



# SNEEZE THAT OFF!

a  
**PHINEAS  
PINKHAM**  
howl

by **JOE ARCHIBALD**

*He liked to play with rubber cigars, phony bombs, and sneeze powder—did Phineas Carbuncle Pinkham, that thorn in the flesh of the American Ninth Pursuit. Their only hope was that von Kohl, the German sky terror who never missed a man, would be a big help to them, after all!*

**L**ONG AFTER YOU AND YOUR SON and your son's son have gone from this world, spectacled gents with big bulging foreheads will still be burning midnight watts trying to figure out one of the mysteries of the Great War. Like experts before them, they will fail at the border of senility and try something easier, like picking a little lead shot out of a vat of caviar. Perhaps the secret will never come to light. And by all of this we mean—how did Lieutenant Phineas Pinkham ever get into the Army Air Force?

There is little doubt, however, that the personnel of the particular recruiting office through which he percolated was anything but particular in selecting the breed to make faces at Germans in the air. Why he was not ushered out when more intelligent humans got their first peek at him makes the mystery more profound. The fact remains, however, that he wasn't. He went through the mill, was shunted to the docks of Hoboken and tagged there for France. And in due time, a Spad brought him to the drome of the Ninth

Pursuit Squadron, two miles south of Bar-Le-Duc. In view of the splendid record of this particular brood of Spads, it may be said that they deserved a better break.

Major Rufus Garrity was standing near the hangars when the ship wobbled down out of the sky. The C.O.'s hard-bitten physiognomy was a credit to his name. Over the bushy eyebrows that almost hid the orbs beneath them and on the undershot chin were little white marks, mute evidence that his rise in the service had been aided and abetted by his freckled fists. His blunt nose wrinkled disdainfully as the Spad came down, bounced like a scared rabbit, then smacked the tarmac again, and missed ploughing up the dirt with its snout by the proverbial eyelash.

For some reason or other, the Old Man felt that trouble and all its cousins had dropped in for a visit. When the pilot climbed out of the pit, with the nonchalance of a man who is proud of a perfect three-point landing, and removed his helmet, the C.O. was sure of it. Weary-eyed pilots blinked before taking a second look. They saw a face suddenly burst wide open and reveal a row of molars and bicuspid almost as long as a piano keyboard. At each corner of the chasm an enormous ear began, and seemed to flap in the gentle breeze. Two washed-out blue eyes, a crown of corn-colored thatch, and a million freckles on what could be seen of the warped countenance. Completed the picture of something mothers must imagine when they wish to scare their children.

Still grinning, Phineas Pinkham strode over to the Old Man and held out a hand. Stupefied, the Old Man reached for it. His palm gripped a soft, flexible mass, cold and clammy. It reminded him at once of the first time he had picked up a dead fish. A shiver played the national anthem up and down his spine, and he dropped the hand like a hot coal. Phineas snickered, hunched a shoulder quickly, and the major's bulging eyes saw the hand disappear up the sleeve. Almost immediately another hand, freckled and more alive, snapped into view.

"HAW! Haw! Haw!" laughed Phineas, and did a joyful shuffle. "I allus git 'em with that one. Scared hell out of 'em up at trainin' school. Haw! Haw! Haw!" Then the newcomer's face reluctantly relinquished its mirth. For some unaccountable reason, he was getting no cooperation. A puzzled expression clouded his homely face and then it gave way to a startled one. The Old Man's visage was a study in everything wrapped up in wrath and indignation. The veins palpitated

on his forehead and the bushy brows stuck out like thistles. A quick glance at the pilots convinced Phineas that his little act had not clicked. And then scorn and indignation coaxed words from his tongue.

"Huh!" he ejaculated. "Can't you guys take a joke?"

The pilots stepped back before the Old Man erupted, and closed their eyes.

"Joke?" he bellowed, shaking a hamlike extremity close to the replacement's twitching nose. "Joke! You fish-faced woozle! You-you-y— stand at attention!"

There was no voluntary impulse on Pinkham's part to comply with the irate command. His thin frame seemed to snap rigid of its own accord, and his hands flapped down against either thigh with a resounding thwack.

"Well, they *did* teach you that, did they?" rasped the C.O., the beet color slowly fading from his dour mien. "Now stand there, you woozle, until I tell you different. And listen to me! You ain't here to do vaudeville tricks, but damned if I know what else you're good for. We've had dirty deals from G.H.Q. ever since we staked out this field, and now they have to riffle the cards and send you here. I'd rather have a carbuncle on my neck."

"Yessir."

"Shut up!"

"Y—" Pinkham, however, choked the word back just in time. The Old Man's fist was cocking.

"Now salute! I'm in command here, and if you don't believe it, it's going to be hard on your pants."

Pinkham saluted, and the Old Man acknowledged it with a withering glance. Then he turned to one of the pilots. "Take him over to his cage, Wilson, then send him back to me," he muttered. "I want to know how he became a flyer. It ought to be good."

"Huh!" spouted Phineas, as he fell into step with Wilson. "A bunch of sour faces, huh? I thought I was goin' to have some fun in this war."

"You won't think it's so damn funny when you get upstairs, Carbuncle," opined his guide. And then and there, pilots of the Ninth Pursuit exiled the newcomer from the euphonious, good old American name of Phineas and labeled him the aforesaid "Carbuncle." Bump Gillis, one of the best fighters in the outfit, grinned and spoke into Slim Mooney's ear.

"What could be better? Ain't he a pain in the neck?"

"Motion taken an' carried," affirmed his hut mate.

Lieutenant Wilson showed Carbuncle to an empty hut, and quickly withdrew, evidently glad to get finished with his distasteful detail. He had not taken a dozen steps, however, when he heard the newcomer's voice directly behind him.

"See you in the funny papers!" it said in a rich soprano voice.

The pilot swore and whirled on his heels. There was nobody there. Back to the hut his startled gaze wandered, and framed in the doorway was the grinning, homely face of Carbuncle Pinkham. As Wilson stared angrily, he saw the replacement insert two big fingers in his cavern of a mouth and pull out a shiny object. Whereupon lieutenant Pinkham ducked out of sight.

But for the fact that Lieutenant Wilson was hungry and also late for mess, he would most likely have gone back and taken a swing at Carbuncle's jaw. Instead, he ripped out the single word, "Nuts!" and went on his way. Apparently sleight of hand was not Pinkham's only accomplishment.

THE topic of desultory conversation around the pilots' festive board that night was one that had haunted the rafters of the mess hall for weeks. Even the arrival of the worst specimen of flying fodder since the beginning of air warfare was passed over with a few uncomplimentary remarks.

"I'd give my right eye," Captain Howell burst out suddenly after a glum silence, "to smack that Prussian into the mud. I'm sick of seeing his mug with that big snoot and hearing his name. Every time he goes up, all hell follows him. Von Kohl! Von Kohl! You hear more about him than about the Kaiser."

"They say he got two more two-seaters yesterday," said Bump Gillis through a mouthful of bread. "That gives him about sixty ships. I'll bet there ain't that many left fit to fly on this side of the lines. He sure is raisin' hell. Has got the wind up on every squadron—"

"Except this one," snapped Howell. "An' I'm laying a dollar to a doughnut one of us gits him. Maybe—"

"Everybody and his brother have said the same thing since I came to this *guerre*," snorted Wilson. "It's going to be a better man than me that gets him, I know that. I'd rather mix it with a whole staff el of Jerries. They might miss, but that devil never does. And can he fly a crate! I saw von—"

"Two—three—four," came a voice from the doorway. Pilots choked on their food and took a look, but they knew already what was there. Lieutenant Carbuncle Pinkham stood surveying them, while a cloud of thick smoke belched from a cigar and swirled around his head.

"Sit down an' shut up!" snapped Captain Howell, and pointed with emphasis to an empty chair.

"Thank you, sir, she said," chirped Carbuncle and strutted to his place. "An' how is the grub in this place?"

"If you say you've been used to half as good," exploded the nettled Wilson, "you're a liar. An' if you feel like throwing your voice, git ready to duck plates."

"Pretty good, wasn't it?" grinned Carbuncle at the pilot "Learned it from an ad in a magazine. Here, fellers, have a cigar. Brought 'em all the way from Patee."

The aroma of the stub which the replacement deposited in a saucer at his elbow had a seductive influence on the nostrils of the pilots. Without thanks, they took the box from Carbuncle and passed it around. Soon the mess hall was hazy with the floating curls of smoke. His face a vacuum, Carbuncle ate ravenously. Sporadically he would pause to sniff unnoticed at the fouled air of the room, then attack his victuals again. Out of the corner of his eye, he studied one or two faces in the smoke screen. Suddenly Bump Gillis smacked his lips audibly and his face twisted with disgust.

"This coffee is terrible tonight" he said. "Any of you guys taste the same thing?"

A dozen tongues played tag with as many palates. Then Captain Howell took a long draught from his cup to make sure.

"There's something damn funny about it at that!" was his verdict. "Maybe Wilson's savin' money this week. He's in charge of mess."

"It's the same coffee we always get" defended the pilot "It don't taste bad. You guys imagine it" Carbuncle choked on his cup of the questionable liquid, and then hid his face in his handkerchief. Silence reigned again. Pilots lolled in their chairs, puffing diligently on their cigars and watching the smoke weave fantastic patterns on the ceiling above their heads.

IT HAPPENED to Bump Gillis first. An invisible hand seemed to paint a greenish tint on his weather-beaten face. Soon it squeezed little globules of sweat out on his brow. Bump fidgeted in his seat, tried to grin down the nausea with a silly smirk as Howell stared at him curiously.

"What ails you?" questioned the captain. "You look sick."

Carbuncle drained his cup and glanced toward the door. With a cursory *adieu* he got up and headed quickly towards it. Bump Gillis did not answer the

flight leader. He forgot his own discomfort for a moment as he watched Howell's face. The blood was draining from it, and in the lamp light it became ghastly.

"Cripes!" gasped the captain, and brushed his forehead with his hand. "I feel woozy."

The hand of nausea circled the table, pausing to lay its clammy palm on every man jack sitting there. Some lay back in their chairs limp. Others hung their heads in their plates and groaned. Half-burnt cigars fell from weak fingers. And then Lieutenant Wilson summoned strength enough to lift his nose toward the ceiling and sniff. He sniffed again. Then he kicked back his chair and began to swear.

"Rubber!" he yelped and picked up the stub of one of Carbuncle's private brand. Holding it close to his nose, he immediately became convinced. "Rubber it is!" he yelled again and turned to glare toward the open door.

He started running. Those who were able to, rose shakily to their feet and staggered in his wake, uttering terrible threats against the life of Carbuncle Pinkham. Bump Gillis, however, lifted his head slightly only to drop it back in his plate again.

"To hell with him," he said weakly. "I'll kill 'im in the momin'."

It had been Carbuncle's intention to flee to his hut and barricade himself within. But he had not reckoned with the speed of one Mister Wilson. A hasty glance over his shoulder prompted the joker to seek another refuge. A tall tree near B flight's hangar beckoned to him, the lower limb of the refuge being at least twelve feet from the ground. Yet Carbuncle's mighty leap brought his Angers into contact with it. A rock thudded against the tree trunk as he drew himself up into the protecting branches, and it was the first of an angry barrage. Carbuncle climbed to the top of the tree and shouted derisively down at the attackers, who were now reduced to two berserk individuals. The others had fled, seeking relief for outraged stomachs. The Old Man himself brought an end to the siege two hours later on his return from Bar-Le-Duc, where he had gone for a pair of drinks.

"What the hell?" he exclaimed, as he jumped out of the squadron car. "Have you got a coon treed, or what?"

"N-Nope," stuttered Wilson, whirling in a dizzy circle to look for another missile. "A nut! P-Pinkham is up in that t-tree. W-We—"

"Yeah!" growled Howell. "He's got the whole outfit

groggy with rubber cigars. I'll git him if I have to saw the tree down."

"Haw! Haw! Haw!" An outburst of mirth came from the tree-top. "Lotsa fun, hey, kid?" chirped Carbuncle.

"You damned woozle!" hollered the Old Man. "Come down out of that tree!"

"Yessir!" faintly.

AN HOUR later, Carbuncle Pinkham sat on his bunk, biting his nails and stamping his feet on the floor. One of his eyes was cloaked in mourning, the crepe having been hung by the fist of Captain Howell, whose judgment of distance in the dark had been uncanny. To the Old Man, Carbuncle owed his remaining good eye. The major had spoiled Wilson's aim in the nick of time. It was just his luck, Pinkham was musing indignantly, to get sent to an outfit that had no sense of humor. And he had planned so many entertaining diversions for the squadron. Finally, with a sigh of resignation, he pulled off his clothes and sought his bunk.

At dawn, Carbuncle folded his ears under his helmet and walked toward the line of quaking Spads in front of one of the big canvas hangars. The Old Man looked hopefully toward Germany, after one glance at the replacement. Perhaps, he soliloquized, von Kohl could be a help to the Allies after all. The pilots of the patrol were not yet in their pits. They were grouped about the Spad that was to fly number-three position, and a medley of wisecracks and chuckles escaped them as they examined the newcomer's fighting machine. On one side, painted in black letters, were the words, "Lafayette, here I am!" And directly underneath was fastened a tin star labeled "Chicken Inspector, Boontowne, Iowa." A yellow rubber snake with black spots was tied to a strut and undulated in the slipstream from the idling prop.

Carbuncle Pinkham ignored the uncomplimentary verbal barrage as he pushed through the scoffing group and climbed into his pit. His face, however, was wearing a pleased grin. His talents were being recognized at last.

"Say, Carbuncle," grinned Bump Gillis, "I sure hate to see you go." And the pilot held out his hand. The gesture brought a loud guffaw from the goggled assemblage.

"Huh?" was the puzzled response from the replacement.

"Von Kohl always gits a new man when he goes

out,” explained Bump, his countenance very grave. “We’ve been glad to meetcha. Carbuncle. Do you want me to forward your mail?”

“Go to hell!” snapped Carbuncle. “If you guys are afraid of von Kohl, all right. I ain’t. Why, I bet he ain’t nothin’ but a pint-sized cabbage-pickler. See you in the funny papers!” And the fledgling began to study his gadgets.

“Where there ain’t no sense, there ain’t no fear,” laughed Wilson, as the pilots broke up and ran to their ships at the angry bellow of Flight Leader Howell.

THE dawn patrol convinced the flight that Phineas Pinkham was no rip-snorting potential ace. As the V soared over the front lines, the curious fledgling forgot everything else but the unusual scenery below. He poked his homely face over the side of the Spad and marveled at the opportunities for sport in this man’s war. If he only had those vile smelling bombs with him! But they were in his trunk, which was still in transit. Six of them, chuckled Carbuncle, and the Jerries would be out of the trenches by Christmas. And then a black flower seemed to blossom right under his chin, and something whined past his ear. A tack hammer smacked him on the side of the head before he could get it out of the way. The sky seemed to be filled with the black bursts, and Carbuncle saw that Howell was climbing so he followed.

As he back-sticked hurriedly, a little stream of liquid trickled down his cheek. He dabbed at it with a gloved hand. The leather came away smeared with blood. Carbuncle swore. Then his eyes jerked to the flight leader’s ship. Its wings were wagging furiously. What ailed Howell? Carbuncle looked to the other side of the V, and everybody seemed to be staring at something above. His head fell back against the padded rest. All he could see were some little black specks. Another thirty seconds, however, and they began to take shape and a discordant note rasped through the Hisso chorus. Planes! Boche ships! Carbuncle’s scalp tingled.

The events which followed are still hazy to the joker from Boonetown. A giant hand seemed to have reached down and pushed the ships into a milling mass. He heard a sinister crackle, like flames sweeping acres of dry brush. At times he would see a target in front of him and trip his Vickers. One of his bursts went through Wilson’s tail, and that pilot forgot the Jerry he was chasing to turn and swear at Lieutenant Pinkham. Carbuncle, however, was skidding toward

the fringe of battle, wondering who was handling the punch that was filling his upper wing full of holes. He prayed and went into a dive, and just in front of his prop a triplane painted red and green appeared.

Carbuncle mechanically squeezed his trigger as he admired the insigna on the side of the ship—a great black eagle’s head, its eyes glittering beneath a Uhlan’s helmet. And then, before he could count two, the triplane was gone. Another ship was in its place, and Carbuncle let it have a burst before he could get away. Then his heart winged over and he zoomed frantically upward. That ship had been a Spad, with little pennons streaming out from its struts. Howell’s ship!

Then Carbuncle threw the Spad’s nose violently upward to miss another thunderbolt that slammed across his bow. He wondered why there wasn’t room enough for everybody in the sky. He looked down. Three ships were dropping out of the flight. A hot breath hissed in his ear as a Tripe, flaming like a torch, missed him by inches. Carbuncle realized for the first time that those flashing shapes could be hit, and he looked around for a victim. And then the fight was over.

CAPTAIN HOWELL was the first out of his ship when the survivors of the brush with Jerry reached the tarmac. Whipping off his goggles, he stamped toward the spot where a Spad was going to stop dead. Lieutenant Phineas Carbuncle Pinkham legged out of his ship and surveyed those around him with a “Well, here I am!” mien.

“Well, Pinkham,” snapped the flight leader with biting sarcasm, “how many Spads did you shoot down?”

“Beg your pardon?” A high-pitched voice sounded behind Howell. The flight leader whirled. Wilson gasped and his face became purple.

“Who said that?” growled Howell, sweeping the faces of the men around him.

“Haw! Haw! Haw!” Carbuncle was leaning against his Spad, laughing with great gusto. “Fooled yuh that time, cap,” he beamed. “It only cost me twenty-fi’ cents to learn how to do that. Now, what was it you was sayin’?”

The flight leader slammed his goggles to the ground and swore for nearly a minute without repeating himself. Then he advanced upon Carbuncle. “Listen, you ugly, bat-eared nitwit!” he roared, his finger shoved with all the force behind it in the fledgling’s midriff. “I asked you how many Spads you shot down!”

“Well, why don’t they git out of my way?” chirped Carbuncle disdainfully. “Why don’t they put their

hand out or somethin'? I saw a ship an' I plugged at it. That's what they tol' me to do at Toul. They oughta know!"

Howell groaned and spread his palms outward in a gesture of despair. "They meant Germans!" he pointed out, when he could find speech again. "Listen, dope, you're fighting on our side. Or ain't you?"

"Sure, but—"

"And the next time you take a shot at me," put in Wilson, "I'll dust your pants with lead on the way home."

"Shut up!" cautioned Howell. "Here comes the C.O."

"Well," asked the Old Man gruffly, "how did Pinkham show up?"

"Great!" announced Howell caustically. "There ain't a ship that gets away from him."

"Fine. Fine." remarked the C.O. dubiously. "See von Kohl?"

"Almost had him," snapped the flight leader, "but—*ah-ah-ah! Ker-choo!*"

The Old Man's snub nose twitched. His steely eyes blinked. Then he went into a convulsion. *Kerchoo! Kerchoo!* The briar pipe fell from his lips and spilled little hot tobacco coals down the front of his tunic. Carbuncle Pinkham essayed a look of great surprise and sidled away. The echoes of outraged proboscises jarred against his eardrums as he entered his cubicle. His first act was to hide under the mattress of his cot a little paper envelope which he clutched in his hand. He grinned then, and picking up an old battered copy of the London Illustrated News, stretched out full length to peruse its contents.

A few seconds later, two faces peered in at him. Mayhem and suspicion radiated from each. Carbuncle looked up, grinned foolishly, and returned to his magazine. Captain Howell and Lieutenant Wilson swore with disgust, swallowed their murderous instincts, and continued on their way.

"Haw! Haw! Haw!" laughed Carbuncle. It was answered by faint *ker-choos* from the far end of buzzards' row.

Then Lieutenant Pinkham's chuckling ceased. A picture on the page in front of him drew his attention. The print beneath it gave his eyes a feast. Baron Manfred Schlossen von Kohl, the scourge of the skies. And then it went on to speak about the great von Kohl's aristocratic background, his arrogant militaristic bearing, his fearless fighting against the flyers of the King. Von Kohl, the proud Prussian, a spike in the iron heel of Germany.

Lieutenant Phineas Pinkham was little impressed. Once he had seen a villain in a movie that looked like the great German ace, and they had thrown gooey pies at him. That was the thing to do. That was the only way to treat them snooty highbrows. The flyer from Iowa sniffed contemptuously at the half-tone of von Kohl with his waxed mustache, great big nose, and sportive monocle. He'd show the kraut what he thought of such when he met him again. Carbuncle flipped the pages of the magazine, preparatory to tossing it in a corner when an ad caught his eye.

"Have Fun with Your Friends," it said. And there was a picture of the novelties that warmed the cockles of Carbuncle's fun-loving heart. It was about the only thing of the kind that he did not possess. His trunk was full of gewgaws such as rubber doughnuts, flexible knives, little bombs that oozed a terrible odor when smashed, artificial cigarettes, in fact, everything designed to fool the gullible. And the flyers of the Ninth Pursuit Squadron were eventually to be the human guinea pigs upon which Carbuncle experimented. Immediately the fledgling began to write a letter, for he wanted that advertised article of merchandise.

THAT afternoon, Lieutenant Pinkham found the greatest sport in the war—knocking down Drachens. It afforded an outlet for his innate propensity for kidding the rest of the world. He watched Bump Gillis pour lead into one and laughed heartily at the sight of the Boche jumping out of the basket when the flames spewed from the bag. Then he dove on another until it seemed to the other pilots that he was going right through it. The Boche jumped just as Carbuncle back-sticked and grazed the Drachen with his undercarriage. That would make the Boche mad. They would have to reel it in and put some more observers in it.

However, when he returned to the field, the Old Man convinced him in a few words that the Ninth Pursuit had little time to play, and that if Pinkham just could not keep his mind on the war, there was a place called Blois where they would help him. The pilots held an impromptu meeting near the hangars and voted that Carbuncle was a disgrace to the service and that they would have none of him. He could come and go as he pleased, but so far as they were concerned, he was in the flying business for himself. The meeting broke up with everyone voicing the hope that Carbuncle would get his Spad in front of von Kohl's guns.

Lieutenant Pinkham, however, was a hard man to ostracize. That night at mess he commanded a lot of attention.

“Ha!” he exclaimed delightedly, as he sat down next to Bump Gillis. “Gettin’ ritzy. Block sugar, huh?” And he reached two yards down the table to pluck it out of the fingers of Wilson. The pilot growled something about Carbuncle having been raised with a litter of pigs, and bit off a chew of bread savagely.

“Here you are,” said Carbuncle, skidding the sugar back again. Then he went on with his gastronomic medley. Wilson took three lumps and dropped them into his coffee. After stirring the black liquid mechanically for a few moments, he took a deep gulp.

“*Who-o-o-o-o-osh!*” The gulp came out of his mouth again in a stream, and Slim Mooney tried to dodge the deluge. He was partly successful, getting the spray on the back of his neck.

“Camphor,” yelled Wilson, and made a dive for Carbuncle Pinkham. His fingers closed around the joker’s skinny neck just as Major Garrity popped into the room.

“What the hell is going on here?” he bellowed.

“Aw, they ain’t got no sense of humor,” complained Carbuncle again. “I only—”

“You again?” barked the C.O., sinking into a chair. “You woozle! There is only one thing that stops me from nailing your pants to the ground, Pinkham, and that is that it would only prolong your life. Up in the air they may knock you off any time, and I have not given up hope. And if you think I’m fooling, then I hope I drop through the fl—”

*Crash!* With a suddenness that was uncanny, the furniture under the Old Man gave way and dropped him below the table’s horizon. Howell swore with surprise, and ran to help the commanding officer out of the undignified mess. The C.O., however, wanted no help. He brushed the flight leader’s helping hand aside with a spine-tingling oath and bounded to his feet.

“Pinkham,” he roared, “if I was sure you pulled that one, I’d take you out and nail you to a tree! Funny, the legs of this chair were all right this noon. Did anybody here see him around today?”

The flyers begrudgingly admitted that they had not. And once more Lieutenant Pinkham escaped a slow, painful death.

TWO hours later, the jester was in the hangars, looking for paint. Two colors were necessary, he

informed the groundmen blandly. He wanted to paint a picture. And he did. The masterpiece did not come to the notice of the other pilots until the following morning. It was the answer to wondering men as to what the newcomer would do next. It was plenty. With his limited artistic talents, Carbuncle had painted an elongated dog on the side of his Spad with black paint. It stretched the length of the fuselage, the head beginning just under the pit and the tip of the dog’s caboose wagging against the tail fins. There was a green blanket on the dog, bearing a crude imitation of the insignia of Baron von Kohl’s ship. Where the dachshund’s muzzle should have been, there was an attempt at a caricature of the haughty Prussian ace’s nose.

Lieutenant Pinkham’s homely face beamed as the Old Man trotted across the tarmac to make a close inspection. Pilots marvelled at the audacity of the thing. If it had been some other member of the squadron, one who could have backed it up, well, it would not seem so—

“Congratulations!” said the C.O. to Carbuncle, and he seemed to mean it. “You’ve invented a new and sure way to commit suicide.” And the words out, he went over and slapped the flyer heartily on the back. Carbuncle grinned embarrassedly and shrugged his shoulders.

“I want to kid the big kraut,” he said. “I’ll bet he gits so mad, he’ll go into a spin. He thinks everybody is scairt of him. But he don’t know the Pinkhams.”

There was a trace of pity in the eyes of Captain Howell and his flight as they looked first at the painted Spad, then at Carbuncle. Yet the soft expression on their faces was not without a savage glee. Something told them that Lieutenant Pinkham would hand out no more rubber cigars.

Soon Howell was barking orders. Pilots ran to the ships and climbed in. Ten minutes later, von Kohl’s circus jumped them ten thousand feet above the Meuse. Carbuncle Pinkham ignored a Jerry that piqued at him from the port side, and swept the battle area for von Kohl’s red and green Tripe. He caught a glimpse of it worrying the tail of a Spad; then flashing shapes blotted it out. Bullets biting through his superstructure suddenly convinced the Pinkham hopeful that he would have to do a little fighting himself if he wanted to give von Kohl a treat.

More by good fortune than skill, he tipped over a Jerry ship with a wild burst as he zigzagged his way through the miasma of ships to the fringe of battle

where von Kohl always hovered, waiting to dart in and strike with the speed and venom of a cobra. Another Boche pounded down on Carbuncle. Prop to prop they were, but the Yank dig not swerve. A hail of lead, and the triplane pointed its nose toward the ceiling like a frightened quail.

At this higher strata, Carbuncle's search for von Kohl was rewarded. The Prussian had just plunged down on a Spad when he saw this new enemy coming in. The painting on the side of the American ship fairly shrieked at him through space. Von Kohl forgot the Spad below. His eyes bulged beneath his goggles, and an angry flow of blood welled to his head as he wrenched his triplane about to see if his vision had been playing tricks with him. It had not. The pilot of the Spad now flying parallel with the Fokker was gesticulating and pointing down to the outrageous picture painted on his ship. And then von Kohl's lips let loose a stream of round, lusty, Teuton oaths. Carbuncle placed his gloved thumb to his nose and waggled the fingers of his hand derisively at von Kohl.

Bordering on a state of apoplexy, the proud baron forgot the war, forgot everything but the terrible insult to a long line of von Kohls. His goat broke free and stepped into space, and with it nearly went the precious Prussian's life. A Spad pounded down upon him and sent burst after burst into the red and green Tripe that staggered sickeningly in its stride, and then pointed its nose toward the ground. In a long glide, von Kohl aimed his ship toward his lines, as the rest of his circus fought desperately to cover his retreat. Deprived of their leader, not knowing whether he was dead or alive, the Jerry flight lost the taste for battle and left that corner of the sky to the Spads.

Carbuncle pinkham was so weak with mirth when the flight returned that he nearly crashed on landing. Captain Howell almost fell from his ship in his eagerness to get to the Old Man and tell him that they had sent von Kohl down with a crippled ship, that most likely he was already being carried to a hospital. The C.O. received the hysterical report and jumped up and down like a kid on Christmas morning.

"Don't fergit," grinned Lieutenant Pinkham loftily, "that it was a double play, major. Pinkham to Howell. Von Kohl is out fer the day."

"Yeah?" sneered the flight leader. "I bet your guns are cold. If von Kohl is down, I get the credit. Get over to your hut an' play with your trinkets, an' don't shoot yourself with a water pistol!"

If the Old Man could have peeked in through the

little window of a Jerry staffel near Montmeay an hour later, he would have lost his jubilant spirits. Von Kohl could not have crashed. In the flesh and still sputtering angrily, he walked up and down in front of his commanding officer like a mongoose tiring out a snake.

"Do you hear, Rheindorff?" von Kohl raged. "The *verdammt* American insults me! He calls me a dog, Rheindorff, with a funny nose. Ar-r-rugh! Me—the great von Kohl. Baron von Kohl he twiddled his fingers at, and I get enraged and I almost die. *Gott!* My ancestors turn over in their graves!" And the boiling flying Uhlan paused to get a full breath.

"I shall avenge my honor, Rheindorff," he burst out again, wagging an emphatic digit in front of the surprised Junker's face. "Nothing else will matter. I shall avenge the *schweinhunds* insults. I shall challenge him to mortal combat. I shall play with him like the cat plays with the mouse, and then I shall shoot him down like the dog he calls me. Ar-r-rugh! A ship will be sent out over the lines tonight and drop a message. I shall say—"

"Control yourself, Baron," interrupted the staffel commander. "It is not safe for one of your circus to go to an enemy drome. It will be dropped in a heavy sack over the American lines. It will get to your Yankee friend."

"I am satisfied," stormed von Kohl. "In it I shall say, 'The swine who calls me dog will meet me over Bois de Sec one week from today, just after midday, if he is not too much of a coward.' And I will kill him, Rheindorff, mind you," added the furious Prussian ace.

"Yes, you mentioned that before Baron," answered the staffel commander dryly. "You will kill the *verdammt* American. Why make such a fuss? It will not be the first one."

"*Bah!*" spat von Kohl, and stamped out onto the tarmac.

The written challenge was dropped over the lines. An infantryman found it and immediately handed it over to the divisional headquarters. By word of mouth, the vitriolic words of von Kohl swept the sector until it reached the drome of the Ninth Pursuit. The Old Man demanded that the challenge be forwarded at all speed, and thus Lieutenant Pinkham was acquainted with the fact that his duty lay in upholding the honor of the Air Force by accepting von Kohl's Challenge.

"Yeah?" grinned Carbuncle. "I ain't crazy. An' my papa and mama ain't cuttin' out paper dolls. An' you



guys know the kraut can't be licked. Is it my fault that Captain Howell's aim was bad?"

"You mean," demanded the Old Man, "that you're crawling out? You're going to let the Jerries think that there's a coward in the squadron?"

"Why? Will they git mad an' stop playin' with us?" asked Carbuncle. "Maybe one of you other guys would like to fight a duel with him?"

"It's your funeral, Pinkham!" snapped Bump Gillis.

"Which Is why I don't want to fight him," replied Carbuncle with a chuckle. "I ain't ready to die yet. I ain't fit."

"You'll meet von Kohl or we'll tar an' feather you an' throw you out of the squadron," barked the C.O. "Think of a trick that'll get you out of that one!"

Lieutenant Pinkham inhaled his cigarette thoughtfully, grinned like an ape again and said, "Tell the kraut that if he'll fight me in the air with bow an' arrera. I'll consider it." And, saluting smartly, he walked out of Wings. The Old Man did not have the strength to call him back. He tottered shakily on his feet and fell into a chair. His big fists beat a tattoo on the table in front of him as he strove heroically to fight back his urge to start shooting at Lieutenant Pinkham.

SOON pilots walked toward their huts, muttering indignantly. But the sanctuary of their cubicles at the moment they arrived was not for them. Each one stepped to his threshold, clapped a hand over his nose and ran back into the open air. Every hut smelled as if something had crawled in it weeks back and had died. Lieutenant Pinkham barricaded his hut and waited. His vigil was a short one. *En masse*, the pilots rushed his stronghold, and demanded that he open the door and get skinned.

"Don't fergit, fellers," shouted the joker from within, "that if yuh do that, the honor of the squadron will be ruined."

And then a voice answered, a voice that was unmistakable. "Pinkham," it roared, "day after tomorrow you go out to meet von Kohl or you pack up and go to Blois! Understand? You're grounded until then and that's final!"

"Yessir!" came the answer from within.

A disgusted snort, and the Old Man walked away. Exultant murmurings came from the pilots and seeped through the door to Carbuncle's ears. "Go ahead an' gloat, you bunch of sour faces!" he shouted. "I bet you laugh on the other side of your faces when I lick that kraut."

A mocking mirthful chorus greeted his sally, and Carbuncle grinned ruefully as he began to rummage in his trunk of tricks. Something would have to be done.

Orders were buzzed to the Allied dromes in the sector that the Prussian's famous red and green ship should not be molested over Bois de Sec on the day specified for the great air duel between the houses of Pinkham and von Kohl. A sky truce would be recognized between the hours of twelve and one on that memorable day. G.H.Q., ignorant of the status of Phineas Pinkham, sent a message to the flyer with well wishes for a splendid victory. Squadron Nine got a pain in the side from laughing, and Carbuncle, the lamb being groomed for the slaughter, felt an ominous chill at the soles of his feet. The die was cast.

The night before the battle, Carbuncle received a package from the novelty house, and its arrival buoyed up his spirits to a surprising degree. An hour later, he called on the Old Man and expressed a desire to remember his commanding officer in his will which was being drawn up at that moment.

"Why, that's nice of you, Pinkham," said the C.O. "What are you going to leave me?"

"I got a pipe here," said Carbuncle, "that my old man gave to me. Maybe if yuh'd smoke it, why, I'd be tickled. Yuh see, we ain't been very good friends, an' I'd like yuh to have it."

"I certainly will be glad to take it Pinkham," comforted the Old Man. "Those who are about to die," he mused, "should be given every consideration. I'll smoke it tonight."

"Thanks," said Carbuncle, and went out Major Garrity looked the gift horse in the mouth and examined it carefully. He was not the one to forget Carbuncle's playful disposition.

Some time later, however, the Old Man came running out of Wings with his eyebrows singed and one big hand shaking violently as if he were trying to shake loose something that was stuck to it Carbuncle's gift pipe had been made largely of celluloid. The C.O. glared balefully toward the pilots' quarters, and then realized that the person of Phineas Pinkham could not be violated. He was a condemned man. Deriving some comfort out of this thought the Old Man blew his breath on his burned fingers and sought medical attention.

THE night passed quickly. To Carbuncle it flew. And the morning flew away much faster. The zero hour was at hand. Near Lieutenant Pinkham's Spad a great wreath was propped on the ground, one made of

pine boughs and raspberry bushes. Standing around this, the pilots of the Ninth Pursuit waited for the appearance of their champion. The Old Man was there, one hand bandaged up, as master of ceremonies. Subsequently came Lieutenant Phineas Carbuncle Pinkham, with a burlap sack in one hand and his helmet in the other. His freckled face split wide open once more as he looked at the wreath.

“Now ain’t that touchin’?” he remarked as he threw the sack into the pit. “Well, olive oil, and all that kind of hooley,” he said, and climbed in after it.

The Old Man growled to hide a strange feeling of emotion and reached a hand up to Pinkham. “Good luck,” he said, “and thanks for the pipe.”

“Don’t mention it,” grinned the flyer, and gunned his ship.

“There goes von Kohl’s seventieth *descendu*,” said Bump Gillis, and walked to his Spad. The Old Man had arranged for an escort of three ships to accompany their entry in the great air duel over the lines.

Twelve thousand feet over Bois de See, Baron von Kohl circled his red and green triplane and warmed his Spandaus. Hovering near were his seconds, three Fokkers of his circus. The German swore savagely as he circled. He was getting impatient. Then out of the haze to the southeast came four black specks. The Yanks. Von Kohl’s lips twisted into a grim smirk, and he tripped his Spandaus again. The smircher of his family escutcheon would soon be a cinder.

Carbuncle Pinkham felt strangely calm as he drilled his Spad toward the scourge of the skies. The three ships just behind him suddenly zoomed toward the clouds, where they would take their places in ringside seats. Von Kohl snarled, knifed out of his wide circle and drilled toward his enemy. One hundred yards now. Seventy-five. Fifty—von Kohl squeezed the triggers. The great duel was on.

History was in the making.

Carbuncle sideslipped away from the hail of lead and threw one arm over the side of his pit, pointing out the maddening insignia to von Kohl. The German, enraged, threw his triplane with a savage wrench skyward, then twisted down on Carbuncle and began to chase him. It seemed that the American was always being chased in the sky. Witnessing pilots tried to look away. Von Kohl was on the Spad’s tail, and his Spandaus never missed. However, the German withheld his death blow. He would play with this Yankee like the cat plays with the mouse. The *verdammt* American was a horrible flyer. He would

torture him by prolonging the *schweinhund*’s mental agony. Then—

Carbuncle glanced desperately back as von Kohl’s triplane rode hard on his tail. The German’s prop was hardly twenty-five yards behind him. Now or never. The Yank’s hand reached down and picked up something that looked like a two-pound bag of sugar.

Holding it up to his teeth, Carbuncle bit at the string until it loosened. Just as a burst from the Spandaus scorched through his wires, he heaved the object with all his strength over his shoulder.

If Lieutenant Pinkham had figured it all out scientifically, it could not have worked with more success. Just in front of von Kohl’s beak, the wind whipped the bag open, and the triplane’s prop sucked in great gobs of black dust. The Prussian was seized with a shock of surprise as he saw the object shoot away from the Spad. His grip on the Spandau trips relaxed. A million little devils were sticking hot tines in the nostrils of his big nose, in his mouth and down his throat. Blindly he sent burst after burst from his guns, as he realized that he had been tricked. But the Spad was no longer there.

A PAROXYSM of coughing and sneezing shook the German in his pit and jolted his hand from the stick. Almost incessantly, his fouled nostrils protested with violent sneezes and brought a lachrymose flood from the eyes under his goggles. The bonfire burned in his mouth and trailed down his esophagus. Von Kohl tore off his goggles with a frantic gesture, and brushed away the water that blinded his vision.

The earth seemed to be spinning around in a dizzy whirl, and desperately his hand groped for the stick. The stunned pilots of the Fokker and Spad sky gallery watched the triplane come out of its spin not more than a thousand feet from the ground, and then drop its nose again toward the earth. Von Kohl glided downward, his face dripping tears and red with convulsive sneezing. Lieutenant Phineas Pinkham flew alongside, waving an arm hysterically to his fellows and laughing like a hyena. They could not hear him, but he was yelling.

“Fooled the kraut that time, huh?”

Beside himself with rage and chagrin, von Kohl stared through his red, watery orbs at the ground below, in search of a landing field. Little pitchforks still bit into his respiratory system as he cut the switch of his Mercedes and smacked a bumpy stretch of ground with a splintering crash. His head whacked against the

dashboard and stopped his sneezing abruptly. A barrel of black paint poured down upon him. Von Kohl recovered consciousness quickly and the first thing his tortured eyes rested upon was the insulting picture of a dog on the side of the Spad resting drunkenly a few yards away, its undercarriage broken. Swearing like a mule skinner, von Kohl reached for his gun, but a heavy body catapulted down upon him and held him fast.

“Now, behave, kraut,” hissed a voice in his ear, “or I’ll have to conk you one. Get up!”

Von Kohl jumped angrily to his feet, funny little animal noises coming from his dry burning throat. He stared into the muzzle of a blue-black object in his conqueror’s hand, and became resigned to his fate. Overhead, the Spads were crowding out of the sky the Fokkers that had shown signs of diving to their leader’s aid. Carbuncle Pinkham looked up, grinned, and shoved his weapon into von Kohl’s ribs.

“Ooscra!” ordered the Yank. “We got a long hike to where we kin git transportation back to the drome, so save your breath.” And whistling a tune, Lieutenant Pinkham marched the scourge of the skies across the field and into a wooded land.

Late that afternoon, a truck rumbled onto the

drome of the Ninth Pursuit, and at the feet of a group of yelling, dancing pilots, Baron Manfred Schlossen von Kohl was unloaded by Lieutenant Pinkham, who jumped down behind him, gun still clutched in his hand. With a low bow, Carbuncle greeted the incredulous, stunned C.O. The returning Spads had brought him the news of the air duel, but no one had been able to convince him of the slightest grain of truth in it.

“I bring you that terrible German ace, Baron von Kohl,” announced Carbuncle. Whereupon he tossed the weapon he held to the tarmac. There was no dull thud as it hit. Pop-eyed flyers saw it land, then bounce crazily several times before it lay still. A horrible roar burst from von Kohl, and with a mighty leap he tried to get at the maddening, taunting, grinning man who had brought him in. The gun was made of rubber!

Captain Howell and Bump Gillis dragged von Kohl down and sat on his quivering frame.

“Sure,” laughed Carbuncle. “I lost mine some place, an’ I fergot the kraut’s gun. Didn’t I fool ’im with that one, though? Oney cost me seventy-fi cents an’—Haw! Haw! Haw!”

And for the first time. Squadron Nine cooperated with Lieutenant Phineas Pinkham to a man.