

Death From the Rising Sun

By Robert Burt

Featuring “Battling” Grogan

THE Jap plane dived with incredible swiftness. Fearlessly, Battling Grogan, *taipan* of the Dragon clan, awaited the hurtling attack. The *skibi* had the altitude, and plenty of it.

The Yank throttled his motor and placed his Boeing in a gentle glide. He was going to need all the speed he could muster in another moment.

Used as he was to aerial combat, the American was amazed at the rapidity with which the Nipponese plane approached. In that bare twinkling of an eye before sudden action became necessary, Grogan knew he had to do with a new type of Jap pursuit plane. There had been rumors of such ships, but this was the first he had encountered.

Then came furious, slashing action. The Yank shot his throttle wide open. The Wasp responded with a throaty roar. The Boeing answered to its master’s touch on the controls with a graceful chandelle. But the Yank miscalculated a fraction—underestimated the speed of his enemy. For an instant the sharp *rat-tat-tat* of Nipponese guns sounded in his ears. A burst of tracers jabbed into his upper wing, snarling and ripping through the taut fabric.

For once the master combat artist had been caught napping!

Thoroughly enraged at himself, Grogan viraged and charged at his enemy. But the Jap airman, who had plunged to the attack so swiftly, had now curved upward and was safely beyond the reach of the Yank’s probing guns. In sudden anger the Yank let loose a sharp, clattering burst, then caught himself and released the trigger. There was no use in throwing away ammunition.

Then the Nipponese plane was upon him again, screaming down with a speed that made it appear almost a bolt of light. This time Grogan was more on the alert. But even then a savage ripping and tearing made the American aware the Jap’s aim had not been futile.

A sudden premonition of doom swept through the Yank’s mind. Was this, then, the one last combat that every fighter of the domed heavens must look forward to—the one that would inevitably usher him across the Great Divide into that Valhalla of airmen, who had fought their last fight—and lost?

All the red blood in Grogan’s veins rebelled at the idea, but the conviction grew that unless a miracle happened, there could be but one result to this battle. Grogan couldn’t understand it. Many had been the times he had fought unequal combats—combats in which his adversary had had a vastly superior ship. But always the Yank’s airmanship, his gun eye, his indomitable will, had carried him through. Not always the victor, perhaps, but certainly not the vanquished. For it is seldom given to the vanquished in aerial combat to spread his wings again.

And again the *skibi* hawk hurtled down to meet the Dragon chief. And this time, as Grogan knew would be the case, his aim was better. Sable-mouthed machine guns, maws like the greedy throats of some poisonous reptile, chattered greedily. Flame-tipped fangs darted forth venomously. The Yank felt a savage stinging in his left leg. A sharp, metallic crash sounded in the cockpit. The Boeing lurched convulsively. The Jap had sped on past, and was curving up again for his customary altitude.

Rapidly Grogan took stock. His instrument panel was a mass of ruin. The horizontal stabilizer control was smashed. His oil pressure had fallen to zero. Looking down, he saw the oil line to the pressure gauge had been severed. Hot oil oozed down onto the floorboards.

Looking up, the Yank saw his adversary curving over for his next attack—a screeching dive that might very easily wipe the American from the skies.

The Dragon chief's brain was in a mad whirl. Was this new Jap ship so immeasurably superior to his Boeing, or had he met some superman of the air?

But in that instant, waiting for the approaching attack, Grogan suddenly became aware that something was wrong. He felt powerless. A dizziness enveloped him. A numbness, a paralysis, was creeping over him.

Momentarily panic surged through his brain. Had he been shot in some vital spot without knowing it? And was this the result? He had been wounded before. Surely this could not be the result of the flesh wound in his leg. But he had no more time for thought. The Jap was rapidly coming within range.

Exerting every effort of which he was capable, Grogan struggled furiously to maneuver out of his opponent's gun sights. But the Boeing—battered, torn, wrecked, lacerated—could only respond feebly to its master's touch. The Yank fought his ship, and what was of greater import, he fought himself. He fought the weakness of his flesh, the dying power of his muscles, the paralytic numbness which crept over his whole being.

Suddenly he knew the battle was over. The Boeing shuddered convulsively, as if shaken and racked in the mammoth jaws of a dinosaur. The very plane itself—the struts, the fabric, the flying wires, the very metal frame seemed to dissolve about him. Grogan leaped, pulled his rip cord. It was a purely mechanical action—as natural to a veteran pilot as the withdrawing of a burnt hand from the fire.

Half-unconscious, his brain a seething vortex, the Yank found himself floating earthward beneath a gleaming petal of white.

Suddenly, with a mighty rush, a plane shot past him—a plane that sported the radiating banner of the Rising Sun, Grogan recognized it as the ship that had vanquished him. Down past him it sped, and well below him the Nipponese pilot redressed and his plane curved upward gracefully.

Even in his half-unconscious condition, the Yank recognized the plane to be one of the new Kawasaki 92 pursuits, of which many rumors had filtered through to the Dragon crew. But that discovery was not what caused the American to draw in his breath sharply.

Enclosing the cockpit of the Jap plane, through which the *skibi* pilot waved at his victim, was a queer-shaped, glassed-in hood.

IMMEDIATELY there flashed into Grogan's mind, even in the numb state of his senses, the thought that here was the explanation of the amazing speed of the Jap ship. The Yank was no aeronautical engineer, but he did know that the terrific suction set up by an open cockpit materially retarded a plane's progress through the air. Evidently the clever Japs had discovered a means of eliminating this drag, undoubtedly adding greatly to the speed of the new Kawasaki.

This conjecture was immediately replaced by a second feeling of amazement. Why hadn't the *skibi* pilot polished him off? There he was, helplessly dangling beneath a floating parachute, a wide-open target for the greedy guns of the Nipponese buzzard. In that instant the Jap pilot curved back toward the Dragon chief—viraged around him, waved at him condescendingly, and was gone.

Instantly Grogan thought of the reason why he had been spared. His eyes darted aloft. Directly over his head there was a large cone of space obscured by the chute above him. But within the range open to his vision the skies were blank.

But he had no time to waste in futile conjectures. He was rapidly nearing the ground. In his dazed condition the thought occurred to him that he had been well behind his own lines when the disastrous battle had occurred. At least there was no danger of landing in Nipponese territory.

A minute later, after having exerted the last vestige of his failing strength, he had succeeded in slipping his chute so as to land in an open but muddy rice field.

For perhaps a minute, the Dragon chief lay in the muck about him. Then with a supreme effort of his will he forced himself to rise. His weak fingers struggled with the buckles of his parachute harness. Finally he succeeded in freeing himself from the chute and made his way, pitching and stumbling, to the edge of the field. There he lay for a moment, striving desperately to regain his strength. He turned over on his back and his eyes sought the heavens. The sun blazed in an unclouded sky, but it blazed with a strange brilliance. Ordinarily, to look directly at the sun

only blinded Grogan momentarily. This time a blackness seemed to creep over his pupils. Queer pains impinged themselves upon his eyeballs and his lids felt numb, causing a supreme effort of his will to close them.

But blindly, savagely, the Yank struggled to his feet. He must not allow himself to succumb to this overpowering weakness which had enveloped him, which had sapped the very essence of his being. Fiercely, cursing himself for his weakness, he stumbled along until he came upon a farmer stretched out on the ground beside his two-wheeled cart, soundly sleeping. The beast of burden, a water buffalo, drooped and staggered unsteadily on its legs.

Grogan reached for the stick beside the sleeping native and slowly climbed into the cart. With curses and blows he forced the unwilling beast forward. All this commotion failed to awaken the tong farmer, who never moved in his slumber.

The Yank estimated he was five or six miles from the tarmac of Hunjao, which was the nest of the Dragon brood. His wrist-watch showed him the time was high noon.

Only his steel will kept the American going. Between blows on the back of the stumbling buffalo, Grogan tried to think. Dimly he recalled leaving the ground with Hank Goyen's flight. There had been seven of them, all told. The dapper Frenchman had flown point, while the Yank had occupied the lookout position 1,000 feet above.

They had cruised at 12,000 feet, but had spied no enemy patrol. Then, far above, Grogan had glimpsed a formation of red-disked ships, gleaming brightly in the scintillating Asiatic sun. Then the leader of the Nipponese flight had detached himself from his formation and had dived to the attack. That was all the Yank could remember.

When within sight of the Dragon field, Grogan began to experience a decided change for the better. He no longer had to exert every ounce of his lagging will to drive him onward. A new life seemed to flow once more in his veins. Strangely enough, the poor beast of burden, the water buffalo, no longer needed to be beaten to continue his steady plodding. The Yank lifted his eyes to the heavens. The sun burned as fiercely as ever,

but there was a change. The glare no longer numbed his eyelids, caused his vision to flicker and grow black.

As he pondered this strange phenomenon, an un-easy chill rippled down his spine, and a sense of foreboding enveloped him.

AS Grogan drove through the main gate of Hunjao, the tong sentry on duty stared at him in utter disbelief. Another minute and the Yank had leaped down in front of Operations. A slender Oriental, his dark eyes filled with a brooding misery, stepped from behind the tent. Upon seeing the Dragon chief, he uttered a strangled cry and rushed to the American's side. He was Captain Cheung Sun Im, leader of "C" Flight, fast chum and boyhood comrade of the Yank ace.

"*Taipan! Taipan!*" he breathed.

"Yes, Ah Im," returned Grogan, "I'm here and alive. How, or why, is more than I know. All I can say is I'm damn lucky."

Suddenly the tong ace spied a crimson blotch on his master's left boot.

"You—you have wound!" he exclaimed, pointing at the Yank's leg.

"Yes, I know. Ah Im. But it's nothing—just a flesh wound. I'll go over to Doc Kuo and have it dressed."

A moment more and the skilful medico, Kuo, was dressing the Yank's wound. While Kuo worked on him, the Dragon chief turned to Ah Im.

"Well, old boy, let's have it. You might as well give me the bad news now. Were Goyen and his flight wiped out?"

A strange look came into the Oriental's sable eyes. "No," he returned, "make thanks to the gods. Captain Goyen come back, also Ah Tan. Four Dragon pilot go West."

Ah Im then reached into his tunic and brought forth a slip of paper.

"What's that?" demanded Grogan.

"Him note," intoned the Oriental. "*Skibi* ship dive down over field, make drop."

The Yank took it in silence. Slowly he unfolded it, read its contents out loud to his companions.

"GENERAL GROGAN:

Today I spared you. Next time your life will be burned out before you can take to your parachute. I

am the avenger of Harada and my other comrades who have fallen before your renegade guns. You will not be able to escape your fate.

CAPTAIN ABASHI MAKING, Imperial Japanese Military Air Corps."

For a moment there was grim silence. Then Doc Kuo gave a snort of disgust.

"Next time you will make mincemeat of that upstart!"

The Dragon chief looked at the medico steadily and shook his head. "No, Kuo, this time you're wrong," he said.

The two Orientals looked at their commander in utter amazement. Was this possible? Had the fearless Grogan lost his courage?

The Yank ace permitted himself a flickering smile. He read the expression on their faces correctly.

"No," he returned, "I haven't lost my nerve. And I don't believe that there's a *skibi* pilot in all the Mikado's forces that can shoot me down in anything approaching a fair fight."

Ah Im was looking out into the shimmering sunlight. A strange expression rested on his face.

"Most beautiful flower is often most poisonous," he quoted, musingly.

The Dragon chief was thoroughly used to the pithy proverbs that often emanated from his chum's lips. Usually he grasped their meaning at once, but this one had him stumped.

"All right," he growled, "out with it, you old devil. What's up your sleeve this time?"

"Today most beautiful day," replied the Oriental ace, shrugging his shoulders, "but today very bad day."

"I'll say it is!" snapped Grogan. "And what caused this day to be so bad is what I want to find out."

But Captain Cheung had turned his eyes once more to the glittering sunlight outside, and a musing light shone in his dark eyes. Grogan knew from experience that there was no getting anything out of Ah Im until the tong ace was ready to talk. After reflecting a moment, he turned to Kuo.

"Have you felt all right today?" he asked.

The medico looked his astonishment. "Why, yes," he returned. "I have enjoyed good health."

He hesitated a moment, continued with an apologetic air. "Except I have been very sleepy."

As Kuo finished speaking, the Yank leaped to his feet.

"That's it!" he cried. "You felt sleepy, eh? Now why should you feel sleepy on a bright winter day like this? Didn't you get any sleep last night?"

The tong surgeon shifted uncomfortably. "Why, yes," he replied. "I slept very well last night. I—" He was interrupted by Ah Im, who had turned and laid his hand on the medico's shoulder.

"No apology necessary," he said softly. "I also very sleepy. Just like warm, summer day. No pep. Feel weak."

"That's it!" exclaimed Kuo. "That's just the way I felt."

"Now we're getting somewhere," exclaimed Grogan. "Tell me—did you notice anybody else feeling the same way?"

The medico looked at Grogan, and a baffled expression came over his face.

"It's strange," he declared, "that you should ask that. Come to think of it, the whole camp seemed to be in a stupor this morning. Just as Ah Im said—nobody had any pep."

"You don't feel that way now, do you?" demanded Grogan.

"No, I don't," returned Kuo.

"Me no, also," added Ah Im.

"What time did you start feeling that way this morning?" asked the Dragon chief, looking at them both.

"I think it was about ten o'clock," replied the medico. "Shortly after you took off with Captain Goyen's flight."

"Now, listen!" stated the Dragon chief, and he told them the complete story of his fight that morning.

The two Orientals listened intently. At the close of the recital, Kuo looked at the squadron chief curiously.

"At first," he said, "I thought this hooded Jap plane might be releasing an invisible gas which had the effect described upon you. But that wouldn't explain the conditions which we experienced here on the ground, several miles away. Personally, I am inclined to believe that an unusual atmospheric condition existed this morning which must have been general all over

this section, and therefore affected the Japs as much as it did us.”

“That certainly sounds logical,” agreed Grogan, “but it doesn’t convince me. All I can see is that we’ve lost four pilots under conditions which ordinarily would have been four victories for us. In addition, I narrowly escaped being sent West myself when I am certain that this *skibi* Makino is no better than I am—even granted he had superior equipment.”

The Yank turned brusquely to Ah Im. “Go get Goyen and St. John!” he directed. “Have them meet us in my tent. We’ll see whether they have any ideas or not.”

ON the way, he was intercepted by Lieutenant Mong, one of St. John’s buzzards, who was officer-of-the-day. With him was Colonel Meng, a trusted officer on the staff of General Lung, Commander of the 19th Route Army and in charge of the Chinese defense at Shanghai.

Meng saluted gravely. “General Lung sends me with an earnest prayer for your assistance. Already, so far today, we have lost more ground than during the past week. Something has happened to our troops. They have suddenly become lifeless, with no spirit to resist the onslaught of the enemy. Our officers are the same way, also. If this continues much longer, the gradual retreat will turn into a rout. General Lung asks you to put every available ship into the air in an attempt to hold back the Jap advance.”

Grogan gazed at the Asiatic officer sharply. “Perhaps you do not know,” he stated, “that we have lost four pilots this morning, and that I nearly missed being shot down myself. But tell me! When did this sudden lethargy descend upon the troops?”

Colonel Meng replied at once. “It seemed to come upon them about ten o’clock this morning,” he said. “I am sure, because it was about 10:30 that one of the regimental liaison officers arrived at Headquarters with the information the Japs had started to storm our lines. General Lung sent one of the staff back to investigate. He finally returned but on a stretcher. He wasn’t wounded but appeared to be utterly done in.”

“What about you people at Headquarters?” demanded Grogan. “Did you experience this same sensation?”

“No, we didn’t,” returned Meng, “and General Lung is incensed about the matter. He can’t understand what has come over his men.”

The Dragon chief pondered for a few minutes. “All right,” he told the staff officer. “I’ll do all I can.”

Colonel Meng saluted and departed.

Just as he entered his tent, the Yank was joined by Ah Im.

“Captain St. John and Captain Goyen will be here directly,” he reported.

The Dragon chief indicated a stool and then drew forth a stone jug of *samshu* and some porcelain cups. He poured out two hefty slugs of the strong tong liquor.

“After what we’ve been through this morning, Ah Im,” affirmed the Yank, “we need a couple of good shots. I’m going to tell you something I wouldn’t tell the others. I know that it sounds incredible, fantastic, unbelievable. But I am absolutely convinced the Japs have cooked up something more diabolically clever than anything the world has ever seen. And heaven knows we’ve seen plenty in the last few months.”

Steps sounded outside. The tent flap opened. In came Goyen and St. John. Monty St. John, lanky Britisher, ex-war ace, was the senior flight commander of the Dragon clan. Hank Goyen, the urbane Frog, led Flight B.

The Frenchman recited his experiences of the morning. They coincided almost entirely with that of the squadron commander. St. John confirmed the strange experiences of Ah Im and Doc Kuo on the ground. But after an hour of careful consideration of every angle of the fantastic situation, they were as much at sea as ever. There was nothing to pin to—nothing upon which they could get a firm grasp. Finally Grogan rose, terminating the meeting.

“Gentlemen, that is all for the present. Patrols will go on as usual. For the rest of the day they will be confined exclusively to strafing the Jap infantry who have loosed a powerful offensive this morning and are driving back the long troops. You will exercise every caution to avoid combat with these new hooded Kawasakis with which we battled this morning. I have a vague feeling that in some inconceivable way they have something to do with the weird experience we have just passed through. That is all.”

As the others rose to their feet, running steps were heard outside. The tent flap was jerked open and the four officers gazed at the grayish features of the Dragon medico. Doc Kuo.

“Come!” he gasped, and that was all he said.

Directly they were gathered round a small wire cage in back of the tent that served as the squadron hospital and dressing room. Still without speaking, Kuo pointed at two furry white objects underneath the wire covering. They were two small white rabbits. One was stretched at full length. It required not a second glance to know it was dead. Its mate also lay stretched out at full length, panting feebly.

The medico found his voice. “As you know,” he muttered, “I have been experimenting on some rabbits, trying to isolate the germ that causes black plague. All my other rabbits died, and these two I had just obtained last night. They were both healthy and strong. Now look at them! One is dead, and the other is near to death.”

Grogan looked at him. “That’s too bad, Kuo,” he replied, “but then, they’re only rabbits.”

The medico gazed at his C.O., and his dark eyes were vastly troubled. Fear showed in them—not fear of death—but fear of the unknown.

He pointed at the two rabbits. “What happened to those two rabbits,” he breathed, “will happen to us!”

“Nonsense!” exclaimed Grogan. “They probably ate something that poisoned them.”

“No,” replied Kuo gravely, “they have not eaten. I have not allowed them to eat. They have been in this cage just as you see. They have had only pure water to drink. They have breathed the air about them—have been exposed to what should be the life-giving rays of the sun.”

The Dragon chief again felt a cold chill rippling down his spine. He looked at the Oriental medico sharply.

“What do you mean?” he demanded, “by ‘what should be the life-giving rays of the sun’?”

“I mean just this,” replied Kuo steadily. “The light from the sun—the rays which penetrate down to the surface of the earth—are life-giving only under certain conditions. When those conditions are changed or removed, the sun becomes a lethal monster, dealing only—death!”

THERE was a weird silence. Under certain conditions the medico’s words would have sounded ridiculous, but his four listeners knew he was deadly serious. In the presence of those two helpless rabbits, one dead, the other dying—in the face of the fantastic experiences of the morning—there could be no mistake.

In that instant the five men that stood there knew beyond a doubt that they stood within reach of the Grim Reaper’s scythe. In that instant something happened. Not one of the five would have been able to tell what, yet each man knew that it had happened.

Something weird, fantastic, incredible. The air was different, the sunlight was different. A change had taken place, and each one of the five felt it in his bones.

Battling Grogan raised his head and looked up into the skies. An involuntary gasp shot from his lips. The sun! It had changed—just as it had that morning. His eyeballs burned—he felt that terrible blackness clouding his vision. He felt again that terrible weakness enveloping him.

He turned his head away, looked down, that he might recover his sight. As he did so, his vision cleared again. Something attracted his attention. His hand! He looked at it again closely, steadily. Then, and it required an effort, he raised his hand so that his companions could see. Astonished gasps rasped from their throats.

His hand had turned greenish gray!

Suddenly Doc Kuo, with shaking finger, pointed down at the cage below.

The second rabbit was panting no longer. It was dead!

The distant thrumming of an airplane motor beat upon the air. The Dragon chief turned savagely upon his companions.

“Now listen!” he thundered. “This—this thing, whatever it is, is at us again. I’m absolutely sure it’s some gruesome, vile device of the *skibis*. But we’ve got to fight to the last ounce of our strength or we’re goners!”

The distant humming had turned into whining roar. A speedy little plane lanced out of the blue and circled the field. But as the ship came in, it wobbled and dipped as though the pilot were careless or drunk.

“That isn’t a Jap ship,” growled Grogan, “or it would have a hooded cockpit.”

“My eye!” exclaimed St. John. “That’s a Royal Naval Air Force plane. I’ll bet I know who it is. It’s Morehouse from the aircraft carrier, Trafalgar. He said he was going to come over and see me just as soon as he could get off.”

By this time, the visiting plane had completed its circle of the field and was coming in for a landing. It finally got on the ground after an attempt that had the watchers silent with bated breath.

Fighting the weakness of their bodies, the five rushed down to the line. St. John was right. An elongated, skinny man rose up in the cockpit and, gingerly holding on to the coaming, let himself down to the ground. Then he stumbled forward, mopping his brow.

“My word!” he exclaimed. “This is certainly beastly weather for this time of the year.”

“Well, you good-for-nothing ape!” greeted Monty St. John. “How do you like China?”

“I liked it all right,” returned the navy flyer, “until this morning. But much more of this and I’ll probably be in the nuthouse. Did you see that landing?”

St. John nodded. Then hurriedly he introduced the visitor to his companions. That formality over, Battling Grogan spoke up abruptly.

“I’m sure you’ll pardon a seeming discourtesy, Commander Morehouse, but it so happens you have chosen a most unpropitious moment to pay us a visit. In fact, for your own safety I must beg of you to climb back into your ship and fly immediately to your vessel.”

The Britisher looked at the American with amazement.

“I can’t take time to explain now,” continued the Yank. “But you have only to look at the faces of my officers here to know that I am deadly serious.”

Commander Morehouse bowed, saluted, held out his hand.

In his plane, ready to take off, the navy man leaned over the side of his cockpit and spoke to St. John. A startled expression came over Monty’s face. Quickly he turned and called to Grogan.

At once the Yank stepped forward.

“Tell the Chief here what you just told me, will you, Morehouse?” asked St. John.

“Sure,” returned the visitor. “I had almost forgotten it. Just before we left England on this

trip there was installed on our carrier a complete unit of Maillot audiophones, the finest and most sensitive sound detectors that have ever been constructed. Our sound expert was testing the unit this morning and he distinctly heard many airplane motors. The locating device clearly showed that the bulk of these sounds came from a point which would place them almost directly over the center of Chapei. However, our most powerful glasses failed to pick them out. The only conclusion is that they must be at a tremendously high altitude—higher than planes have ever reached before.”

There was dead silence for a second. Grogan looked at his officers and they looked at him and at each other. In each pair of eyes was the same question. Quickly the Yank decided on a course of action.

“Would it be all right,” he asked Commander Morehouse, “if Captain St. John and myself flew over and landed on your carrier? I’d like to listen to those sounds myself and find out just exactly over what point they are located.”

The British Navy flyer hesitated. “I have no love for the Japs,” he declared, “and I am eager to be of any service I can. But we want to avoid any possible criticism which might come from the landing of Chinese planes on our carrier in plain view of the Japanese fleet.”

Captain Cheung, who had been standing directly behind his chief, laid a hand on the Yank’s arm.

“We have two ship no insignia yet,” he intoned softly.

The Yank grasped at the idea. “That’s the stuff!” He turned again to Morehouse. “We have two ships,” he said, “which have no insignia painted on them as yet. How about using those?”

The Britisher smiled. “It will be a pleasure to have you come over,” he replied.

The Dragon chief turned to Goyen and Cheung.

“Now here’s what you two must do!” he ordered. “I am convinced it will be fatal to remain here. Each minute you do so, you will become closer to those two rabbits—just as Kuo said. Therefore waste no time. Get all the ships out and all the trucks. The ships will be flown and the trucks driven over to the field at Soochow. When

Captain St. John and myself leave the Trafalgar, we will join you at Soochow.”

FIFTEEN minutes later the Dragon chief and his senior flight commander were on the deck of the British aircraft carrier and Grogan had his ears glued to the earphones of the gigantic Maillot unit. Clearly, distinctly, he heard the sounds of airplane motors. There could be no mistaking them. Commander Morehouse introduced Lieutenant Hansley, the sound expert. Hansley brought forth a map of the Shanghai area.

“There,” he declared, indicating a restricted area on the map, “it is directly about that section that those planes must be operating.”

Grogan nodded thoughtfully. “How far up do you think they are?” he asked.

“I can tell you that almost exactly,” returned Hansley. “They’re up at an altitude of approximately 32,000 feet.”

Grogan’s jaw hardened. His lips became a slit in his face.

“I’d give ten years of my life!” he growled, “to have a ship that would take me up that high. I know damn well the Japs have discovered some diabolical device with which they can kill millions of people.”

The two officers of the Trafalgar looked at him as though he had lost his mind.

“I know,” returned Grogan grimly, “you think I’m crazy, but I’m not. You don’t know these Japs as well as I do. This isn’t poison gas, and they fire no shells. Yet, if something isn’t done, I can assure you that just as certain as I am standing here, the Mikado will not only conquer China but also the world.”

“If you’re convinced of the truth of what you’re saying,” stated Commander Morehouse, “I’m not going to stop at anything to help you.”

“I, and I can speak for China, also,” returned Grogan, “am infinitely grateful to you.”

“Not at all,” returned Morehouse. “It is as much for our protection as yours. Now here’s what I suggest. I have two of the latest type Gloster Interceptor planes, which, as you probably know, are designed principally for fast climbing and high-altitude work. The engines are supercharged and each plane has oxygen apparatus for the pilot. They are guaranteed to reach 35,000 feet. Now here’s what we’ll do. I

will have our mechanics paint out all British insignia, and tonight you can fly them over to your new field and have your mechanics repaint them with the Chinese insignia. Then if anything should happen and they should fall into Jap hands, we’ll be in the clear.”

Late that night, Grogan and St. John landed at Soochow. To his relief the Dragon chief found his squadron intact. Goyen reported that as soon as they had reached a point about a mile away from Hunjao, an instant change was noticed. The air seemed different, the sunlight no longer had that greenish tint to it. Immediately the men began to snap out of their lethargy.

Frantic appeals for help had been coming from General Lung, however. His men had been pushed back farther and farther. Only with the coming of late afternoon had they seemed to regain their pep and put up any kind of resistance. Another day of the same nature would spell ruin.

Grogan went in search of Ah Im, but he had disappeared. Upon making inquiries, the Dragon chief discovered that the Chinese had taken off in a captured Jap Kawanishi scout about dusk—no one knew where.

Early the next morning Grogan and St. John were ready for their attempt. Ah Im had not appeared. The two pilots bundled into winter flying suits, provided by Morehouse and especially equipped with electric pads. The Yank ace had gone over everything in detail, and was certain nothing had been missed. The leads from the special generator to the heaters which warmed the oxygen containers were attached. Each plane was equipped with one gun synchronized to fire through the propeller. It was a .50 caliber shrapnel-type and designed to explode upon passing through fabric.

They took off at 7:30 a.m. The sky was cloudless. At 8:40 Grogan had reached the apex of his climb. St. John was no longer with him. At about 25,000 feet, noticeably lagging behind, the Limey had pointed to his motor and gone down—obviously with engine trouble.

The Yank had never been to such an altitude before. He was distinctly uncomfortable. The oxygen bothered him. But looking over the side, he was absolutely amazed at the sight that met his eyes. Shanghai and vicinity looked exactly like a small scale map. Definite objects were almost

indistinguishable. He patrolled directly over the section Hansley had pointed out, but could see nothing. Just before ten o'clock, beginning to run low on gas, he descended.

Down on the Soochow field, the Yank found St. John and a group of grease-balls busily working on the motor of the Limey's ship.

"It was the supercharger," St. John informed him. "But I'll have it ready in a little while. We're going up again, aren't we?"

"I don't know, Monty," returned Grogan. "I got up to over 34,000 feet and couldn't find a thing. Maybe my idea was all wet."

"But we certainly heard airplane motors on that audiophone," protested the Englishman. "You can't get around that."

"I know," responded Grogan, "and it's certainly got me stopped. I wish Ah Im would show up. He may have found out something."

Captain Goyen hurried up to the Dragon chief.

"General Lung just telephoned," he stuttered, visibly shaken. "The same thing has started again that happened yesterday morning. The tong troops have lapsed into that state of lethargy and are seemingly powerless to oppose the Japs, who have started another offensive. The general is crying to you for assistance. He says that his men are beginning to believe that the gods have put a curse on them. You know Chinese soldiers. If they get to believing something like that, everything will be all over."

"I know," returned the Yank, "and I'm going to make one more flight upstairs to see what I can find out. You wait an hour and a half. If you don't hear anything from me by that time, put every available ship and pilot into the air and go over and give the Japs hell. We may all go West, but if we do, we'll take a bunch of *skibis* with us." Grogan waited ten minutes, and when St. John's plane was not ready by that time, he took off.

AT 32,000 feet Grogan leveled off and again took stock of the situation. Everything seemed as before. He was just about to withdraw his gaze from the earth to search the heavens above when he saw something that attracted his attention. At first he wasn't sure what it was. But suddenly an eerie chill gripped his heart.

He was looking down at a point where he knew the heaviest fighting was going on in the outskirts

of Chapei. He knew there wasn't a cloud in the sky. And yet—there was a distinct shadow on the face of the earth, a rectangular shadow.

And then he became aware that this shadow extended up into the sky. It wasn't a shadow exactly. It was a difference in the tint of the atmosphere. Inside this shadow, the air seemed a bluish green, while outside it was whitish, transparent. Suddenly he became aware that as this shadow extended up into the sky, it gradually narrowed, like a cone. And Grogan suddenly knew that it must come to a point—a point approximately on the same elevation as his plane.

In that moment things happened so rapidly that they lost reality. They took on the nature of a wild, unbelievable fantasy. Grogan's first impression was as if he had flown straight at the side of a vast building, and he had not seen the building until the wall was within a few yards of his propeller.

For suddenly, out of the void in front of him, had loomed up a gigantic bag. The Yank's first move was automatic. He yanked back on his stick and even as he did so, a great wonder flashed through his mind that he could have gotten so close to a mammoth object in the air without seeing it.

But in the thin ether of that high altitude, the American's plane refused to obey the controls. The Gloster went up into a stall and hung on the upper side, its wheels bouncing against the taut fabric of this mammoth bag that had barred the plane's sky-path. In that instant Grogan knew that he had practically run into a huge dirigible!

Suddenly a blasting fire, a furious clattering, sounded in the Yank's ears. Nipponese machine guns! At once he knew that they came from the top of the airship. The Gloster seemed to disintegrate about him. Flames shot from its motor. Frantically Grogan loosened his belt and clutched for the emergency oxygen mask which was to be used in just such an emergency. Then he leaped.

He had a faint impression of a ball of flame and smoke disappearing below him. The next thing he knew he was bouncing and rolling down the side of the dirigible. How his rip cord ever came to be pulled he didn't know. Certainly he didn't pull it. It must have jarred loose as he bounced and rolled down the side of the silken

bag. Then his chute opened with a snap. At the same moment he slid away from the side of the dirigible. His heart was in his mouth as he saw, almost directly below him, the flashing propeller of one of the motors of the large bag. Then the chute above him veered outward and he breathed easier.

But in the next instant the chute had swung back and was being rapidly sucked in toward the propeller. Suddenly the chute came in contact with a propeller blade. There was a rending and tearing as the folds were wound up by the churning propeller.

Grogan felt himself being whirled rapidly upward toward those flashing blades. Another instant and he would be decapitated. There was only one other thing to do and that was to unbuckle his chute harness.

A 32,000 foot drop—without a parachute!

Suddenly, with a grinding noise, the propeller blades stopped. Grogan dangled directly below them, one tip within a foot of his head.

He hadn't been able to attach his emergency gas mask. Rapidly he felt himself sinking into unconsciousness. But as he went out, he heard a panel slide open in the engine nacelle, and two masked faces peered out at him.

Five minutes later the Yank found himself regaining consciousness. Weakly he sat up. On his face was an oxygen mask, but he immediately discovered that his hands were tied behind his back. One glance showed him where he was—in the control room of a Jap dirigible!

AMONG the faces which peered at him he recognized one as being that of Captain Makino, the Jap who had shot him down yesterday and left the insulting note for him. The *skibi* came close to him.

“So you decided to pay us a visit, eh?” he laughed. “I had looked forward to the pleasure of shooting you down later on today, but now that you have decided to become the guest of Count Kamato, he will probably have other plans for you.”

He laughed again and made way for a slender, diminutive Nipponese who wore large glasses with lenses which made his eyes look grotesquely large.

“It is a pleasure indeed,” said the Count, “to entertain the famous General Grogan. Everyone in Japan has heard of your prowess, a skill which is highly distasteful to us and which I am glad to say will trouble us no longer.”

Then his face clouded and anger gleamed from his narrow eyes. “But tell me,” he cried angrily. “How did you know where this dirigible was? Our airship is painted with a special preparation which does not refract light rays, thus making it practically invisible. And how did you get up this high? Your squadron has no planes capable of attaining such an altitude.”

“I'll tell you nothing. I know you Japs too well to think for a moment that I'll get out of here alive. Therefore you can all go straight to hell!”

Count Kamato glared at the American. “I had intended,” he retorted, “to make you a present of an easy death—something like dropping you out of this control car. But now I have changed my mind. Come over here to this window.”

He drew the American over to the side of the control car. He pointed out to a large structure which protruded at right angles to the airship, almost level with the floor of the control car. The outside of this structure was supported by two cables which evidently went over the top of the bag. In the middle of this structure was an immense lens, possibly twenty-five feet in diameter.

“On the other side,” stated the Jap proudly, “is another similar lens. If you will look down below at the earth, you will see a shadow on the ground. That is the area covered by the two lenses from this height. By manipulating the controls you see on this instrument board, the area can be increased or decreased although, naturally, there is a limit to the effective size controlled by one lens. Our only handicap is that we must work when the sun is not hidden by clouds and is near its zenith—from about ten a.m. to three p.m. Also the beam which goes down can be directed into almost any shape desired—from a cone to a square. Back in my laboratory, I have a similar lens which I shall be glad to show you later on. In fact, I shall allow you the pleasure of basking under its light. Thus any curiosity you may have regarding its effectiveness will be answered.”

“I have no curiosity,” growled the Yank. “I know full well its purpose.”

“But I want you to know how it works,” insisted the inventor. “It would not be fair for you to depart this life without knowing the means that accomplished your departure. The light of the sun is life-giving only because the atmosphere surrounding the earth’s surface filters out the shorter wave lengths of the invisible ultraviolet light bands. If a means could be discovered to negate the effects of the earth’s atmosphere and allow the shorter wave lengths of the sun’s spectrum to reach the earth’s surface the living organisms on the face of the earth would soon disintegrate and die. I, Count Kamato, have discovered such a means. I have also discovered a protective glass covering which in turn will not allow the lethal wave lengths to filter through. The ships you met yesterday, such as Captain Makino was flying, are equipped with these glass coverings.”

The little *skibi* drew himself up to an absurd height.

“I have discovered what the best scientists of the Occidental world have failed to discover,” he shouted. “We Japs will now assume our rightful places as the rulers of the world. All other peoples will be our slaves and servants.”

Grogan, his words to the contrary, had not given up hope. He had been in too many tight scrapes in his life not to know that all was not over until the last breath had been drawn. Now, looking over Kamato’s shoulder, he gave a start of surprise. With that start hope flared in his breast. Another Jap officer had entered the control car and was talking to Captain Makino. Like the others, the lower part of his face was concealed by his oxygen mask. But Grogan would have known those eyes anywhere.

The Jap officer was none other than Ah Im!

Suddenly, the dirigible gave a convulsive shudder. A dull explosion boomed in the distance. Everyone in the control car was thrown to the floor. Grogan kept his eyes on Ah Im. Somehow, in that moment, something snapped. He suddenly realized how completely at a loss he would have been without his faithful henchman. How in the world had Ah Im been able to accomplish the impossible?

Cautiously, carefully, the Yank watched. But the convulsive shudder of the giant airship had removed all attention from him. The control car

was a mad melee. Human beings, sensing the nearness of that All High Command—death—were struck with a paralysis of fear. Safety, life, was all that mattered!

Grogan’s gray eyes sought the dark orbs of Ah Im. They carried him a fleeting message to be ready for anything.

CAPTAIN St. John’s motor was ready about fifteen minutes after the Dragon chief took off. When he was up to about 22,000 feet, he was startled by the appearance of a large missile which came screeching down from the heights above, a plume of smoke and flame trailing from it.

As it passed by, although at terrific speed, the Limey recognized the tail of a Gloster. An oath of consternation and rage burst from his lips. Grogan, his beloved chief, had paid the supreme price. An iron resolve burned into St. John’s soul. The Yank would be avenged, no matter what the cost.

St. John suddenly became aware that something had come between him and the sun. Obviously it must be a large object—and it was in the direction from which Grogan’s flaming wreck had dropped. Spiraling carefully, the Limey kept climbing, always working toward that object above him which was in the sun’s path.

Suddenly, when it seemed he could force his ship no higher, a white bag appeared above him. Immediately he recognized it—a dirigible. Further ahead, he made out a giant control car and two strange structures on either side. But the Britisher hesitated not an instant. He kept his nose straight at the wall ahead, and when it seemed as if he were about to collide with it, he tripped his gun. But his ship had reached its stall point. It hung in the air, wavering. As it hung there, a murderous stream of shrapnel speared upward into the bag above. Then St. John fell into a vicious spin.

A Jap officer rushed into the control room, his face ashen.

“Everything is lost!” he shrieked. “We have been hit! The dirigible is on fire!”

Every Jap officer sprang for parachutes which hung on the wall. Strapping his on, Count Kamato glared at the prisoner.

“I’ll have to change my mind, American dog,” he shouted. “You will remain here—to burn with

this ship.” He turned to the others. “We will all jump.”

The others hesitated not an instant. A door was yanked open and out they piled, each one fighting desperately to get ahead of the other.

Ah Im drew close to his chief. A knife flashed in his hands, severing Grogan’s bonds. From a holster on the wall he snatched a pistol which he pressed into the Yank’s hand. At the door of the control car Count Kamato and two others were struggling to get out. Ah Im’s pistol coughed twice in succession. Kamato and one of the others dropped. The third one leaped just in time. Quickly Grogan and Ah Im unsnapped the parachute from Kamato and fastened it on the Dragon chief.

Then—through what seemed to be a roaring sheet of flame—they leaped.

Far below a ball of fire two chutes suddenly blossomed into white-petaled flowers. Separated only by one hundred feet, Grogan and his chum grinned at each other.

St. John, charging down the skyways, came upon them. He recognized Grogan first—then Ah Im—and almost fell out of his ship.

With the aid of a favorable wind and by slipping their chutes, the two Dragon airmen succeeded in landing back of the Chinese lines. St. John, following them down, landed in a field nearby. His Gloster Interceptor having a powerful motor and wonderful climbing ability, he took off

with Grogan on one wing and Ah Im on the other. Fifteen minutes later, he landed on the field at Soochow, just as every available Dragon ship was about to take the air.

The tong pilots leaped from their planes and surrounded their *taipan* and Captain Cheung. For once the staid immobility of their race was thrown to the winds. They hoisted the two returned heroes to their shoulders and paraded up and down the line, shouting.

“How did you do it?” Grogan demanded of Ah Im, when they had persuaded their buzzards to lower them to the ground.

“Him cinch!” grinned the tong ace. “I show orders direct from Mikado. Make big inspection tour. If up to snuff, recommend Count Kamato for Order of Rising Sun. Him fall for in big way.”

The Yank ace doubled up with merriment. Then he and Ah Im piled into Boeings and the whole Dragon crew took off in one slashing zoom.

When the Dragon Squadron reached Chapei, the *skibi* advance had come to a momentary stop. Their foes were not giving way as easily as they had. Suddenly Grogan and his hardy eagles fell upon them with the unleashed fury of fiends.

The Japs retreated, and their retreat became a rout. General Lung, about to give up hope, leaped to his feet when the news was brought him.

China could not—must not—fail!