

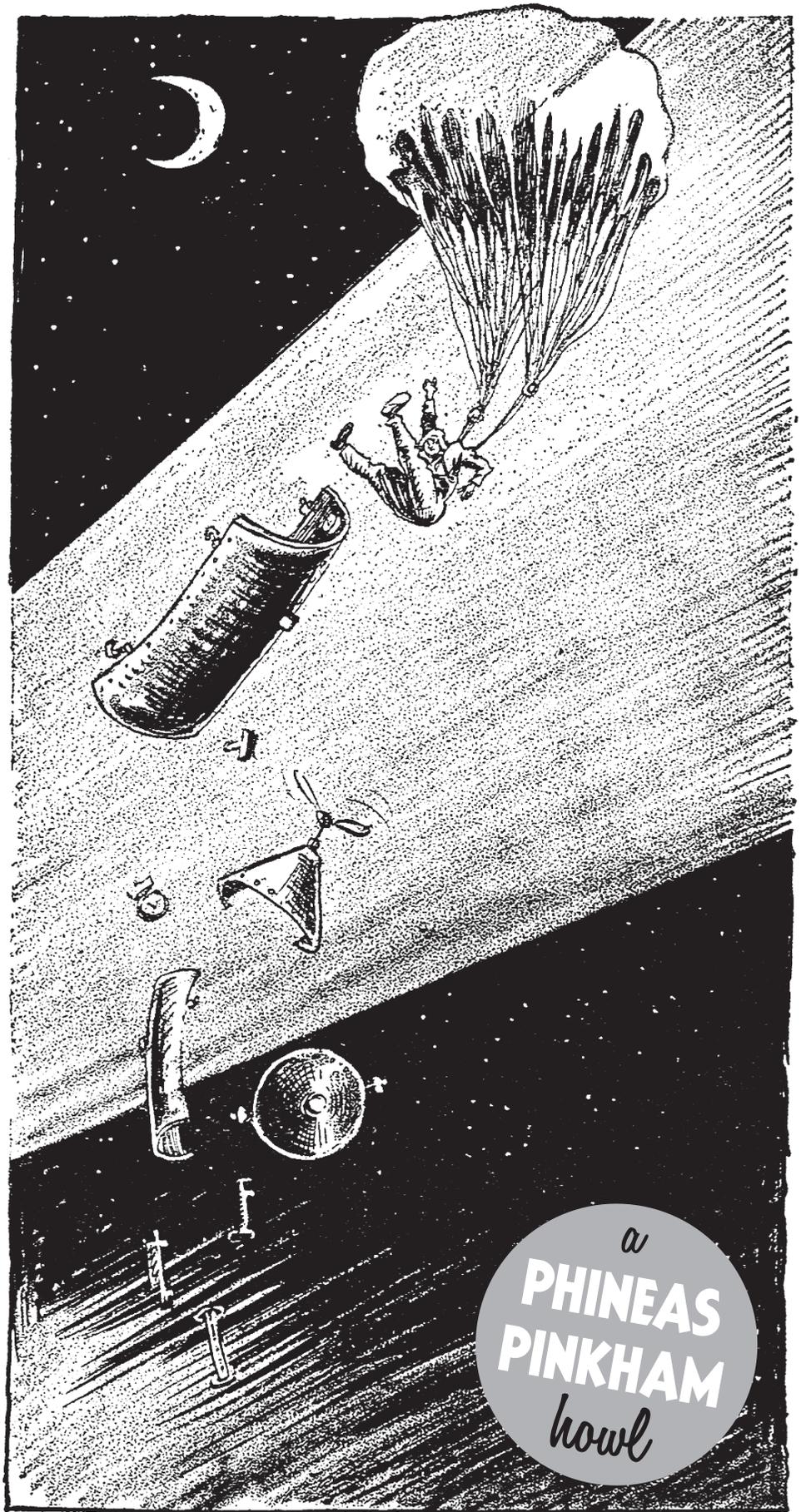
SMELLS, SPELLS, AND SHELLS

written and illustrated by

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The Yank Brass Hats made a great mistake in leading an Ace when the Boonetown Joker was still in the deck. And matters got worse when the Krauts opened up with a mile-high variety of the old shell game. Only on that last play, the Heinies forgot to look under the shell!

THE BRASS HATS—those in charge of the flying end of the A.E.F. in sunny France—made mistakes at times. Everyone pulls a boner or two during his stay in this vale of tears. Consider Caesar and the “Little Corporal,” otherwise known as Napoleon. Julius had a bread knife inserted between his floating and first stationary rib because he thought Brutus was on the up and up. Bonaparte got the wrong road map and went to Waterloo. There



would be no jails or erasers on lead pencils if we did not make mistakes.

Anyhow the Wing made a whopper in 1918. They sent America's leading ace into the same sector with Lieutenant Phineas Pinkham, who certainly had not been a shrinking violet in the fight to save the Democrats. Moreover, the war correspondents were instructed to ballyhoo the aforementioned ace at the slightest provocation. He was to be built up as the foremost Boche obliterator wearing the colors of Uncle Sam, despite the fact that Phineas Pinkham had snagged a flock of honest-to-goodness aces out of the hostile pack with the finesse of a gambler in a gold rush mining camp. Something had to happen. When two champion mauling bull elk find themselves in the same woods, all the lesser wild life move out until the battle is over.

"Voose ate a fickle wench," Phineas yipped at Babette.

The news of the arrival of the ace in the sector came on the same day that a wild story trickled out of a base hospital near Revigny. Yankee air moguls together with a smattering of infantry satraps hurried over to the hospital to get the low-down. When they reached the bedside of a Yankee pilot who was wrapped up in bandages like a defunct Egyptian king, they immediately accused the pilot of having been drunk on patrol. One or two even suggested that his noggin be probed for signs of a cuckoo. It so happened that Lieutenant Phineas Pinkham was in the hospital when the powwow took place, having biked over to see a sick buddy. He sidled as close as he could to the knot of brass hats and pricked up his ears that were every bit as big as a pair of abalone shells.

"Come, come, now, Lieutenant Coakley," one of the Colonels derided, "you sure you didn't see a flying alligator, too? Ha! ha!"

"If I was sure I was goin' to kick off," the indignant pilot ripped out, "I'd call you all the names I'm thinkin', sir. I tell you I was flyin' over Nomeny when I saw the thing flying through the ozone. It was gettin' kind of spent and wasn't makin' much speed. All at once it broke up—fell apart—an' somethin' come out of it. It looked like a dead guy weighted down with somethin'. It fell maybe a couple of hundred feet an' then a parachute opened up an' it went down. It was only maybe a minute or two before I heard somethin' like a railroad roundhouse blowin' up. Huh—well, if you don't believe me, to hell with it!"

The brass hats looked at one another. "Must have

hit his head pretty hard to rave like that," a brigadier chirped. "Says it looked like a big shell flyin' through the air. Well—when he gets on his feet, arrange for a mental test. Too bad—nice lookin' chap."

"Haw-w-w-w-w-w-w!" Phineas could not repress his guffaw any longer. "Boys, I would like to have the recipe for that drink you had, garsong. I would go right over to Potsdam an' kidnap the Kaiser and his wife and the Clown Prince. Now what was it you said you saw ag'in?"

"Who is that impertinent jackass?" snorted a colonel. "Get him out of here at once."

A nurse touched Phineas on the arm. "You heard the officer. Get away from the patient. If he sees that face—"

"You're a disgrace to Florence Nightingale," Phineas sniffed with indignation. "Here I am cheerin' up patients—when I could be in Barley Duck with a dame—an' I git insulted. Well—"

"Get out—you!" one of the brass hats thundered. "Or I will have you escorted to the nearest klink. That plain enough?"

"Aw, I ain't dumb," the unwelcome one tossed out. "I know where I ain't welcome. Adoo!" He turned toward the nurse. "Just to show you I ain't sore," he grinned, "here's a bottle of perfume I got from a dame in Paree. It's called Fatima's Big Moment. I got it from Mata Hari; she used it to lure the suckers with. That is the kind of guy I am. Haw-w-w-w-w! Well, adoo again."

The nurse was very much agog when she took a whiff at the neck of the bottle. The temptation was too much. She yanked out the stopper and held her proboscis close.

A few seconds later the coterie of brass hats was fanning her with their headpieces. A most offensive smell still hung over the little bottle that had fallen to the floor.

"Call a doctor," squawked a topnotch officer. "Get an ambulance."

"Ha! ha!" chortled a dough from a nearby bed. "Where d'ya think they are, in a fire station?"

The colonel picked up the nurse and carried her out into the air. She came to when he was about to set her down in the shade of a gnarled apple tree.

"Uh—er—fresh guy, huh?" She whanged the Colonel in the eye. "A woman ain't safe any place. Why—what happened?"

"You fainted," the officer growled and clapping his hand to the eye which was getting ready to close up for

the day. “Damme, where is that homely lout? By cripes, I’ll—”

The brigadier, face puffed up like a poisoned pup’s, came running out of the hospital with the small perfume bottle in his hand.

“Look at that—on the label! In little letters—“Aladdin Novelty Company.” Hah, that was that Pinkham fellow. Phone Major Garrity—Ninth Pursuit Squadron. Arrest him the minute he gets to the drome. Thought I’d seen that mug before. The—the—I’ll—”

PHINEAS indulged in an assortment of chuckles on his way dromeward. A dame would get fresh with him, would she? Haw-w-w-w-w! That trick bottle had been burning a hole in his pocket for a long time and he had about given up hope of its utility. Essence of defunct hen fruit topped off by a little container of cheap perfume. It was a howl. But as he gloated, Phineas’s versatile thinking apparatus harbored thoughts of the strange thing that flew through the air and came apart. Maybe, he reasoned, the pilot had been boiled to the ears. But there had been a night not more than a week ago when Phineas had been flying home solo from a jaunt across the Meuse that a strange shape had passed between his Spad and a cloud. The famous Yank had decided that it might be a renegade blimp broken loose from its moorings and had let the matter pass from his mind. At the moment, however, he had a strong feeling that a Kraut had been experimenting with something that would mean no good to anybody who sided with the Allies.

“That Looey wasn’t gaga,” Phineas finally grunted with conviction. “He saw somethin’. Well, I must have a look into a thing or two.”

The first look he took was into the Operations office five minutes later. The Old Man was stomping up and down the floor, his hands balled into a merged fist behind his back. Curls of smoke seemed to be coming out of his collar, but Phineas was not sure of that.

“Uh—er—here I am, sir,” the pilot from Boonetown, Iowa, ventured. “What’s troublin’ you? Is it the riddle that I asked you all at mess last night? Well—haw-w-w-w-w—here’s the answer. You can put four horses in three stalls by cuttin’ them up into hamburger! Boys, you would never think of that in a hundred y—”

“Shut up!” bawled Major Garrity, whirling and stabbing a finger close to the Pinkham bugle. “What have you been doin’—raisin’ hell in a hospital? Is there

no place you wouldn’t upset? Maybe you have been to some graveyards to switch the stones around, too. Shut up!”

“Did I say somethin’?”

“You’re out of the air, you weasel!” Garrity yelled. “You might as well start learnin’ to pilot a truck. Phoney perfume, huh? Getting a nurse on duty to pass out—of all the—!”

“That is a dame for ya,” Phineas yipped. “Bight off the bat she has to poke her snoot into the bottle. That spoiled it. Boy, what breaks I get!”

“You’ll get one—in the neck,” the Old Man snorted. “Wait until that brigadier gets time to throw the hooks into you. Know who he is?”

“Pershin’s twin brother, I s’pose,” guessed Phineas, prepared for the worst. “Now if you tell me different, it won’t sound bad no matter who it was. I plead guilty this time. But I was insulted there. I am an officer—”

“Your grammar is bad, you big lug,” Garrity spat. “You mean you ‘were!’ Get out of here and if you as much as climb up a ladder, I’ll have you busted for going up against orders.”

“You are makin’ a mistake,” Phineas argued. “Who will find out about the Jerry shell that carries passengers, now, huh? Haw-w-w-w! Well, it is no concern of mine. Adoo, sir.”

“Wha-a-a-a-?” gulped the Major. “A shell that carries—passengers? Huh—sure, Pinkham, sure. Ha ha! I understand. They will never convict you for anything. I will get the doctor in the morning.”

“He thinks I’m goin’ nutty,” the culprit mumbled when he got outside. “They laughed at Columbus, too. They laughed—”

“When I sat down at the pianner,” Bump Gillis supplied. “But they didn’t when I told them I was the instalment man. Ha! ha! what’ve you got into now, Carbuncle?”

“Shall we tell him the news?” inquired Howell with a chuckle.

“Go ahead—it’ll panic him,” another Spad nurser urged.

“From now on, you ain’t much,” Howell said to Phineas. “The great Captain Beaman has moved in ten miles south of us and all the newspaper boys in the world are headin’ that way. Ha! ha! Pete Beaman with thirty-one planes! The hero of the western hemisphere. Wasn’t there a guy named Pinkham in the war once?”

“Huh?” bristled Phineas. “Beaman? D’ya mean—”

“The one and only American ace,” Bump Gillis assured him. “They are puttin’ his picture on the fly

leaves of the cadet's handbooks. He's the Ty Cobb of the ozone—the Frank Merriwell of Issoudon. The trouble with you is that you're too tight to hire a publicity man. Oh well, you were good once."

"I'll show that fathead," flared the displaced Yankee headliner. "No bum can push me out of my place in history. All the Pinkhams before me were famous. Thirty-one planes, huh? I have mislaid more Kraut crates than that. Haw-w-w-w!"

"But the public don't know it. They tell me he will fly around here for maybe a month—an' then he goes back to the States to tell of his terrific battles above the clouds to audiences from coast to coast. I guess the Allies ain't nutty. Beaman looks like Barrymore. You would scare an audience of gorillas away from the ticket offices. Ho hum. Well, it was your folks' fault, not yours. I bet your ma was scairt once by a hallow'en mask."

"Laugh, go ahead," Phineas cracked, "but don't say I didn't warn you bums! When I get back into a Spad—"

"It will have a beard and arthritis in the tail assembly," a voice bellowed from the doorway of Wings. Garrity crossed the floor. "So you told our hero the great news?"

"Oh, I got it all right," Phineas yelped. "That is this *guerre*. Hero today and a bum tomorrow. Maybe all I been doin' is chasin' snails in France, huh? Why when I show that bum my medals—I got a pocket full an'—"

"The last time Beaman showed his medals to me," Major Garrity said, easing himself into a chair, "he wheeled them up in a two-wheeled Frog vegetable wagon. Compared to that flyer, Pinkham, you haven't enlisted yet. Goomer—get me some more tea."

"Put arsenic in it—uh—er—I mean in Bump Gillis's," the tormented pilot growled, his appetite lost. "But I'll show that big slob who is the leadin' man in this sector. Only a worm with paralysis can't turn. It is the Pinkhams who play the violin first. I—"

A car pulled up outside. Four officers came into the Frog farmhouse. A tall flyer with the masculine beauty of a matinee idol and the build of a Dempsey grinned at the members of the Ninth Pursuit as he introduced himself.

"Name's Beaman, fellows. Captain Beaman. Heard of me no doubt."

"Let's see—what was the name?" Phineas spoke up, his face twisted as if he had swallowed a bug with his lettuce. "Ever been up?"

"Ha! ha! ha!" from Bump Gillis. Major Garrity cursed and lunged out of his chair.

"Glad to meet you, Captain. I'm running this squadron. How do you find things in this sector?"

Captain Beaman did not reply. He was looking at Phineas and his hands were doubled up into fists the size of smoked hams.

"I have been up a couple of times, Pinkham," the visiting flyer cracked. "Beaman is the name."

"It's still only the name of chewin' gum to me," the stormy petrel warbled. "I hear it's good for cramps. You don't have a stick of it, by the way, as I all of a sudden got a cramp? Bump, pass the canned cow before the company starts moppin' it up."

"Fresh guy, huh?"

"You have no idea, Captain," Garrity sighed. "But he will trouble us for only a few days more. He is in a sling. Right now a room is being swept out for him at Blois. Won't you sit down, gentlemen?"

"Don't mind if I do," Captain Beaman grunted and still he eyed Lieutenant Pinkham.

TEN minutes later the ace and his three fellows walked out of Garrity's aerie, uttering dire threats. Captain Beaman had no sooner sat down when Phineas grinned and reached for Bump Gillis' cigarettes. The ace accepted with thanks and Phineas handed him an old bricquet with which to light it. A stream of water came out of the lighter and hit Beaman plumb in the eye. The cigaret, once lighted, hissed like a tormented snake and he spat it out into Major Garrity's lap. That had been enough for the visitors.

"I'll get you yet, Pinkham," Beaman yipped as he climbed into the car. "You wait."

"Adoo," called Phineas. "When you go lecturin' back home, look up Aunt Sophronia when you hit Boonetown. She's the head of the Anti-Cigaret League an' she sure can make doughnuts. Haw-w-w-w! Now, Major, don't look at me like that. Think of your arteries, as they might snap. I'm busted anyways so it is only a waste of time to swear at me. I beg to be excused as I am behind in my sampler makin'. Bong swar."

"The fathead asked for it," Captain Howell declared.

"Comin' in here crowin' at us like we was boy scouts. It's one time I am backin' Phineas."

"Ditto," agreed Bump Gillis. "Huh, the big swellhead. 'You have heard of me,' he says. An' Carbuncle says you are only a stick of gum to me. Boys, that was a fast one. Ha! ha!"

Major Rufus Garrity knew when the odds were against him. He withdrew after smashing two plates and a vinegar bottle.

Phineas Pinkham bit his finger nails all the next day. He slumped in the doorway of the farmhouse and watched Captain Howell and his Spads take off three times during the day. The third time always tells. The patrol came back in mid-afternoon looking as if it had flown through enemy barrage of scrap iron on the front. Bump Gillis dropped short of the field by half a mile holding up part of the top wing that had broken loose and was sliding down into his lap.

"The Jerries are up to somethin'," Howell told the Old Man while he poked at a bullet hole in the sleeve of his coat.

"You did not think they were out there havin' a clambake, did you?" sniffed Phineas. "I bet it's that mysterious passenger-carry shell. They have got a gun buried some place that they shoot them out of. That is why they are gettin' extra tough this week. Well, I should worry! I am retirin'. Here comes Bump! He is limpin' all over, haw-w-w-w-w!"

"Where was that great big ace today when we needed him?" snorted the Scot. "Maybe he was out gettin' pictures made for the magazines. Huh, there was a Yankee flight goin' by where we were gettin' licked and they did not even wave their hands. I don't go up again for a week. Somebody just try an' make me!" Bump's scowl invited a fight.

"Uh—the ace was over Pont a Mousson today," Garrity ahemmed. "He shot down two Krauts. He has got thirty-three now. You lugs can't get one with a whole flight."

"He—he shot down two?" repeated Phineas unbelievably. "Look here, you have got to let me go up. I will not stand idle and let that bum who looks like a collar ad hog all the medals. I will demand a hearin' as my country needs me worse than a brigadier. I'll show that stuffed cootie."

"All of you get out of my sight," the Old Man bawled. "I'll bust the first fathead who talks back to me just once more."

Eight pilots talked at once. Phineas grinned. "Well, it looks like you are out of business, Rufe—er—sir. Haw-w-w-w! Well, we all could start packin'. There is a train that leaves—"

"I'll show you. I'll show you who's boss," bellowed Garrity. "Don't any of you dare leave this drome tonight. Nor any other night until I say you can. Hah, I'll show you wiseacres!"

"That's what you get us for shootin' off your mouth," Bump tossed at Phineas.

"Yeah," the other pilots chorused truculently. "We ought to climb his frame."

"Blamin' me, huh? That's enough. I am through with you bums for good. It's the last straw. Compared to me from now on a lone wolf will look like a bargain sale rush." Phineas strode away in a big huff to his cubicle where he sat down to think up more hate for one Captain Beaman than was already boiling under his skin. A few minutes later Bump Gillis entered and told his hutmate that a friend of his in Bar-Le-Duc had told another friend that a certain aviator had been seen promenading with a particular femme in the balmy city.

"He didn't mention no names but he said he was sure it was Beaman. And Babette was grabbin' onto him like she would fall down any minute. She kept lookin' up at him like he was a movie cowboy or somethin'," elucidated Bump. "I just thought I'd put you wise, Carbuncle."

"If you ever told me any good news, it would kill me," Phineas yipped. "That's the breakin' point, That fathead has pushed me too far. I will tell that dame a thing or maybe a dozen. The two-timin' croquette!"

"You will have to holler loud, then," grinned Bump, "as you know your orders. Ha! ha! I wish I had lots more bad news for you."

"Do me a favor and change huts, will you?" snapped the object of Bump's unseemly ribbing. "Otherwise it will be no time before I am guillotined fur murder!"

"Oh, I wouldn't think of it," refused Bump. "I have become so attached to you—like you were a turtle I found, or somethin'. Well I think I will hunt up a poker game."

THAT night a truck pulled out of the drome. It had been unloading supplies in back of the farmhouse. Halfway to Bar-Le-Duc part of its return load pushed a lot of burlap aside and breathed deeply of fresh air for a few moments. Then he made himself as comfortable as possible and smoked a cigaret. Phineas was never without ways and means of transportation to Bar-Le-Duc. When the truck reached the Frog town, he jumped down and headed for Babette's house. It had never occurred to the flyer from Boonetown that Bump Gillis might have been taking him over the jumps. So much woe had been stalking Phineas for a week that he was ready to believe anything.

"What ees thees zat eets from mow. Phenyas *ce soir*?" Babette inquired when she opened the door in answer to a knock that shook a panel loose. "*Voila*—"

"You double-crosser, you. Voose fickle wench!"



yipped the jealous Romeo. “Been allezin’ wiz ze beeg ace, *oui*? Well, I—”

“*Vous avez ze beaucoup* dreenk, eh?” countered Babette. “An’ I have ze surprice *aussi pour vous*. Don’ mak’ ze face sour *pour moi* like zat,” she objected.

Phineas was beside himself. “I’ve a good mind to pin *votre* ears back,” he yelled. One word led to another and soon Babette picked up a tea kettle and bounced it off the Pinkham cranium. Phineas picked Babette up and tossed her into a chair with such abandon that her teeth rattled. Just as Babette made the forced landing, a door flew open and a Frog officer stuck his head into the room.

“*Sacre—vous avez smack ma soeur, oui!* Lieutenant Pheenyas Peenkham, ze peeg you are, ze *chien!*”

“*Votre sewer*, huh? Is that all you Frogs can call people? So her beeg brother he ees fresh, *non*? When did voose come home? Oh, don’t make ze pass at me. I am warnin’ voose!”

Smack! “Zere! Zo—how ees thees *vous* like heem?” *Kerwhop!*

“How ees eet votreself, voose wise garson, haw-w-w!”

Babette’s brother picked himself up slowly, staggered to the window and yelled for any kind of police help that might be about.

“Shut up!” yowled Phineas. “Or I weel poke voose encore.”

“*Gendarmes! Gendarmes!* He-e-e-ey! *Assistez moi? Gen—*”

Wham! “That’ll make him sleep for awhile. Adoo. I am leavin’ voose,” Phineas howled. “Boys if I don’t get out-of town this time, it’ll be the bastile.” He ran down the backstairs and into a narrow street. Outside in the main drag he heard the shrill blast of whistles and he knew they were not made by peanut roasters. Rough-voiced M.P.’s

started to yell. Phineas found something that looked like a possible haven, but he had a hard time convincing the dog to move out. Cramped inside, he sat down in a pan of water until the hullabaloo died down. An hour later he managed to elude the M.P.’s and reach the outskirts of Bar-Le-Duc. At the end of a second hour he had found sanctuary in a small bosky dell where crickets cricked aplenty. The Boonetown flyer sat there for five minutes before the sound of voices pierced the insect operetta. He advanced toward the disturbance and came out into a small

pasture. A plane stood on the ground with several men flitting around it. Two lanterns afforded scant illumination.

“Boys, it’s an S.E.5,” Phineas muttered. “I always wanted to have one of them. Well—” He made his way forward until a certain voice became very plain.

“In the morning I’ll come out and take it in. Don’t want to take a chance getting off here without flares. Gasoline put in okay?”

“Sure, Cap’n,” replied a mech. “It’ll perk fine now. Ya better let me stay here an’ watch it, though.”

“Good idea. Yeah. That last Jerry almost ruined that crate. I’ll get him tomorrow.”

“Why if it isn’t the great big ace,” Phineas chuckled.

“Better take my flyin’ coat if you’re goin’ to stay out here,” he heard Captain Beaman say to the mechanic. “Gets damn’ chilly at night, Mike. I’ll get it later. Well, let’s get to the car.”

The ace and two other men moved away, crossed the pasture. Five minutes later Phineas Pinkham heard the sound of a motor turning over. Twin lights stabbed into the gloom beyond a line of trees that fringed a sunken road.



“What a setup!” he said to himself, chuckling. “I don’t have my flyin’ coat. In the morning before the Frog roosters even get up I go out an’ get the coat and the S.E.5. I will take one more smack at the Krauts before I resign, haw-w-w! An’ I want to find that gun. Adoo, Captain, an’ mercy bowcoo.”

Phineas retired to the bosky dell until the sun began to take furtive peeks above the eastern horizon. In another quarter of an hour, he figured, it should be light enough to make a pass at the S.E.5. At the end of that time Phineas began to reconnoitre with

the skill handed down to him from his Indian sniping forefathers. He had a scarf wound around the lower part of his face. When he came to a fence, he threw caution away and advanced across the pasture with bold strides. Ten feet from the plane, the mech stirred and got up.

“Mornin’ sir. You’re early, sir. Didn’ hear ya.” He started on the jump for the S.E.5 and Phineas stifled a pleased guffaw.

“Good work, Mike,” he muttered, climbing to the cockpit. “Haw-w—er—uh—heard a funny story last night.”

Seems there was an Irishman an' a—switch on! Contact!”

The mech hesitated, backed away from the ship. Phineas gestured impatiently. The groundman jumped forward and laid his hands on the prop. He spun it. The motor sucked spark, caught, and roared petulantly. Phineas waited until its voice was smooth and even, then he got cut of the quaking battle wagon and asked for the coat.

“Sure—sure, Cap'n. I fergot,” and the ackemma peeled off the coat which he handed to Phineas. No sooner had it left his hands than he let out a howl.

“You ain't Cap'n Beaman. You ain't—”

“You can't always be right,” Phineas said, swinging his fist. “Haw-w-w-w-w!”

In five minutes he had managed to get the ship off the pasture and into the air. He headed through the mists toward the fighting lines and took a look at his watch.

“The bums are just gettin' up over at the madhouse,” he grinned. “I guess nobody ever took off any earlier in this *guerre* unless it was a pigeon. Keep me on the ground, huh? The brass hats would try an' break a cat of eatin' liver. I will be over the Kaiser's backyard before his Vons are startin' to work an' I should find out a thing or two.”

IT WAS over toward Albesdorf thirty minutes later that Phineas spotted signs of activity far from any Heinie trench. He could see a truck or two crawling along a road and then they suddenly disappeared as if they had fallen into a mine shaft. There was a circular opening in a stretch of bumpy terrain that looked like a manhole shorn of its cover. Five minutes later Phineas had to find out what he could do with an S.E.5. Three Jerry Albatros Scouts came scooting down from a high shelf to knock him off. The Boonetown pilot was amazed at the Captain's crate. It could do more things in three seconds than a Spad could in as many minutes. It could climb like a scared chicken hawk when it had to—and this was a day when it had to.

“No wonder the fathead could knock off Krauts,” he yipped just as he slammed a burst into a Jerry's tail fin and stripped it. “I guess you have to be a politician to get one of these—oh, you will, huh?”

A Boche came in close, seemed on the point of merging with the Boonetown scrapper. Phineas fed the cupro-nickel poison into the Alb's spleen and it made a quick hop like a dog jumping a fence and then rolled

over on its side. When he looked around there were only two Heinies left. One and a half, to be correct. The Spandaus of one had suddenly gone democratic. Phineas was beginning a hem-stitching job on the Dutchman's playmate when something happened. It seemed as if the Vons might have got their signals mixed or had lied about their astigmatism when they answered the Kaiser's call. Be that as it may, one Albatros tried to occupy the same space in the ozone as the other one was in. It has never been known to work successfully. The empennage of one kissed the wing of the other with a loud smack and both Jerries had no other thought in mind but how to nurse what was left of their sky wagons to the linoleum eight thousand feet below.

“Bum voyage!” Phineas howled in their wake and started for friendly oxygen. A flight of Camels signalled their approval to him when he knifed by. Later he wished he had joined the Limey party. A mile away from them, five Fokkers came tumbling out of a cloud ambush and started to work on him.

“Huh, I am ashamed to fight with such overwhelming odds with me,” Phineas gulped. “The bums in those crates would not bet on a horse unless he was the only nag in the race and had a cyclone behind it. Well, a Pinkham never 'went West' without takin' company along. Come on an' fight! Haw-w-w-w-w!” The guffaw was weak, however, like a consumptive butterfly's cough. It had occurred to Phineas that he should expect no quarter being in the crate of Captain Beaman, the renowned American ace. The ace's insignia—a crowing rooster in a ring—was splashed on the side.

Well-aimed Jerry mayhem had eaten the fowl's head away, had washed out a leg before Phineas could get in a punch himself. He laced lead at a Fokker that appeared in his ring sights and knocked it for a row of Nissan huts. Three seconds later there was nothing left of the ace's insignia but a wishbone. Part of the S.E.5's top wing was flapping like a scarecrow's meatless arm in a high wind, when a flight of ten Spads suddenly breezed into the aerial shooting gallery. Phineas wasted no time in thanking them. He started for his own lines in a long downward sweep. He hedgehopped three acres of barbed-wire, seven Jerry pill boxes, and a line of tanks before the wing of the S.E.5 came loose. When he had collected his scattered marbles, the adventuring Yank was sitting in a smelly dugout with a lot of mud-caked officers, and from every side came the “*crump crump crump*” of bursting shells.

“The war ain’t very far off, huh?” he grinned and dragged a gill or two of cognac out of a bottle. “Boys, how can you play poker with all that noise?” The Pinkham physiognomy was covered with mud, most of which was stuck to his chin, altering his features strangely.

“Want to git in on the game, feller?” a bullet-headed first looey tossed at Phineas. “What’s your name?”

“Uh—er—Beaman. Captain Beaman, haw-w-w-w!” Phineas’ thinking mechanism was still a bit awry.

“Well, by thunder, you’re lookin’ at the great ace,” a captain of infantry yipped. “Glad to have you—yes sir! Think of it, boys! It was the leading Yankee ace we pulled out of that shell hole!”

Eleven hours later the Boonetown pilot crawled out of the dugout muttering to himself, “Glad to see me, huh? The bums! I bet they were Monte Carlo ace sleever before the *guerre*. It’s a good thing I could still write I.O.U.’s or I would have come out nude. The hypocrites. That is the infantry—the dirty—”

The errant pilot got a ride out of the palpating area in the sidecar of a motorcycle. He was a little stiff when he climbed out of the mechanical bug near the Drome. Major Garrity called him a big one when he limped into the farmhouse.

“Where’ve you been? Come on, no alibis. I won’t believe you even if you tell the truth.”

“I went to sleep in that truck that was out back of here last night,” Phineas explained. “They drove off with me an’ what do you think?”

“I could be arrested if I told you,” the Old Man retorted. “Well, go on, go on!”

“It got hit by a shell and I spent the night with three rats and a dead horse in a shell hole. That is my story an’ I’m stuck with it, haw-w-w-w-w-w! Lemme be. Hang me in the A.M. but just lemme sleep—ugh—er-r-r-raw-w-w-w-w yaw-w-w-w-wp!”

“Hear the good news?” Bump Gillis inquired pleasantly. “Beaman got four Krauts today. Four in one day. Boys that is a record.”

“He—uh—wha-a-a-a-a?” Phineas sleepiness jumped clear out through his skin. “The fathead got four—oh, wait a minute. You wait!” He began to count his fingers. “Now the first one—yeah that was one. The other two hugged each other—and that was three. The one that—”

“What’s that?” yelled Garrity. “What you say about—?”

“Uh, I will not stand for such—it was—” Phineas clamped his jaws together and hurried out, chilled over. Captain Beaman—he—his ship. He had claimed

four crates on one day—four—while he was actually sitting on his empennage in his cubicle. Phineas, the fall guy. It would mean at least ten years in a United States klink if the news ever got out.

“Jes’ let me die—somewhere,” he gulped, groping his way out of the farmhouse. “Make it a simple funeral. Adool!”

“He’s been slapped nutty,” decided Bump Gillis. “You see him countin’ his fingers?”

“Nutty?” Major Garrity shot out, his fingers scraping a heavy stubble on his chin. I wonder. I—”

All that night Bump Gillis listened to Phineas muttering in his sleep. “Four—in one day—the fathead—the liar. Four in one day—four—four Krauts. Four—”

A COUPLE of days later the news came through that Beaman was going to be decorated. Phineas seemed to suffer a slight stroke. A letter came to him a few hours after that marked “Private.” He read it in the privacy of his hut.

“Ha! ha! What a laugh, you speckled baboon! You know what, chump! Don’t forget. You open your trap and it will talk you out of circulation for ten years. Don’t ask me how I know. Ha! ha!”

Phineas was absent from mess for twenty-four hours. Pilots en route past his hut heard a sound like an axe being sharpened on a grindstone. The Pinkham masticators went on grinding far into the night. Bump Gillis did not court permanent disability and slept in the groundmen’s barracks. In the morning the Ninth Pursuit Squadron was in an uproar. Lieutenant Phineas Pinkham had stolen one of “B” Flight’s Spads two minutes after it had been wheeled out of the hangar. Mechs chased it to the limit of its run out onto the field and Sergeant Casey sat in front of a hangar counting his bicuspid. Major Garrity was ready for a strait jacket when he came running out of the farmhouse with no shoes on.

“He thtolt it right in plain thigh,” Casey lisped, tossing away a tooth that was no longer of any use to him. “It wath warmin’ up an’ the big thtiff come out an’ thwatted me. The firtht thing I knew he wath—”

“Let him get killed,” Garrity roared. “An’ stop talkin’ like a sissy to me or I’ll bat you! To hell with him. But,” he calmed down momentarily, “there was one thing I’d like to know. Why he was counting on his fingers. I’ve got a hunch that—” He slumped down on an ammo case and swabbed his brow.

Phineas got over a certain spot near Albesdorf

some time later. He hovered in the ozone for just two minutes and a half. A flight of Albatros Scouts barrelled him against the sky ropes and Phineas called for a fair catch at Potsdam real estate holdings. The Krauts were jubilant as they herded him to the ground. They knew a Spad from the Ninth Pursuit Squadron when they saw one and they had a hunch they could make the pilot tell very much about *Herr Leutnant* Pingham. When the Yank got out of the pit, he looked nothing like the Boonetown miracle man. He had a very nicely proportioned Grecian nose and more chin than Phineas ever owned. His hair was black and curly and when he whipped off his helmet, he bowed insolently at the Heinie soldiers who closed in on him.

"Wee gates," he greeted them. "Don't waste time talkin' as I would not tell you where any Allied dumps are, not even a garbage one. I never could read a map or count more than ten doughs at a time. Where do I get locked up?"

The two Jerries who had escorted Phineas down exchanged puzzled glances, then shot a line of gutterals at the infantrymen.

"*Der* oopstardt Pingham, how *ist* by *der* Deffil?" one barked at Phineas.

"Oh, he's in Patee," the downed Yank replied obligingly. He let his eyes wander fast. Woods were not more than fifty yards from where he stood and the trees seemed too close together. The tops seemed a little phoney to Phineas. "Last we heard he was in jail for murderin' eight *gendarmes* an' burnin' down a palace or two at Versailles. Some boy, huh?"

"*Ja*," a Kraut who understood some English agreed. He was apparently seized with a sudden chill. "*Das* Pingham—*ach!*"

The prisoner was taken to a house at the edge of the woods. Here an *Herr Oberst* quizzed him until he was blue in the face. After a bit he exclaimed, "Take *der* bumper away! *Der Dumkopf* is he. Lock him oop *mit* Schultz."

Schultz proved to be a very strange prison companion. It seemed that he had punched a Heinie brass hat in the nose while staggering under a load of *Schnapps*. On the brink of shooting Schultz, a *Herr Oberst* conceived a brainy idea. The man should be made useful—he would be given a chance to be the first living man to ride in the shell—the same shell that had mystified that wounded pilot back in the hospital near Eevigny. So Schultz told the Boonetown pilot.

"*Der* mornink eooms *und* they pudt me in *der* case *und*—boom! Oop I go yedt," the prisoner explained

to the Yank. His voice was not very distinguishable being bandaged up. It was quite clear to Phineas that the *Herr Oberst* had been pretty good himself with his dukes.

"Boys, a guinea pig, *nein? Und* if *der* thing vorks, vhat?"

"I am *der* spy," replied Schultz. "*Und* I don't know nottings of being *der* spy. So maybe if it vorks, I get idt shot by *der Amerikaners*. *Und* if it don't vork, I get it killed vunce anyvay. If I shtay here, idt *ist der* shoodtink gallery for me—*ach Himmel!*"

"You're worse than behind the eight ball, Schultz," chuckled Phineas. His brain was already scheming to the limit as he eyed his fellow prisoner. He thought of a little box he had hidden in a false heel in one of his boots. Of a few knick-knacks concealed in the lining of his flying coat.

An hour later a pair of Heinie brass hats and two flunkeys came in with alleged chow for the prisoners. One of the Teutons squinted at the Yank through a monocle and indulged in a nasty laugh.

"*Ach*, too badt idt *ist das* Pingham finds nocht *der* gross invention, *nein!*" he tossed out. "*Der* gross spy dropper of *der* ages. Oop in *der* gun like *der* circus cannon vunce *und* joost pull *ein* lever vhen *der* altimeter says ten t'ousandt feets. *Und der* shell idt cooms open *und* down goes *der* spy in *der* parachute *und* nobody sees because it giffs dark. Maybe tvendy spies ve drop before *der* gun *ist* kaput!"

"Well, I'm a monkey's valet!" muttered Phineas. "What'll you bums do next?"

"*Und mit* Pingham by Pariz, ho! ho!" chortled the *Herr Oberst*.

"Boys, will he be sore!" grinned Phineas.

The Krauts turned their full attention on the hapless Schultz. The ultimatum was, "*Drei Uhr es ist*. Ve coom, *Herr Leutnant*, *und* maybe *der* gross hero you will be instead of gedttng shodt yedt, *hein?*"

"*Ja Wohl*," gulped Schultz. "Heh! heh!" weakly.

THE hours dragged. Phineas glanced at his watch and then fished into his coat for something, a pair of concave objects which he inserted between his eyelids and eyeballs. These fake eyes, bought from a peddler in Bar-Le-Duc weeks before, were reproductions of the orbs of Mesmer, founder of hypnotism. *Herr* Schultz was dozing and only roused to consciousness when his fellow prisoner shook him. He looked into Phineas' eyes, swallowed hard, gulped, "who *ist? Ach—Gott!*" *Herr* Schultz's eyes widened and remained fixed to Phineas.

“You obey me, slave,” intoned Phineas, alias Mesmer.

“*Ja Wohl*, Master,” rumbled the Kraut.

Phineas removed the bandages from Schultz’s face, tore off his own strange mask and the black wig that crowned it. Hastily he put them on the Jerry and then got up to remove his outer garb. The wizard from Iowa worked with frantic haste to get Schultz’s attire on his own frame. Then he produced the miniature makeup box from his heel. It contained enough stuff to build a nose similar to that of *Leutnant* Schultz. The Pinkham eyebrows were light enough to pass inspection. Phineas’ eyes were a bleached blue also. The bandages would hide his buck teeth and receding chin. Schultz’s clothes fit Phineas very well. When he was through, even Mother Pinkham never would have known her boy.

“When the Heinies come back, you’re *Leutnant* Dillberry of the U.S. Air Corps, *hein?*” Phineas intoned to his foil. “Open your mouth *und* I kill you in cold blood.”

The fascinated Heinie nodded, watching Phineas produce an onion skin from a tin box in another of his voluminous pockets. This the Yank affixed to the roof of his mouth.

“I’m glad I been practicin’ that voice-throwin’ of late,” he muttered and sat down to wait. Schultz was on the verge of snapping out of his trance when Phineas gave him the works again. With those false eyes on him Schultz seemed frozen like a codfish in a monger’s window.

A bevy of the Kaiser’s war lords came to the improvised hoosegow a little later and the beefy one with the monocle grinned at Phineas and beckoned.

“Coom vunce, *Herr* Schultz. *Der Uhr es ist. Ja.*”

“*Ja Wohl*,” guttured Garrity’s prodigal son.

The *Herr Oberst* spoke to the man in the corner. “*Ach*—how *ist es der* Allies like idt *der* spy dropper, *Herr Leutnant?*”

The reply came from the dark corner, but Schultz’s lips did not move. “It’s nutty. I bet it don’t work. You Dutchmen are only wastin’ the taxpayers’ argent. Even if the spy gets down he’ll have dropsy for the rest of his life—haw-w!”

“Ho! ho!” a Hun laughed. “*Der* Yangkee slang *es ist* komical!”

“Oop, Schultz, you hear me vunce?”

Phineas got to his feet, muttered, “*Ach, Gott!*” and walked away amongst six Kraut doughs who led him toward the woods. In their depths he lifted his eyes.

No patch of dark sky studded with planets was visible. Camouflage, that was it. The tops of the trees would be covered with fake foliage. At last the troop came to a clearing in the middle of which stood a tremendous piece of ordnance that made Phineas suck in his breath. Eight or ten men were huddled close to it in wait for the ceremony. They moved toward a great cylindrical object on the ground and a light beam was turned on it.

“*Der* cocoon you fly *mit*, *Herr* Schultz,” the *Herr Oberst* gritted. “By *der* inside is *der* lever *und* *der* altimeter. When you get to ten t’ousandt foots you are ofer *der* Yangkee lines *und* you pull it *der* lever *und* *der* shell cooms oben vunce *und* down you go.”

“*Ja Wohl*,” acknowledged Phineas in a very weak voice. He questioned his own sanity when he took a look inside the big container. When he stooped over, a Heinie began to strap a closely packed parachute onto his back. The Krauts were working fast.

“When you gedt ofer *der* lines, you vill be *der* agent of Wilhelmstrasse Number *Nein, ja*. Odder *der* fire squad. You are *der* hero, *hein Herr Leutnant?*”

“*Ja Wohl, Excellenz*—gulp!” Phineas crawled into the shell. His heart was drying up like a wizened kernel inside a hickory nut. Before ducking his head into the cocoon he had caught a glimpse of Heinie doughs wheeling bags of powder toward the gun. He felt as if he were already as defunct as King Tut when the door of his container clanged shut. Beads of sweat as big as mothballs oozed onto his forehead when he heard chains clank. He felt the thing he was in being up-ended and hoisted aloft.

“Boys, Garrity an’ the bums was right. I was born gaga,” groaned Phineas. “They’re lowerin’ me into the muzzle now.” He thought of the circus he had gone to in Waterloo, Iowa, where he had watched a human cannon ball do his stuff, flying through the air to land on a big net. But Phineas knew the Allies would not be expecting him and would have no net ready. If the shell did not open—

“Cripes!” he groaned and made sure that his hand was very near the lever that was supposed to work. Right in front of his face was an altimeter, its numbers and arrow made luminous with paint. “I wish they’d step on it,” he gulped. “Adoo, all the Pinkhams! Adoo, buzzards! Maybe I’ll send you a postcard from out west. Now I know how a sardine feels—ow-w-w-w!”

A tremendous sound blotted out everything for several seconds. Phineas felt himself being hurled into space and his ears began to fill. He had never climbed

into the ozone as fast in all his life. He heard noises like a great cluster of harps twanging and a whistling sound as if all the M.P.'s in France were sounding the riot call. His eyes were pressed close to the altimeter. Up it went—three thousand—four—five— six— seven—eight—nine—ten!

“Now I lay me down to sleep,” Phineas bit out fast. “I wish I had my light fall underwear on. I—” He yanked the lever, heard rasping noises and felt cool air strike him. Away he fell, clear of the metal container. He groped for the ring at his chest and yanked. Nothing happened while he fell about a thousand feet. Suddenly a violent tug almost parted his collar bones and he began to float down. “Boys! I wouldn’t have missed this for the world. Haw-w-w-w!” The Pinkham spirits were instantly restored.

Down below, near a Frog cross road a bunch of doughs had heard a strange sound from the murky skies of early dawn. One yelled to the guardians of a big searchlight mounted on a truck.

“Play that glimmer upstairs! I hear somethin’ an’ it ain’t no hummin’ bird!”

The long finger of light stabbed high and swept in a wide arc. A tough dough swallowed a chew of tobacco and pointed.

“Lookit! A big shell—big as a steam boiler. It’s bustin’ up an’ somethin’ has fell out. Skunky, what was in that bottle ya gimme, huh?”

The searchlight followed downward, picked up Phineas two thousand feet from the ground. The Boonetown patriot hit a patch of briars, was dragged all the way across it until he thought every housewife in France was using his empennage for a pincushion. Finally he grabbed a low hanging tree branch and hung on. Three Yanks found him thus and cut him loose of his shroud.

“Where’d ya come from, buddy? For cripes’—was that you in that—that—” The dough pointed speechlessly. Phineas grinned and nodded. Hurriedly he wiped away his fake nose, ripped bandages from his face.

“Haw-w-w-w-w!”

“B-b-b-by—it’s P-P-Pinkham! Of all the—”

“In the flesh,” chuckled the human cannon ball. “You got to be my witnesses. Otherwise they’ll put me in a cuckoo nest. Ya saw, me didn’t ya? I hope you’re all sober.”

BACK in Hunland a group of Heinie brass hats were sitting near the woods that screened the spy

dropper. One or two held Lugers and all contemplated blowing their brains out.

“*Das Pingham!*” groaned one. “Right by *der* gun he vas—*ach, Donner und Blitzen!*”

“Maybe idt von’t vork, *Excellenz,*” suggested a Hun hopefully. “Maybe *das* Pingham *ist* kaput.”

“*Nein, der* inventor tells to me *der* shell *ist* proof from fools, *ja*. Heinrich, you shoodt idt straight if I giff by you *der* gun *hein?*”

JUST before Captain Howell and his buzzards were preparing for a flight into the scraposphere back on the drome of the Ninth, a big car rumbled in and stopped in front of the farmhouse. Major Garrity and three pilots came out to take a look at the early callers. The Old Man heard a voice and immediately buckled at the knees.

“Haw-w-w-w-w! Well here we are home again. Come in an’ have a snort, garsongs!”

The Major lunged and caught Phineas by the neck before he was clear of the car. “So! Come back, did you? That shows you’re nutty. Why you—er—why, how d’you do, sir? Why—er— what’s—what—?”

A colonel said, “Garrity, this flyer of yours has achieved the impossible. He has dropped out of the sky near our billets, having come over from Germany in a steel case. Shot out of a gun. The spy-dropper, the Heinies have invented. Don’t look like that! I have proof. My men were eye witnesses and we found a piece of the thing not three miles from where we picked up the lieutenant.”

“Boys, is this some *guerre!*” enthused the hero. “It’s just a little shell game. Come in an’ let me tell you a story that never could have have happened in Arabia.”

“He’s got on a Kraut suit,” mumbled Garrity. “He—must have—er—no, it’s a lie. I will not fall for such—”

“I quit,” groaned Bump Gillis, sitting down on the ground.

But proof, concrete proof, of Phineas’ flight from Hunland without a plane was soon produced. Even as he told the Old Man and his stunned buzzards of the trip, big Allied brass hats were examining a piece of spy-dropping container over by Vaubecourt—the part that held the altimeter. The news spread along the front with dazzling speed, reaching the ears of the Yankee war lords in Chaumont. A pilot in the hospital near Revigny laughed and bounded up and down on his bed.

“There, I was nutty, huh? Oh, yeah?” he shouted. Phineas became the man of the hour once more.

The great ace, Captain Beaman, was forgotten like last year's weather reports. A stream of Allied brass hats trickled into the drome of the Ninth to feast their eyes on Lieutenant Phineas Pinkham. Pershing wrote him a personal letter. Medals were promised. The squadron was going to be decorated. Twenty-four hours after Phineas' ride through the zone, a flight of Handley-Page bombers went over and washed up the big gun. Each pilot had carried a map roughly drawn by Phineas Pinkham bearing a great "X" marking the spot where the spy-dropper was cached.

It was a pushover for the egg droppers.

"So I play the violin around here second, do I?" the unconquerable Phineas yipped one night after the decoration doings. "As I said before, Beaman is only the name of chewin' gum to me,"

Major Rufus Garrity took the floor. "Pinkham, a few days ago I met a Limey Major in Nancy. He got nasty with me. He wanted to know about a lot of

I.O.U.'s some infantry officers are holding against a certain ace. And about charges of assault preferred against the captain by a Yankee major, Seems the ace owes a thousand francs to certain guys. Seems he got sore when a king dropped out of his sleeve and he poked—it happened the day that the ace got four Huns in one day—"

"Haw-w-w-w-w!" guffawed Phineas. "So I am a chump, huh? Boys, when that king fell out I says, 'you dare to cheat among gentlemen an' officers, do you?' I says, 'I am Cap'n—er—' Oh, just forget it. Skip the whole thing."

Howell yelled, "Get some water! Gillis has fainted. Uh—er—Major, what is the matter? You look sick—uh—eripes, he's fainted too! Goomer—get some water—!"

"Haw-w-w-w-w!" enthused Phineas and he limped out of the farmhouse.