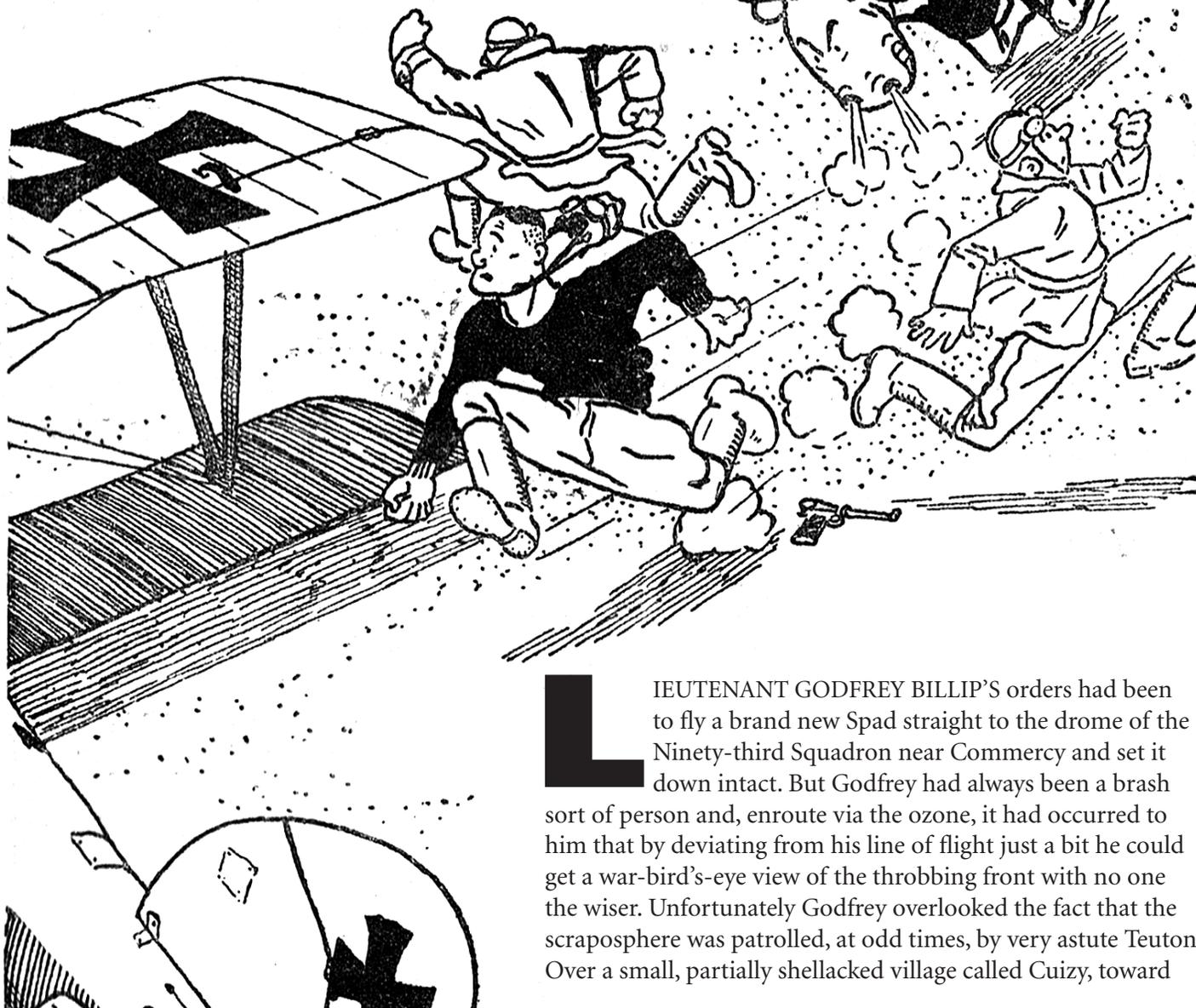


A FUEL THERE WAS

by JOE ARCHIBALD

He was washing out ships at fifteen thousand dollars a washout—but Ambrose was determined to win the war along with the heart of a girl in Kansas.



LIEUTENANT GODFREY BILLIP'S orders had been to fly a brand new Spad straight to the drome of the Ninety-third Squadron near Commercy and set it down intact. But Godfrey had always been a brash sort of person and, enroute via the ozone, it had occurred to him that by deviating from his line of flight just a bit he could get a war-bird's-eye view of the throbbing front with no one the wiser. Unfortunately Godfrey overlooked the fact that the scraposphere was patrolled, at odd times, by very astute Teutons. Over a small, partially shellacked village called Cuizy, toward

which he had slanted, he met an extremely ambitious Von.

Lieutenant Billip's pantry began to shrivel to the size of a pecan nut meat when the Heinie fell out of a cloud and started pasting merry hell out of his tail assembly. Godfrey felt that the instructors back at Kelly and Issoudon had kept something back when every maneuver they had taught him failed to get rid of the black-crossed crate on his tail. He should have known that any sky wagon with an aileron dangling like a hangnail and a rudder post kicked on the bias by Spandau lead, cannot be expected to operate with one hundred per cent efficiency. A jolt to the shortribs—a jab to the prop boss—and the Spad started to founder through the atmosphere like a duck slapped silly by a load of birdshot. Lieutenant Billip decided that it was a good time to get down to the linoleum and he gave the Spad its head toward the Allies' back yard.

It was fortunate for Godfrey that the Kraut had jumped him close to the Yankee lines. Anti-aircraft began to toss up remnants of old stoves, iron bathtubs, and anvils at the Heinie and when one of the bursts bit out a chunk from his wing he clawed for a high shelf and wiped his hands of Godfrey and his brow of sweat.

The little town of Cuizy, or what was left of it, seemed as deserted as a Dundee street on tag day when Lieutenant Billip hedge-hopped his crippled Spad over a crumbling chimney and glanced about frantically for a place to crack up in.

But Cuizy was not quite uninhabited. In the doorway of a shell-smacked house stood a frowzy Yank doughboy. His tin hat was tipped back over a bandaged cranium and his uniform looked as if he had crawled all the way from Russia through a series of pigpens. He had a bottle in one hand and, while watching Godfrey's precipitous arrival, he tipped it at intervals and imbibed prodigious swigs.

"Hah," the dough chortled between gulps, "that aviator would be jus' as safe up there if he was sittin' on a crowbar. Lookit the thing steam! I bet he could make swell rice puddin' in the radiator. If I couldn' of put up a better fight than that cluck, I would eat a Frog cow raw. Huh!"

The dough shut his eyes when Lieutenant Billip was about to put the Spad down. The crash made him shiver and he took a big drag at his bottle before he ventured to look again. He was then startled to see Lieutenant Godfrey Billip climb out of the heap of wreckage on his hands and knees. The flyer had the control stick of the Spad in his hand and he looked at

it for a moment like a dog looks at a bone. Then he tossed it away, clambered to his feet, and reeled around in a tight circle.

"I don't believe it," the dough gulped as he started weaving his way toward the pilot. "He'll fall apart in a minute. No guy can live through—ugh!"

The dough stopped dead in his tracks and squinted into Godfrey's face. Lieutenant Billip looked at the infantryman but his eyes were still a little out of whack.

"I—I—" began the dough. "Y-you're—awright? Shake your dome—see if it'll hold together. I saw the fight. You didn' do so good, feller. Maybe you're kinda new here an'—" he caught the pilot before he slipped to the ground.

GODFREY was still a lot of marbles short. The dough led him unresisting to the house and down into the cellar. The dank place was lighted with a guttering candle revealing in one corner a small heap of bottles. There was a strange gleam in the dough's bovine optics as he opened one of the bottles and handed it to Lieutenant Billip. The flyer lost no time in lubricating himself inwardly with a half-bottle load and the strong Frog brew kicked the cobwebs out of his brain. He sat down and peered through the gloom of the cellar at his good Samaritan.

"How'd I git here?" he tossed out in bewilderment. "I was flyin' along when—"

"A Kraut messed you up a little," the Yank grinned and took a swig at the bottle. "But ya can't eat raspberry jam without gittin' seeds in your teeth, Lootenant. Jus' sit back an' relax."

"I've got to leave here immediately," Lieutenant Billip yipped. "I must get to the squadron. Call me a vehicle of some sort right away. Take me to your commanding officer. I—"

"Y'know it's funny but I don't know where he's at right now," the dough grinned amiably and leaned back against the wall, his omnipresent bottle cuddled in his lap. He was in a dark corner so Lieutenant Godfrey Billip could not get a very good gander at his physiognomy. Actually there was a wolfish look in the dough's wine-mellowed orbs. "It's this way, Lootenant. We had a fight some days back with some Heinies an' 'most everybody was kilt. All the guys what was with me an' didn't go west went out without me as I guess I looked like a stiff, too. The Heinies are only about three miles from here right now. There ain't nothin' you can hire around here in the way of a cab, so you

better start walkin'. Me, I'm satisfied to stay here. I have a box of corned willie here an' lots more bottles of vin rouge that I dug up. Here's lookin' at ya, Lootenant! Not that it gives me no appetite."

"You're a very fresh soldier," Lieutenant Billip sniffed with dignity. "I don't want you to forget I am an officer. What is your name—you didn't give it to me."

"Uh—didn't? Why—er—Joe Doaks. Corp'ral Joe Doaks."

"How far am I from Commercy, Doaks?" Godfrey yipped.

"Roughly, I'd say it was about the same distance from here as it is from Newark to Philadelphia, but I ain't sure, mind ya. Have a drink, Lootenant?"

Godfrey felt very miserable so far from home. His fuselage was aching all over like a hollow molar and he felt that his noggin was still cluttered up with butterflies. He needed another very stiff drink and he took it. That was followed by several more. When twilight fell Lieutenant Godfrey Billip and Corporal Joe Doaks, well satiated with corned willie and vin rouge, decided to render a duet. Arms wrapped around one another's shoulders, they made their devious way up out of the cellar and to the open doorway. Crawling wild life cut short their own serenade when a doubtful bass and a more questionable tenor merged to ululate: "*D-o-o-o-on't yo-o-o-ou re-e-emem—bah Swe-e-e-et Al-lus, Ben Bo-o-o-olt?*" One line seemed to satisfy the renderers and they went back into the cellar. There Lieutenant Billip became very confidential.

"Corp'ral, huh?" he gurgled at Doaks. "Infantry, yeh? Ever meet guy name of Hooley? Ambroshe Hooley. Knew Ambroshe back in Hush-Hushishun-Hush'shun, Kan-shash. Joined up in air forshe shame time ash me. We wen' with shame dame—Lulu—Lu Lu Wickett. She shays she gonna marry the guy who gitsh to be offisher firs'. Ambroshe shays it'sh a pushover but down at Kelly I play trick on Ambroshe. Lulu writes me she'sh comin' down to shee ush. Shee? I git Ambroshe potted in Shan Antone, Corp'ral. Ha ha, it wash a scream! He don' know Lulu ish in Shan Antone 'til we meet her." Godfrey took another drink before continuing. There came a sound like two grindstones rubbing against each other from the corner where Joe Doak sat.

"You shoulda sheen Lulu's fashe, Corp'ral," gurgled Lieutenant Billip. "An' her Ma bein' head of Christshun Temp'ransh League back in Hush-Hush'shun. She shays to Ambroshe— why you low-down cur, you,

darin' meet a lady in shuch a disgrasheful shtate of— Ha, ha I Wash a scream—" Godfrey rolled over at the recollection.

"If I had been Ambrose," Joe Doaks declared, "I would've busted you in the nose."

"That'sh jush what he did," grinned the story teller. "But I get to be offisher ash who shees Ambroshe drunk, too, but shome brash hat. They busht Ambroshe an' put him in infantry. Shome fun!"

"Yeah," the dough said and took another drag on the bottle. "All's fair in love an' war, Lootenant, so the sayin' goes. Well, let's have some more corned willie."

"Gotta be goin' to shquadron," pushed out from the midst of a long-drawn-out yawn. "An' you shay 'shir' when you talk to shuperior offisher—unnershtan? Ah—er—hie—which way ish it to Commersh, huh?"

"I lost my compass," Corporal Doaks clipped. "Adoo, Lootenant. I—"

BUT Godfrey's undercarriage folded up like a camp stool. The air was close in the cellar and the Lieutenant had absorbed enough vin rouge to preserve a herring for, twenty years. He sank down onto the floor and heaved a deep sigh of contentment.

"G'night ev'body," he grunted. "Shet 'larm clock for sheven o'clock—hic—sharp."

Joe Doaks got up from his place in the corner and knelt close to the already somnolent Godfrey Billip. He reached into the torpid pilot's pocket and drew out two grimy letters. They were post-marked Hutchinson, Kansas. Doaks read each one down to the signature of Lulu.

"Mush!" the dough clipped. "Callin' this guy her great big brave aviator, huh? Imagine it! She asks him did he git the choklit cake she sent? An' how did the sweater fit? Dames are screwy."

Joe Doaks got up and scratched his stubbled chin with a dirty thumbnail. After that operation he decided upon another snort or two. Later the dough reached inside his tunic and ripped a dogtag from his neck. He buried it in the dirt and then looked at Lieutenant Godfrey Billip in much the same manner a cat looks at a canary.

Time dragged. Twenty-four hours after the events recorded two pilots of the Ninety-third Squadron jumped up from an empty ammo case on which they had been sitting. Their eyes had lit upon something that had loomed up out of the gloom near A Flight's hangar. It was a mule and somebody was riding it. A sentry challenged the arrival with a hoarse shout.

“Who do I look like?” came a voice. “John of the Ark? I’m reportin’ for duty as my Spad got shot down. Stick that bayonet into the mule an’ I won’t be responsible for what happens. Giddap, Lightnin’! Giddap!”

The strange equestrian came on. The pilots saw that the mule’s ears stuck out through the crown of an old straw hat. It wore collar and hames and from one of the hames hung a musette bag. A leather trace trailed along in the dust on either side of the quadruped. It appeared that the rider had commandeered the means of locomotion in something of a hurry.

“What in h—” began the C.O.

“Whoa-a-a-a-a!” the rider yipped and then slid from the mule’s back. “It’s better than walkin’ but how kin anythin’ stuffed with oats feel so hard? Where’s the commandin’ officer?”

A harsh voice answered the rider promptly. Major Bertram Bagby assured him that he was looking at the C.O. of the outfit and wanted to know where he had swiped the mule and a lot of other things.

“I started out in a Spad,” explained the arrival. “I got lost, sir, as my—er—compass went wrong. A Boche knocked me down. They’re liars, them guys at Issoudon. They said you could get out from in front of them Heinies by just twistin’ the stick to the left and then—”

“Your name Billip?” barked the Major.

The flyer nodded. “Yessir. Any mail for me? From Hutchinson, Kansas? There’s a dame—”

“So you got lost, you—you homely ape?” snorted Bagby. “Got shot down. Washed out a nice new Spad, huh? Fifteen thousand dollars they cost the government, you numbskull! Stole a mule. You know what they do to guys over here who steal from Frogs? They hang ‘em. Where’d you get the mule?”

“I—I don’t quite remember,” confessed Lieutenant Billip meekly. “Y-you see I got a crack on the dome when I hit the ground. I—er—well, I just forget some things that happened. Maybe I got somethin’ like magnesia, as I didn’t know my name until you said it.”

“They sure must be short of material over in the States,” groaned Major Bagby. “How’d you ever get into the air force?”

“Oh, I—jus’ went in an’ a guy looks down my throat,” the replacement obligingly explained. “He takes my reflections but I don’t know why, as he didn’t use a mirror. They count my teeth an’ put me in a swivel chair and then they make me sign my name on a sheet of paper. After that they tell me I’m in the air force. Funny, ain’t it?”

THE Old Man of the Ninety-third wiped a sleeve dazedly across his eyes. “Get him to a Nisson,” he said to a big pilot standing nearby. “Show him where he eats and then drag him over to the Operations shack.” He swung on the bewildered newcomer. “And you’ll pay for the feed that mule eats until the Frog comes to claim it!” The Major leaned close to Lieutenant Billip. He sniffed. “Potted, too, huh? If you got near a gas tank now you’d blow it up. A nice start you made in this outfit, Billip! You lose a new crate, get drunk and steal a mule. You aren’t hiding a murder anywhere by any chance?”

“Hidin’—? Er—ha ha,” grinned the lieutenant. “You’re a panic, Major.”

“Get him out of here!” the major trumpeted. “Get him away from me before I knock his brains out.”

“Come on, Lieutenant,” a pilot said. “I’ll show you where you bunk. But the mule’ll have to look out for itself.”

“When do I go up?” queried Lieutenant Billip, grinning. “I can’t wait ‘til I meet them Heinies.”

“You can’t wait, huh?” the flyer tossed out. “Why, I thought you said—er—you got knocked off—”

“I gotta git hunk, don’t I?” the newcomer countered. “There must’ve been somethin’ wrong with the Spad. Them Heinies flew all around it like it was tied to a cloud. I heard Spads was fast—”

“It was that new Kraut patrol, that’s what,” declared the pilot. “They’ve got a high-test gas that can make them climb to six thousand while we are grabbin’ off a couple of feet. They better do somethin’ about it on this side of the *guerre* or we’ll all go west faster than the Forty-niners when they heard gold was struck. My name’s Happy Day.”

“Ya don’t look very happy to me,” Lieutenant Billip said as he tossed his musette bag onto a cot. He stripped clown to a very bright red flannel undershirt while Happy Day looked on.

“That’s some union suit ya got,” the pilot grinned. “I ain’t seen red flannels since my grandpop kicked off. Don’t they bind you a little, Billip?”

“Oh, them? I wouldn’t be without my red flannels,” said the new addition to the Ninety-third. “They not only prevent lumbago, to which all my folks is subject, but they are very lucky. Once in the Argonne—er—that is—”

“The Argonne? How’d you ever—?”

“I says ‘once I see they are gone,’ and somebody has stole ‘em,” explained Billip painstakingly. “Are ya deaf? I chased the guy for two days until I found him with

my flannels. What're ya so d—nosey about, huh? Just because a guy don't wear them sissy skivvies—"

"Aw, nothin'," mumbled Happy Day. "See ya in the morning, Billip."

"Bong swar," Lieutenant Billip said airily. "I wonder how Joe Doaks is makin' out over in Cuizy," he murmured to himself when he was alone.

An orderly came after Lieutenant Billip a little later and acquainted him with the fact that the Major would allow him just two minutes to get over to the Operations shack. When Lieutenant Godfrey Billip saluted in front of C.O. Bertram Bagby, he made very humble apologies.

"It's my dome, sir," the flyer alibied. "I keep forgettin' things. I—er—I'm not a guy to forget discipline, sir. Maybe I'd ought to see a doctor, as since I left Cuizy I ain't been up to snuff."

"I should say you'd better," the Major snapped. "Let him look you over. If you're okay, you'll go over in the morning with Captain Stokes' flight. Sorry to throw you into it right off the bat but we're short of men. Guess, though, you've been baptized already, Billip. Well, all we ask of a man is that he do his best. That's all, Billip. Carry on."

LIEUTENANT BILLIP saluted smartly and walked out. A big car was pulling up in front of the Operations shack as he trudged off. Three very important looking brass hats with faces as long as political speeches got out of the vehicle and strutted into the Old Man's sanctum.

"They must be big officers awright," muttered Godfrey. "They show a lot of wear on the seat of their pants."

Three pilots cut across his line of flight just then.

"That means trouble," said one. "Another pow-wow about the Heinie gas. They'll want us to go over an' steal a Heinie crate loaded with it. Just somethin' simple like that."

"How many guys have been killed so far?" speculated another. "Let's see—one—two—three—" He began counting on his fingers.

"Eight," supplied the third pilot and all three looked askance at Lieutenant Billip as they went on their way.

"I wish to hell I never heard of Joe Doaks," wailed Lieutenant Billip. "Eight killed—ugh! Well, if I see a good chance to git out of here—"

After mess the next morning the latest replacement at the Ninety-third Squadron watched the dawn patrol come in. Two of C Flight's Spads looked like

a couple of crows that had lost an argument with an electric fan. Out of one climbed a short, thick-set pilot who got down on all fours and kissed the tarmac affectionately. Then he jumped to his feet and started running for the mess shack.

"I got to git me a drink an' see how many holes there are in me," he yelped.

"I don't see any sense in sendin' up any more patrols," C Flight's leader said to the Old Man when he put in his report. "If them Krauts put that gas of theirs in a Rumpler, it'd out-smart a Camel in three seconds. I want a transfer if ya don't mind, sir."

Major Bertram Bagby emitted a stream of choice cusses and pawed at his face. It was the sign for all the pilots to turn empennages in a hasty retreat from the Operations shack. A wire waste basket just missed the flight leader as he dove through the door. Ten minutes later the C.O. barged into the mess shack and stood surveying his grumbling Spad pushers with baleful optics.

"You're a fine-lookin' lot of lugs," he exploded suddenly as though the sight of them had fanned to life a smoldering inferno of rage. "You're set-ups like Limey pugs! For three days you haven't even shot down a balloon. G.H.Q. callin' me a scout master! A bunch of pansies—that's what you are!"

"Oh yeah?" retorted Lieutenant Godfrey Billip. "Well, I ain't scairt of any Heinie that lives. Wait until I git up there, I'll show ya!"

Major Bagby's laugh was very sour. "You won't have to wait long, Paul Revere. You go out with Stokes in just two minutes."

"My, my," grinned Billip. "How time flies!"

Captain Stokes led four Spads over toward Pont-a-Mousson a little later. Lieutenant Godfrey Billip was the last one to take off. It seemed that he had a lot of trouble getting organized. The other crates were circling over Lerouville when he finally caught up with them. Just above the Meuse three Jerry Drachens strained at their cables while three thousand feet higher hovered three Boche Scouts. When the Spads headed for the sausages, those Scouts came tumbling down like steel rivets dropped out of a bucket.

LIEUTENANT BILLIP forgot to be scared. Things happened too fast. Spandau tubes began to expectorate Krupp phlegm and the Yank apprentice marveled at the design the bullets made in his lower wing. He winged over and side-slipped a thousand feet. A big balloon marked with a black cross seemed

to leap at him. Godfrey straightened out and poured lead into the big bag. His undercarriage caressed the fabric of the gas bag when he zoomed clear. Up ahead he saw a Heinie stunting to get away from Captain Stokes' twin streams of mayhem. Lieutenant Billip let his Vickers roar and the Albatross jerked up its snout and hung in the ozone for a few seconds before it began tumbling toward the carpet, as buoyant as an iron kettle.

"It's a cinch, this air fightin'," howled Lieutenant Billip jubilantly as he dove for another balloon.

A Jerry flashed across his path and the Spad's churning prop missed its tail assembly by the width of a communion wafer. The Heinie, scared out of his pants, was a set-up for Stokes, who knocked him for a row of Nissan huts. By the time the flight leader began to take an inventory of the scrap Lieutenant Billip was roasting another Boche weenie. Two Krauts were through with the war. The third was making a bid to get his Albatross down to the linoleum before his Mercedes power plant tore itself loose from its moorings.

Captain Stokes herded his battle wagons into formation and headed back to the Old Man. When all the other Spads had landed, Lieutenant Godfrey Billip was still circling above the tarmac. Twice he came down to land, then changed his mind.

"His crate looks okay," an ackemma warbled. "What ails the cluck?"

Stokes was yelling at the Major, "You should've seen Billip go to work, sir! He knocked off an Albatross an' two balloons. He's a heller!"

"Well, why don't he come down?" Bagby yelled. "What the h— is he doin' up there yet?"

Almost as the C.O. spoke Lieutenant Billip came down for the third time. This time he made a grab at Frog real estate. The Spad was listing to port when it hit. A wheel went flying and the left wing tip crumpled up like a soda cracker. A siren screeched and brought the meat wagon clattering onto the field. The Spad spun in a dizzy circle and turned upside down with the pilot underneath,

It took the groundhogs five minutes to get Lieutenant Billip clear of the mess. They had to unwind a brace wire from his neck and pluck the little metal arrow of the altimeter out of his bugle. To the amazement of the rescuers Godfrey grinned, disclosing a gap in his upper dental assembly. He looked at them out of one eye, the other being closed.

"Somethin' oughta be done about this tarmac," he ripped out. "It looks like a prairie dog village. I would

think somebody'd iron out the bumps in it. Well, anyways, I got me a Hun."

"An' two sausages," Captain Stokes added. "Major, he—"

"Two Spads washed out already," roared the C.O. "Thirty thousand bucks! He's no bargain at any price. That leaves us just eleven crates on this field. Did they forget to teach you to land, you—?"

"That's the catch, Major," confessed the Lieutenant. "I never—uh—I seem to forgit what happened. It's my dome again. I clean forgot how to land a plane. I guess it'll never git cleared. Who's got an aspirin? I—"

ANOTHER two rounds of the clock and Lieutenant Godfrey Billip knocked off a couple more Heines. He returned to the field and pancaked right in front of the Operations shack. A mechanic scratched his head in bewilderment when he saw the pilot crawl away from the wreck.

"I'm tryin' to remember somethin', Pete," he said to another ackemma. "When I was back at Kelly there was a guy who could do anythin' with a Jenny but land it. That gink looks familiar, but I am damn' sure that guy's name wasn't Billip. I wish X could place this mug. They's somethin' screwy about all this."

"Well, you can fix this one up awright," Lieutenant Billip was saying to the boiling C.O. "It's only the undercarriage. Be just' as good as new after the grease monkeys—"

"You'll fly it!" howled the Old Man. "You'll fly it no matter what it looks like. And one more washout and you go to Blois, you dumb ox."

"They git sore at anythin' around here," Godfrey complained. "I shot down some Krauts, didn't I? That's what ya want, ain't it? It's the ships they give us. I had to hold a wing up all the time I was fightin' today."

The next afternoon Lieutenant Billip came winging back to the Ninety-third again from a brush with the Vons over Mont Sec. He swooped down to land and ackemmas as well as everybody else on the field took to cover.

The Spad straightened out three feet from the ground and Lieutenant Billip caught a glimpse of somebody standing in front of the Operations shack. He was garbed in a Yankee dough's ensemble that fit him like a horse blanket draped over a goat. A tin hat dangled from his hand. He was waving a fist at Pilot Billip and jumping up and down as if stamping out a brush'fire.

"It's Billip!" yipped the Spad pilot. "He got loose,

I guess. Well, this ain't no place for Ambrose Hooley. Switzerland's the next stop if the gas holds out. Adoo everybody!"

Down on the ground Major Bagby was stamping and trumpeting.

"Come down here, you dirty crook! You blankety—blank—"

"His name is Joe Doaks," said the unkempt looking arrival at the Ninety-third. "He got me scalded an'—catch him!"

Corporal Ambrose Hooley, alias Joe Doaks, alias Godfrey Billip pointed his prop boss toward the roof and kept the stick pressed hard against his pantry. Ten thousand feet up he became aware of the fact that he had no more sense of direction than a blind mouse caught in a butter churn.

Five minutes later he looked overside at the war going on below. In two minutes he was dodging Heinie scrap iron. The Spad's Hisso coughed as if it had suddenly acquired asthma. Ambrose looked at his gas gauge. The needle pointed to zero and Corporal Hooley shivered. The next moment he heard rivet hammers all about him and he took time out to wonder how anybody in Europe had time to construct a skyscraper. Then the Hisso quit cold. Hooley looked around him then and saw two Heinie battle wagons tossing lead at him.

"Oh well, the firm' squad won't git me," he mused philosophically. He signalled for a fair catch at whatever field there might be below, ripped his belt loose and tossed out, "Adoo, Lulu! It looks like you'll be Missus Godfrey Billip after all. An' I made an ace out of the bum!"

Ambrose then gave his entire attention to the nursing of his Spad down through the ozone. Landing a sky wagon with a motor ticking over was something he had never quite perfected, but with it as dead as a salt mackerel— The ground suddenly seemed to jump up at him as he wing-slapped frantically. He saw a level space below quite devoid of anything animate. Five hundred feet up he said a prayer, pulled back on the stick and closed his eyes.

A resounding whack on the back of his head brought a shower of planets down on Ambrose Hooley. How he had got onto the toboggan that was slicing down the milky way was a mystery to him. The toboggan suddenly looped and Ambrose was tossed into space. He grabbed at the handle of the big dipper and hung on for dear life. When the handle broke loose, he went tumbling down again.

AMBROSE blinked. He was sitting on damp sod looking up at two grinning individuals who wore flying suits.

"*Wie Gehts,*" guttured one. "*Ein leedle bit hardt you hit, hein Herr, Leutnant?*"

"Krauts!" gulped Ambrose, rubbing his stunned noggin. "So I ain't dead, huh?" He looked around swiftly. A hundred yards away he saw two Heinie battle buses. Shifting his gaze he looked toward another corner of the meadow and saw a big cow eyeing the trespassers upon its stamping ground. But was it a cow? Ambrose was not quite sure. A second later he was. Quickly his brain began to rev. If he could get one of those Heinie crates, he could still get somewhere like Switzerland or Russia. Russia seemed the safer.

"*Mach Schnell,*" a Kraut Von clipped at him, gesturing with a wicked looking toy cannon. "*Gedt idt oop vunce. Ve don't vant ve shouldt loose der time mitt you, Amerikaner Schweinhund!*"

"*Ach, Hans,*" said his companion, "*der cellar ist. Ve take idt der Yankee und put der lock mitt. Lader ve coom for der prisoner, ja!*"

The Vons lifted Ambrose to his feet and sent him stumbling toward the fence. He eyed the grazing bovine avidly and then, when within fifty feet of it, suddenly grinned and stopped.

"I gotta peel off this coat, you guys," he said. "I think I am shooted vunce."

The Vons obligingly stopped and waited for the Yank to rip off his flying coat, tunic, and his khaki shirt. At last Ambrose stood revealed in his red undershirt. He kept one eye on the bovine while he explored his fuselage for signs of punctures. Suddenly there came a snort from the cow's relative. It was followed by a mad, spine-chilling roar.

"Hah, it was a bull!" hollered Ambrose. "Look out, Heinions! It's comin' fast an' seein' red! Run or you'll git massaged."

"*Ach Himmel! Mach Schnell,* Heinrich! For *der* lifes run yedt." A Von legged it for the nearest tree.

Heinrich needed no coaxing. Flinging caution to the winds along with his Luger, he directed his undercarriage cross-country. Ambrose tore for an Albatross, the bull at his heels. It was coming, head down, just as the Yank reached the German battle wagon. Ambrose side-stepped and the bovine's skull ploughed into the fuselage of the Albatross. Instantly the Yank legged it to the other idling crate while the agitated husband of the contented cow tried to extricate its head from the innards of the Kraut ship.

Ambrose jammed in throttle and the Albatross leaped across the turf. He yanked the stick back when the trees at one side of the meadow rushed in close. He could hardly believe that a sky-wagon was able to leave the ground in such a hurry. It hopped into the air like a pooch with a pinwheel tied to its empennage.

"It's that new gas!" yowled the Yank in red flannels while a Von down below started shooting at him from a ditch. "I got a load of the pep juice, that's what. Oh boys, what the Allies would give for it! But I should take it back to 'em! All they would do is shoot me. To hell with the *guerre!* I am headin' for the coast. Maybe I kin find me a boat to stowaway on. I'm satisfied now. I joined up with the democrats just to be a aviator. I have been one an' that's all I ask."

But Ambrose Hooley came from a long line of patriots. His great, great grandfather had "fit," as his Aunt Hattie used to say, with the Continentals at Saratoga. Six miles from the scene of his getaway Ambrose Hooley's conscience began to gnaw through his thick skin. His better self argued with his worse until the spirit of his forebears won.

"Oh, awright, then, if ya want to git shot," he yelled at his conscience. "Awright, I'll go in an' give myself up an' hand over the gas. But before they shoot me I'm gonna bust Billip right on the beak. Tha's what I'll do! Why didn't I think of it before? They can't prove I was in my right mind when I took his name. I'll try it out on the brass hats."

TEN miles from the Ninety-third's field, another jarring thought occurred to Ambrose. If he crashed the Albatross the gas would burn up. And he had never set a crate down on all three in his life. So he decided to land with dead stick to insure his precious cargo's safe transportation.

It was dusk when the pilots of the Ninety-third heard the Boche prop sound over their heads. But when they got out into the open, the Mercedes chant was choked off. Major Bagby hopped out of the Operations shack like a frog shocked out of a quiet pool. He stabbed a finger up at the sky.

"It's comin' in dead-stick," he shouted. "Don't shoot at it! Don't shoot! The Von wants to land. What in h—do you think he's doin' that for?"

It was Happy Day who yelped, "Look! The pilot's wavin'! His arm is red like he was—it's him! It's him! That's who it is!"

"Who's 'him'?" somebody wanted to know.

"Lieutenant Billip—"

"But I'm Godfrey Billip," interjected the man who was still wearing bedraggled doughboy scenery.

"Then it's Joe Doaks. He wore red flannels. He—he's somehow captured a Kraut wagon."

"D-doaks!" trumpeted Captain Stokes. "Then get to cover, everybody. He's liable to wash out 'most any place."

Ackemmas watched with bated breath. Major Bertram Bagby stood like a frozen haddock while the Albatross nosed in. The wheels hit. The tailskid plopped down and no one on the tarmac had ever seen a more perfect landing. Officers, near officers, ackemmas, and lowly grease monkeys surrounded the German ship. A face grinned down at them. The pilot clambered out wearing nothing above the belt line but a red flannel undershirt.

"Boy, it was sure cold on the way back," he exclaimed. "Lemme git to where there is a fire before I git lumbago!"

"You're under arrest," yipped the Major.

Ambrose Hooley scratched his dome. "Haven't I seen you somewhere before?" he said to the C.O. amiably. "Seems I was here once before. Things look kind of familiar. Oh well, my head is still a little gaga. Maybe when I git warmed up—"

"Look here, you—Joe Doaks!" the man in the private's uniform shot out. "You'll git shot for—say, that's not Joe Doaks! That's a guy I know by the name of Hooley. Ambrose Hooley! Why, how the sam hill did he—?"

"Make up your mind, make up your mind!" yelled Bagby. "Who is it? How do we know who to shoot?"

Lieutenant Godfrey Billip's mouth opened and closed like a swinging door, but nothing came out. Ambrose was taken inside and deposited by the fireplace in a comfortable chair. The Old Man, arms folded, face as hard as a chunk of teakwood, requested him to start talking.

"Well," began Ambrose, "every-thin's a little mixed up. We are chargin' on two Heinie pill boxes over near Cuizy. I git plugged in the dome an' I don't think so good afterwards. Uh—where am I now?"

"In the air force, you halfwit!" Bagby ripped out. "You've washed out three Spads—but you bring in a German ship and set it down like a feather. Are you on their side or ours?"

"I remember now!" Ambrose suddenly exclaimed. "I got captured by the Krauts and there was a bull in a field. I scare hell out of it with my red shirt an' git in a plane a Heinie left tickin' over. It jumps almost from

under my pants when I give it the gun. I says I bet it is loaded up with that new gas the Germans are using—I heard about it some place. I wisht I could remember better. First I forget an' then I remember."

"The gas!" exploded the Major. "You mean that that Albatross out there has got that new Kraut petrol in it? If it has—come on, everybody—let's take a look!"

"But I'm tryin' to remember more," Ambrose protested weakly as the place quickly emptied, except for the dirty dough.

"You look me in the eye, Ambrose Hooley," Lieutenant Godfrey Billip growled at the man of the moment. "You come clean! You were Joe Doaks! I didn't recognize you because you wasn't shaved. An' it was dark in that cellar an' you got me drunk an' you took my uniform."

"You big ape!" clipped Ambrose, "you got me scalded, too, back in San Antone once, an' made Lulu give me the air. You also got me shoved out of the air corps. Well, I got hunk! You dare claim them balloons an' them Vons I shot down, you—"

AMBROSE trapped his lips. Major Bagby and a dozen jubilant pilots came piling back into the mess shack.

"That's right! That's the new petrol. We will be decorated," the C.O. was enthusing. "You're all right—er—whatever your name is!"

"I wisht I could remember things," wailed Ambrose. "I just can't git my dome straightened out. I guess that bullet I got hit with is still pressin' against my gray cells. Who's that guy?" he asked plaintively, pointing at Godfrey Billip.

"Look here," blustered the Major, "don't kid me, Doaks—er Hooley, or whatever you call yourself. Where did you learn to fly?"

"At Kelly Field," supplied Lieutenant Billip. "He got tossed out for gettin' oiled, and because he never could land a ship. He washed out three Jennies at Kelly an'—"

"Who is Jenny?" Ambrose wanted to know. "Oh, I wish you would tell me how I got here. I tell ya it was when we was fightin' the Krauts near Cuizy. A bullet hit me—"

Major Bertram Bagby gave it up. "He's either kiddin' or he is really gaga," the C.O. decided. "It's what they call amnesia. Maybe the cluck really did think he was an aviator again when he got slugged by the Krauts. And when he saw Billip here in a uniform, he got it on him somehow an'—look here, Hooley, you

come clean. Are you fakin' this?"

"Is my name Hooley?" countered Ambrose. "All I want to know is how did I get here?" He stared blankly at the Major.

"He's givin' you the run-around," Lieutenant Billip erupted. "I know that cluck! He's fakin' he is gaga. Why don't you arrest him an' send for the M.P.'s?"

"Huh?" Bagby shot out. "Arrest him? After he's made himself a hero? He's due for three medals, that guy—sane or insane. Listen, you birds, Ambrose Hooley is suffering from amnesia, get that? We're going to send him to the hospital. And when he comes out, I will see that he gets sent to Issoudon and stays there until he can land a Spad. That's my story and you guys better stick to it! You, Billip, shut your trap or I'll bust you wide open for taking a jaunt over the front in a Spad that you were supposed to be ferrying over from—"

"Huh?" yipped Ambrose. "Godfrey is only a ferry pilot? Ha, ha! Yow! Er—everything has gone blank again. Where am I?"

Major Bertram Bagby eyed Ambrose with a big fist cocked. "I ought to throw you in the klink. I ought to have you shot! You know damn' well you remember everything. You—"

"Prove it," gurgled Ambrose, grinning obliquely.

The Old Man pawed at his face and the pilots gave him a wide berth. But he went limp again and sat down in a chair facing the culprit. They eyed one another wordlessly.

Ten days later Corporal Ambrose Hooley was discharged from a base hospital near Revigny with his memory restored. Not that there had been anything wrong with it. The C.O. of the Ninety-third had been working almost every spare hour of the ten days arranging for Ambrose's transfer to the Yankee air force at Issoudon. The change was made on the A.E.F. books in due time and Ambrose Hooley went to the training base to see just why it was that he could not land a Spad without ripping its gizzard out.

Two months later Lieutenant Godfrey Billip at Romorantin began to get no more letters from Lulu Wickett back in Hutchinson, Kansas. It did not take him long to get the total from adding two and two.