iron, and on it was drew Mulligan’s family tree. What do you think happened? I will tell you. Durin’ the Heinie raid Mulligan picks up the wrong papers and sewed them to his shirt. They was the papers Rickenberry read to us, and Mulligan didn’t stop to look at them as he was knocked haywire from the bat on the dome.

“Oh, cripes, Elmer,” Pokey says, “Mulligan won’t be no lord. He will get to Ireland and find out that he has got the wrong—”

“What’ll we do. Pokey?” I says.

“I got a idea,” says Pokey, and I shivers, Pete, as you know what ideas from Pokey means by now. “Mulligan has to crost the Channel. That means he will sail from C—, the same of which is a big port on the coast, Elmer. It is up to you and me to overtake the bum as I always wanted to ride a horse and chase grouse—er—foxes. Come on as time is precious. We’ll go to Rickenberry.”

“WELL, we done it, Pete, and the fatheaded actin’ C.O. says sure. Why? Because he knows that if Mulligan don’t get the estate he would come back and take his job back, and they was a chanct he wouldn’t if he got the Irish farm. You can see the bum was lookin’ after himself, hey, Pete? “And anyways,” he says, “maybe it is the last I will see of you fatheads. Get goin’ or it’ll be too late.”

So me and Pokey climbs into our Spads and in no time at all we was flyin’ toward the coast of France. On the way, Pete, we run across a couple of Fokkers and they holds us up ten minutes as it takes about that time for me and Pokey to slap them down, and at the instants we could of licked a whole jagstaffel as nothing could stop us from saving Mulligan’s chanct of being a lord.

After five more minutes it gets foggy, Pete, and you could of cut out pieces of the ozone in cubes. It meant we was clost to the coast, but we got as much chanct to spottin’ the city of C— as we would of findin’ a snowflake in the Congo. I misses Pokey and starts hollerin’ the same of which was no sense, and then I almost merges with him as his tail sweeps right by over my dome so clost I could of put a chalk mark on a fin. All at onct Pokey shoots a Very pistol and sometimes, Pete, he shows some intelligents. It was maybe the worst flight I ever been in as the fog thickened up and it was like findin’ your way through a cellar maybe filled up with lard.

Pokey shoots all his Very lights and we goes down low and I thought I seen a place to land and says to hell with Mulligan as maybe the Boche raiders will sink the ship he gets on, anyways, and we would only be wastin’ our time.

I goes down, Pete, and lands the Spad and wisht I’d stayed up as I hit two feet of water and the crate bucks and kicks and flops over in a couple of summersalts. When my dome stops spinning, I found I was sittin’ on a beach and I

could hear the surf pounding and a wave come in and slapped me all around and I stopped from being washed maybe to the North Sea by holding onto a big rock.

I wades out and then I hears somebody swearin'. It was Pokey. I run over to him and he was tryin' to pull a crab off of his thumb and a starfish was glued to one side of his face.

"Elmer," he says, "I am glad to see you. Where are we?"

"I ain't sure," I says in nasty tones as I coughs up maybe a gallon of salt water, "but it is not Sebago Lake back in Maine. What do you think?"

Pokey whangs the crab against a rock and it leaves go of his thumb. "Gripes!" he says. "We flew right out of the gare, Elmer. Well, let's allay as we might run into the coast guard. Maybe we are the first guys to crost the Atlantic by air."

"The same of which will make us deserters, you crackpot," I says. "Well, come on."

Pete, you will not believe what I tell you and I do not blame you. We dropped onto a beach the same of which was only six miles from the town of C—. Pokey and me starts walking and all at onct he grabs me and says "Listen! I hear voices."

We ducks around the back of a shack that looks like a bathhouse, and they was a whole line of them that stretched way out of sight.

"Well," come a voice, "we got a hour before we report to old Gold Stripes. It is a nice warm night for swimmin'."

"Oo-la-la!" come another voice the same of which was soprano, and it was a dame. Then we hears another one.

"Let's go," says another bum. "We'll get into the suits and meet you later."

"What in hell?" Pokey whispers. "Is this Atlantic City or what?"

"Shut up!" I says. "Didn't you ever know that C— is lousy with beaches? Look!"

WE peeks out and seen two guys go into a bathhouse. The dames goes into another one. It's a swell gare, hey, Pete? I mean for orfisers.

"They was Navy guys," Pokey says. "I wonder—Elmer, I got me a idea. Mulligan has went since morning an' I bet he sailed already. It is our only chanct. We will get the uniforms and steal a boat."

I picks up a piece of driftwood and was goin' to slam him, Pete, as can you tie the bum?

"Pokey, I come to the end of my rope," I says. "I won't have no more trucks with your ideas as we are clost to a Frog basteel an'—"

"So you want to see Mulligan lose his hounds and foxes, huh?" the crackpot says. "And you want to work for Rickenberry for the rest of the gare? Well, adoo, Elmer, as I will go it alone like a wolf."

Pete, it is strange what a influence that halfwit has on me so I follers him. When the orfisers and the dames run down to the surf and splash around, we barge into the bathhouse and find the uniforms.

"We're in the Navy now," Pokey sings loudly as he takes off his wet clothes. "We ain't behind no plow! We'll never get rich—"

"Shut up!" I says. "You will have plenty of times to sing when you're servin' your time, you fathead. Stealin' a boat! Of all—" I puts on one of the suits, Pete, and it fits too late and the coat had brass buttons so I felt like a bell hop.

"Ice water to Room 6," Pokey laffs. "Comin' right up. What monkey suits, huh, Elmer? Who'd join a Navy?"

"You would," I says, "and did you ever see the Navy klink back in Portsmouth, N. H., Pokey?"

He didn't say nothing but starts pickin' up the clothes he took off and says we will hide this stuff outside some place. Well, after ten minutes maybe me and him was walking into C— in our Navy suits. We was carrying our helmets and goggles rammed into our pockets. We was headin' for the docks when what happens? A motorcycle come up and almost run us down and out of it tumbles a bum that says he is a lieutenant in the U. S. Navy and it is about time we showed up.

"Yes, sir," Pokey says, and he tries to act like a sailor. "We got detained on the way from—"

I sticks my hat over one ear and spits and tries to walk like I just come off a boat that rocked and the lieutenant calls a taxi and says to the Frog driver to foller him where he goes. We get in and I feels like assaultin' the person of Pokey Cook as was I scairt out of all my wits!

"We got into a mess now," I says. "Let's jump out as—"

"Think of Mulligan," says Pokey. "His fam'ly tree an'—"

I will skip how we got where we did. I tries to stop my knees from playin' taps when we was pushed in through a door the same of which was marked headquarters but Pokey walks in like he was a visitin' admiral and salutes. They was a big bum all covered with gold leaf starin' at us. His face looks like it come through maybe twenty battles of Manilla and he growls like somebody throwed him a bone when he looked at us.

"Lieutenant Hatch and Lieutenant Moody, huh?" he snaps at us, and Pokey nudges me and nods.

"Y-Yes, sir," I squeaks. "Reportin' for duty, and they is nothin' me and P—er—him can't do. We—"

"Harumph!" the rear admiral says, and I would hate to see one who is up front. "Well, I guess you know what you've got to do. There will be medals for you if you can bomb that Boche raider. It sank the *Lass of Glengarry* this afternoon. Well, we've got to get that boat. I have an obs. fighter with bomb racks. That's all. Sink that boat, understand? We've got no time to lose. There\*s a ship going acrost now loaded up with brass hats and big Navy officials. Report to C wharf, Commander Wiggs. That's all."

ME and Pokey goes out and I wisht I could of had a word with that bum as would I of told him plenty? It was maybe the worst pan of eels I ever fell into, and I looks around for a chance to run before we gets to the wharf, but it was no go. It looked like me and Pokey was fixin' a date with some mermaids as what did we know about a obs, fighter, huh? Just as much as you do, hey, Pete?

Well, we gets to the wharf and reports to the Commander and he was nothin' to make you think of college boys, Pete.

"Glad to meet you," he says, "even if not for long. The crate is moored out there at the end of the wharf. Good luck!" He looks up at the fog and shakes his dome and walks away. The crate, Pete, was a two-seater and it was a Spad model the same of which was made to fly over water, and guns was up front and a Lewis in the rear pit.

"Well, Pokey," I says, "everythin' has to come to a end. Adoo!" I climbs in with the Lewis and lets Pokey worry about getting the crate away, the damfool. I will show him, Pete! Maybe they is nothing built with wings on that the nitwit can't

fly, as he just makes the Hissso snort and turns around and shakes a hand at me. The prop roars and whips up half the ocean and I ducks down into the pit and waits for the worst.

The obs. ducks and waddles around like a turkey learning to swim and I says, "Well, this is too long already to be in the Navy, anyways, so let it sink." By a miracle Pokey gets the thing off the water and starts upstairs and I sticks my head up and Pokey looks back and hollers, "Well, Elmer, is this the berries?"

"When we come down, I will tell you," I yells at the halfwit. "I hope it's in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean and you get a cramp!"

Well, Pete, we gets up to eight thousand feet and I was already soaked through like I waded the Channel from Belgium to London, and I had to hold my hand in front of my face so I could see it. Then Pokey throttles down the sea-going Hissso to half-speed and circles round, and was it a relief, as the prop had been kicking hunks of water back at me like they was bullets.

And then, Pete, the fog starts liftin' up and Pokey goes down to maybe a thousand feet and we seen some lights along a shore.

"We're in England!" Pokey hollers.

"That helps Mulligan a lot," I says. "You damfool, you won't find a Heinie raider in the streets of London. Go back over the water."

Pokey circles around and goes back and onct we was so clost to the waves that I could of reached out and scooped up a mackerel with my bare hand, and a whitecap shoots up and almost drowns me. We had some Cooper bombs under our pants, Pete, and one smack at the Channel would maybe blow us to Sweden in eight or nine parts, and I leans forward and yells at Pokey and reminds him but he don't pay no attention but keeps on looking down and then all at onct we seen something. Pokey throttles down and yells at me.

"It's a steamboat, Elmer," he says. "Let's smack it!"

"How do you know who it belongs to?" I says. "It ain't got no maltese crosses on it. It might be a Allied—"

"Well, you go down and ask for the ship's papers," Pokey hollers back sarcastic. "How elst will we know? This is a mess, Elmer! We should of asked what the ship Mulligan was on looked

like. Well, I will go lower and if it tosses scrap iron at us, it is Heinie.”

HE lifts something up that he must of found in his pocket and they was binoclers—you know, field glasses. He throttles down and shoves up his goggles and squints through the glasses and the bum forgets how close we was so he just misses the mast of the ship by the thickness of a hunk of hardtack. Well, he shoves upstairs in time and then he hands me the glasses and hollers, “Look, Elmer!”

“I seen a guy on deck,” he yells back, whilst I leans close to his face. “He was eatin’ a big hunk of boloney, and only a kraut—”

Well, he turns around and then wings over and dives on the ship. Before I could bat him one, he unloosed a bomb, and when it hit, the obs, that we was in shivered like a Zulu caught at the north pole without nothing on, and it bounced like a basket ball, and I hangs on and swears as how do I know Pokey hit the right boat? Well, we goes down again and I looks through the glasses that time and I seen something go up on a mast and I felt faint, Pete, and wisht I had a shot of spirits of nighter as it was a Limey flag.

“You damfool!” I yips. “We have hit Mulligan’s boat. Of all the—” *Boom!*

“That’s a gun shootin’ at us, Pete.”

“Well, I told you,” Pokey hollers. “I was right. They’re shootin’ at us.”

“Yeah?” I come back. “What did you expect them to do, send us up a sandwich, you crackpot? We’ll get hung for this. We’ll—”

Pokey drops the rest of the bombs, Pete, and they all fell like they was in a basket. When I gets nerve enough to look down, I seen that the ship buckled in half and was going down for keeps.

“That is that!” Pokey yells. “Where do we go from here?”

“Zanzibar!” I yowls. “I don’t know where it is but it sounds far away.” Pete, it looked like we was two bums without a country as where did we dare go? “Point straight down,” I hollers to Pokey. “And keep on going. Adoo, you fathead!”

Pete, before you could say, “Comin’ up!” the fog thickened again. And while we was circlin’ around tryin’ to decide what to do, the fog gets like pea soup and then even worst happens, even if you think it couldn’t. The gas give out. If Pokey

and me got caught in the midst of the Sarah Desert, we would die of frostbites.

“Well,” I says, leaning my chin on Pokey’s shoulder, “How do you like the Navy? The only trouble is you will drowned and that is too good for you. Oh, you fathead, if I only joined up with a different army, I would not of met you. Well, adoo. Hurry it up as the suspents is awful.”

“This thing will float,” Pokey says. “We will get picked up, Elmer. Don’t be such a pestermist. I will set it down—”

He never did, Pete—that is, not where we figgered, which was in the drink. I was scootched down in the back pit with my hands over my face, sayin’ a prayer, When the obs. nudges somethin’ and it was a nudge like when a tank sideswipes a Heinie concrete pillbox. I hears a awful ripping and a lot of guys hollerin’ and then a whole lot of smoke and ashes spits in my face and I falls out of the obs., Pete, and bounces against a big stick of wood. Then I lands in what looks like a big barrel. I lit soft, as under me was two guys that was swearin’ and taking punches at me.

“Where am I?” I hollers when I gets untangled.

“In the crow’s nest, you swab!” a guy says. “A hell of a place for a aviator to land. You cluck, get off my leg or I’ll—”

“Then I lit in a tree,” I says, “but I would like to see the crow that carried this barrel or whatever it is up here. Oh, my dome! Get me a ambulance. Where’s Pokey?”

“Who?” a guy says, and I seen he was a gob. Then I looks down and I seen everybody running around like Gothas had come over and a whistle was blowin’ and I was on a ship, Pete. And then I seen the wreck the same of which was onct the obs., and it was between two smokestacks. Half the Navy was trying to get at it all at onct and the same time.

Then I seen somethin’ get out of the ruins and of courst it was Pokey. He was makin’ funny passes at the air and he had on a life preserver around his neck. He also had a joystick in his hand and he looked like he was leading the firemen’s band back in Rumford Junction, Pete. Well, the gobs showed me how to get down to the deck the same of which is a risk of life and limb in any langwidge, and me for a Spad any time.

“WELL, I’m a cock-eyed kangaroo!” It was a big belling voice and then a guy grabs me, but I knew who it was before he shoved his face into mine. It was Mulligan. Oh, boys, I could of kissed the bum!

“You, Hubbard!” he yips. “In the Navy! This morning you were in the Army. Don’t tell me why or how yet. It’ll be a damned lie, anyway. You sunk the Boche raider, huh? You and Cook, huh? Medals again! I—”

“Where’s Pokey?” I hollers.

“Up against a ventilator,” Mulligan says. “He is not talkin’ straight yet, not that he ever did.”

“Oh-h-h, Pokey!” I yells, and then I was surrounded by maybe all the guys that ever graduated from Annapolis and they drags me over to where Pokey was at.

“Hello, you fathead,” I says. “Nice trip, hey kid? I was wishtin’ you had fell into a smokestack.”

Pokey’s eyes finally lines me up and he says, “How many yards did we gain through the center that time, Elmer? Let me carry the ball again. They can’t stop us!”

After they had fed him a shot of hot rum, Pokey snaps right into normal and he looks around and then at me and he grins, the damfool.

“Any landin’ place is okay if you make it, huh?” he pipes up. “Well, then we did sink the Heinie tub, as there’s Mulligan in the flesh, ain’t it?”

“It is!” the C.O. says, and he was scratchin’ his dome and tryin’ to figger it out, but what a chanct, hey, Pete?

“It’s a good thing we caught up with you,” Pokey says, “as you took the wrong papers.” And he puts his hand inside his shirt and hauls out the Mulligan family tree.

“Whaa-a-a-a-at?” Mulligan howls as he rips it open. “You mean you bums came all the way to—er—you mean I sewed the wrong papers in my—”

“You grabbed them papers that Rickenberry was readin’ to us last night by mistake,” I explains. “We found ‘em after—”

“Gripes!” Mulligan says. “I—er—that is—”

“Yeah,” I groans, “its a good thing you will get the estate as only a lord can help us now. Me and Pokey—”

“What’s that?” the big admiral shoots at us. “These men belong to your squadron, colonel?”

But they have Navy uniforms on! They’re army flyers? Look here, Mulligan, I—”

“They can explain,” Mulligan interrupts in a weak voice, and he knew he was a liar, but Pokey is a better one. If that bum found out he told the truth some place, he would walk back and change it into a lie even if it was fifty miles away.

“We had a forced landin’ in—,” Pokey says, poking a elbow into my ribs, the same of which was the office to shut up. “We met up with two bums—er—orfisers from the Navy and they got two dames and some cognac and got boiled and we found out what they was supposed to do and we says the Boche raider has got to get shellacked so me and Elmer thinks of our country first and takes their places. Ain’t that right, Elmer?”

“H-Huh?” I says. “Oh-h, yeah. He’s right. I says to Pokey, I says, we are flyers no matter what uniform we are in and have got the spirits of the patriots so out we went to smack the tub. Of courst we don’t dare tell the admiral back in C—as maybe he would think we could not fly a sea crate an’—”

“By gad!” a big guy covered with gold braid says. “That is the spirit! Well, you’ve accomplished a great feat for the Alleys. You’ll get what is coming to you—”

“I been afraid of that,” I says.

“Shut up!” hissed Mulligan. Then he raises his voice and says, “If you don’t mind, I will take these men to my quarters and make them comfortable.”

When we was alone with the C.O., he looks at us out of one eye. “You’re both liars by all the clocks in Switzerland,” he says. “I don’t know how you got away with this, but you’re here. Rickenberry, huh? It would of been his fault mostly if I lost that estate. I’ll show him! Thinks he’s got my job, huh? Well, I’ll be back as soon as I can get through my business. The fathead! Got those papers mixed up. Dropped them where—”

“I bet he done it on purpose,” Pokey says, grinning at me. “I bet he was jealous that you was goin’ to be a lord an’—”

“Thinks he’s goin’ to be a major, huh?” Mulligan goes on. “Well, a hell of a chanct he’s got.”

“Never mind no medals,” Pokey says. “That is pay enough. Well where do we go from here?”



Well we docks in D—, England, Pete, and Mulligan gives us each two pounds in Limey argent and says, "Put up in a good hotel until you feel ready to start back. I will see you guys later." He says it nasty, Pete, and it looked like me and Pokey was still in a sling. The crosting was awful rough and Pokey got maldy mare the same of which is Frog for seasick, and he give everything up but the ship. I am also through with Navies.

Yours Very Truly,

FIRST LT. ELMER HUBBARD,

U. S. Air Corpse,

P. S. I am finishin' this billy doo back on the drome. What do you think? The admiral sent us congratulations, etcetery, and says we was heroes, and we also found, Pete, that them two Navy buzzards really did get boiled on cognac and they was found sleepin' under a old ashwagon in C—. That is a disgrace to the Air Corpse, as if you want to be a orfiser and a gentleman, you have got to stick to discipline and regulations like me and Pokey! Is Rickenberry mad, oh, boys! He has bit his fingernails off up to his elbows.

E. H.