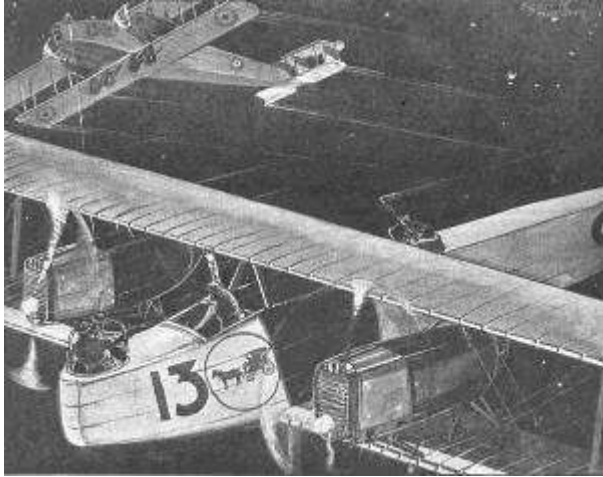


Hell's Hack

by Arch Whitehouse



GOLFERS go out and win championships on inspired rounds. Tennis stars capture tournaments on inspired rallies. Baseball players become World Series heroes on inspired innings, and many a beaten boxer has climbed out of the resin, fired with an inspired fury, and battered his opponent into defeat.

It must have been an inspiration of the gods that made Ralph Conklin paint that repulsive insignia on the sides of old No. 13.

Hell's Hack! A disreputable old four-wheeler, with a creaking bag of bones in the shafts, and from its ill-fitting doors dripped a scarlet stream of gore. Sickening, yes, but nothing could better portray No. 13 and her crew. Hellions, every one of them, blood-letters from the word "Contact." They fought in the mess, in the hangars, on the tarmac and up and down the narrow catwalks of the Handley-Page, until blood literally streamed down the three-ply flooring and trickled through the fabric of the throat hatchway.

No. 13 was a hack in every sense of the word. She was slow, but she got there. She was old and

battered, but you can't go through several months of night flying for the Independent Air Force and not be marked. Her sides were patched and mottled with various shades of doped pigment. Her wings, weary and worn by many hours of flight and hundreds of foldings, seemed to sag like the puffy shoulders of some old rheumatic grandma. Even the powerful Rolls-Royce motors seemed to hang in their spiders like two gaunt, hunt-weary dogs.

But if Hell's Hack, as the Yankee corporal had named it, had shed her fighting lines, her crew had become cockier, more belligerent, more insulting, and ten times tougher to handle. The tall, lithe, blond Major McDairn, who had been out since '14, had given up the problem weeks ago.

There was Lieutenant Jimmy Sanders, the American pilot, a tall, gangling man with fists like steam-shovel scoops. Jimmy had been out for months now. Too heavy-handed to fly Camels, he was but a whale of a man when it came to motors and rigging. They tried him in Canada where he had enlisted, but it was no go. Strange to relate, he could handle a lumbering Handley-Page with all the delicacy of a surgeon snipping an appendix. Jimmy wore the ribbon of the Military Cross, two gold wound stripes and a broken nose. We'll overlook the butcher's block knuckles.

Then there was little Bertie Bronson, an Englishman who had been tossed out of Cambridge three days before the war broke out. Bertie had had a spell on B.E.'s and a still shorter spell on seaplanes. His delight in taking pretty girls for joy rides when he was supposed to be doing a Dover Patrol almost cost him his commission. They compromised by handing him a ferry pilot's job,

but something queer happened there, too, so he was finally shipped out as a bomber officer on H.P.'s. Bertie, despite his name, was a battler. He knew a jab when he saw one, and could hand it out, too.

Down inside was Sergeant "Flint" Ferguson, another Yank. Flint lived up to his name. He was plenty hard. Joined the Canucks in 1914 for the want of something tough to do. His pay-book showed that he had been through Salisbury Plain, Ypres, the first gas attack at Poperinghe, and over the top at St. Eloi. How he got into the R.F.C. will never be known, but he was a damn good bomber sergeant.

Up front in the Amen turret was Corporal Duncan Duff, a braw Scot. The finest machine gunner in France, but cold, bitter and against anything that pertained to war. He worried for days after he had shot a Jerry down, pondering whether the poor guy was killed outright so that he never felt the flames, and whether he had a family. He was jugged once or twice for his anti-war sentiments, but they always let him out when No. 13 was due for a raid.

The rear gunner was the squadron 'artist, First Class Air Mechanic Ralph Conklin, another Yank who never could quite explain why he was in a British outfit. Conklin was quiet and studious. When the news came through that April morning that America had entered the war, he snorted once, reached for his dixie of oatmeal, and went back to his sketch pad, on which he was outlining an advertisement for some British baby food. He and Lieutenant Sanders were at loggerheads all the time, and they do say that once they had it out behind "A" flight hangar, where tunics were tossed aside and rank forgotten. Anyway, Sanders came out of it with a broken nose, and Conklin couldn't put a pencil to a sheet of paper for days. No one seemed to make much fuss about it, though.

The sixth member of the Hell's Hack crew was little Toby Marsh, a wizened, bandy-legged Cock-

ney, who first saw the light of day within the codfish stench of Covent Garden. A Second Class Air Mechanic, they listed him on the squadron roll, but even that was absolute flattery, for Toby didn't know a monkey wrench from a rudder cable.

Just an R.F.C. bomber gang. Take 'em or leave 'em. But keep your nose clean, for they could scrap. Usually among themselves, of course, but you were in for it if you so much as raised an eyebrow at one of them. The rest considered it a personal affront.

NO. 13 was on her way to Assebrouck, just south of Bruges. There was a new dump of some sort there, and the Wing commander decided that the Hell's -Hack crew might keep out of mischief by slipping over there one night and spoiling its neat, angular proportions. Major McDairn agreed. The crew seemed to be spoiling to wreck a hangar or swipe a squadron car. They hadn't been over the line in seventy-two hours. One reason was the weather, the other the fact that Lieutenant Sanders was still trying to squint over his bulged conk. That probably was the more important of the two. Anyway, they went.

As they crossed the line, Duff stood up and shuffled about. A few desultory shots came up at them and belched out 2,000 feet below. Duff spat over the side and rammied on a drum. Sanders was watching the Scot, when Bronson leaned over and bellowed in his ear, "Head a few points farther south."

"What for? We're dead on for Assebrouck!" snarled Sanders.

"I know, but I've decided to try Oedelem. There are some new Gotha hangars there."

"But we're supposed to be bombing Assebrouck!" raged the American. "What's the idea?"

"Never mind that. I'm bomber officer on this barge. Do as I say. You're only the pilot," replied the Englishman.

Sanders knew that Bronson was right. The bomber officer was O.C. on Handleys. There was nothing he could do about it.

“Crazy!” he stormed back. “We’ll get hell there. This Assebrouck thing will be soft, and we can sneak back down the coast, if necessary. Why go asking for trouble?”

“Don’t worry, there’s a reason,” bellowed the Englishman. Then he sat back and began to fiddle with his bomb sight and check their drift. Duff turned around and stared at them through his goggles. He wondered what they had been yelling about.

Bong! Bong! Bong! Three more archie coughs came up and showered them with steel. One motor chugged grimly, but Sanders smoothed her off with a mysterious movement of the throttle.

Bang! Bong! Bang! Archie growled again, and spat his venom. Snooping Sarah, the noted searchlight, flashed her lone orb across the sky and caught No. 13 in her gleam. Duff stood up to look down into the silvery blindness and snarled. Sanders whipped the big bomber over and sideslipped out of the blade.

“You still aiming to go to Oedelem?” he bellowed as he eased her out.

“Right! Farther north. You’ll cut in from the wrong side,” answered the Englishman. “I want to hit from the north side and pull out and cut around toward Kresselaere.”

Sanders snorted, and turned back to his instrument board.

At the word “Kresselaere” which was wafted down the companionway, Sergeant Ferguson scrambled to his feet, and while the ship did a cakewalk, he struggled up the narrow lattice floor and worked his way to the window again. He pulled a dog-eared map out of his pocket, studied it for a minute or two under the gleam that seeped in from the flashing sword-blade of Snooping Sarah and checked their position again. With a guilty glance down at Marsh, he stuffed the map

back in his leather coat pocket and went farther up the companionway so that he could look through into the control pit.

“Well, what about it?” he snarled into Bronson’s earpiece.

“Stand by! We’re going to bomb Oedelem. Gotha sheds there. You take the toggles and have Marsh stand by for the rear turret in case Conklin stops one. Understand?”

Ferguson nodded savagely.

“And be faster on those toggles, this time,” snapped Bronson. “You were slow the other night. No use my figuring these angles and getting the range if you are going to waste seconds getting them away. This barge can go a long way in a few seconds, you know.”

They were welcomed with booming breeches, open muzzles and cheering Q-F guns when they got to Oedelem. Everything that would spit was aimed at them. Lead, copper-covered bullets, steel casings and high explosives came up in a thunderous greeting. Flaming onions, twisting like poisonous lizards on a chain, climbed up the sky lanes and crept toward them.

Bang! Bang! Bang! The catwalk danced a mad fandango, and Ferguson bashed his face against a bomb-rack. He fell forward, sprawled over Toby Marsh’s outstretched legs, and wound up in a heap at the bottom of the catwalk. He gazed up into Ralph Conklin’s turret and saw the gunner staring at a black-winged something that streaked over them like a giant vulture. As he scrambled to his feet, he saw Conklin fumble in his canvas tool bag and withdraw a Very light pistol. He saw him ram a bulky cartridge into the breech and snap the snub-nosed barrel shut.

“What’s his game?” snarled Ferguson. “Don’t mean to say he’s going to fire a signal light?”

But there was no time for further reflection. Someone was standing over him, yanking at his shoulders. It was Bronson.

“Come on, you! What the devil are you doing down here? Get to that toggle board. Salvo of 220’s right away. We’re going down. Come on, damn your eyes!”

Ferguson spat, swore and struggled to get up.

THE engines screamed and then choked back their bellow as Sanders withdrew the throttles. Behind, Conklin’s gun was chattering madly. More searchlights slashed the sky with their broad blades.

The Handley-Page was hurtling down at the low huts, hump-backed hangars and elephant-iron sheds. Across the field numerous antlike things were streaking away, leaving scarlet tails. The defense was coming up to stop No. 13.

Sergeant Ferguson rammed himself against the toggle board and watched the upraised arm of Lieutenant Bronson. His fingers gripped the wooden handles of the 220 toggles. Then, with a gleam back at Marsh, he released them and took the handles that would loosen the 40-pounders.

The guides rasped and the small bombs went out. The ship lurched with the shift in weight. Marsh stared, amazed, as the big babies still hung there. Four 40’s left four narrow spaces clear. That was all.

The Handley pulled out of her dive with a sweep that sent stomachs constricting and made knees bend. Over she went, and Bronson hung on as he watched four puny flashes of light belch out on the broad tarmac in front of the first two hangars. For an instant he stared back into the dark cabin and screamed a bellow of hatred. “Shut up!” snorted Ferguson, steadying himself again. Bronson couldn’t hear him, but he sensed that something was wrong.

The Handley curled around while Duff and Conklin sprayed the climbing Pfalz ships with Lewis lead. Two went down before they could get their wheels clear. Another wobbled wildly in mid-air and curled over to smash its nose plunk

into the open door of a hangar. Flame bit up, smoke curled away, and the Handley was ready for her second dive.

“The 220’s!” screamed Bronson. “The 220’s, you fool!”

“Go to hell!” snorted Ferguson under his breath.

The Handley went down the chute again and Bronson went back to his bomb sight. Ferguson braced himself and grabbed the 40-pounder toggles once more, casting a quick glance back at Marsh. The Cockney was hanging on for dear life now, staring at Conklin’s feet—and waiting for his chance at that rear gun.

The lumbering bomber was down to the right level again, and Bronson’s hand flashed down. Up it went again, and down once more. But Ferguson did not pull. The toggles remained in their slots and the flexible cables hung limp.

A Pfalz came down at them, but Duff sprayed it away with a series of short bursts. Sanders sat and swore as he climbed the Handley to a respectable altitude. Desultory shots came up at them, but they were all well over them. He yelled at Bronson, “What happened? Fine mess! Nothing went off. Who detonated those eggs?”

“Bah!” snorted Bronson, crashing through into the bomb chamber. “Wait till I get that bloke Ferguson.”

The sergeant was away from the toggle board when Bronson came in. He stood staring out of the window of the port side.

“What the devil’s doing down here?” opened the Englishman. “Why didn’t you release those 220’s? Nothing went on the second dive. Where were you?”

“Right there,” snapped Ferguson, without looking back from the narrow window.

“Why didn’t you pull those toggles? Look at them! The bombs are still in there!”

"I—I—I lost my footing," replied Ferguson, still staring out of the window. "Slipped just as you jerked your arm down!"

"You what? Of all the damned excuses, sergeant, that's the worst. You'd better chuck it and go back to carrying duckboards. What can we say when we get back with all this lot?"

Ferguson edged closer to the window, stared out again and suddenly whirled on the bomber officer. "Oh, so that's it? You don't want to go back with the stuff, eh? Well, we'll soon fix that. Get out of my way!"

As he edged past Bronson to get to the toggle board, something hissed above them. They both stood still for a fraction of a minute and stared about them. From the opening in Conklin's cockpit came the blinding gleam of a white Very light.

"What's that? Who fired that light?" yelled Bronson.

"Conklin! 'E fired that, Mr. Bronson," answered Toby Marsh. "I saw 'im, just now. 'E fired it!"

"What the devil?" started the bomber officer, leaping down the catwalk. Then, before he had taken two steps, the Handley lurched as two great 220's went out of the rack with a dull crunch. Bronson stopped to stare at the empty racks, and saw two more go out. He turned. A fanatic sergeant was yanking wildly at every toggle on the board. Before he could get back up the catwalk, every rack in the crate was empty.

"Hey! What's the game?" roared Bronson. "Those bombs! Where are you dropping them?"

But Ferguson was edging back to the window and watching gigantic glows of fire blossom out down there at Kresselaere. The Handley swung due west and raced for the line, while Ralph Conklin fought off a saucy Pfalz fighter with his last drum.

It was a puzzled Lieutenant Bronson who led the way down the narrow ladder out of the throat

of the Handley-Page when they got back to Watten. Inside, there was a scuffle and scramble of crunching feet. Conklin and Ferguson were fighting like a couple of Kilkenny cats, while little Toby Marsh was trying to separate them. Duff crawled down the tunnel from the front turret to join in the fray, and only the crushing blows of Lieutenant Sanders broke it up at all.

"He fired that white light," Ferguson was yelling.

"What the hell is it to you?" rasped Conklin, sucking his knuckles.

"Why did you fire that Very light?" demanded Sanders.

"I—I didn't mean to. I was fumbling with a spare bolt for the Lewis. I'd had a couple of bad ejections, and I decided to change it the first chance I got. The Very pistol went off in my hand."

"Damn liar! I saw him load it sometime before, snapped Ferguson. "He fired that light for some reason."

"Don't you accuse me of anything queer, Ferguson!" roared Conklin.

"Come on, you birds," someone was yelling up the ladder. "The major wants you all right away. Orderly room first."

They went down the ladder, this crew of Hell's Hack, and stumbled across the tarmac, stiff-legged and weary-eyed, while a ground crew took No. 13 and began to fold her wings back.

Major Ian McDairn was the replica of some Egyptian god, dressed up in a military cap and fitted complete with a waxed mustache.

One hand, minus two fingers, fumbled with a chewed pencil that had been jabbing down notes on the back of a petrol chit. The other still lay on the portable phone. As they came in and stood before him in a ragged half-moon, McDairn stood up, towering above all of them by two or three inches. They waited for a torrent of words that would singe their souls. They could see that the

major had already found out that they had not bombed Assebrouck, but to a man they were preparing to fight for Bronson.

The major opened up with, “Lovely!” The acidic sweetness of the word almost slit their gullets. They gulped and turned to one another.

“Lovely!” the major repeated, with the acid turned on a little harder. “A beautiful show! Marvelous! It doesn’t seem possible that for the mere expense of ten thousand pounds a man, and the addition of a fifty-thousand pound airplane, so much could be accomplished. I don’t know how you could do so much damage in so little time with so little to work with.”

Still they didn’t get it. They shuffled their feet, loosened their flying coats and tugged at their chin-straps.

“Half of Bergues blown off the map, a complete hospital washed out and a third of the staff, a tank park destroyed and at least twenty new Marks tanks ruined. Beautiful! A lovely show! So you’re bombing British towns now, eh?”

“What?” squeaked Bronson, wriggling like a seal.

“Bergues? Bergues, just south of Dunkirk?” gagged Sanders.

“Why, we weren’t anywhere near there, sir,” the Englishman gasped. “We crossed at the Yser and went straight to Assebrouck,” said the American, glancing sharply at Bronson.

“Shut up! We know that nothing was dropped at Assebrouck,” snarled the major. “Not only that, but a Handley-Page, bearing the number ‘13’ and carrying an amazing bit of art on the side that coincides with what you are carrying about on your ship, bombed Bergues not more than an hour ago. Can you explain that?”

“No. 13? Picture on the side? Bombed Bergues?” gagged Bronson. “But there must be a mistake. We went to Assebrouck.”

“You lie!” rasped McDairn. “Not a thing was dropped there.”

“Look here, major,” broke in Sanders, “Bronson’s not lying. We did go to—or almost to Assebrouck, but Bronson changed the course and we went to Oedelem to bomb the Gotha sheds.”

“Is that so? Well, what happened there?” snorted the major.

Bronson charged into the conversation. “We went down twice. I called for 220-pound salvos, but Ferguson only pulled the 40-pounder toggles on the first. On the second, he didn’t pull anything.”

For a minute, McDairn looked as though he would explode. He tried to speak, but no words would come, so Bronson went on.

“Don’t ask me why he didn’t, sir. All I know is that he didn’t. Then, when I went down the catwalk to remonstrate with him, he suddenly leaped up and pulled the lot and let it go somewhere near Kresselaere.”

McDairn shoved his cap to the back of his head and fumbled with a stack of maps. He looked up Bruges, ran his finger down the highway and saw Assebrouck. Five miles southeast lay Oedelem, and farther along, about another five miles, squatted Kresselaere.

“What was the idea, Ferguson?” the major finally asked. He was puzzled now, and his voice had lost most of its harshness.

“It was an idea I had, sir. Just as Lieutenant Bronson wanted to bomb Oedelem instead of Assebrouck,” replied Flint.

McDairn was floored. What sort of a mob was he handling, anyway? They were sent to one point, the bomber officer suddenly decided to bomb an airdrome five miles southeast, and the bomber sergeant refused to pull the toggles because he wanted to bomb another place even farther southeast. He turned to Marsh in desperation and in a puzzled tone asked, “How much of all this is true, Marsh?”

“Every word of it, sir. I never seen anything loike it in all me born days, sir. An’ not only that,

but just before Sergeant Ferguson yanked it all out, Corporal Conklin fired a white Very light—and we was over ‘Unland, mind you, sir.’”

“Fired a white light? What—what did you do that for, Conklin?”

For a minute Conklin turned the hate on Toby Marsh with eyes that might have burned the bone buttons off his flying coat. Then he explained. “I didn’t mean to, major. It went off without—well, I couldn’t help it.”

“But what the devil were you doing with a Very pistol that was loaded? Do you mean to say you flip around up there with loaded Very pistols? Why, that thing might have gone off in your turret, and set fire to the whole ship. What sort of discipline do you maintain up there, Bronson?”

“We all have Very pistols, sir. You have one, haven’t you, Duff? Duff? Where’s that Jock?”

They all stared about, but the Scotch gunner was nowhere to be seen,

“I don’t think ‘e came in with us, sir,” offered Marsh. “I think ‘e went over to our ‘ut.”

“That’s funny. I told him to come in here.”

“Funny!” stormed the major. “Funny, is it? Well, I think you are all stark raving mad. That was a fine idea of yours, Conklin.”

“You mean the white light?” broke in Sanders.

“No, the insignia he painted on the side of your bus. Hell’s Hack. Lovely! The balmiest lot of airmen on the Front. Now explain why you bombed Bergues.”

“We didn’t!” Bronson and Sanders snorted together.

“Well, who did?”

“I don’t know,” responded Bronson, “but it certainly wasn’t us. We haven’t been within fifteen miles of the place.”

“Bah!” snorted Sanders. “If you’d carried out your orders and smacked Assebrouck, this wouldn’t have happened. What the hell were you after at Oedelem, anyway?”

“The Gotha sheds,” snapped Bronson, “and I don’t want any more of your questioning.”

“No? Well, probably you’ll explain all this mess and get us out of it with the Wing, eh?” retorted Sanders.

“Oh, buzz off to bed,” growled the major. “You’ll be fighting in here next, and I’m sick of seeing you birds mooning around with black eyes and busted noses. Report here again at noon tomorrow.”

THE crew of “Hell’s Hack” reported promptly at noon in Major McDairn’s hut. Marsh was limping. Conklin’s face was puffed beyond recognition. Ferguson had a gash across his chin that had been drawn together with four stitches. Duff, hollow-eyed and ashen, had both hands bandaged and his face was a mass of scratches. Bronson was peeping out of one eye, the other being partly closed and mousy-blue. Sanders displayed one fist that was puffed and scarred, while his left ear appeared to be stuck on with lengths of surgeon’s tape.

McDairn stared over the half-circle of belligerents, speechless. Finally he sat down, and motioned to the gang to do the same. A few petrol boxes served as chairs.

“The crew of Hell’s Hack,” he opened. “Lovely! The pride of the regiment! Our bold and intrepid airmen. Well, I hope you all feel satisfied. Honor above everything, eh? The Donnybrook Dragoons. Black eyes and all the trimmings.” No one answered.

“All you have to do now, gentlemen,” the major went on, “is to find out who was masquerading as you last night. I’m satisfied now that it was not you who bombed Bergues, but Wing is not, so you’d better find out who’s doing all the dirty work.”

“Is that all?” asked Sanders, standing up.

“No! Sit down. There’s plenty more!” the major rasped.

“Now, in addition to Bergues getting a pasting, Paris got a packet last night, also, from a Jerry ship, the like of which has not been seen or heard of before. One crate dropped at least four and probably nearer five tons of bombs. The Gotha carries only about three thousand pounds of dirt, and our Handley-Page cannot do much better.”

At the word Handley-Page, Bronson leaned forward like a setter. He drew in his breath sharply, and then relaxed with a guilty glance.

McDairn raised a puzzled eyebrow, but went on,

“We’ve been hearing of a new German bomber for weeks, but there has been nothing at the Gotha plant. They’ve been experimenting with new ships, but their efforts have been guided toward larger fuselages and tractor engine jobs. They also have been trying out a seaplane job of large proportions, but nothing like this. Five tons of bombs in one blow, gentlemen—five tons, get that?”

“How about the Aviatik plant?” inquired Sanders.

“No chance. They gave up big jobs in 1917. This is something new entirely. To get to Paris from any of the back area dromes where we know Gothas to be established means a flight of anything between 200 and 250 miles. Do you realize now what that means? A lot of petrol, eh?”

“Well, what’s it to do with us?” snapped Sanders. “We can’t chase it in a Handley-Page. What are the night-flying Camels doing? What are the Frogs doing?”

McDairn studied the American several minutes, then snorted, “No, I don’t suppose it means anything to you. If you met it upstairs and you hadn’t received a formal notice to attack it, you’d all probably clear off and drop bombs on Switzerland. You can’t tell what the men in Hell’s Hack will do, I’m sorry I interrupted your brawls to inform you of all this. I thought you might be interested, but I suppose your own petty squabbles are

much more important than getting a new German bomber. That’s all, gentlemen. Good morning.”

“But—but,” broke in Bronson, “what’s our show tonight, sir?”

“Oh, nothing. You all need a few days off to lick your wounds, I think. We can get along without you chaps for a few days. That will be all for now. Good morning.”

Stunned, they all trooped out, glancing sideways at one another.

But if Major McDairn expected to keep the crew of Hell’s Hack on the ground after all this, he didn’t realize what a pot of plot he had set boiling.

First off, Duncan Duff went plodding across the airdrome and through the thicket that led to Liborg. Conklin went back to his sketch pads, finally disappearing behind a hangar with a palette of paints and some brushes. Sergeant Ferguson retired to his bed, unlaced the top of his kit-bag and drew out a package of letters. He wept quietly over one, and then blinked at a clipping snipped from the casualty column of the “Times.” Marsh did nothing but suck on a stubby pencil and painfully word a letter home. His spelling was like his speech, broken, disjointed and colorless, but a weary-eyed woman selling sprigs of lavender in Trafalgar Square would treasure it.

Across at the Officers’ Quarters, Sanders sat staring out of a window, trying to piece this amazing puzzle together. The bombing business, the crazy sergeant who refused to pull the toggles over Oedelem, the mysterious Very light fired by another American and above all, the strange actions of his bomber-officer, Bertie Bronson, had him worried. Bronson was nowhere to be seen.

By six o’clock that night, the crew of Hell’s Hack was divided into two camps. From his window Sanders had seen Duncan Duff return across the airdrome, and he went out to nail him. The result was that a quiet order to have No. 13 tuned, fueled and loaded with light bombs was issued by Major McDairn, who winked knowingly to the

flight sergeant. Sanders, Duff and Marsh were the only ones let into the secret.

Bronson knew nothing of all this, but Conklin, who had been lurking in a hangar, had overheard the conversation between the flight sergeant and a rigger corporal. Without a word he glided back to his hut, drew out two sheets of fabric and returned to A Flight hangar, where lounged a Handley-Page marked "3."

No. 13 was fueled and loaded in the hangar. Then, promptly at 10:30, three figures crept into the hangar and took their positions. A squadron tractor coughed and jerked and finally drew the big ship out into the open. With a snappy movement, the wings were unfolded, the main guys snaffled in and the king-bolts dropped into position. With but a preliminary warm-up, No. 13 went hurtling down the cinder track that served as a runway.

Hardly had she left than the canvas doors of A Flight hangar went creaking open and out came another ship—another Handley-Page.

It went through the same movements, a tractor chugged and drew it to the runway. The wings were unfolded and two Rolls-Royce engines opened up. In the cockpit sat Bertie Bronson. Up front huddled Ralph Conklin, and behind scowled Flint Ferguson.

There was a shout, and a rattling of petrol cans as someone raced forward to stop them. The major came from behind a hangar and stared at the ship's gleaming sides as it passed the spluttering flare put down for Sanders' ship.

"Who was that?" he yelled.

"Lieutenant Bronson, Sergeant Ferguson and Corporal Conklin, sir," answered a corporal.

"But what ship was that?" demanded the major.

"No. 3, sir. Lieutenant Catlet's, sir."

"No. 3? Why, I saw with my own eyes that it was No. 13—a No. 13, at any rate. And it had that damned silly Hell's Hack insignia on the side, too. What's the meaning of all this?"

"Sorry, sir. I didn't notice."

Major McDairn peered after the two pennons of flame that streaked back from the disappearing Handley-Page.

"All right, corporal," he replied.

But to himself he muttered, "Now what the devil is in the wind? I wonder if Duff has Conklin right? There's something fishy somewhere."

SANDERS guided No. 13 northeast toward the line. It was evident from the compass-course pinned below the light on his instrument board that he was going back to Assebrouck and bomb that ammunition dump. But Duff, who had suggested the idea, had other plans. The interview with the flaxen-haired nurse at Liborg had caused him to suggest that they start at a certain time so that they could bomb the dump, get rid of their excess weight and complete a mission that had been in the Scot's mind for weeks.

They planned that once they got to Assebrouck, Duff would handle the bomb sight and Toby Marsh could pull the toggles.

Mile after mile they droned on, snug and sure. At Thourout, Duff came back down the tunnel that connected the control pit with the front turret and went to the bomber-officer's seat. There he went to work on the birdcage bomb-sight, checking his height, adjusting the brass knob and clicking their speed on a church steeple below. They were ready for the dump at Assebrouck.

Boom! Bang! Boom! Archie spat again. He rammed her into a sideslip and came out smack in the center of a searchlight beam which brought out her moving-van outlines in stark reality.

Duff glared over the side as if he wanted to lean over and drop a rock in the center of that giant mirror reflector. Marsh's gun began to chatter. Duff whirled and caught the flash of a darting Albatross. His guns, too, came into play while Sanders maneuvered to get the Handley out of the beam. Back and forth, back and forth he swung

her, as though she were suspended in the sky on a giant swing. The light held them.

Duff's guns roared, and a twin spray of cupro-nickel, spiked with flaming tracer, bit out and caught the Albatross full in the vitals. She jerked, staggered and threw away her wings. Toby Marsh gulped as he saw the tragedy unfold before his eyes. He wondered whether he had done all that.

The Handley dived and yanked up suddenly and slipped the beam. Then, swinging wide, Sanders shot clear.

For another five minutes he ran, and then turned back toward Assebrouck. By now he had lost considerable height and was satisfied that they could prepare for the raid. Slapping the cowling before him, he drew Duff's attention.

"All right! Come on back and get rid of this junk," he yelled easing back on the throttle. "We're about there now."

He pointed off to the left, and Duff nodded. He disappeared for an instant and finally came up through the tunnel. Continuing on, he made his way down the companionway to the rear cabin and slapped at Marsh's legs.

"Come on," he said. "Ye'll take the toggles, lad. When I gie ye the signal, ye understand?"

Toby nodded. Back in the control pit, Duff checked his cross-wires again and nodded over his shoulder to the American pilot.

The raid was on.

The dump at Assebrouck was perfect for a raid. The patch of grayish lumps lay along the railroad tracks which trickled out of the western side of the town and ran on toward the Bruges-Ghent canal. The opening for a steep dive was clear. There were no tall smokestacks, no wireless masts and no unusual obstructions in the way. Sanders decided to attack first from the south and shoot north and then return from the north and cut south and be on his way home before too much grief could be sent up at him.

He explained this to Duff who nodded gravely.

"An' when ye do," answered Duff, staring at the clock on the instrument board, "will ye head toward Lopheim?"

"Lopheim? We'll run right over it, Duff," replied the American.

The throttles went back, and as if in response, the bellows of hell opened up. Three-inchers, three-pounders, flaming onions, one-pounders, Spandau and Mauser bullets came up at them. It was like flying through an explosion in a tin-can factory, but Sanders kept her at it. Duff leaned over his sight, drew a bead on the dump below and flashed his hand down twice. Inside, steady-ing himself at the board, Toby Marsh yanked hard on the toggles.

The cabin leaped with the release of weight, and he almost went over his back. Again he caught the sight of Duff's arm and again he yanked, spilling out a salvo of forty-pounders.

Up she came out of the first dive, and Toby went to his knees, scraping his face down the harsh toggle board. Below and behind he could hear the detonation of death. Gigantic coughs echoed out and flaming blossoms of fire shot up, snuffing out lives, devouring thousands of tons of high explosive, machined steel and polished brass.

Above, the war-inflamed Handley screwed over and prepared to slash back with the rest of her spawn.

The wires screeched their insane chorus. The engines went on, and they tore into the smoke and swirling sparks of inferno. Duff's hands went up and down madly. From inside the response came, and the Handley danced like a released stallion.

They cleared and clutched for height as they swung back toward Lopheim. But ahead fully thirty miles away, they could see a glow within the Allied lines. Someone had been bombing around Bergues again!

Duff caught it first and snorted. Then he swung around and began firing off to his left. Sanders

tried to pierce the mist and smoke to see what the Highlander was picking on.

Sanders gave her the gun and slewed over a trifle, so that Duff was firing directly over the snub nose of the Handley. Then like a flash, it all came to him. Duff was firing on a Handley-Page!

“What the hell?” bellowed Sanders.

The Scot evidently sensed the pilot was remonstrating with him. He waved back, as much as to say. “Shut up! I know what I’m doing.”

Sanders weaved back again and Duff had to twirl his Scarff mounting. He was screaming at the top of his voice, but the rattling of the guns and the roars of the motors deadened any word that might have sifted across the cowling. He continued to direct burst after burst at the oncoming bomber.

“What’s the idea?” bellowed Sanders.

“That’s it. The ship that bombed Bergues!” screamed Duff.

“So it is,” gasped Sanders. The gleam from the oncoming ship’s exhaust ports showed up in bold relief the figures “13” and their own Hell’s Hack insignia!

“Get that guy!” ranted Sanders.

INTO another inferno dashed Sanders’ Handley-Page. This time the thrill was icy. Here they were, thirty miles within the enemy lines, having it out with another Handley-Page that carried their numbers and their pet insignia! It was like flying inside a great circular mirror, fighting themselves. At any minute, Sanders expected that front gunner, who might yet turn out to be Duncan Duff, to put a burst into the Scot up front.

By now, the other Handley-Page was taking up the war. From front and rear came trickling lines of blue tracer that puzzled Marsh, but it gave him his cue. Someone was firing on them, and their fire was too accurate. The tail took a burst and fluttered in pain. Marsh let drive and with beginner’s luck put the front gunner out of action.

Duff squealed in delight and let another burst scream out.

Marsh’s guns halted, and it was several minutes before he realized that his drums were empty. The lay-off gave the others a chance to put a new gunner up front. They were even again and both ships took a terrific beating. Something had to be done soon.

It was.

Out of nowhere came a new menace—a new two-winged giant, roaring and bellowing its wrath.

“For cripes’ sake!” gurgled Jimmy Sanders. “Another one!”

The Highlander held his fire for fully a minute and stared up at the newcomer. There it was, a Handley-Page marked “13” and carrying the insignia of Hell’s Hack!

For an instant the Scot stared at Sanders as if appealing for enlightenment. Then he went on ripping away at the Handley with which they had been sky-jousting. Marsh opened up again, and his tracer crossed a new stream that came from above. The newcomer had joined forces with Sanders and Co. She was going down on the third with the front gun blazing away like a Camel on a ground target. There was a loud report, a puff of flame and the unhappy Handley went up in smoke. She wrenched a wing and it fluttered back, covering the whole fuselage. An engine went out, toppling over and over, while the battered ship stalled frantically and then dropped away. Down, down she went, fluttering and struggling through a misty layer, and disappeared into the blackness below.

“Now what?” shrieked Sanders.

In the meantime, the other Handley continued to circle above them and the forward gunner was leaning over, waving his arms wildly. Scottie pointed up, but Sanders wagged his head and swung around until the letter “W” appeared in the little window of his compass. Then, just as he had

straightened her out and peered over the side to check his position, the bottom dropped out of the earth.

Bang! Pop! Pop! Splutter! Not one, but both engines conked as cold as a tin of bully beef!

Sanders fumbled frantically with the throttles and stared at the instrument board. He plunged at the feed pump and dived her. No response!

“Red light!” he bellowed at Duff. “We’re through! Red Very light!”

Plop-ziss-s-s-s-s! Up went the spinning scarlet ball, sending the message of “dud engine” to the men in the craft above. Another and another Duff discharged and then unhooked his guns, snatched up what few drums he had left and dived down the tunnel.

Down they went in an easy glide, while Sanders pawed about for the wing-tip flare wires and a place to land. He was darting about aimlessly for several minutes when a blinking white light caught his eye. Duff put his guns in the companionway and took the bomber officer’s seat. He, too, saw the white light, slapped Sanders on the shoulder and pointed.

“Try that. It’s a signal of some sort. Either one of our agents, or a German. A two-to-one shot either way—worth the risk,” he yelled.

Sanders nodded grimly and S-turned to get in.

As he slid for the landing, his eye caught the final flickering of that maddening white light.

After about 150 yards of running, the ship stopped in the shadows of a heavy thicket. Sitting there, they glared at each other, while they loosened their helmets and raised their goggles.

“Look ye,” gasped Duff, gripping Sanders’ shoulder. “The other one’s coming down, too. Quick. Get oot! We may get back yet, eh, mon?”

Duff was right. The third ship carrying the insignia of Hell’s Hack was on its way down the chute.

“RIGHT! Quick, your guns, Toby—everything that’ll fire. We may get off yet.”

Like madmen they worked as the other Handley-Page came in. The guns and drums were ripped out and tossed over. Duff swiped the clock off the instrument board. Sanders wrenched the compass out of the other side and grabbed a pistol from a canvas holster that hung near his seat. Then they went inside and began firing Very lights into the interior to put it on fire. In a minute a wild hissing indicated that some of the signal balls had ignited the oil-streaked fabric, and the rest was a matter of minutes. The glare from the first glow of light was enough to give the incoming Handley-Page pilot a landing guide. It came in and hit as their great ship went up in one final burst of flame.

“Come on! What are you waiting for?” bel-
lowed a voice. “Get aboard!”

“Sounded like Mr. Bronson, sir,” whispered the Scot.

“It was Mr. Bronson,” gurgled the Cockney. “It’s Mr. Bronson and the rest—Sergeant Ferguson and look, there’s Conklin, comin’ down the bloomin’ ladder!”

Marsh was right. The steel ladder had been dropped from the open throat of the Handley-Page, and Corporal Conklin was coming down.

All three ran over toward the big ship, whose engines were still ticking over.

“Bronson!” gasped Sanders. “What the devil are you doing aloft in this crate, with those numbers and insignia?”

“Never mind all that. Did you three want all the glory? We are out to bomb Oedelem. Come on, get aboard. Who was that you were scrapping with?”

“A Handley-Page marked like ours,” answered Sanders, making for the bottom of the ladder.

“Get her rudder numbers?” yelled Bronson from the cockpit above.

"I did, sir," rasped little Toby. "It wuz 'C-9701'. I saw it as plain as day when she caught fire!"

"C-9701? Thank God!" breathed Bronson.

"Well, let's go," roared Ferguson, from the bombing officer's seat. "Where's Conklin?"

"Here I am. Just a minute," called Conklin. He was somewhere over in the thicket beyond the gleam of the burning ship.

"Come on, man. We can't stay here all night."

In a minute Conklin ran up to Sanders, gasping, "Quick! Make a decision. I want a pilot—a man who can fly a bomber bigger than this. Will you take a chance, sir?"

"Bomber? Where is it? What's the idea, Conklin?"

"We can't miss, Sanders," he rasped, with all respect for rank thrown away. "There's one of our agents, an American, over here. He's got a line on this new big ship, but we need someone to fly it out. Will you take a chance?"

"Come on, Conklin!" screamed Bronson. "You'll get the lot of us nabbed!"

"Shut up," ranted Sanders. "Conklin's got a big Jerry bomber over here somewhere. You want to fly in it?" Then as though something had struck him at last, he bellowed, "Say, Bronson, who the hell taught you to fly Handley-Pages like that?"

"Never mind. I flew them before you ever saw one. Come on, let's hop off. Never mind old Conklin's silly stories. He's a bit off his nut, I think."

"Where is this crate, Conklin?" demanded Sanders.

"Only a little way off. This chap is an American secret agent, and he's been working on the idea for weeks. I have been in touch with him for some time. I'll explain it all later. That white light the other night was the last tip-off. I kidded Mr. Bronson to come out here tonight, but he didn't know what I was after. Will you come with me, or do I have to take a chance on flying her in myself?"

"Let's go! Toby, you get in with Bronson and get back. How about you. Duff?"

"I'll go," started the Scot.

A figure dropped down from the control pit, all arms and legs. It was Flint Ferguson.

"Nothing doing!" growled Flint, snatching Duff's guns. "You fly with Lieutenant Bronson. I'm going with Sanders—me and Conklin. Us Yanks will take the chance together, eh, Sanders?"

"Okay, Ferguson, but don't forget, you guys, I'm still Lieutenant Sanders to you, Let's go!"

"But—but—what the devil shall I do?" spluttered Bronson.

"Go home, if you like. Otherwise stick around and see the fun," yelled Sanders, uncorking a blue automatic.

But Conklin was more practical. "If you like, sir, it might help if you stuck over us and bombed the drome the minute we got off. It's about a mile over here. That'll help a lot. Then stick with us all the way home, and have them put out some flares, so that we can get her in without smashing her up."

Then, turning to the rest, Conklin took full charge of the situation. "Now remember, no talking all the way in. Then work fast and do what this chap tells us."

Without another word they went across the field in single file while Duff and Marsh crawled up the ladder and disappeared in the throat of the bomber. In two minutes Duff was again up front. Marsh was peering over the top of the rear turret, and they were booming down the graying field.

BRONSON, swearing and fuming, brought the H. P. up into a neat climb and roared away from the thicket that had seen the last of the three Americans. He headed off for Oedelem and fought to resist the temptation to release a few eggs. Somehow he sensed that it was all useless now. He remembered the rudder numbers that Marsh had called out—'C-9701.' That was it, those rudder numbers.

The wheel felt good again, and he knew it was his own now. He whipped off his debt, a debt that could only be paid in fire and flame. At 4,000 feet he scoured his map-board for the spot from which they had taken off. There it was, down there just this side of Lopheim.

Over went the wheel, and he nosed down, giving his motors all they had. He brought Duff back, and the Scot had to get another set of bombsights ready. He went back and got Marsh again, and they went through the same tactics.

Bronson smiled as he put his nose on the distant drome, and suddenly realized that Sanders and the rest were unwittingly scoring a revenge move for him. Down they went, dead on the parched tract that had been cut to decayed turf by the slashing skids of air-planes. As he approached within half a mile of the field, he saw something like a great winged beetle go creeping across the field. In its wake stabbed pin-pricks of flame. From its exhausts poured scarlet streamers. It was getting away fine.

“Now for it, Boss Hun!” growled Bertie. “Give it to ‘em. Duff!”

Down they went, wires tense and twanging. The motors bit in with the extra throttle and Duff’s arms went up and down with his signals to Toby Marsh inside. A trail of 40-pounders began dropping from the time they were over the living quarters situated on one side of the road until they reached the far end of the field. Bertie swayed her from side to side so as to spread the gore widely.

Then, with a scream of delight, he raced after the captured ship and came upon her four miles away, heading hell-bent-for-election toward the Allied lines—and straight into a swarm of coffin-nosed Pfalz scouts.

“Got to get them through,” screamed Bertie, slapping at Duff to hurry him through the tunnel. “Get up there, Jock!

Into another inferno tore the big Jerry ship. As they came up to it, Bertie rubbed his eyes, and stared amazed. What the devil was it?

“Damn my eyes!” he bellowed. “Look at it. Makes this barge look like a Nieuport! Two—three—four—five—it’s got five engines, and that wild Yank’s flying it without a lesson!”

But there was no more time for speculation. The two big bombers were thundering into the darting armada of Pfalz ships.

Behind, Toby Marsh was bawling and screaming as he sprayed the sky with Lewis venom.

For what seemed hours this sort of thing went on. Then they crashed into a veritable wall of archie fire. Marsh was stretched out on his turret floor with a chunk of lead through his thigh. Duff was caught with a splinter that opened a gash above one eye and blinded him with gore.

The Pfalzes made one final effort to stop them. One came down the chute like a fiery dart, but the gallant pilot tried his best to make his last effort tell. He only missed the Zeppelin Giant’s tail by inches, blasted away by the gigantic back-wash of the five Mercedes motors.

Aboard the big bomber, Sanders was struggling with the unfamiliar controls and attempting to figure the strange dials. How he got her off will always be a mystery, but the fact that he landed her will go down as one of the marvels of the war.

Bertie Bronson swooped in first, chattering and utterly unintelligible. Major McDairn finally got the idea and fired a landing flare for the monstrous bomber that went roaring back and forth over the field. Through all this Jimmy Sanders brought the big brute in.

What a night! First they stormed all around the Zeppelin Giant, for such it was, and dragged Sanders out by way of a step-ladder. In the flurry they completely forgot Conklin and his American agent. Ferguson came tottering out, holding one arm which had been badly gashed by a chunk of shrapnel. Someone grabbed him and guided him

off for the M.O.'s shack. Then Sanders remembered his Yankee corporal, climbed up on the wing and fell inside the cockpit. In a minute he reappeared with a stranger, who was assisting him to get Conklin out.

"Stopped one just below the knee. Out from loss of blood," yelled Sanders. "He'll be all right."

"That reminds me," gargled Bronson. "Where's my mob?"

Back to the Handley he raced, and came out with Duff on one arm and Marsh on the other. Another group came up and took them off to the Medical Officer's hut. Men raced in all directions, dousing flares and putting out fires. Others were tugging the big German ship under cover and organizing a guard to surround the hangar. Finally, Major McDairn herded Sanders, Conklin, Bronson and the mysterious American agent together and led them across to the Recording Office. There he provided stiff pegs of brandy, hot coffee, cigars and comfortable chairs.

"All right," he beamed, thoroughly contented with himself now. "Let's have it. Slowly now. You start, Bronson."

"WELL, sir, there's nothing much I can say, except that what this chap Sanders did tonight simply takes the biscuit! He doesn't know it, but he staged a sweet bit of revenge for me when he pilfered that ship tonight."

"What do you mean?" asked Sanders.

"It's like this, Sanders, old chap. I'm the bumpkin who handed the Germans the first Handley-Page that was brought to France. I ferried it over and lost my way. Half-drunk, at the time, I suppose. Anyway, I handed it to them at Laon—all new and shiny. What a mug I felt! I managed to escape, and ever since I've been thinking up some way either to get it back or to destroy it. When the major told us about this strange Handley-Page bombing Bergues, I knew this was the one I'd giv-

en them. That's why I wanted to blow it up at the Oedelem airdrome."

"Well, I'll be damned!" burst out the American. "But how did it come to have our insignia on it?"

"That's a queer one, but most likely one of their spies had copied our insignia, numbers and everything and given it to them. By that they could masquerade as us for some time and continue to bomb the British back area. Somehow they found out just when we were in the air, and it was easy for the blame to be poured on us."

"You're right, Bronson," nodded the major. "We discovered who the bird was, too. He was a mechanic in A Flight. Had a pigeon loft in the top of the old barn on the far end of the field. Getting messages through was easy. We caught him when he tried to get away to advise Germany of the take-off of the second Handley-Page marked with a '13.' We did a fair job tonight."

"Whew!" gasped Sanders. "Now you explain your stunt, Conklin. This should be a great story."

"There's not much more to mine than what you know. Even the major didn't know who I am, and who I am working for, but I'm really Major Conklin of the U. S. G-2 staff. We had been working on this Zeppelin Giant thing for some time, and by flying with a British Handley-Page outfit like this, I could work better under cover."

"Major Conklin?" inquired Sanders, amazed.

"That's right. Here are my papers. But let me go on. I had learned from one of our agents—a man, by the way, who had been reported killed in a German prison camp, to mask his movements—that this ship was near Lopheim, and was being flown regularly on long-distance raids. Later on he advised me that the coast was clear for stealing it and bringing it through so that the Allies could study the special engine mountings and gear-control system which made flying it so easy."

"What?" roared Sanders.

“Never mind, Sanders. You must admit it was easy to fly. You landed it without any trouble. Admit that much.”

“Right,” agreed Jimmy sheepishly. “It’s a beaut!”

“Well, from then on I tried to get in touch with this agent by various means, and finally I gave him the okay with a white light. It so happened that you all saw me, and I was under suspicion, considering everything else that happened.

“My idea was to make a contact with him at a designated spot—Lopheim, to be exact—and get either Sanders or Bronson to drop me there, so that I could help get the ship out. But as I would have trouble convincing everyone that I was on the square, I had to devise this idea of kidding Bronson to go over and bomb Oedelem, telling him that Sanders had gone to Assebrouck to show him up. I had planned to force Bronson to go down and sacrifice the Handley-Page, at the point of a gun, and explain it all later.”

“That would have been great,” gulped Bronson.

“But why did you take all that trouble to paint No. 3 into No. 13 and stick those two sheets with our insignia. Hell’s Hack, on the side?” growled Sanders, who was still sore.

“First, because I didn’t want our agent over there to think that something was wrong. I wanted to land with a ship bearing No. 13, as he expected. What was probably my real reason was that I wanted to go under our old colors, just for luck. We’ve had a lot of luck with Hell’s Hack.”

“Fine,” nodded the major. “Now introduce us formally to your American agent. We haven’t heard much from him.”

A tall, slim man arose from the shadows and came forward. He was dressed in the nondescript uniform of a German Air Service mechanic.

“Go ahead, Conklin,” he smiled. “There’s nothing to lose now. Our job’s done, for the present.”

The door behind him opened and in trooped Duff, Marsh and Ferguson.

“This is Captain Ferguson,” explained Conklin.

At that, a low cry went up from the back of the room. Sergeant Flint Ferguson, one arm in a sling, came tottering forward, clutching at the man in the German uniform.

“Steve!” he gasped. “Steve—they said you were dead.”

“Ronald!” gasped the mysterious American agent.

“Steve! I heard they’d done you in at the prison at Kresselaere. I tried to blow the place up, the other night—to get even.”

“No, old man. It was a gag. I es-caped, got in touch with one of our agents over there, and landed a job. I worked with Conklin, here. The news of my death was a blind, to cover up my movements.”

“So that’s why you tried to bomb Kresselaere, eh, Ferguson?”

But the bomber sergeant could only sit back and stare up at his brother.

“That explains another point, I suppose, gentlemen,” said the man known as Captain Ferguson. “The rest is easy. I worked my way into a German squadron and planned for the stealing of the ship. I didn’t even see my brother tonight, I was so interested in seeing that everything went off right. We got it out, warmed the engines and got away, because I had doped most of the whole squadron by putting something into the drinking water. Lieutenant Sanders did the rest. That’s all there is to it, I suppose.”

“No, it isn’t,” rasped Sanders. “Where’s that Jock?”

Duncan Duff came forward, one eye in a bandage, smiling sheepishly.

“Well, gentlemen, I’m on the hind leg, as they say in poker. I was working on the missing Handley-Page, too. Major McDairn knew who I was and with whom I was working. We knew where it was and what it was doing, but until this afternoon I couldn’t learn of its actual movements. A

wounded German airman over at the hospital at Liborg gave the show away in his delirium. A nurse, a member of the White Heather Legion—a group of women working with the Secret Service bureau—finally pieced the movements of the ship together, and I induced Lieutenant Sanders to go up there tonight to bomb Assebrouck. I was afraid of Mr. Conklin—Major Conklin, is it? Evidently it all worked out fine.”

“It all sounds fine to me, except that I can’t figure out how you birds in Bronson’s ship could tell which was the real No. 13 and the German-flown ship,” broke in the major.

“That was easy,” explained Conklin. “They made one mistake. They put a German Parabelum gun in the back turret, and I could see the big ammunition drum. Then I knew which was the German crate.”

“Good Lord!” croaked Major McDairn. “You Yanks take the cake!”

“Well, it may seem like a hair-raising evening to you, major, but there’s one point that simply floors me, and I’ll bet none of you got it.”

“I know what’s coming,” groaned Sergeant Ferguson.

“I’m sorry, Flint, but I simply had to mention it,” laughed Sanders, “With all Sergeant Ferguson went through tonight, the way he cleaned out that guard—the ones who were left on their feet—and the way he took the unexpected appearance of his brother whom he thought dead, we have to go all through this to learn his name is Ronald!”

“I’ll never live it down,” choked the chalk-faced bomber sergeant, still staring at Captain Ferguson.

“Never mind, kid,” bellowed Sanders, “You’ll always be Flint Ferguson to the crew of Hell’s Hack.”