



*Four crashing jumps from a flaming sausage in one day were enough for one man.
When Eddie met the pilot who knocked them down and boasted—*

SAUSAGE MEN ARE CRAZY

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IT WAS A RAW GUSTY DAWN, and the wind was singing down the ravine in which the 4th balloon company was quartered. Two miles toward the Front lay the line of trenches; about a mile to the rear the guns boomed. Everywhere was the tense expectancy, the gathering flood, that was presently to be a great American offensive. In the lurching basket below the big bag, the two observers exchanged comments in terse sentences, their manner abstracted, their eyes glum with foreboding.

It had been a hard week on balloons, and they had gone over the side four times. Every movement now carried with it memories of those jumps, as bruised and scraped skin protested against activity. The crew around the winch below, as the steel, cable unwound, could be dimly discerned—phantom figures in a gray mist.

“Goin’ tuh be rotten upstairs. Too much wind and clouds.” Sergeant Clymer spat over the side and adjusted his binoculars. Second Lieutenant Tommy Curtis nodded.

“To-day or never,” he said grimly, “we’ve got to lay the fire on that road and that railhead.”

The balloon was nearing the two-thousand mark, and Jimmy adjusted the head sets. His voice rang sharply into the mouthpiece of the telephone that connected with the office on the truck, and through the office, with the batteries at the rear. The sergeant watched him out of the corner of his eye.

Old and grizzled, Sergeant Clymer was as hard as they make them, and born to army life. He had hooted at first, when they teamed him with Tommy Curtis. “That weak sister!” He had spoken from the depths of his soul. Nothing in his experience had prepared him to understand a man who blushed and stammered; a man who carried another man’s picture in his watch; a slender hundred-and-forty pounder, to whom no talk was fighting talk. No, sir. He had been prepared to dislike Tommy Curtis and to make his life miserable. That was before he took to the air with him.

Now, after weeks of sharing balloon baskets and weeks of racing the lieutenant to earth in clumsy French parachutes, Sergeant Clymer understood Tommy less than ever, but he had learned a profound respect for the man he had labeled a weak sister. For in the air, Tommy Curtis neither blushed nor stammered. He asked no quarter, and he stuck to his work when the sky darkened with Fokkers. All that it took to make a man and an officer out of Tommy Curtis was a balloon basket and a couple of thousand feet of air.

“Okay. Hold it!” The lieutenant’s voice rang out, crisp and commanding. Sergeant Clymer raised his binoculars. The basket lurched against a taut cable, dropped with a sudden down blast of air, and then leaped hard again to the limit of the leash that held it earthbound. Flimsy clouds raced against the background of pale sky, and fine mist beat into the faces of the two men. The lieutenant frowned and lowered his own glasses as Sergeant Clymer shook his head.

“Clearing up,” he said. “Be able to spot that church in about fifteen minutes.”

He raised the binoculars again and focused hopefully toward the point where half a church stood as the marker for a road on the other side of the line. Then he stiffened. The sergeant beside him lowered his glasses and clutched a cable, his eyes peering anxiously into the clearing mist. Somewhere out in the void was the drone of motors—a heavy drone that meant Mercedes engines, not Clergets; Albatrosses, not Camels.

For a tense second the two men held their positions; then the lieutenant’s voice snapped instructions into the mouthpiece. The sergeant, leaning over the edge of the basket, once more had his glasses glued to his eyes.

“Flight—five or six,” he said huskily. “About four thousand—Here they come, two of ‘em!”

The lieutenant, one eye on the sergeant, was still talking into the telephone. The basket gave a sudden lurch as the ground crew started to haul it down. Then came the cough of archie and the thin spatter of machine-gun bullets. The ground crew was shooting at an invisible target and laying a protective ring of fire around the big sausage.

Wisssssssh! With a graceful swoop, the first Albatross pulled out of its dive to the right of the bag, stood on its tail momentarily, and buzzed like a hornet. A spray of incendiary bullets played above the basket, and the plane was gone, just as its mate swooped down to duplicate the performance.

The lieutenant, silent now, seemed indifferent to the commotion of the attacking planes. He had, however, been carefully calculating their position and the speed of his own descent with a mind that was nothing if not mathematical. The sergeant, relying on instinct rather than mathematics, was less cool. He was gazing anxiously upward toward the belly of the bag. He knew very well that there could be a perfect score for the attackers, and a line of flame up there

that couldn't be seen for the bag. Sweat stood out on his forehead, and he leaned toward the silent Tommy Curtis. The lieutenant pointed to the sky.

"Be about right when we go up again. Clearing fine."

The sergeant swallowed the speech that he was about to make and shook himself. "Just what I was a goin' tuh remark," he said hoarsely.

THE lieutenant seemed not to hear. He was tense again, and he leaned the least bit in the swaying basket. Through the infernal racket of the ground fire, there beat the roar of diving ships. Two more Albatrosses—or the same ones back—swooped down below the bag in defiance of archie, and sprayed upward with a curtain of fire as they climbed in a tail-chasing zoom. The two men dropped low in the basket, and the lieutenant snapped sharply into the mouthpiece. The sergeant's eyes shot a question, and Tommy Curtis nodded. They were down to a thousand feet now, but mathematics said that this bag had been hit right.

With inward shudders, the two men sprang to the side of the basket and went over. The ground fire lessened as the gunners left a clear area for the silken chutes, and the motor roar was swallowed by the sky.

Down like a pair of sandbags for a couple of hundred—feet then with a snap the silk billowed open, and they were floating. There was a sudden roar up above and a blast like the sudden uncapping of inferno. The balloon was gone.

The breeze was still blowing down the ravine and despite his manipulation of the cords Tommy Curtis was being swept along with his body standing out at a steep angle to the chute. That meant a hard landing, and since he was still in the air, Tommy Curtis cursed. That was one of the things that he didn't do on the ground.

With startling suddenness, he ran out of air. One minute he seemed a long way up; the next minute the ground was leaping toward him; then he hit. With a whistling rush, the wind swooped at the chute and billowed it out once more. Over the hard stony ground, the lieutenant bounced his way, each bounce adding to the collection of skinned and discolored places that was rapidly becoming second to no collection in France.

A bunch of shrubbery loomed ahead, and Tommy recognized the archie camouflage. Two men started from the cover, and one of them stepped on the playful chute. The lieutenant's progress was checked

immediately, and he staggered to his feet, dirty, rumbled, unimpressive and blushing.

The gunners grinned, and Tommy Curtis hated them for it. He saluted stiffly and turned away, leaving the chute for the gunners to return to the office. As he walked painfully back toward the truck, there were tears in his eyes—tears that were not inspired by his cuts and bruises. Tommy Curtis wanted to bawl because he was afraid that he wasn't much of a man.

The sergeant had already reached the truck when the slender lieutenant limped in. He was taking his kidding good-naturedly, secure in the knowledge that the groundmen were taking this unsentimental means of letting him know they were glad he was alive. Tommy tried to adopt the same attitude but became suddenly aware of the crimson flush that always robbed him of his poise. The kidding speech he had framed died on his lips. "Darb" Davis, the liaison officer, waved cheerfully.

"Saw your matinee idol up at Baulny. Says he's getting a leave pretty soon. Goin' to Paris."

Tommy felt a fierce rage welling up within him at the hated phrase which his fellow officers always applied to Eddie Tipson. Instead of the hot phrase that he framed, however, a stammered halting speech left his lips.

"That—that matinee idol stuff isn't—well, it just isn't fair to Eddie. He's a real guy. I wish you wouldn't—"

He was kicking himself mentally, but he couldn't check a speech that he knew was asinine. Darb Davis had a grin as wide as the side of a balloon. "Okay, Tommy, but when fellows carry a guy's picture in their watches and—"

Tommy's fists were clenching and unclenching, but the voice was still mild and the blush still burned his face. "Eddie won four letters where we went to school. He's a man's man and—"

He nearly said what he thought—"I wish to God I was like him"—but he didn't. He checked himself in time. Davis was rising slowly to his feet. His tone was more serious now, and the grin was gone. It really wasn't an awful lot of fun to kid a guy who suffered as much as Tommy Curtis.

"Okay, Tommy. Thought you'd like to know. They've got him on Camels with the 206th, and he's due for a leave Thursday."

The dapper figure of the liaison man disappeared in a cloud of motorcycle exhaust, while Tommy still stood impotently. Then the old colonel emerged from

the mist down near the office, and Second Lieutenant Curtis became one hundred per cent military once more. There would be a new balloon for him shortly, and that meant another trip aloft. Albatrosses or no Albatrosses, the big guns in the rear needed his eyes this morning. Transportation must be messed up over there near Clerges before the drive got under way.

As he climbed in the basket half an hour later, with the grim Clymer beside him, he kept thinking of that drive and of the lives that could be saved through skillful directions to the guns. But running counter to this military line of thought was the other, more personal line. Eddie Tipson was going to be in Paris this week.

Years of hero worship had built Eddie up to the status of a demigod in Tommy's mind. Eddie was all that Tommy never could be—star athlete, brilliant talker, nappy dresser, lady killer. Eddie Tipson had straddled the campus at Missouri University like a superman, while Tommy Curtis had crammed over his books. Eddie was the kind of fellow a grind craves to shake hands with; a man who has his picture draped everywhere.

TOMMY flushed at the thought of that picture he had. Eddie never knew it, of course. He had cut it out of a school paper. It had been a fool thing to show it to the balloon gang, but he'd been proud that he had known Eddie Tipson, who was going to be an ace in this man's war. If only he could get to Paris and see Eddie again. Maybe he could be a man himself if only he was around Eddie for a while.

His chain of thought came to an abrupt end. They had cut the bag loose, and the line was singing around the drum. There was work to be done. As if by magic, his eyes changed. No longer dreamy, they became coolly efficient, appraising.

As the bag gained altitude, his binoculars caught a flight of ships for an instant, before they were lost in the sun. They were Camels. There was a world of consolation in that. The powers behind the line knew how important it was for him to place those shots. Maybe Eddie was in one of those Camels. Maybe Eddie would—

He cursed like an officer, and Sergeant Clymer jumped. The lieutenant was focusing on the German lines.

They were situated about right now, twenty-five hundred feet up. Tommy barked into the mouthpiece, and the singing line went taut. The bag lurched for a

couple of seconds, then adopted a straining attitude against the cable. The old ruined church that marked a military road was visible in the binoculars.

Off beyond the church went the road, and the road was dark. Some mist still hung low, but trained eyes could not be fooled. Men were being massed down there beyond the crumbling landmark. Then to the south. That would be the railhead. Wisps of smoke rose to the sky. Lieutenant Curtis was speaking into the mouthpiece. Coolly, precisely, he was telling it off.

The guns boomed. A shrieking bedlam of sound arose, as steel-jacketed destruction raced across the lines. There had been other fire all morning, of course, but this was different. It belonged to the balloon and to the two men in it. With the glasses pressed hard against his eyes, Tommy Curtis watched the little patch of France that was his to destroy. He shook his head. Wide, very wide. His voice barked into the phones.

That was better. The line of fire changed. Now they were close, but they still had to do better. His voice cracked whiplike, while the sergeant beside him cursed and grabbed his arm. Finishing his instruction, Tommy turned impatiently. Clymer was pointing aloft.

There was a sky battle up there, and one that was worth the price of a grandstand seat. Camels and Albatrosses were tearing in wild confused circles over ten miles of sky. And coming down in a menacing dive was a single Albatross—a red plane that left a crayonlike streak in the sky as it zipped for the balloon.

Rat-a-tat-tat! The red destroyer played its tune along the bag, rolled off on one wing, and came down past the basket. Stuttering death passed above the two observers, and the Albatross swung wide and came back.

Tommy Curtis was pale, but his hand held the binoculars steadily and he had turned from the death near at hand to the death that was dropping on the earth twenty-five miles away. His voice was sharp as he snapped into the mouthpiece of the phone.

"No, leave us alone. I've got to get this."

There would be no more balloons available while the good light lasted. That railhead must be destroyed to day. The boys would be going over to-night and—

The Albatross was back, and the grim face of Sergeant Clymer was gray as he ducked back from a burst that didn't miss the basket by more than ten feet. Up and over. The red plane was out of sight now, but that was when he was most dangerous. He would be spraying the bag up there. Sergeant Clymer remembered the terrific burst which had marked the

explosion of that other balloon, and spat over the side with impatience. He was beginning to think that Lieutenant Tommy Curtis was being a hero, and he hated heroes. So far as he was concerned, the army was a job. This lunatic was taking it too seriously.

Tommy Curtis was still talking, his glasses fixed on that wisp of smoke. The boys were getting the range. The cable under the bag tightened and then started to roll around the drum Clymer cursed thankfully. Somebody down there had taken matters out of the hands of this crazy kid.

BACK came the red plane. He was ignoring the basket now, and buzzing angrily around the bag. Sergeant Clymer looked questioningly at the lieutenant and Tommy waved his hand wearily. With a heartfelt sigh, the sergeant slid over. Tommy raised his binoculars.

They were down to 1500 now, and it was hard to focus with those fools reeling the cable in, but it was a case of now or never. That last burst was so close. He barked into the receiver. A correction. He was guessing. No observer could tell accurately, under the circumstances. But that queer calculating machine in his brain assured him that he was right. They would get that line of steel next time. He felt mentally weary and numbed. His job was done, and he felt the thousand scratches and cuts and aches and bruises that he had been ignoring before in the concentration of a grim job.

“Jump, lieutenant, jump!” The words crashed about his ears as the enlisted man at the switchboard transmitted the words of the maneuvering officer.

Jump? Oh, yes. There had been that Albatross buzzing around. He’d probably got the bag. “Wonder where Eddie Tipson is. Wonder whether he was up there in that fight. Wish I could get leave to Paris.” He was moving mechanically to the edge of the basket. The line was still reeling and the basket was rocking under him. Funny how indifferent he was. The thing was probably getting ready to blow up. As he poised for a moment, he had to force his will to the point of jumping. It was so far down, and he had jumped so often. Moreover, he was so banged up that he couldn’t stand straight.

He leaped off into space. For a few seconds everything was blank, and then the parachute opened with a jerk that took all his breath. Far off down the sky was another chute.

Warooooom-puh! The sky was full of flame, and

the parachute rocked and started to buckle; then straightened out. There was smoke in his eyes and an acrid odor that was not from the guns, filled the air. A terrible pain seared his eyes where the sudden flash had registered.

Then everything was calm again, and he felt cool and in command of himself for a second. Only a second, however. For that tiny chute down the skyway was running a race with a huge hunk of flaming bag. Ugh!

The piece of bag flared out, but a tiny spark leaped to the billowing silk of Sergeant Clymer’s chute. With horrified eyes, Tommy saw the silk dissolve in a second. The tiny figure dropped like a plummet to the ground.

After that, delirium. Months at the Front, six jumps over the side in a week, four balloons blown up on him, and his basket-mate killed. It was too much, and Tommy cracked. He was lying in a heap and babbling when some field-battery men cut him out of his chute.

Four hours later, pale but sane, he drew his battered and bruised body straight to salute the old colonel who was commanding the balloon group on this Front. The colonel passed his thin finger lightly over his big mustache and smiled.

“It might interest you to know, lieutenant, that an airplane observer reported a direct hit on our objective. Your courage in sticking to your duty under trying circumstances does you credit, sir.”

Tommy blushed, and his tongue stuck. The colonel’s face was suddenly grave. “However, nervous men make poor observers. An observer must feel right and be right, or he is no good. After your collapse this afternoon—”

Tommy’s world dropped away. They were going to ground him. He wanted to grab something and hold on, to hit the deck and argue with this man. He was nervous on the ground, but, dammit, he was never nervous in the air. Never. He wanted to thunder these words out, but couldn’t move his tongue. The colonel’s voice flowed on.

“After your collapse, as I said, I am convinced that you need a rest. I reserved for myself, in view of your performance today, the privilege, of telling you that I am sending you to Paris for two weeks.”

PARIS. In the glory, Tommy forgot the war and the Germans and the artillery and the parachutes. He even forgot that he had scarcely an inch of whole skin on his body and that he had been walking with a cane

since he stiffened up. He was in Paris. So, too, was Eddie Tipson. Eddie! Lord, how he wanted to see him.

He made his way to the Cafe of the Little Men. Some one had told him that there were a lot of American flyers there. Probably Eddie would be with the crowd. No, the crowd would follow Eddie. Crowds always had.

Two other men passed him, hobbling. They were Americans, but he did not speak. He had a horrible conviction from the crippled look of them that they were from a balloon outfit—men who had hopped overboard too often. He didn't want to be reminded of that.

At last. Three steps led downward, and there was a sound of revelry within. He drew himself straight in ecstatic anticipation. Only a few minutes more, now. He opened the door. A tall straight-backed figure was lounging gracefully against the bar, while infantry officers clustered close. A well-remembered voice was reciting a tale with evident enjoyment. Tommy stopped short, and there swept over him a wave of confidence such as he had not felt in months. He would walk up to Eddie, and Eddie would remember him; would introduce him as a classmate.

He felt himself blushing already, and cursed his affliction. Then he went cold. The great one's words penetrated to his consciousness.

"It was the funniest sight I ever saw. Every time we

passed them, we dived on 'em. 'N' those Krauts were so nervous that they piled over the side the minute they saw us. There was one sausage up near Apremont that was extra good. We scared those Fritzie's over the side six times in one day."

Six times. That horrible boast turned Tommy sick and giddy. This man had made some poor devil leave a balloon six times in one day. It was appalling. He thought of his aching body, of his lost skin, and of that terrible revulsion against the chute and the long drop. And this man said that it was funny. Six times, he said, and it was a funny sight!

Without a word, Tommy Curtis, second lieutenant of the 4th balloon company, walked up and smashed Eddie Tipson in the jaw.

The infantry officers started up in amazement, as the flyer sagged glassy-eyed to the floor. One of them clutched futilely at the slim balloon-man, who was already spinning on his heel; then a door slammed and Tommy Curtis was gone. Outside, the fragments of a tiny photograph were scattered along the dirty cobblestones by a vagrant breeze.

Eddie Tipson never knew what it was all about. Neither did any one else. But they were not overly amazed. A little red-headed artillery sergeant expressed the verdict of the majority. "Aw, hell," he said. "All those sausage guys are crazy."