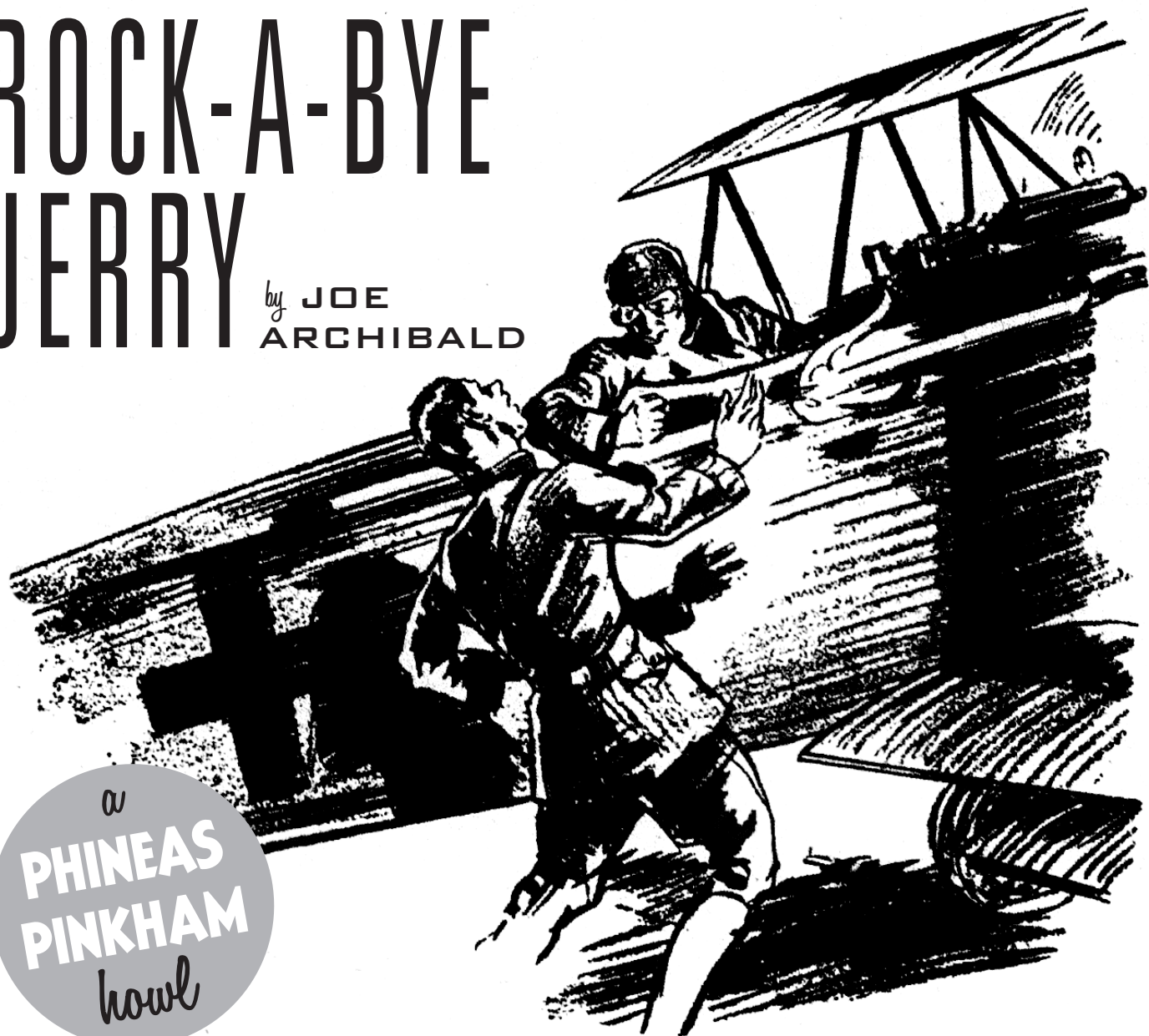


# ROCK-A-BYE JERRY

by JOE  
ARCHIBALD



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PHINEAS  
PINKHAM  
howl

*The Jerries thought themselves lucky, when Lieutenant Phineas "Carbuncle" Pinkham crashed within their lines. But that was before they were acquainted with this ace of practical jokers. Poor Fritz!*

**S**ANGUINARY CONFLICT with Flying Fritz at an end for another day, Major Rufus Garrity's brood of fighting cocks, Ninth Pursuit Squadron, Yankee air force outside of Bar-le-Duc, preened their ruffled feathers and settled down to an evening of peace and quiet, or what corresponds to such in a nest of war birds who never had agreed on anything and never would.

While the usual arguments were waxing torrid among the pilots, Major Garrity, the big rooster himself, stood near the big fireplace conversing with Captain Howell, leader of A flight. No one seemed

inclined to strain an ear for a word which would betray the gist of the pow-wow. They all knew that it could only be a load of grief, and were content to remain blissfully ignorant.

Abruptly the door opened and a little gust of wind blew in. Right behind it came Lieutenant Phineas "Carbuncle" Pinkham, the wrong answer to any C.O.'s prayer. There was a big smile on his face and a bundle of papers under his arm. As he taxied toward a promising roost in one corner of the big room, jaundiced eyes followed his course.

Where Phineas was, trouble remained not far

behind. It could be expected in any shape or form. If a twenty-dollar gold piece at this moment had fallen out of the flyer's pocket and rolled to the feet of a pilot to whom Phineas owed a month's pay, it would have been left untouched. Lieutenant Pinkham was just like that. His greatest joy in life was to hook the gullible with every conceivable thing that was not what it seemed to be.

At present, one "Bump" Gillis, who had been unfortunate enough to draw Phineas as a hutmate, was still striving to banish the taste of soup from his palate, where it had been established by a harmless-looking sweetmeat commonly known as the marshmallow. There was anything but kindly concern for the welfare of Mr. Pinkham on this flyer's face as he watched the newcomer sink into a chair. One pilot suddenly sniffed at the air. Another noticed the action and followed suit. It became contagious. Even the Old Man paused in his peroration and exercised his nostrils. He glowered over at Pinkham. Unmistakably there was an alien odor permeating the air of the room. The flyer looked up and grinned.

"Don't git scairt," he shot at the pilots. "That's only citronella. The muskeeters is thick outside." He returned to his reading.

Bump Gillis swore under his breath and kept a watchful eye on the apparently innocent Phineas. The Old Man's voice rumbled on.

"And the Boche," he was saying, "are establishing an ammo dump over between Metz and Verdun. The Intelligence know it for a fact. Looks like a big drive is in the making, Howell. Mark my words, the brass hats will be on our necks soon. I don't believe in crossing bridges before I get to 'em, but I can see what's comin' with half an eye. The G.H.Q.'ers will want that blown off the map, understand? We've got to anticipate it. We've got to watch ourselves. Take no unnecessary risks with ships and men. I believe that preparedness is half—"

Phineas glanced over his shoulder, yawned and fumbled at his heap of reading matter. His face, turned away from the dim light shed by the lamp, wore a cryptic smile, albeit there was not the least provocation for levity within the four walls.

"It'll be the toughest job the Air Force has had to face yet," the C.O. went on. "The D.H.4s will get the job. We've made a name for ourselves lately against Manheim's Tripes. Been givin' 'em merry hell, eh? Wing will say, 'There's the outfit to escort the bombing crates. Always get through!' Right, Howell?"

"Sure," grinned the flight leader. "But why worry? It hasn't happened yet, an' anyway, maybe they'll send over one ship or two. Combat ships with a coupla bombs. More chance to get through—"

"That used to be a new idea, Howell," answered the Old Man, "but it won't work any more. Power's the thing. Men and ships. Force! Numbers!" The Old Man grimaced and shoved a hand inside his tunic. He went the gesture made famous by Napoleon one better by scratching prodigiously. Phineas glanced at his C.O., then dipped his nose lower into his magazine. Over in one corner of the room a pilot swore fitfully and fidgeted in his seat.

"Be a great job for the outfit that pulls it," spoke the major again. "Medals for some. Curtains for other buzzards. Don't know as I care to have this bunch get the assignment. Manheim's staffel will bear the brunt of protecting—damn!" Again the Old Man's fingers groped under his tunic, and seemed very serious about checking a most unpleasant disturbance around his fuselage. "Must be gettin' hives, Howell," he growled. "Nerves, maybe. Well, as I was sayin'—"

An irritable burst shot from Bump Gillis' lips. Phineas looked over his shoulder and saw his hutmate turn into something resembling a cruller as he sought to get a whole arm into his tunic at his back. Two other flyers were squirming strangely. In fact, the Ninth Pursuit seemed to have suddenly been smitten with the spirit of St. Vitus. Phineas Pinkham yawned, stretched himself and got up from his chair. With a nonchalance that was completely disarming, he walked to the door, opened it and went out into the darkness.

"You'll soon see that I'm right, Howell," persisted the C.O. "I can read those brass hats like a book. The last time they blew in here—*cripes!*" A ludicrous mask fell over his face as his hands this time flew to the small of his back. Backing close to the stone side of the fireplace, he vigorously rubbed that portion of his harassed anatomy against it.

Suddenly Howell himself uttered a surprised squeak and dug into the region of his portside floating rib with a big thumb. The Old Man looked at him strangely. Then his eyes swept over the agitated, cursing occupants of the big room and he began to see the light. His jaw became as hard as an anvil. The hand that was not busy exploring his empennage balled into a pound and a half of homicide.

"Pinkham!" he exploded. "The fishfaced woozle! Not here, huh? Somebody bring 'im in! I—"

THE door opened slowly. The patriot of the Boonetown, Iowa, Pinkhams entered as if nothing in the world were amiss, even though his face had been pressed against the glass outside for the preceding ten minutes. Bump Gillis let out a yelp and leaped at Phineas.

“Another smart joke, ya bum!” he accused. “Been out huntin’ cooties, huh? For two bits I’d pop ya one on the—”

“I’ll attend to this, Gillis!” The C.O. thrust the flyer aside and shoved his chin close to Phineas’ nose. “Look here, you—you—hell!” The Old Man made a brief attempt at an Oriental dance as the disturbers beneath his tunic attacked in formation. Having discouraged them for the moment, he whirled on Phineas once more. The flyer was just a little too late in getting the grin off his freckled features.

“Laughin’, eh?” roared the major. “Well, you won’t feel like it when I get through with you! I’m at the end of my rope with you, Pinkham. Goin’ to turn you over to these other men and let them—”

“Look!” blurted Bump Gillis angrily and triumphantly as he slid in close. He held up a hand in front of the C.O.’s face. Between the thumb and forefinger he held a prisoner, an insect of the genus *pulex*, remarkable for its agility and irritating bite. Not that the flyers of the Ninth Pursuit knew it as such. They had a more ugly name for the captured winged mite. For several seconds they stared at the specimen, angry rumblings manifesting themselves in the many throats. Phineas himself broke the ominous silence.

“Huh,” he commented, “that ain’t no cootie. I’ve seen ’em. That’s—”

“Yeah,” barked the Old Man, unbuttoning his tunic in haste. “Then you know all about it, eh, Pinkham? Now I’ll give you just one minute to—”

“Me?” replied the flyer with a hurt look upon his face, “Ya blame me fer everythin’. If a Gotha come over right now an’ laid an egg, ya’d say I was flyin’ it. I don’t know nothin’ except—”

“What?”

“Well, I put this citronella on me tonight when I saw Gillis here scratchin’ hisself in the hut. I told ’im more’n once to stop playin’ with them Frog dogs. I bet you fellers all caught them things from him,” Phineas orated.

“You big bum!” yelled Bump. “Ya lousy—”

“Not me,” grinned Phineas. “You!”

Bump Gillis swore and swung from his insteps. The major threw himself forward to stop the blow from

landing on Phineas Pinkham—and succeeded. A few seconds later he was pulled to his feet. One of his ears was the color of a beet and felt as if a bon-fire were burning inside of it. A swarm of bees was buzzing inside his head. Bump Gillis was already on his way to his hut, wondering whether Blois were as bad as it was painted.

Phineas Pinkham, petrified, waited for the avalanche of Garrity wrath. The Old Man shook his head like an angry bull, dislodged the cobwebs in his brain and spun on his heels to confront the cause of it all. Phineas choked and tried to speak to this sputtering volcano, which seemed on the point of exploding right in his face.

“Shut up, Pinkham!” bellowed the C.O. “No matter what you say, you’re a liar. If I ever find out that you know Anything about this flea circus,” I’ll have your hide and use it for a wind sock. How you ever escaped from an asylum and got into the Air Force is beyond me. You—you crazy ape! I’ll start enjoying this *guerre* when a Kraut wipes you off the records. I haven’t got a thing on you for this little trick, have I Pinkham? No! I—” The Old Man swore and dug splayed fingers into his fuselage. Wrathfully he ripped off his tunic and threw it savagely to a chair. “But when I do,” he resumed with a roar, “I’ll—I’ll—”

“But I said I didn’t know nothin’ about it, sir,” reiterated Phineas. “Gillis never could take no joke. He’s—”

“Shut up!” growled the Old Man. “And git out of here before I break a lamp over your skull. And,” he shot at the group of pilots toward the door, “if Pinkham is found in the morning unfit for flying, there will be no investigation.” So saying, he snatched up his coat and stamped into his private cubicle.

OUTSIDE, on the tarmac, Lieutenant Pinkham grinned, shot a glance over his shoulder and quickened his pace. However, he had nothing to fear from his fellows at the moment. Their minds harbored a kindred purpose—to rid their persons of pestiferous supercargo. Phineas opened the door of his Nissen cautiously and peered within.

Sitting in the nude on his cot, his eyes blazing with wrath, Bump Gillis was meticulously examining his discarded clothes. Suddenly he made a lunge at something, grunted with savage glee as he held his captive up for inspection. It died a violent death just as Phineas opened the door wide and stepped inside.

“Hello, Bump!” he greeted.

The man on the cot seemed on the verge of springing at his hutmate. Changing his mind, however, he was content to regard Phineas with utter distaste.

"Ya ain't sore, Bump, are ya?" went on Phineas, with a tormenting grin.

"Sore, ya half-wit!" yelled Lieutenant Gillis. "You're my pal, ain't ya?"

"Sure, Bump," answered Phineas. "That's the stuff! You sure socked the ol' turtle, didn't ya? Haw-w-w-w!"

"Do me a favor tomorrer, Carbuncle," rasped Gillis. "If a Boche gits ya lined up with his guns, fergit to duck, will ya? I'm li'ble to be shot for hittin' a superior orficer. I'm all over bites an' the gang thinks I got fleas. A nice pal, ya big bum!"

"No sense of humor," remarked Phineas indignantly and prepared for bed.

Dawn came as dawns do. A flight tumbled out of cosy bunks, filled their stomachs with steaming hot coffee, yanked down their goggles and walked out to the waiting Spads. Phineas Pinkham was the recipient of many baleful glances and scathing remarks as he shuffled across the mist-drenched tarmac.

"I'm through riskin' my neck gitting him out of tight places, the flap-eared baboon!"

"Yeah, me too," agreed another with a growl. "I'm for bumpin' him off on the way over."

"Thinks this *guerre* is a vaudeville show."

"Him an' his lousy tricks, huh! If I was sure he brought them bugs in—"

"Soreheads!" commented Phineas, his omnipresent grin still with him, nothing daunted by the uncomplimentary bursts from his companions. Let them go jump in the canal. He could take care of himself. Anyway, that card reader in Bar-Le-Duc had told him he was going to die with his shoes off. Reassured by the remembrance, Phineas climbed into his shaking machine and jazzed the Hisso. Howell glanced up and down the line and gunned his ship away. Carbuncle made a derisive gesture toward Bump Gillis as he jammed in the throttle. His hutmate completely ignored him.

The fighting cocks lifted their wings, their defiant crow drowning out the incessant rumble of big guns. High in the rapidly brightening welkin they soon skimmed over the palpitating front lines on the hunt for Krauts. The music of exploding Archie signaled for the first act of the show. *Blam! Blam! Blam!* The crashing of great cymbals. It reminded Phineas of Doolittle Brothers' orchestra back in Boonetown. They made a lot of noise, but it didn't mean anything.

Playing safe, Captain Howell climbed a bit higher. It was a good move because Manheim, the bitter foe of the Ninth Pursuit, was coming down with a dozen Tripes. There is little waiting for things to happen upstairs. Distance is gobbled up in the wink of an eye. Before Phineas Carbuncle Pinkham could get organized, a Jerry took a quick bite out of his' Spad, whirled away, and tore around to make it a regular dinner.

IF A war correspondent could have followed every maneuver of Pinkham's ship in the hectic dogfight which followed, and had seen fit to call it a sample of Yankee fighting ability, he very likely would have sent a hasty dispatch to the non-combatants across the pond with the opinion that the Boche would convert the Garden of the Tuileries into a beer garden within two months.

If an aerial grandstand had been possible, the spectators would have marvelled at how consistently Phineas seemed to get in front of a ship splashed with a Maltese Cross. They would have wondered whether or not his guns were loaded with blanks and why he continued to stay aloft with a ship that looked like a nutmeg grater.

To make a long story short, Manheim's Tripes took the decision on points and were content to run home when some tiny specks appeared in the sky toward Paris. It was well for the Yanks. Minus one Spad, they went back to tell it to the Old Man. The riddled Spad carrying Phineas was still wobbling overhead when the rest of the flight were dragging themselves out of the pits. In a group they stood puffing cigarettes and watching. Carbuncle's landings were always something to gaze upon.

"Y'know," declared the C.O. as he reached his pilots, "if Pinkham should jump out now, that Spad would be able to make a decent landing by itself."

"Somethin' tells me he got tagged," said Bump Gillis with no little concern. "I never saw a guy get more lead thrown at him than he got today. Whoops! He almost turned upside down. Hope the bum is all right—"

"Couldn't kill him," grunted the major. "Don't see but what he is getting down as well as usual." The Old Man, however, signaled to the groundhog who was standing by the crash siren. Across the tarmac the crew of the meat wagon were grinding cigarette stubs under their heels. They climbed aboard the grim chariot just as Phineas' bus hit the ground, bounced high into the air, came down, bounced again. It stayed put at the

end of the fourth leap, one wheel on the bias. Willing hands pulled Phineas from his Spad. Faces whitened as a glimpse was caught of the gory features turned their way. As they eased him to the tarmac, the corner of his mouth let out a thin red trickle.

"Hey, Carbuncle," murmured Bump thickly, "did the dirty bums git you?"

"Well, I don't feel so good," answered Phineas weakly.

"Hell!" The word fell from the C.O. as the meat wagon rumbled up.

"He was a good guy," declared Howell and turned his head away. Belated eulogies came from the other pilots and seeped into the ears of Lieutenant Pinkham. A medico reached down and tore off his helmet.

"Hey, be careful!" snapped Bump. "That guy's got feelin's."

If the medico heard him, he made no sign. With narrowing orbs he stared closely at Lieutenant Pinkham's smeared face. Snapping out an impatient curse, he looked up at the C.O. Bump Gillis' mouth gaped open.

"Major," said the medico as he rose to his feet, "this man ain't hurt—but somebody ought to kill him!" He walked away, muttering. A rueful grin on his mouth, Lieutenant Pinkham jumped nimbly to his undercarriage.

"Sure," he said, edging away, "I jus' wanted to see if Bump was still mad at me. That stuff on my face is only—"

"Ya crack-brained bum!" exploded Gillis. "Ya—"

The Old Man seemed to swell like a puff adder. He made as if to leap at Phineas, checked himself and struggled to speak. It was futile. Making funny little noises in his throat, the major turned to stamp toward Wings.

"I knew ya wasn't really sore," grinned Carbuncle at his purple-faced hutmate, "I knew ya—"

"I don't know ya," yelled Bump. "Never saw ya before!" He, too, walked away with murder in his heart.

THAT afternoon the irate C.O.'s ruminations anent a fit disposition of one Lieutenant Pinkham were rudely interrupted by the buzzing of his phone. The message that came over the wires banished all thoughts of his playful flyer. Just as he had expected, the Ninth Pursuit was to escort a flight of bombers over the Jerry-lines to take a poke at the ammo dump near Metz. Immediately he summoned Howell to his presence.

"Told you it was coming our way," was the major's

greeting as the ace of the squadron entered. "Comes off tomorrow, an' five chances to one it'll be a rum go. That dump is at railhead in the sector covered by Manheim's *Jagdstaffel*. No doubt they expect us to come over, but I hardly think they'll look for us so soon. Once Boche observation posts spot us coming over, they'll buzz the Tripes. Looks like numbers will have to do the trick. Six D.H.4s are going over, and two flights of Spads. You and Wilkins lead 'em over. Rendezvous just before dusk, five thousand feet over Commercy."

"Okay," said Howell, "but I think Wing is making a mistake. All those ships—"

"Can't question orders, Howell," growled the C.O., "I'd do it differently if I were running things. Remember, we'll need every man and every ship, and patrols tomorrow will take damned few chances. Understand?"

"Yessir!" The orders-were in. Jaws tight, Howell left the Presence.

As the day was drawing to a close, and just as two Spads, which had been out worrying Drachens to the ground, nosed in to the field, a big car rumbled up to stop in front of the big farmhouse. Out of it stepped a headquarters johnny and a fiery-eyed individual whose little goatee seemed to stick out at right angles from his face. As he followed the brass hat into the squadron headquarters, it was apparent that he was much perturbed about something.

Never missing a bet, Lieutenant Pinkham watched the proceedings from A flight's hangar for a brief moment, then made haste toward his hut with a worried expression on his face. He was kneeling beside his trunk a few moments later when the voice of an orderly sounded behind him. Lieutenant Pinkham was wanted immediately in Wings.

Perhaps during his varied and turbulent career the Old Man had received many shocks. But if he had, they must have been mild surprises as compared to the one he received when Phineas appeared in answer to his summons. It was Pinkham, yet it wasn't.

Choking back a startled utterance in the nick of time, the major valiantly strove to appear as if nothing were amiss. A bandage was wrapped around the lieutenant's head, partially covering the big ears. Above a mouthful of buck teeth, profusely studded with gold, was a blond mustache. Clearing his throat noisily in an attempt to gather his addled wits. Major Garrity turned to the little man standing near the brass hat.

"Is this the man, *M'sieu* Couteau?" he asked. "Can you identify him as—"

The Frenchman gestured despairingly after one look at Lieutenant Pinkham. He clamped his hands to his head, then raised them toward the ceiling, where they beat at the air like bats' wings.

"Ze soldat ees not here. We go!" he chattered to the brass hat. "*Sacri! Mais* I find heem, *oui!* Eef it will take up to Lafayette, he comes back. *Oui!*" Snatching up his hat, he rammed it sideways over his ears and clattered out of the room.

"Sorry to bother you, major," apologized the brass hat, "but you see we can't tolerate this cheating of the French. Glad it was not one of your men. Well, good luck!" The C.O. mumbled in reply, and tried not to look at Phineas until the ear outside was well beyond the limits of the drome. The silence inside the four walls of Wings was harder to bear than the salvo of a battery of French 75s. If a feather had dropped on the floor, Phineas would have screamed. The sound of the brass hat's car

"All right!" snapped the Old Man. "Take off the disguise now, Pinkham!"

"Y-yeah!" grinned Phineas. "Ha! Ha! Sure fooled the Frog. He didn't know—"

"So you bought a flea circus for fifty francs over in town and paid for it with stage money, eh, Pinkham? Said you didn't know nothin' about those fleas, eh? Knew you were a damned liar. You—you—that's a serious offense—cheating the civilians. Don't know why I didn't turn you over to the brass hat!"

"Well," began Phineas, "if the Frog was dumb enough an'—er—well, no fleas ain't worth fifty francs. I—"

"There's only one thing that stops me from breaking you, Pinkham!" exploded the C.O. "That's the job we've got to do tomorrow night. It's one way to get rid of you. A lot of these flyers won't come back. If I didn't need even imitation men like you, I'd have you out of the service in twenty-four hours. Anyway, I'm cancelling that leave you're supposed to get in two weeks. Now, get out of here! Fleas! Hell!"

PHINEAS lost no time in making his exit, thanking his stars for getting off so easily. If he had sneaked back and peeked in at the Old Man, he would have seen that grizzled old warrior treating himself to a row of chuckles. He would have been forced to take back a lot of mean things he had said about an old moss-backed buzzard who had no sense of humor.

Once in his cramped quarters, Phineas devoted the remainder of the day to making a diagnosis of

the dangerous trip to Jerry territory and wondering whether or not there was an outlet somewhere in the scheme of things for his own inimitable talents. But as he gunned his mental engine, nothing came out of the exhaust but a whispering voice reminding him that there was only one thing to do on the occasion of the visit to the Jerry back porch, and that was to bring himself back in a condition that was not beyond repair. It was sound advice. Phineas decided to take it and retired for the night.

Manheim's circus was out for trouble as usual the next morning. B flight's leader, Williams, spotted them through a rift in a fleecy ceiling, saw that Jerry outnumbered his Spads almost two to one, so followed the Old Man's instructions and went back to the roost. Manheim's pilots laughed, and their helmets tightened on their swelling craniums as they went in search of other prey.

It was well that they could not see the tarmac of the Ninth Pursuit at the moment. Activity there was running a high temperature. Ackemmas, sweating and swearing, swarmed about every ship on the drome that was fit for the air. Grease monkeys scurried about with pots of dope and strips of edged fabric. A carload of brass hats and a colonel from Wing headquarters came over to show the Old Man how to run things. The phone buzzed all morning. Bursts of machine-gun fire came from the pits as pilots brushed up on their marksmanship. Props growled sporadically up to mess time at noon. Time then for the cursory midday reconnaissance, the last pattol until the big job.

Lieutenant Pinkham received a package of chocolate in the mail just as he was wrapping his great flying coat about his spare frame. He shoved it into his pocket and immediately forgot about it as he fell into step with Bump Gillis on his way to the line of warming Spads. The brass hats tumbled out of Wings to watch the seven ships roar away. When the flight had become a tiny chevron against the high blue canopy, they returned to the house and began to unroll maps of the sector wherein the ammo dump was located.

Howell led his buzzards cautiously over the lines at twelve thousand. It was a perfect day for flying, visibility almost incredible. Down below, two sausages were floating lazily. Tempting morsels, they were, and all the more so due to the fact that there was no sign of Jerry in the skies.

Howell waggled his wings, turned in his pit and gave a familiar signal. Phineas Pinkham drifted out

of formation and started downward. From the other side of the V, Bump Gillis did likewise. Howell and the other four remained aloft to fight it out with any Fokkers that might take a notion to drift in.

Down, down to within a hundred yards of the Drachens. The observers went over as streaks of phosphorus spat into the gas bags. Bump Gillis zoomed over a flaming weenie and threw his ship into a wide bank, leveled out and climbed back to Howell. However, as Phineas shot over his victim, gleeful yelps falling from his lips, he spotted a clumsy Rumpler lumbering along not a thousand feet from his whirling prop. He could not hear Howell swearing nor see the wildly gesticulating arm from the pit of Bump Gillis' climbing Spad. There was only one thing on his mind. Here was a cinch to get his third *descendu* in this *guerre* and he needed it. Rumplers were duck soup. He drove his point straight at the Rumpler's belly and tripped his guns. The observation crate sideslipped from the path of lead just in time. Phineas shot above it and immediately felt his digestive organs go into a spin. Coming down on his neck were two Tripes. He glanced wildly around for the Spads. They were drilling slam-bang for home and the sky space which they had occupied a minute before was choked with what seemed to be the entire German Air Force. Phineas pushed his stick away from him and went into a dive, straightened out and dove again when Spandaus began to open up. Panic robbed him of all sense of direction and he headed for Germany on a down grade. He never has been able to swear to what happened before he finally picked out a great stretch of road on the rapidly rising panorama below his wheels.

As he nosed down, Phineas glanced fearfully around at the prodding Jerries on his tail. Their guns were still at last. They had him cold behind their lines. A captured Ship and pilot was something to write home about to a *fraulein*. A rueful grin on his face, Lieutenant Pinkham resigned himself to his fate and went about the hazardous task of landing his Spad on that widening ribbon below. It seemed to reach up and bring him down. The jolt as the wheels hit sounded the knell of Phineas Pinkham's part in the *guerre*. He wondered if they had cognac in a prison camp as his ship waddled down the stretch for several hundred feet to finally come to a stop. Almost immediately several gray-green figures surrounded the ship. The sun flashed on steel. Bayonets groped within an inch of Phineas Pinkham's nose. He heard the stuttering voice of a Mercedes engine not far behind. A Fokker

was rolling up. Shortly a German pilot thrust the infantrymen aside and grinned at Phineas.

"*Wie gehts!*" he greeted.

"Speekit *der* American?" inquired Phineas as he unstrapped himself.

"*Ja!*" replied the German. "*Leutnant* Karl Wasser my name is. You are my prisoner. *Ach!* I thought I would have to kill or follow you to Berlin."

"Where am I?" asked Phineas as he jumped to the ground. "I bet it ain't Paree."

"You are but four miles from von Manheim's *Jagdstaffel, mein Freund,*" laughed the Jerry. "It is there I take you at once."

"Goot!" exclaimed Phineas with a grin. "Like to meet the big 1—er—the great feller. Kin he play pinochle?"

THE German turned and barked orders to the soldiers. The Yankee knew that it had something to do with his Spad. Well, let them have the bunch of junk. *Leutnant* Wasser relieved Phineas of his artillery and ushered him down the road to the Fokker. The Yank was told to climb between the mid and lower wings and hang on. *Leutnant* Wasser climbed in his pit, gunned his Mercedes and skimmed along the road. Phineas had just about time enough to wonder what the Old Man was saying about him before he was ordered to crawl out of the Fokker on the German drome near Metz. Jerry pilots gathered around him like flies drawn to a discarded biscuit covered with molasses. He was getting irked at the prolonged inventory when the group split to admit a tall officer wearing a monocle.

"*Leutnant* Pinkham, baron," introduced the proud Wasser. "I brought him down inside the lines. His Spad—"

"So!" Von Manheim grinned icily, his voice triumphant. "Not the great *Leutnant* Pinkham who brought down von Korpff in such an unmilitary fashion. I am glad to welcome you, *Leutnant, ja!*"

Phineas did not like the man's mustache and if the Kraut wanted to wear glasses, why didn't he make up his mind? Well, he wasn't afraid of the big knackwurst!

"Maybe I didn't shoot 'im down," he answered the baron, "but ya notice he's down fer good, don't ya?" Manheim shrugged and said something in German to his officers. It produced a laugh that rasped on Phineas Pinkham's pride. He stared significantly at a line of Tripes in front of one of the big canvas hangars and grinned mockingly at his captors..

"Them busses look like they got hit by a barrage of shells," he remarked to Manheim. "Looks like you guys ain't doin' so good!"

The German winced and his steel gray eyes flashed. "Nein?" he countered. "Wait *und see*, *Leutnant!* In one more month, we will smash the *verdammte* Yankees into the ground, *ja!*"

"Jar your Aunt Minnie!" growled Phineas. "We ain't even got started yet, baron. We—"

"Insolent pig!" barked von Manheim in German to his officers. "But we will treat him as a gentleman just the same. We will keep him here until tomorrow, then send him over to the prison camp, *ja!* Bring him, Wasser. When *Herr Oberst* comes back, we shall show him our prize." Adjusting his monocle, the baron turned on his heel and strode away.

"Some day, that big stiff'll make a mistake an' poke his eye out," muttered Phineas.

"You speak to me?" asked Wasser.

"Nope," answered Phineas and fell into step with his captor.

As they neared the Jerry mess shack, one hand slipped into the pocket of his coat. His fingers came into contact with the package of chocolate he had received earlier in the day. Bringing it out, he handed it to Wasser. The German's eyebrows lifted.

"Seein' as you guys are goin' to invite me to mess," explained Phineas, "I'm gonna give you this big bar of chocolate I got from home today. Makes a good drink. Warms ya up swell. We allus drink it before we go up."

"*Danke schön*," Wasser smiled. "Our chocolate it has not been plentiful. *Und* the quality, *ach!* My comrades will appreciate your kindness, *Leutnant* Pinkham."

"Don't mention it," grinned Phineas. "I ain't got no use for it no more."

What a strange reversal of fortune. Lieutenant Phineas "Carbuncle" Pinkham sitting down to mess with von Manheim's Fokker riders. Sitting on the right hand of the great German ace himself. If Boonetown could only see him now unloading a glass of Rhine wine and trying to translate the questionable English sliding from a Staffel of Teuton tongues. A mess attendant soon brought in a great pitcher of chocolate, Phineas' own contribution to the festivities. Pewter mugs were filled with the steaming liquid. Von Manheim picked his own up and raised it high.

"*Leutnant* Pinkham!" His smile was arrogant. "May his stay in our prison camps be as pleasant as von Korpff's in the Yankee pigsty!"

"Okay by me," acknowledged the Yank and picked

up his own hot drink. In some manner his elbow collided with that of the German sitting nearest him. The mug slipped from his fingers and irrigated the front of his tunic. Manheim's chiseled features wrinkled up with disgust as he called the mess attendant to pour out another mugful. But the pitcher, the apogetic Jerry assured his superior, was empty.

"That's awright," hastily put in Phineas. "I've had lots of the stuff. Wine's good enough for me. That Frog stuff I been drinkin' sure ain't nothin' like this."

Approving glances shot toward Phineas. Manheim and his officers took long draughts of the steaming chocolate. Grunts of satisfaction rippled about the table. Lips smacked and closed over the rims of mugs again. Manheim slammed down his empty receptacle and indulged in a deep sigh.

"*Ach!*" he breathed. "The chocolate it is excellent, Pinkham. Right now I could go out und lick a whole Staffel of Yankee upstarts with my own ship, *ja!*"

"Yeah?" growled Phineas, poking at another piece of cold liverwurst.

TIME passed. The Germans sat about the table in mellow somnolence. The Rhine wine perhaps. Manheim yawned and glanced at the watch on his wrist. Abruptly he became animated and barked to his officers. Dutifully they rose to their feet. The baron glanced at Phineas.

"*Leutnant* Wasser will take you to his quarters," he concluded in English. "You will remain until tomorrow. That is all. May I offer you sympathy for— what would you call it, *Leutnant*, your unfortunate—"

"Baloney!" supplied Phineas and followed Wasser. The Yank's mouth tightened as he walked outside. The light of desperation gleamed in his eyes. Every muscle tensed, he moved like an automaton. A great sigh of relief escaped him as Wasser at last turned into one of a hastily constructed row of elephant iron huts. The German motioned him to a seat and stretched his own frame on one of the cots. It was not very different from the cubicles occupied by the Old Man's flock over on the other side. There was a trunk jutting out from under each bunk. A mirror hanging on the wall. A little table cluttered with letters, personal belongings. A picture of a comely German girl smiled down from the wall.

Wasser reached for his pipe. A yawn opened his jaws wide. Phineas, with moist hands opening and closing, thought that the Jerry's mouth would never close.



“Sorry, Leutnant,” grinned Wasser with an effort, “feel drowsy. You mind if I take a nap? After we shall talk, *ja?*—unless I have to go—” He yawned again. The lids of his eyes were very, very heavy.

Phineas’ heart hammered like a machine gun as he watched the German like a mongoose eyes a cobra. Wasser mumbled something and his lids drooped. A low curse escaped Phineas. He waited until Wasser began to breath regularly, then leaped to the little window and looked out. There was no unusual stir out there. Groundmen were busily tinkering with the row of Fokkers. Two or three pilots were standing near a hangar engaged in earnest conversation. He saw one of them brush a hand over his eyes and edge away. A motorcycle rolled onto the drome and stopped in front of a house that apparently was the headquarters of the *Jagdstaffel*.

An officer got out of the side-car and disappeared into the building. Phineas smiled icily and began to rip off his clothes. He had noticed that the shadows outside were lengthening. It meant that twenty miles away the Spads of the Ninth Pursuit were growling on the line. They might even be on their way to the rendezvous over Commercy.

Almost nauseated with nervousness, Phineas bent over the figure on the bed and ripped at his tunic. Breath laboring, sweat rolling down his face, the Boonetown flyer raced against time in getting wrapped up in the uniform of *Leutnant Wasser*, who was oblivious to everything that transpired. And Phineas knew that all other pilots who had imbibed his brew were locked just as tight in the arms of Morpheus. It was urgent that he get away before the Jerries tumbled to the truth. As he pulled on Wasser’s boots, props roared overhead. Fokkers coming back to the field! No doubt these pilots would soon find their comrades dead to the world. The Yankee pulled on a big flying coat, rammed a visored cap over his head and, with every nerve screaming, walked nonchalantly out of the hut and across the drome. Mechanics glanced up at him and went on with their tasks. A sentry saluted as he passed within twenty yards of the man at the edge of a wood that formed one boundary of the Jerry aerie. Phineas grinned and melted into the shadows.

Who said that the squareheads weren’t dumb? This was easy, too easy. He paused a brief instant to listen and let his eyes get used to the gloom of the wood. There were no outcries from the field behind—yet. He pushed through the underbrush until, to his astonishment, he came to a path. It dawned upon him

in a flash that this was used as a short cut to the village he had seen from the wing of Wasser’s Fokker as it had nosed down for the landing. This path would lead to a road. Would it be the road?

Phineas grinned. The hand of Providence had been pressed between his shoulder blades ever since he had left the Jerry’s hut. And the Krauts went around yappin’ somethin’ about *Gott* bein’ mittum!

Phineas’ grin was short-lived. He knew he was nowhere near out of the frying pan. The path led him out of the woods over a meadow to a road lined with thick bushes. In these he lay down and waited. Dusk was meaning business now. The sun had almost disappeared below the church spire of the village in the distance. The Old Man’s fighting cocks were thundering toward Metz now. Well, if everything was as it seemed to be, the Krauts would be minus a lot of marks’ worth of concentrated hell in the morning. And then Phineas heard the, sputtering of a mechanical bug. He raised himself on one elbow and looked up the road. In the next second he was on his feet and leaping into the road, waving his arms frantically.

The coal-scuttle-helmeted rider came to a stop and saluted. It was probably the last thing he remembered for some time. An explosion took place in the region of his chin and night came all of a sudden. Two minutes later Phineas Carbuncle Pinkham was passing; the German drome, fast, very fast. The Fokkers, hangars, etc., sped by in an indistinct blur as he coaxed the motorcycle over the road at its maximum speed. Nobody in Manheim’s establishment paid any attention to it. It was too much of a madhouse. Boche infantry units were constantly buzzing it. Pilots swore and raged as they tried to rouse a dozen fellows out of a profound slumber. Manheim was snoring in his bunk. The Yanks were coming. A million ships! Already over the lines. Bombers! Spads! Somebody tumbled to the fact that Pinkham had flown. Ten pilots ran to thundering Fokkers and climbed into the pits. The absent *Herr Oberst* von Stahl, Staffel commander, returned to the drome in a cloud of dust. Acquainted with the facts, he threw a fit, recovered and groped for his telephone. *Gott!* Manheim dead to the world! The whole Allied Air Force on their way to the ammo dump. If it were blown up—*ach!* In twenty-four hours the *Herr Oberst* would be a private.

THE hand of Providence still steered Phineas along his hectic course. Half a mile ahead on one edge of the tapering ribbon that widened swiftly as the

machine under him ate up distance was an airplane. Phineas yipped and cut down his speed. The Spad! The Jerries had not towed it in yet. His lips tightened as he saw four soldiers walk into the middle of the road. Hurriedly he tried to remember some German as he coasted down upon the sentries. They loomed up bigger and bigger until they seemed veritable giants in the gloom. One of them shouted as he came to a stop directly in their midst. Phineas let his machine flop into the road then drew his collar higher about his face.

“*Leutnant Wasser!*” he said thickly. “Von Manheim’s Staffel. *Die Spad*—” He stopped and waved angrily toward the machine.

One of the soldiers saluted stiffly and barked orders to the others. Every fibre in his body threatening to snap, Phineas managed to force a grin as he watched the Boche labor with the heavy ship. After what seemed centuries they succeeded in getting the wheels into the road. Without a word Phineas climbed into the pit and fumbled with his instruments. Lo and behold, one of the Jerries stationed himself by the prop. Phineas signaled “*Kontakt!*” The Jerries swung the prop. The Hisso caught and began to roar. Abrutly a face was thrust over the edge of the pit. Phineas stared into it as he jammed in the throttle. With a curse he slammed his elbow between two malevolent eyes just as the ship lurched forward. The roar of the Spad drowned out the shots that followed.

Phineas heard the bullets hiss around his head and stab through the ship. One of them sliced along his right cheek as his undercarriage kissed Hunland goodbye. Bringing his stick back, he climbed and climbed, his nose pointing toward home. Somewhere not far away the Tripes were thundering through the skies drilling toward Metz to meet Howell and his gang. It would be a great show but he would have to miss it. There was just enough gas left to get him back to Yankee territory.

At fifteen thousand feet Phineas “Carbuncle” Pinkham sliced through the twilight. And as he flew, tons of high explosives rained down on the Jerry ammo dump while steel-throwing Spads cut a flight of Fokkers to ribbons. Spads flown by pilots hardly daring to believe that this was all the opposition offered by Manheim who only a matter of days before had been seen in the skies with over two dozen triplanes.

The damage was already done when a fresh flight of Jerries droned over the blazing shambles which had

been the hope of a fresh Boche drive in that sector. A flight of Pfaltzes went up to catch the Yanks on the return trip but finding themselves outnumbered and open to annihilation, they quickly retired. It had been up to Manheim and he had been asleep. Captain Howell’s squadron paid with three Spads in bringing four of the five DeHavilands back to their field. A great feather in the Old Man’s cap. A deadly wallop in the eye for Jerry.

Close to midnight the Ninth Pursuit was still celebrating. They had reason to dig deep into the wassail bowl. The squadron would be mentioned in despatches. There would be medals. Yet in the big room of the farmhouse outside of Bar-le-Duc there was something lacking to make the binge a complete success. A personality in the shape of Phineas Pinkham was missing. Slouched over the table, Bump Gillis would not let anybody forget it.

“He was a swell guy even if he allus was doin’ crazy tricks,” reiterated Bump. “Anyways there ain’t no harm in a guy havin’ fun. He—”

“Damned sorry about Pinkham,” admitted the Old Man, looking up from his cups. “I’d bet he’s handin’ the devil a loaded cigar right now. Good sort of fellow. Had me ready for the bughouse. Sure he’s gone, Howell?”

“Yep,” answered the flight leader. “Had him cold. His own fault. Sorry about that bird. Didn’t think I’d ever miss him. Still can’t get over that job tonight, major,” he went on, changing the subject “There wasn’t half of Manheim’s flight there. And I know he was not around. Damn queer! Looks as if Jerry gummed things up for himself.”

“Which ill wind blew things our way,” grinned the C.O. lifting his glass for the twentieth time. “Let’s drink to the Allies and—*er*—Phineas Pinkham.”

The door opened slowly. “Pagin’ me?” inquired a familiar voice.

THE Old Man turned his head. The glass fell from his fingers. Grinning at him from the doorway was the face of the errant Lieutenant Pinkham. But what was that he had on? The Old Man blinked and rubbed his eyes. Maybe he hadn’t stopped at the right drink. That wasn’t a khaki uniform. It was gray—a Boche pilot’s uniform! Bump Gillis kicked back his chair and reached his hutmate in two strides.

“Hey, Carbuncle,” he yelped hysterically, “damned if it ain’t you! Knew them Boche couldn’t kill ya. Whereya been? Where’d ya git that monkey suit? How—”

The Old Man recovered and put on his best scowl. "Well, lieutenant, where in hell have you been? Crawled out of the job tonight, eh? Well, I'll—"

"Been over to Manheim's place fer tea," explained Phineas with an engaging grin. "I woulda been back before the gang if I hadn't run into a couple Kraut bats over the lines. They plugged my gasoline an' I jus' got down on our side by a whisker. Well, I — guess by the looks of things here," he added, "that that Jerry dump is finee an' Manheim is still asleep."

"Manheim?" snapped the C.O. "Asleep? What is this?"

"Cripes!" gasped Howell.

"They brought me down way behind the lines," said Phineas after downing a glass of cognac. "Took me over to the Jerry drome. Well, I got some chocolate through the mail today. Got it from Liverpool. Gave it to the Jerries an' they brewed it. One bar of that stuff would put a horse to sleep for a week. It was full of dope. I stole this suit an' walked right outa the place like I was goin' to Sunday School. The guy what owned these rags was pounding his ear plenty when I said 'Oof widderson!' An' Manheim an' a dozen others was

doin' the same thing. And," concluded Phineas with a laugh, "I went down the road an' found my Spad waitin' fer me. Some Jerry soldiers took care of it fer me. One of 'em put this trench in my face because I wouldn't give him a tip. Did I fool 'em? Haw-w-w-w-w!"

Nobody spoke. Their throats were paralyzed. They refused to believe the flyer yet the events of a few hours before had been such as to absolutely bear out his statement. The uniform and the papers which Phineas soon produced from one of the pockets banished the last shred of doubt.

"Pinkham!" exclaimed the Old Man at length. "There isn't anything you can't have in this man's *guerre* for the asking." He shook his head. "It's incredible! Absolutely impossible!"

"I jus' want one thing, that's all," declared Phineas, draining his fourth glass.

"Name it," mumbled the Old Man, still in a daze.

"That two weeks' leave," wearily suggested the Boonetown worker of miracles. "There's a guy I know in Parea that sells rubber pancakes. They would be swell to give to a brass hat when—"