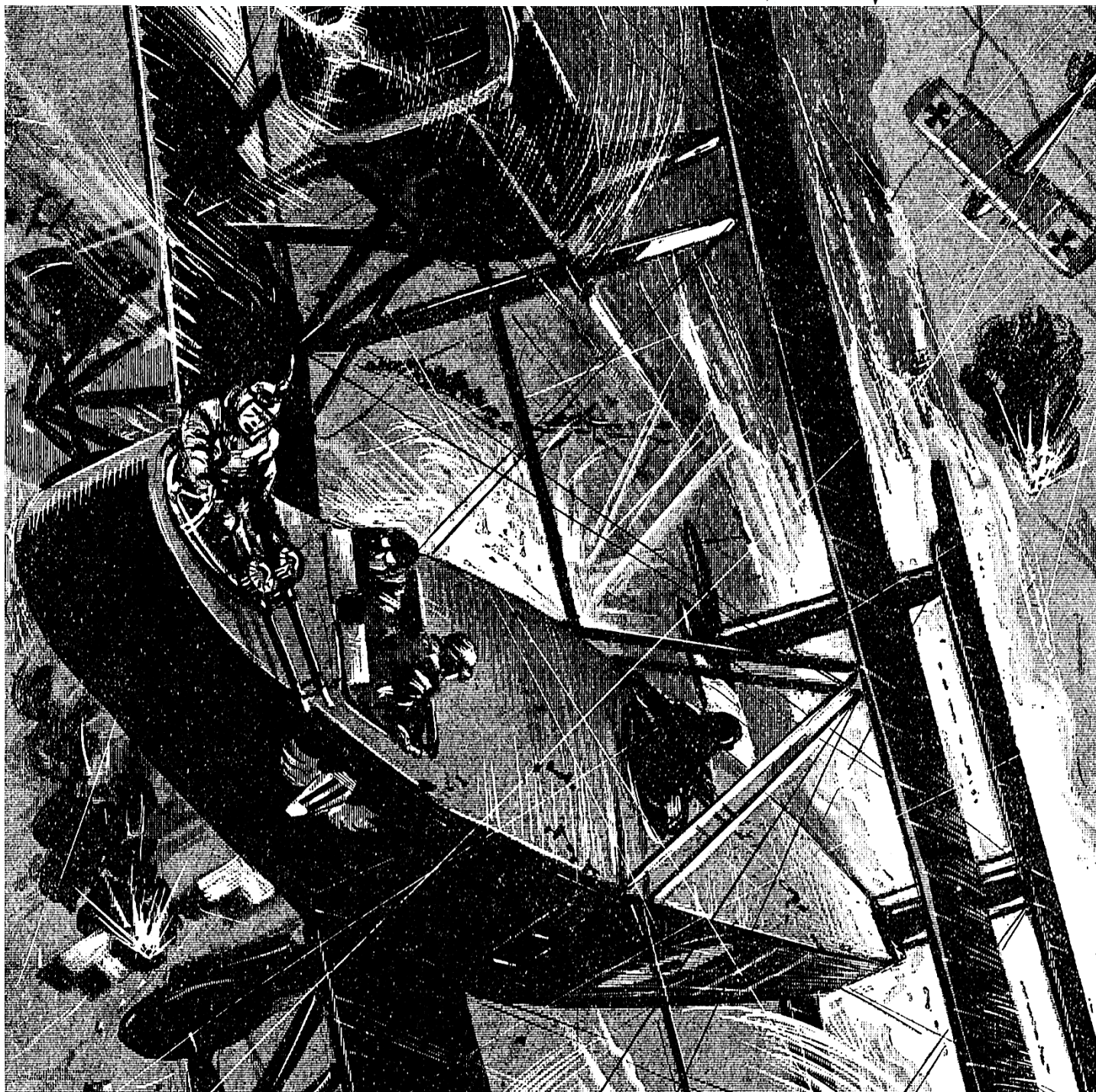


the **COFFIN CREW**



TRAITOR'S TUNE

by **ARCH WHITEHOUSE**

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It was a Strange Clue that First Linked a Lonely Graveyard behind the Enemy's Lines with the Mysterious Disappearance of Britain's Greatest Air Fighters, and Led that Crazy Band of Night Bombers, the Coffin Crew, upon the Most Desperate Adventure of their Madcap Fighting Career!

CHAPTER I THE FLAMING FOKKER

AN' THOT'S FRA MAJOR MacKENZIE," grunted Andy McGregor as he leaned over his double Lewis bracket and released a stream of cupronickel. "Take thot fra Major Mackenzie!"

The old Handley Page night-bomber, No.11, jerked and danced to the blasts and bellows of war. McGregor clenched his teeth, but the martial strains of "*Ruiag Ghlinn Fraoine*," the rallying call of his clan, wheezed through his great nostrils and his double Lewis added a fitting discord as the big bomber plunged down upon the sheds at Audenarde. McGregor's aim was true, as ever, and his leaden flail sent a cartwheel gunmounting spinning. Three indistinct figures in colourless grey were slashed into a heap beneath the wreckage, and their bronze-snouted Maxim tilted forward with a belt of ammunition still drooping from its silenced feed-block.

"And thot's fra Major Mackenzie!" roared the exulting Scotsman.

No.11 came up in a smooth zoom and then shuddered violently to two tremendous blows. Two of her 112-pound bombs had fanged into the sheds below and burst with flame-splintered fury. A broadside of earth, splinters, timber and debris mushroomed up, caught the lower wings of No.11 and sent her staggering away in a low turn to port.

"McGregor, despite them, shall flourish for ever!" chanted Andy, and whipped round to snap at a hangar mouth a burst that spat a sheen of golden sparks off the tarmac.

Farther back in the fuselage of the great bomber, Lieutenant Phil Armitage bent over his birdcage bomb-sight and checked the seconds on the stopwatch that was pronged into one of the perches.

"One, two—three!" he muttered, and jerked his arm down.

Sergeant Mike Ryan, bracing himself down in the

companionway between the two big petrol tanks, watched the Canadian bomber officer intently. He caught the signal and slapped Private Alfred Tate, the toggle-man, on the back. Tate spluttered, yanked frantically at two more toggles, and then held on grimly as the 'plane jerked under the release of the heavy missiles.

BONG! BONG!

No.11 screamed over a row of sawtoothed huts, and Corporal Arthur Marks, the Australian gunner in the back cockpit, waited until No.11 zoomed, and then poured a double spray of Lewis lead into the huts. He could hear the wild screaming of McGregor away up front as the Handley Page came around again.

In the pilot's seat of the bomber, Lieutenant Graham Townsend threw a glance across his cockpit towards Armitage, who had stiffened up suddenly, and was now peering ahead at the kilted Scot in the front turret.

"One of his nights, eh?" Armitage shouted, making the exaggerated lip movements that were necessary to establish communication above the din of two roaring Rolls-Royce Eagles.

"Yes, and he's got it pretty badly," replied Townsend. "How about it?"

"Just two more," said the bomber-officer. "Make for that low shed over there . . . the petrol stores."

The Englishman nodded and switch-backed across the fields again to approach the burning buildings from the far corner. He roared in upon the target with both engines full on, and McGregor, wailing his Highland war-cry, turned swiftly on something that came hurtling down on them from above. It came on wings of lightning, but Andy McGregor was even swifter. His guns swung true, his trigger finger constricted, and a black Pfalz flew straight into a lane of leaden death. With its propeller splintered, the engine roared to a crescendo, flames leapt from the fuselage, and the burning mass came charging on towards the bomber. Desperately now, McGregor gave it another burst, then whirled to yell a warning to Townsend.

But Graham Townsend had already seen the danger and was sitting tense, timing his move to the second. As the tangle of iron, spruce and fabric came plunging towards them, old No.11 suddenly dipped a wing, and

as she pivoted in almost a vertical bank the flaming wreckage of the Pfalz swept below and behind her with but inches to spare.

Then, steadying her on a new course, Townsend sent the great bomber nosing down at the petrol dump. Armitage, who had merely glanced up for an instant at the flaming Pfalz, was now engrossed with his bomb-sight, and as they tore through a flaming curtain of smoke and Spandau lead, his arm slashed down twice in quick succession.

As the two great bombs left the guides with barely a pause between them, Townsend whipped the Handley hard over, arms and legs braced on the controls against the coming eruption. There was a muffled roar . . . two roars . . . and then a blinding sheet of yellow-ochre flame stood up suddenly from the ground like a glittering curtain. Swiftly the burning fuel spread, leaping and darting across the ground in weird rivers of flame, all radiating from the blazing inferno of the devastated petrol store.

"God!" yelled Townsend suddenly, peering down into the red chaos beneath. "Look at that!"

ARMITAGE stood stupefied for a moment, and it was McGregor who first leapt into action to meet this new menace. His guns crackled and spat into the centre of that rising curtain of flame, and even as they watched, they saw the tell-tale lines of tracer smash with a spatter of silver sequins against the coffin-nose of a Fokker!

"Holy smoke!" gasped Armitage. "Where did he come from?"

Straight out of the flaming barrier through which it had taken-off came the Fokker, its wing-tips festooned with flame, and hurtled headlong at the Handley Page. With chattering guns, McGregor strove to hold it off, and from the rear turret the Australian's gun joined in the mad chorus. But nothing could stop the Fokker. Its pilot was a god of vengeance leaping from his hangar of flame.

Armitage, helpless in his seat, threw an arm over his face, while beside him Townsend sat, grim of face, waiting for the collision that seemed inevitable.

Up in the nose of the Handley, McGregor stood his ground, because he knew he had to.

Brat-at-tat-tat-tat-tat-tat!

His guns spoke, and two Spandaus answered. Still the flaming Fokker came on, firing point-blank into the Handley. The big bomber vibrated under the thudding blows, and a chunk of the port propeller

flew off to tear a great rent in the side of the bomber's fuselage.

Then McGregor, his Black Watch kilt fluttering over the edge of the gunmounting, drew a last desperate bead on the winged nemesis—and his aim held true.

The Fokker seemed to check suddenly in full flight as though it had collided with an invisible barrier. A black-helmeted figure jerked forward against the dash, and the biplane nosed down, just missing the Handley's wheels as it hurtled down out of control.

Not a man among the bomber's crew spoke as Townsend wrenched the throttle back and eased down a runaway engine. They swerved around on one prop, until the pilot could set a new adjustment on the vertical fins.

"Well, that's that," said Armitage at length, sitting back and folding his arms. "There went a brave man, Graham."

"Yes, I'd like to meet that lad some day," was Townsend's reply, when he had succeeded in getting the Handley to hold some sort of a true course. "I hope he got away with it."

"Same here," Armitage agreed soberly. "But if we meet him again we may both be sorry he did."

CHAPTER II MADNESS OF MCGREGOR

OLD No.11 WAS JUST ABOUT ALL-IN. Townsend tried his best to gain a little altitude, but the port engine, with its much damaged airscrew, was vibrating badly even at quarter throttle. They were about thirty miles from Ypres, so far as he could make out, and he checked his calculations again as they floundered along at less than six hundred feet above the traffic-clogged road that ran between Audenarde and Courtrai. The starboard engine was putting up a game fight, but it was too much to hope that it could last out under the extra strain of its full-power revs. Quickly, Townsend made his decision.

"Everything overboard!" he yelled. "Everything—and as fast as you can make it!"

Up in front, McGregor heard the order, and heaved his spare-parts case overboard. He unbolted one of his guns and hurled that clear. Then, selecting one drum

of ammunition, he rammed it on the remaining gun, and tossed the rest away.

Armitage dived down the companionway and almost collided with Sergeant Ryan standing against the toggle-board with his short black clay pipe upside down between his browned tusks. Nearby, Alfred Tate was leaning against the empty bomb-racks, scratching his head.

"Everything over!" Armitage shouted. "Get a move on!"

Leaping into action, Ryan ripped a first-aid kit off a bracket, made as if to hurl it out through the companionway, and then stopped suddenly. Bending down, he wrenched it open and, with an apologetic grin on his face, extracted a flat brandy bottle which he handed to Armitage. Without hesitation the Canadian took a hefty swig at it, and handed the bottle back. Ryan wiped a grimy hand across his mouth, swallowed gustily, and, after peering surprisedly at the bottle, handed it on to Tate. The little Cockney looked at it, then started up the catwalk to the control pit and made his way up to Townsend.

"Mister Armitage's compliments, sir," he said. "And will you join us?"

Townsend grinned, took the bottle and sucked heartily. Then he hammered the bottle on the top of the cowling, but McGregor turned only long enough to shake his head, and was back at his task of tearing out every movable fitment from his turret.

"First time I've ever knowed the Jock to turn down a nip," remarked Tate in surprise. "Well, Arthur and me'll manage to finish it."

Armitage and Ryan were hacking away at the bomb-racks and throwing the parts out through a great gash one of them had torn in the side of the fuselage. Tate stopped to take his own swig in the companionway and then clambered past them and tugged at Marks' legs, which appeared on the platform under the rear gun.

"Finish this, Arthur, and chuck the bottle away," Tate bellowed, and went back to rip out the toggle-board.

They jettisoned everything possible, even their heavy Sidcot suits. Tate even suggested that he be allowed to clamber out on the wing and attempt to chop away the landing gear, but Armitage told him they were awarding no V.C.'s on this trip.

"Our only chance is to get as close to the line as possible and hope to be able to glide over when our engines pack up," he said. "We're not done yet, by a

long chalk—but damn that fellow in that Fokker, all the same!"

WHEN Armitage got back to his seat in the cockpit, he found that they were losing height rapidly, and were now staggering along less than four hundred feet above the ground. Small towns and villages filtered past below, and, here and there, an occasional light blinked. From time to time a few desultory bursts of machine-gun fire spurted up at them, and it was only with difficulty that McGregor, remembering his one and only remaining drum of ammunition, restrained himself from answering their fire.

They skirted Courtrai and headed for Alluin, letting the Lys slip past under their starboard wing-tip. Foot by foot their altitude dropped, and very soon it was apparent that they could never make the lines. They would have to land at any moment now.

"Stretch it as far as you can. We still have a few hours of darkness," Armitage encouraged. "McGregor's sure to know a way through their lines."

"I'm getting every yard I can out of her," Townsend replied. "We'll never get much farther than Alluin. Lucky to get that far. Listen, she's spluttering now."

The port engine faltered, spluttered wearily, and then caught again.

"We're losing fuel fast and——"

Armitage began, and then stopped suddenly, a hand tensed on the cockpit rim.

The port engine had cut completely.

Townsend juggled the throttle quickly, and it caught again, but they had lost precious height. The engine picked up slowly and they sat there holding their breaths. More gunfire spattered up, and bullets starred the fabric of the Handley's broad black wings. Townsend, his heart in his mouth, eased the bomber into a gentle turn and they slipped clear of a silver beam that had slashed up into the sky from beyond Menin.

"No use," Townsend said, shaking his head. "Get 'em all well aft in the cabin. We'll be going down any minute now."

They signalled to McGregor and ordered him back. The Scot unhooked his gun and dropped down in his turret with it. A moment later his head came out between their knees and Armitage stood up to let him through. But McGregor had other plans for the moment. Cradling the gun over one arm, he pointed the muzzle over the side and, before either Armitage or Townsend could remonstrate, he had pulled the trigger

and was spraying the ninety-seven rounds in the full drum all over the enemy landscape.

"What the . . . ?" Armitage bellowed.

Calmly McGregor finished the drum out, and then, raising the Lewis above his head with both hands, he flung it clear.

"Thot's fra Major Mackenzie!" he roared, and stalked down the companionway to the bomb chamber.

Armitage remained standing, staring in astonishment at the vanishing Scot, until Townsend abruptly pulled him down into his seat again.

"He's been like that ever since we got the news this afternoon that Mackenzie was missing," Townsend explained.

"Mackenzie missing? . . . What, that Mad Major chap there's been so much talk about . . . ? I never heard. . ."

"Yes. It came through while you were in St. Omer. He went out this afternoon . . . and didn't come back. No trace of him anywhere."

"Whew! That's bad. And he only got his V.C. a few days ago, didn't he?" asked Armitage, momentarily forgetful of their own predicament.

Townsend was too busy to answer, and Armitage sat back and pondered on the news of Mackenzie's disastrous loss—youthful Major Mackenzie, the colourful British ace of Scottish ancestry, who had captured the imagination of every soldier in the British trenches. They had dubbed him "The Mad Major" because of his amazingly daring exploits in "ground strafing" German trenches, performances which they considered he put on for their special benefit.

Hawker, Ball, Rhys-Davids, McCudden, Mannock—and now Mackenzie. Who would be the next to go?

Then suddenly Armitage realised that, in all probability it would be the Coffin Crew. The overheated and bullet-battered Rolls-Royce had choked into its last gasp. The four-bladed wooden prop, jerked back like some drunken semaphore signaller, and was still.

"Over there! Over there!" Armitage yelled, pointing to an open space beyond a small Belgian church, "you can get her in along that wooded copse. Run her up as close as you can—it'll give us a chance to get clear."

CHAPTER III THE MARCH OF THE PRIESTS

WITH A LOW HUM OF FLYING WIRES, the Handley glided down, cleared a low hedge and floated across a white-patched cemetery to drop with a rattle and thud into the field indicated by Armitage. Townsend had timed his approach perfectly, and after the bomber had trundled along heavily for a few yards, he was able to edge her gently round so that she ran into the heavy shadows cast by a large clump of willows.

One by one the Coffin Crew clambered down the metal ladder through the throat-hatch and dropped to the turf. Instinctively they grouped themselves round Armitage, but the bomber-officer knew that it was Andy McGregor who would have to be the leader now.

"Know where you are, McGregor?" he asked.

"Aye, sor," was the confident reply. "Ah was through Alluin in September, '14. . . Yon is Coffin Corner. The Black Watch held four Prussian Guard regiments there. Ye canna beat the Black Watch, sor."

"All right. All right, McGregor," Armitage said hurriedly, "but none of your 'Ard Choille' war-cries just now, please. We don't want the whole German Army down on us."

"Ard Choille wouldn'a do naw, sir. It ud ha' tae be Tulach Ard."

"All right, have it your own way, McGregor," said Armitage resignedly. "But what I want to know is, can you find your way out of here? And is there any chance of our being able to get through the lines before dawn?"

"Aye, sor, that there is," rejoined the Scot. "Ye take yon tur-rning oot o' Coffin Corner and cross that field until ye coom tae Birdcage Walk. Thot wull lead ye tae the Lys locks sooth-west o' Wervick. We can follow the bank of the river tae the junction of the canal and the river in front of Armentieres. . . ." Corporal Arthur Marks nudged the gaunt Scotsman.

"Will that Mamoselle be there, Mac?" he whispered, with a grin.

"Aye, and plenty more, Arthur," was the reply. "But they'll a' be livin' in the cellars an' ye can thank ye lucky stars thim cellars are there."

"Why?" demanded Marks.

"Ye'll see," grinned McGregor, "ye'll see."

"Come on," said Armitage. "Let's get moving."

But just then something caught their ears. The sound came from a little creeper-clad church across the field near the cemetery.

McGregor stiffened, and his face paled. "The same tune, sor!" he exclaimed. "The vurry same tune!"

"What are you talking about, man?" Armitage demanded. "The same tune as what?"

"Just a minute, sor. . . . Just a minute," urged McGregor, motioning them to silence.

They listened again.

"Why, that's the 'March of the Priests,'" whispered Townsend. "But who the . . .?"

"What d'ye call it, sor?" McGregor interrupted urgently.

"The 'March of the Priests,' McGregor; it's a famous organ classic." Armitage, impatient to be moving, could stand it no longer.

"Hi, what the blazes is all this about?" he demanded angrily. "Are we taking a course of classical music or are we on the wrong side of the lines and liable to be shot at any moment? Come on, McGregor, snap out of it and lead the way!"

"Just a minute, sor," the Scotsman pleaded. "Just a minute." And, before Armitage could reply, he had dashed off in the direction of the church and was lost to sight in the darkness.

"What a night!" moaned Arthur Marks. "Here we drop into a churchyard near Coffin Corner, and now that crazy Jock wants to study organ music in the Jerry lines. Let's light a fire and roast some chestnuts."

"Silence, there," snapped Armitage. "We must get that madman back. Follow me—we'll make for the graveyard."

IN SINGLE file they crept through the shadows towards the church, with Sergeant Ryan clutching a revolver big enough to justify a pair of wheels. He kept one eye over his shoulder and the other on the dim light that came from a window over the chancel of the little church.

They waited in the shadow of a wall for a time and then crawled over and huddled against a white tombstone that had been erected to the memory of one Emil Beaussart, who had died in 1904.

"I don't know why we 'ang about 'ere waiting for that blighter," Alfred Tate complained in a whisper to Sergeant Ryan.

"I'll tell ye, in two words," Ryan hissed back. "Coffin Crew—now do ye understand, me bhoy?"

"Oh, ah . . . the Coffin Crew," Tate mumbled. "You're right, Sarge!"

"Sure I'm right, laddie, and never you forget it. If there's nothing else in your life you can be proud of—and I don't suppose there is—you can always be proud that you were one of the Coffin Crew. Not that you're ever much use to it, ye lazy spalpeen!" he added as an afterthought.

They could hear the strains of the "March of the Priests" sifting through the open windows of the battered church. It came in staccato bursts of sound, and then simmered down to a gentle nocturne. Certain notes were thumped out in anger or misjudged enthusiasm until the piece lost much of its intended beauty. The little group of men listened intently, fascinated against their wills by the strangeness of the music heard in the grim setting of the deserted churchyard. Townsend was the first to break the silence.

"What the devil is that confounded Jock doing?" he demanded angrily.

"He always does it," came Marks' muttered comment.

"Always does it? What do you mean?" Armitage demanded.

"Well, sir. I mean he does it back on the other side, outside Cassel. That old church there."

"You mean he dashes off in the middle of the night to listen to church organs?"

"Yes, sir, when they play that there," Marks replied.

"Play what where?" Townsend broke in. "Is everybody crazy round here?"

"I mean that tune, sir," Marks explained. "The same one that's playing now."

"The 'March of the Priests'!" exclaimed Armitage. "Why, what's it got to do with Andy McGregor?"

"I don't know, sir. All we know is that he goes out every night, just before we shove off on patrol, and listens to that monk feller back there playing the organ."

"And he always listens to the same tune?"

"That's right, sir," said Marks, and then added reflectively. "I s'pose its the only tune these Frog organists know."

"If I hear much more of this conversation, I'll go crazy, too," remarked Townsend, and lapsed into silence as the last thunderous bass notes of the March made the air tremble around them.

The quiet that ensued was broken by a sudden rustle close at hand, and next moment McGregor had

returned. He was still pale and panting, but offered no explanation of his action.

"We've got tae get back," was all he said.

"What was the idea, McGregor?" Armitage asked, as they filed out through the churchyard. "What did you see over in the church there?"

"Ah wouldn'a ken, sor," was the Scot's enigmatic reply. "But Ah wouldn'a be altogether sure that yon edifice could be considered a house of God, sor."

"And what about that organ we heard, McGregor?"

"Ah dinna ken, yet, sor. It may be the organ, it may be the music . . . an' it may be the organist—but Major Mackenzie went west ta'day, sor."

"What the devil's that got to do with it?" Armitage demanded.

"Too many British airmen hae gone west near Alluin Church, sor."

FURTHER conversation became impossible, for McGregor was now leading the way across the cemetery, past Coffin Corner and then in short spurts across an open field to a sunken road. Back in 1914, the Old Contemptibles had christened it "Birdcage Walk" because of the litter of household equipment left by the Belgian refugees. Now it was shell-pitted and deserted, and the little party moved forward carefully in McGregor's wake until they came to another open field that led them to the Lys.

From this point on they moved more boldly through the darkness, led by the kilted gunner who knew every inch of the ground. They gave a wide berth to several small encampments and added to the excitement of the night by setting fire to a large haystack, with the object of diverting as much attention as possible away from themselves. The ruse worked well and at length they came out near the locks where the canal and River Lys join, north-east of Armentieres.

"What now?" demanded Armitage. "Ye'll all please step softly as a moose, sir—and dinna gie a peep if ye value yer life!" McGregor whispered.

McGregor paused for a moment, listening carefully, then, apparently satisfied, led the way forward along the shadows of the lock wall. From the other side, as they stole cautiously along, they could distinctly hear the stolid tramp, tramp, of a sentry.

The line was not very far away now. They could see the searching star-shells climbing up into the sky, while, at intervals, a few "Minnies," fat black little pigs with sparkling tails, crumped into the sky, stayed poised at the top of their trajectories for a few seconds, and then began their slow fall to earth.

Suddenly McGregor halted and held up a warning hand.

"Wait here, sor," he whispered to Armitage. "And you'd best lie flat until I'm back."

"Another organ, somewhere?" Marks enquired, hopefully.

"Ye're right, Arthur Marks," said McGregor grimly, drawing a gleaming dirk from his hose-top. "An' this is what I'll be cutting it out with!"

He crawled away into the darkness towards the flight of stone steps that led down to the canal. They saw him slide over, his bare thighs two spots of white in the darkness, and then he was gone.

Armitage, crouching close to the ground, turned to Townsend.

"What's he up to now?" he said.

"Just on the prowl again. God help someone."

"Wonder what the old devil meant by saying that too many British airmen have gone west near Alluin church?" Armitage continued.

"Yes, funny that, wasn't it? And there may be something in it. Ball was last seen flying over Alluin, you know, and Rhys-Davids went down somewhere near there. Collishaw, too, lost a couple of men near Alluin. S'truth, when you come to think of it, quite a lot of our fellows went down in that section."

"Maybe, but what the devil has an organ got to do with it?" Armitage objected. "They don't bring 'em down with top notes, do they?"

Before Townsend could reply, he was violently nudged by Marks.

"There he is, sir," the Australian whispered excitedly. "He's calling us."

Now they could see McGregor's kilted form over the edge of the lock wall, and he was beckoning them towards him. One by one they darted across the open space and hurried down the steps. McGregor led the way, and at the bottom they came suddenly upon the still quivering body of a sentry in field-grey.

"Ah had tae do ut," the Scot said, almost apologetically, as he stepped over his victim. "An there'll be anither at the other end."

"What is this place, McGregor?" Townsend asked, a few moments later. "I seem to remember it, somehow."

"Ut's the overflow tunnel between the upper lock and the river on the other side o' the line, sor."

"You mean it goes right under the line?"

"Aye, sor . . . through tae the river just this side o' Armentieres."

CAUTIOUSLY they made their way through the dank tunnel, littered with stores and ammunition, until, coming to a section where the tunnel widened, they were brought to a sudden halt by McGregor's warning hand. Again the gunner went forward and reconnoitred. He disappeared round a bend in the tunnel, and as the little party waited with bated breath, there came the sounds of a short sharp scuffle. A minute later McGregor was back, wiping his dirk between thumb and forefinger. He stuffed it back in his hose-top, and there was a grim look on his gaunt face as he said briefly:

"It'll be all right the noo, sor."

They made their way through a barricade of crates and boxes and soon came upon the still and silent victim of McGregor's deadly skill with the dirk. The sentry lay flat on his face with one leg twisted under him. He might almost have been asleep—but for his grotesque attitude and the growing pool of blood that seeped out from beneath his head.

"We'll have to be vurry careful noo, sor," whispered McGregor. "The Jarmins are easy, but we'll be running into our own boys any minute now."

"I don't understand all this," Armitage said softly. "If this tunnel connects the two fronts as you say, why hasn't someone blown it up before?"

"One's afraid, and the other daren't," McGregor explained. "You see, sor, they can both use it, in a pinch, and as this wee piece o' front is always changing hands they both hang tight on to the tunnel an' put their own guard at each end."

Cautiously they advanced another hundred yards, and then, as the opening of the tunnel loomed dimly ahead, McGregor again halted and beckoned Arthur Marks towards him. The puzzled expression on the Australian's face vanished as McGregor whispered urgently to him, and next instant the silence of the tunnel was shattered by a piercing yell.

"Co-o-o-o-oe-e-e-e-eee!"

Marks' call wailed through the dank tunnel, and before it had died away there came an answering shout.

"Co-o-o-o-oe-e-e-e-e-eeee!"

"What the devil . . . ?" Armitage spluttered.

A sudden light seemed to dawn upon Townsend as he looked at the Australian gunner's excited face.

"Come on," he said. "We're all right now. That was an Australian bush call. McGregor must have known the Aussies were in the line at this point—that's why he got Marks to do his stuff!"

"Heavens! What a night!" breathed Armitage. "I thought the man had gone stark, staring mad."

They hurried along the tunnel and came up to a barricade. A gaunt Australian challenged them, and made them identify themselves. Satisfied at last, he pulled a section of the barricade away and they scrambled over, just as a fusillade of shots poured in on them from the other end of the tunnel.

Once safely within their own lines, reaction set in upon the nerve-racked members of the Coffin Crew. A guard of Australians came up and guided them out of the line, completely done up and exhausted. A lorry appeared from somewhere and ran them into Armentieres, where they flopped thankfully on to wirenetting beds in the dug-outs under the Garede Ville. Before he collapsed, Townsend managed to get a message through to Cassel, and almost fell asleep at the telephone.

Only McGregor stayed awake, and long before daybreak he was out again, haunting the streets of Armentieres, and trudging in and out of what went for shops in that war-scarred area. He even tried his luck at the cathedral and, finally, about ten o'clock, he found what he was seeking.

It was a copy of the musical score of the "March of the Priests."

CHAPTER IV MYSTERY OF THE MAD MAJOR

BY NOON the Coffin Crew were back at Cassel, still weary and worn, and Armitage handed in the routine report he had prepared that morning.

"Well, that's one way to get rid of a 'bus," grinned Major McKelvie as he read it. "But we'll have another for you by to-morrow . . . don't worry." The little party saluted and broke up. Sergeant Ryan led his gunners and toggle-man across to their Nissen hut, while Armitage and Townsend went over to the jumble of boards and elephant iron that served as an officers' mess. They ordered double Scotches and dropped off to sleep in their wicker chairs without even removing their boots.

In the gunners' hut it was much the same. Tate threw himself on his pile of boards and blankets and sucked at the fag end of a cigarette. Marks found a

magazine and tried to read. Mike Ryan packed his dirty clay pipe and applied a match, while he watched Andy McGregor fumbling with the roll of music he had brought from Armentieres.

"What's the idea, Andy?" Marks enquired, moving over to sit on a corner of McGregor's bed. "Still learning to play the organ?"

McGregor shook his head: "Ut's Muster Mackenzie," he said moodily.

"Mister Mackenzie," the Australian repeated, "who the hell's he?"

"He means the Mad Major bloke wot went west yesterday," Tate interjected.

"Muster Mackenzie no went west," Andy retorted. "He were tricked . . . aye, tricked, Ah say."

Marks blinked, and turned to the little Cockney for enlightenment.

"Don't look at me," Tate muttered. "I don't know what he's talking about, neither. First he goes crawling through graveyards to listen to an organ. Then he goes balmy because someone shot old Mackenzie down. Now I s'pose 'e's going to give us all a music lesson. 'Orace, pass the conductor 'is wand and step off smartly with the right foot.

*"Ark the 'erald Kangels sing!
Beecham's pills are just the thing!"*

Mike Ryan threw a flying boot at the singer, and Tate collapsed backwards on to his bed.

"Ye wouldn'a understand," McGregor said, forking a short length of pencil out of his sporran pocket and sucking it meditatively.

"Honest, now, Mac, tell us what you reckon to do with that there music," pleaded Arthur Marks.

"Ye sound like a mon of some sense," McGregor replied. "D'ye ken anything about music?"

"Was second cornet in the Sydney Silver Temperance Band, back home," said Marks proudly.

"Temperance is noo the thing to make a band out of, to my way of thinking," Andy remarked, "but still, maybe ye'll do."

"I couldn't play that piece, if that's what you want," Marks announced firmly.

"Ah wouldn'a let ye. All ye ha' tae to is to mark the notes of the top line here, so that I know what they are. Ye ken . . . the letters the notes mean?"

"Sure . . . but what for?"

"Ah'll show ye to-night, if ye'd like tae take a wee walk," McGregor said quietly. "Ye do those notes first, though."

Marks started laboriously to pencil in the notes on the score. Then suddenly he looked up.

"But what the hell does all this have to do with this Mackenzie guy you're so upset about?" he demanded.

"Thot's what Ah want tae find oot," said McGregor, and stalked out of the hut without another word.

THAT night, the sole topic of conversation in the Squadron was the probable fate of Major Mackenzie, V.C., who had now been missing for about twenty-four hours. No news of any kind had come through about him. Pilots of his squadron had flown over the lines early that morning and had dropped notes of enquiry. Later that afternoon red, white and black message streamers had been picked up behind Poperinghe, Estaires and Merville. The messages they contained seemed genuine enough, but none held any news. No Major Mackenzie had been reported as a prisoner, and no trace of a wrecked or burned S.E.5 had been found. To add to the mystery, one message said that no German pilot had reported a combat between the times mentioned in the British messages as covering the Major's disappearance.

What then had happened to the Mad Major? asked the squadron messes. Was this to be yet another Ball or Guynemer mystery? He had last been seen patrolling a narrow beat back and forth between Courtrai and Tournai by British balloon observers. One or two had even seen him go down for his usual trench "strafe" around Alluin, but had lost sight of him in the low-hanging smoke of a wire-cutting barrage.

That was all anyone knew.

Another topic of conversation was the arrival of another Handley Page for the Coffin Crew. It had been flown in from Marquise at noon that day, and was a typical Coffin Crew machine in appearance, made up of the discoloured wings from one 'bus, a much-patched fuselage from another and a tail assembly from yet a third. It was promptly given No. 11's old number, and the Coffin Crew insignia was crudely daubed on it by Alfred Tate who, when complimented on his handiwork, coyly admitted he had always "bin good at drorin."

By late afternoon the new No.11 was ready, her racks tested and her toggles checked under Sergeant Ryan's critical eye. Just before teatime, Townsend took a rollicking bunch of mechanics up in her while he tested out the new Rolls-Royce engines. The mechanics hung over the gun-rings, out of the open windows, and enjoyed themselves like schoolboys. They returned

to earth, breathless and excited, declaring that "Leftenant" Townsend was the greatest pilot on the Front.

"Joy-riders!" observed Alfred Tate scathingly as he inspected his now somewhat blurred insignia. "They'd talk a bit different if they was up there with Jerry having a smack at 'em. They wouldn't larf then."

After mess that night the Coffin Crew received their orders for another raid. It was to start at eleven o'clock, and their objective was the railroad sidings at Renaix, a point about fifty miles from their Cassel base. Townsend and Armitage wandered off to the Recording Office to draw up their compass courses and to plan the raid. There were aerial photographs to be studied from which they could choose the best approaches and select the most important sections of the sidings for their targets.

Sergeant Ryan supervised the loading and fuse-setting of the bombs. Tate assisted him, and McGregor and Marks should have been on the job as well, but they had both disappeared a short time after mess that night.

CHAPTER V THE BELL OF DEATH

AS SOON AS DARKNESS FELL, McGregor, with his sheets of music stowed away in his tunic pocket, and trailed by the puzzled but highly interested Australian ex-cavalryman, hurried across the fields, through what had once been an orchard, and dropped into a sunken road that ran due east and west. They exchanged no conversation of any sort until they were well on their way towards the canal that ran down to Hazebrouck. They were heading west, and a square tower a mile or so ahead was their goal.

The road came out on a clearing along the canal, and they turned north a few hundred yards and crept across a lush stretch of grass. They entered a churchyard and made their way carefully past weather-stained slabs of sandstone and marble. Behind one of these they lay for nearly half an hour exchanging not more than half a dozen whispered words throughout their vigil.

"Here he comes," whispered McGregor at last.

The Australian followed the direction of his companion's pointing hand and saw a tall, broad-shouldered man in clerical garments hurry out of a small cottage on one side of the graveyard. He carried a spluttering lantern and chose his steps carefully as he made his way through the graveyard and entered the main door of the little church. The lantern threw his silhouette against the brown wall for a second as he stopped and peered about.

"Come on," said McGregor, when the man had disappeared. "Keep close tae me."

Together they hurried through the tombstones and made their way in the shadows to the doorway. Carefully McGregor drew it open, and peered through. There was another vestry door to pass and after waiting a few minutes Andy cautiously eased it open. Now they could see the cleric striding down the aisle towards the chancel, his swinging lantern casting a weird silhouette of himself along the left-hand wall.

They watched him pass the nave and then turn in towards the short row of choir stalls. He set his lantern down and seemed to disappear for a minute behind a panel of carved oak.

"Now then," McGregor whispered, and they slid into a row of seats at the back. "Get down on the floor wi' ye light and mark the notes as he plays them."

"Mark 'em down?" repeated Marks in a puzzled tone.

"Aye! Ah mean them notes he bangs and holds down. Ye can easy tell when he's no playing it reet."

Marks blinked and nodded. From somewhere up in front came the wheezy treadle of organ pedals, followed by the throb of air entering the bellows and the creak of weary mechanism. There was a fingered trill of a skilled musician and then . . . the opening bars of "March of the Priests."

Almost immediately Marks understood. The player was not accenting the notes as they were written. Compared with the skill of the opening trill and scale, the rest of the music sounded like something picked out by a heavy-handed amateur. It was slow and painful, and Marks found it easy enough to jot down check marks over the notes the strange monk was accentuating.

The music stopped after a few bars and started over again from the beginning. Again Marks followed the notes on his music score with the aid of the small flashlamp they were shielding with Mac's kilt. But no pencilling was needed this time, for the repetition followed the previous tune, note for note.

The music stopped, and they heard the monk lower the lid of the organ and descend from the stall. He picked up his lantern again and started down the aisle.

"We'll be locked in," Marks whispered. "We'll never get back in time."

"Dinna worry. We'll get back. Ye'll see some real fun noo!"

They switched off their light and waited until the monk, all unsuspecting, had passed them. He opened the vestry door and closed it gently. Then they heard his footsteps going up some stairs.

"Ah knew ut!" McGregor exclaimed. "He's going up tae the belfry."

"What for?"

"Tae listen tae the other burkie . . . at Alluin," said McGregor.

"Alluin? . . . *Alluin*?" Marks repeated. "Why, that's the dump we were at last night."

"Aye, an' didn'a he play the same toon?"

"Maybe he did, but I still don't get the idea," said Marks, shaking his head.

Moving quietly, McGregor stepped into the vestry and stood listening for the footsteps of the giant monk. Then, with a nod to Marks and a quick movement towards his stocking-top, he led the way up the circular staircase.

Carefully they ascended, giving a wide berth to loose treads that might betray them. They reached the trapdoor and peered over. The belfry was in semidarkness, but they could discern the monk leaning over a small table. There was a curiously-shaped black box in front of him and he was twirling two large brass knobs. He turned slightly, and then they saw that he was wearing a set of earphones which were connected to the black box. They saw him reach high and twist another knob fitted to a black rod that led up into the darkness above.

"I've seen that bloke before," whispered Marks. "He's been around our place several times."

"Aye . . . too mony times, Alfred . . . and too mony aerodromes," was the Scot's cryptic reply.

"Let's nail him," Marks whispered. "We've got to move fast if we're going to be back in time."

"Not too fast. . . . Let's see what he's up tae."

"Pretty clear to me," said Marks. "That's some sort of a micro . . ."

"Aye, Ah ken thot. But what's he gettin'?"

"Oh, the message. Yes, let's wait a bit. . . ."

Now the monk was leaning over his box, adjusting the two brass knobs again. Then he huddled down

lower and began jotting something down on a sheet of paper. The two airmen waited impatiently, conscious of the minutes that were speeding by and bringing their zero hour ever closer.

They crept carefully nearer, crouching tense and silent near the wide trapdoor. Above them were the great bells and from them hung the heavy ropes that went through smooth, well-worn holes in the floor to the vestry below.

Then suddenly the silence of the church was shattered and pandemonium broke loose.

THE giant monk had turned and caught sight of the two intruders. He wheeled quickly, jerking the headphones off and grunting a loud oath.

McGregor was upon him in an instant, his dirk gleaming in the light of the lantern. Marks, leaping forward, slipped on the smooth belfry floor and when he recovered his balance he saw McGregor caught in the vice-like grip of his huge opponent. His arm had been trapped in a wrestler's hold and the monk was steadily forcing it back until the Scot let out a scream of agony.

With a quick jerk the monk hurled his opponent away and the Scot hit the angled wall with a sickening thud. Marks took one awed look and knew that his friend was "out"; then he dug his hobnails in and awaited the onslaught. The monk stood breathing hard for a moment and then came on. The Australian stood his ground and the monk dived at him with a wild bellow.

McGregor stirred in his corner.

"Hold him, Arthur!" he cried, and started to crawl towards the small table near the lantern.

Marks stood his ground and as the monk hurled himself forward he let his knees sag. The monk landed full on his shoulders, and with a knock gained on Australian cattle ranches Marks heaved up into a flying mare and sent his attacker sprawling. They heard a low guttural scream as the monk went flying across the room—straight for the open trapdoor.

Marks turned sharply, poised ready to renew the attack, but there was no need. Arms and legs outspread, the monk hit the floor and disappeared headlong through the trapdoor. The belfry ropes above swayed wildly for an instant and then one jerked taut. There came a low gurgling cry, followed an instant later by an ominous crack.

The one taut bell-rope swung gently to and fro in the narrow width of the flooring.

Still crawling across the floor on his hands and knees, McGregor gained the small table at which the monk had been sitting and, reaching up for a sheet of paper, stuffed it into the breast-pocket of his tunic. Marks pulled him to his feet and held the lantern up to his face.

"You all right?" he asked.

"Aye. . . . Get me ma dirk, Arthur," McGregor replied, steadying himself against the table.

The Australian found the gleaming knife, and McGregor stuck it in his hose-top. Then he let Marks help him to the top of the steps.

"What happened tae him?" he enquired, gesturing towards the trap-door.

"Dunno," Marks answered. "But we'll soon find out."

Marks went first, lending the still-groggy Scotsman a helping hand. Halfway down they found out what had happened to the monk. In the dim light of the lantern which the Australian still carried they saw him swaying gently among the bell ropes. One rope had caught under an arm and had somehow wound itself round the throat of the monk. His mouth was wide open, the head forced back in a grotesque position.

"He got caught up in the ropes, Arthur," McGregor whispered.

"Yes. Fell head first through and tried to grab one," Marks said, watching the dangling figure twist slowly. "I must have caught him under the chin."

"Well, it was him or us," McGregor said reflectively, and stared in fascination at the slowly revolving figure until Marks had to pull him away.

"Thot's fra Major Mackenzie," said McGregor finally as he started down the steps.

"Cripes, Mac!" gasped Marks. "We've got to move. They're all ready."

The Scot nodded and broke into a shambling run in Marks' wake.

They found six Bristol Fighters and two other Handleys, besides No.11, waiting on the line. Sergeant Ryan, clad in oily leather and with a stub pipe between his thumb and forefinger, bellowed at Marks the instant he saw him.

"Here's your gear. Jump into it. The Major's just about roarin' for you two spalpeens."

"Where the devil . . . ?" began Armitage, appearing from under the bomber's nose, and then passed on with a curt "I'll see you both later."

McGregor said nothing, but shoved his arms into another short leather flying coat. He pulled his helmet down tighter and peered up at his guns, which someone had already locked on for him. Beside him, Arthur Marks threw off his shoes and dragged on long-legged fleece-lined flying boots, a leather flying coat and a shapeless helmet.

"Where you bin?" demanded Ryan. "We thought you'd missed it."

"Tell you later, Sarge," Marks promised, and McGregor nodded agreement.

Engines were revving up now and officers in trim khaki were bustling about and counting their crews. Townsend came out of the shadows, expressed a brief but biting opinion of the two late-comers, and climbed aboard No.11.

At last the two were ready and, mounting the throat ladder, crawled along to their positions. McGregor, still silent and morose, checked his guns and then sat down well below the gun-ring and produced the sheet of paper he had taken from the table in the belfry.

He still had his small flashlight with him, and with its aid he now tried to make out the writing on the paper. There were letters quickly blocked in, but no group seemed to make any sense until he discovered that the letters used were limited to the letter-notes of the music scale, A, B, C, D, E, F and G.

Even that discovery, however, was of little help, for he could not see how seven letters alone could be used to fill out a twenty-six-letter alphabet. Nevertheless, he continued to puzzle away at the code while the three Handley Pages rumbled away and took-off. He changed over from the paper he had taken and worked on the sheet of music, poring over the letters Arthur Marks had checked.

Still it made no sense.

CHAPTER VI THE BOMBERS GET THROUGH

MARKS SAID LITTLE on the way back to the aerodrome, except to encourage his companion to hurry. They scrambled along sunken roads, across fields, and finally reached the orchard. Staggering on, weary and breathless after their efforts, they gained the aerodrome and saw several machines lined up on the tarmac with their engines running.

The Bristol Fighters came up after them and sat high above them in a wide V-formation, their trailing exhaust flashes plainly visible. The other two Handley Pages were in position off their wing-tips, and in loose formation the aerial cavalcade set out for Renaix.

No sooner had they crossed the line than they were struck by an unusual absence of trouble. There was no familiar "Archie" greeting. The searchlights simply swished slowly back and forth, making no apparent effort to pick them out. Once the Bristols were caught dead in a glare, but the beam was suddenly switched off and swung to another area.

Townsend drew his brows together and then looked across at Armitage.

The bomber-officer was up on one knee staring about him, as if he already scented trouble.

Then it came.

A Bristol Fighter fluttered down from the darkness above, a winged ball of flame that missed a wing-tip of No.11 by inches.

Simultaneously, Marks' guns began chattering madly at a black Pfalz that came diving through the Bristol formation. The two-seater gunners were giving as good as they were getting, but the sky suddenly seemed full of black single-seaters. In less than three minutes the Bristol escort was broken up and scattered and the three lumbering bombers were flying on, alone, into the enemy territory.

Behind them the sky was lit by the flare of a blazing Fighter as the battle still raged, and the Handley Page crews knew they were in for it. This was to be no ordinary night. Never before had they been trapped so close to the front line.

THE Handleys closed in together now and as they forged on through the darkness it occurred suddenly to Armitage that McGregor had taken no part in the excitement they had just left behind them. Never once had he even made a move to get up and use his guns.

Armitage leaned over and thumped the top of the cowling. The gunner stirred slowly and peered over towards the control pit.

"Get up, man! Get up!" the bomber-officer yelled, jerking his hand up to illustrate his meaning. "You're not hit, are you?"

McGregor shook his head, but showed no sign of having heard the order. Armitage took a deep breath and was about to bawl out a final order when suddenly the "Archies" began their battering again, and once more the searchlights slashed their blades through the

thin veils of cloud. Out of the darkness, four of the Bristols reappeared and joined the bombers. The noise of their arrival made McGregor look up, and he saw that two were missing.

"Four oot o' six," he muttered. "Four oot o' six . . . Four . . ." he went on mumbling, and then the figure four became mixed up in his mind with the figure seven. There were seven letters to the scale of notes he had been studying.

"Seven and four are eleven. . . . Noo. . . . Eleven won't do. . . . Seven less four is three. . . . Noo. . . . Seven times four is twenty-eight. . . . twenty-eight. . . . Two too mony. . . . Only twenty-six letters in th' alphabet. . . . But that brings it doon."

Quickly he scrawled a line of the alphabet across the top of the sheet of music and then under the letters he wrote a series of scale notes running from A to G.

"The fust seven notes will be all right," he muttered as a Bristol Fighter and a Pfalz fought a duel less than fifty feet above his head. He could hear Marks' guns trying to get at the Hun fighter. Yet all he did was to crouch closer to the floor of his cockpit and begin laboriously to work out the code and decipher the two messages.

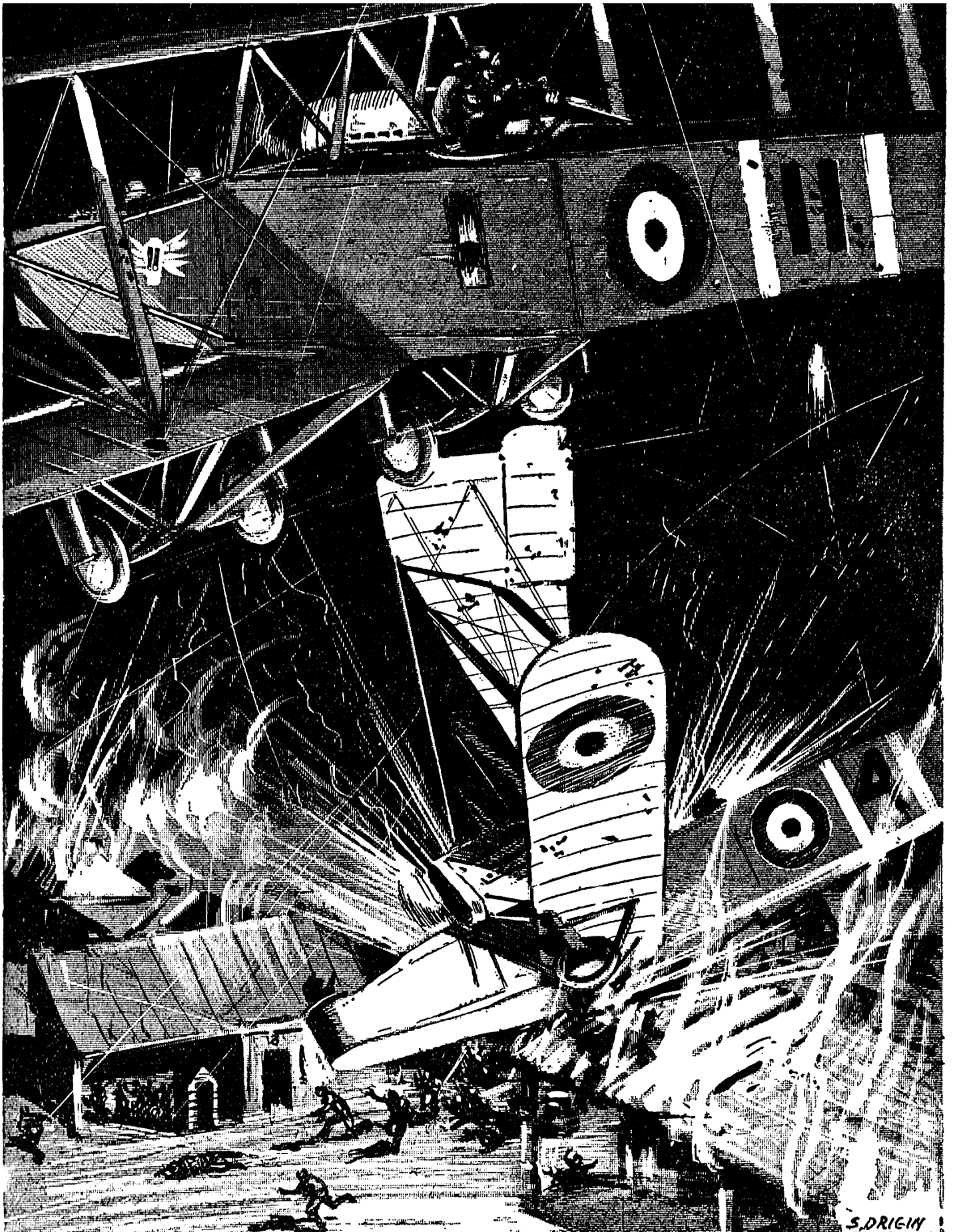
He soon grasped the obvious fact that any letter between A and G had to mean one of any four letters with the exception of F and G which could only be repeated three times, as there were only twenty-six letters in the alphabet. Meanwhile he ignored both the frantic shouts from Armitage and the pandemonium of the action that was now raging all around him.

THE three Handleys had reached Renaix by cutting sharp across from Roubaix, and already they were in line for bombing.

Only three Bristols were left now, but those that were absent had not gone without company, and the course from Armentieres to Renaix was dotted with Bristol and Pfalz fuselages.

No.11 took the lead and went down on the goods yard with throttle wide open. Two Pfalz tried to get into position beneath them, but the front gunner on the second bomber sent a burst clean into the leader's petrol tank and the machine exploded right in the path of the second machine. Mingling their debris, the two 'planes went down in a welter of fabric, spruce and flaming petrol.

When the first of No.11's bombs hit with a reverberating roar, McGregor was sucking the end of his pencil. He leapt up like a Jack-in-the-box, but the



S. DRIGIN

sudden upward zoom of No.11 jammed him quickly down again and he caught his chin on the gun-ring, opening up an old gash which trickled blood all over his hands. Wiping it away with his sleeve, he turned once more to his endless pencilling.

Armitage was on one knee, leaning over his bomb-sight. His arm came up again as they roared round, and down inside the fuselage Ryan and Tate stood ready to jerk the toggles. Marks was hammering away at everything in sight, but stopped suddenly to cry out in horror as he saw a Handley Page crash headlong into a long line of warehouses. The great bomber blossomed once with a billow of smoke and flame and then exploded, scattering men and machine into a thousand pieces.

Down in the front turret of No.11, McGregor still worked away at his blood-spattered sheets. Finally, a word made sense and he leapt to his feet waving the sheet of music. Armitage turned as though a ghost had suddenly appeared before him.

"Major Mackenzie!" McGregor screamed, holding the sheet of paper aloft.

Armitage turned his back upon him and glued his eye to the bomb-sight. He drew a quick bead and jerked his arm up and down in quick succession. No.11 leaped and bucked as Tate answered the signal and jerked the toggles of the 112's.

McGREGOR crawled up his tunnel and his head came out somewhere near Townsend's knees.

"Back to Alluin, sor. . . . Back to Alluin," he pleaded, shoving the sheet of paper forward.

Armitage took it and stared at the scrawled words. "Read it! . . . Read it, sor! . . . You ken the French," he begged.

Armitage helped the gunner out and dragged him down inside the bomb chamber. Drawing Armitage's sleeve back, McGregor stared at his watch, then burst into a hurried explanation of how he had intercepted the two messages and the way in which he had deciphered them.

Suppressed excitement in his eyes, Armitage glanced again at the message.

"Bomber crew escaped and returned. Caution," he read.

"Thot's the message the priest at Cassel sent first," McGregor explained anxiously. "What does the other say about Major Mackenzie, sor?"

Armitage took the second sheet of paper and read :
"Removing Mackenzie at midnight."

"Twenty minutes!" breathed McGregor. "Ye'll do ut, sor?"

"I don't quite grasp all this yet," Armitage objected.

"Don't ye see, sor? They must hae Major Mackenzie there at that auld kirk. They shot him doon there . . . somehow. They shot Captain Ball doon near there, too, and a lot more. They hae somethin' in thot belfry."

"But why should they keep Mackenzie there, and how do you know he's there?"

"Why, that's the place where they played the music, sor," McGregor said excitedly, "thot's where this message came from. They were workin' taegether . . . them twa fake priests. Thot's how they knew we were going to Renaix . . . yon burkie i' the belfry tells 'em on the organ."

"By Jove, you may be right!"

Armitage gasped, as the plot began to dawn on him. "Come on, McGregor. Up there at that gun!"

The Scot was back at his post in a moment and his guns were alive again as Armitage leaned over and explained the situation to Townsend. The Englishman's eyes opened wide, then he nodded and grinned as he saw McGregor try a long-range burst at a black Pfalz which had appeared from nowhere. From the rear turret Marks, too, joined in, and as No.11 turned north-west over Mouscron and headed for Alluin, he celebrated by clipping the wings of a scarlet-and-green Fokker that was diving down on the lone Handley behind them.

They hurtled through the slashing blades of searchlights, dodged "Archie" and his sister "Kate" who threw the flaming onions, and then Townsend shot a Very-light signal towards the following Handley Page that sent it ruddering off to make the return journey to Cassel unaccompanied.

"I'll get her in and out," Townsend promised Armitage, as No.11 flew on alone, "but as McGregor and Marks seem to be the only two here who really know what all this is about, I suggest we let them play the hand out when we land."

"Good idea," Armitage agreed. "They started this riot. We'll let 'em finish it."

"Don't worry," Townsend laughed, "they will!"

CHAPTER VII THE SECRET OF ALLUIN

No.11 CIRCLED WIDE OVER ALLUIN for a time, and then Townsend, satisfied of his bearings, throttled back and sent the bomber nosing down.

With a skill born of long practice, he put down in the long field near the Alluin church while Armitage told McGregor and Marks what was expected of them, and gave them his and Townsend's automatics.

At the far end of the field the bomber came to rest, and McGregor, Marks, Armitage and Ryan all tumbled out and together hoisted the tail on their shoulders and swung the machine around ready for a quick take-off. Then Armitage and Ryan climbed back aboard, the bomber officer taking over McGregor's post in the front gun turret.

By the time he reached it, McGregor and Marks were out of sight. Crouching low as they hurried along, they cut through the graveyard, which was about four hundred yards from the field in which they had landed, and soon caught the light clatter of an idling motor-car engine. They climbed the churchyard wall and crawled towards the car, which stood without lights. There were two men standing near the hood, cupping their hands over cigarettes and talking quietly. The two airmen waited in the shadow of a low monument, tense and watchful.

A few moments passed and then the church door opened and three men emerged. One was a stocky priest with a hand resting in the waist-cord of his dusty cassock. The second was a tall, heavy-shouldered officer and the third a slim, slight youth in British khaki. He had one arm in a sling and a white bandage around his forehead.

"It's Major Mackenzie," breathed McGregor, gripping his companion's arm. "I'll gie him a signal. Wait for it, and then. . ."

The priest and the German officer exchanged a few words and then there burst from McGregor's throat an earpiercing yell that woke the echoes in the little churchyard.

"Tulach Ard!" roared McGregor.

For a second there was a breathless silence as the

three men stood petrified with amazement, then Marks' gun spoke once and the German officer fell to the ground.

"Tulach Ard!" echoed the slim British officer and, spinning quickly on one foot, his fist caught the monk full in the stomach, toppling him over backwards.

The scuffle lasted only a few seconds, for McGregor and Marks had already leapt upon the two men by the car. With one swing of his dirk the Scot cut his opponent from throat to breastbone, and turned to see Marks go down with a thud, bowled over by the rifle the second man had thrown at him. McGregor wheeled round and caught the German full on the mark to send him rolling in agony under the running-board of the car.

Mackenzie, who had dashed up to join in the struggle, jerked Marks to his feet, and together he and McGregor got him over the wall. From then on they practically dragged him along, for the blow from the rifle had caught him full across the shins and he was numb from the knees down.

Through the gravestones they staggered and over another low wall, then out in the open field that led down an easy slope. Shots rang out behind them and they knew that one of their opponents had picked up a gun and was following them.

Panting and dishevelled, they gained the bomber at last and hoisted Marks up the metal ladder to the throat-hatch where Sergeant Ryan lugged him through the companionway to the bomb chamber and set to work on him. Townsend opened up the engines, and No.11 rolled away while Armitage and Tate spattered the graveyard and grounds with Lewis fire.

They roared up off the ground, and Townsend, levelling out, turned over a railway embankment and headed west.

Half an hour later No.11 crossed the lines again and headed for home in company with a chance-met flight of night-flying Camels which insisted upon escorting them all the way into Cassel.

THAT night the orderly office on Cassel aerodrome was a centre of unusual popularity and excitement. First, McGregor and the still-limping Marks had to describe how they had picked up the messages. Then McGregor had to explain how he had stumbled upon the secret of the scale code and to display the sheet of music covered with his scrawled lettering.

Major McKelvie took the paper and, with Mackenzie, Armitage and Townsend crowding interestedly around him, studied it intently for some moments. At first

glance he could make little sense of the apparently random strings of letters, but gradually the nature of the code became clear as he checked the marked music score against the scribbled messages. When he had finished, he threw the papers down and laughed aloud, for the only word in the messages that could possibly have made any sense to McGregor was the name "Mackenzie." All the rest was in French.

"NEVER mind, one word of Scots is worth a dozen in any other language," Major Mackenzie retorted when McKelvie had explained his amusement. "And the best two Scottish words I've heard for many a long day were that '*Tulach Ard*' of McGregor's when they were taking me out to that car by the church."

"*Tulach Ard*?" repeated Armitage in a puzzled tone. "That's a new one for McGregor, isn't it? What does it mean?"

"*Tulach Ard*," Mackenzie replied with a glint in his eye, "is the war-cry of the Mackenzie clan, and the only Mackenzie it won't stir into action is a dead one!"

"Good work, McGregor!" Major McKelvie nodded approvingly. "But, look here, Mackenzie, you still haven't told us how you ever got into that confounded church in the first place."

"That's soon told," Mackenzie replied. "I was doing a late afternoon show and on the way out I came down low, as I usually did, to do a spot of trench 'strafing.'"

"Yes, we'd gathered that much from the balloon wallahs," McKelvie observed.

"Well, I suppose I was rather asking for trouble," Mackenzie continued, "but on my solo shows I'd got into the habit of coming low down behind that old church at Alluin. It seemed a safe sort of place to check up one's bearings, and for another thing, I used to set my watch by the clock in the church tower there. Well, this time I did it once too often, for just as I got level with the tower the fun started."

"You mean they opened fire on you?" McKelvie asked.

"Fire! I'll say they did," Mackenzie grinned. "Why, that clock face just opened out, and there, not fifty yards away, were about half a dozen Maxims mounted on a stand. I was just cold meat for 'em, and I still can't make out how I managed to get away with it. One bullet grazed my head and two more went through the fleshy part of my arm. They practically blasted the engine out of my 'bus and though I don't remember anything much after that, I suppose I must have pulled off some sort of landing. Next thing I knew I was in

a cot in that church. They were quite decent to me in a way, and pretty bucked about having winged me. Seems they'd been gunning for me for quite a while."

"But why on earth did they keep you there?" asked Armitage.

"Don't know, for sure," Mackenzie replied. "But I rather imagine they couldn't very easily move me just then and were quite content to lie doggo for a bit. It wasn't until they found your old Handley the other night that they began to get a bit scared."

"But none of the German squadrons even seemed to know that you'd been brought down," McKelvie interjected.

"Yes, I heard about that, too," Mackenzie said. "That monk chap—of course he wasn't a monk really; it was just a disguise to keep the locals from talking—explained it to me. The idea was that the effect of the news about my being a goner would be greater on both sides of the line if it was kept quiet until the excitement had been well worked up. Damned silly, I thought it, personally."

"Not a bit of it," McKelvie objected. "A very clever move of theirs, aimed at getting the maximum moral effect. You seem to forget that you're all kinds of a national hero and that the papers at home have been making a hell of to-do about your disappearance."

"And what made them decide to move you in the end?" Townsend enquired.

"The arrival of you fellows," was the reply. "When they found your Handley and discovered that you'd all got clear away they decided it was time to think of moving. I rather gathered they were scared that you, or someone else, might have got ideas about that church and would be back to call on it with a load of 112-pounders."

An appreciative chuckle came from the members of the Coffin Crew standing in the background. Then McKelvie spoke again.

"There's only one other thing I still don't understand," he said, "and that is how the monk at Cassel church here was able to listen to the organ at Alluin. Why, they must be miles apart."

"I think I can explain that, sir," offered Townsend quietly. "I've had a talk with McGregor and Marks, and they tell me that while they were in the belfry at Cassel they noticed a very sensitive microphone set with directional detectors. Now, if you look at the map, you'll see that Cassel and Alluin are about twenty-seven miles apart and in a straight line that runs between two valleys."

"Go on," said McKelvie interestedly, studying the map before him.

"Well, sir," Townsend continued, "organ music is particularly suited for sound-wave detection because of its vibration, and a sensitive receiving set could be tuned so that any especially loud or accented notes could be picked up and noted. Then, in this case, all the man at the detector had to do was to change the music notes into the letters of his code. Of course, reception would have been impossible at that distance during a barrage or anything of that sort, but the vibrations could be heard well above the ordinary noise of war and could easily be picked up during the quiet periods of the night. And I imagine that was the time these fellows did most of their transmission of information."

THERE was a silence for several minutes as the full ingenuity of the scheme sank into the minds of the

little group of fighting men, all accustomed to open and straightforward methods of waging a war, but rather at a loss in the deceitful intricacies of this web of espionage.

It was Major McKelvie who broke the silence at last, and when he spoke he voiced the general feeling of his audience.

"This war is beginning to 'get a bit too involved for an old war-horse like me," he said with a smile. "In fact I almost believe I'd apply for a transfer to the Army Service Corps—if it wasn't for one little thing."

"And that is, sir?" asked Armitage and Townsend almost together.

"That is, if I wasn't so darned curious to see what crazy kind of mischief the Coffin Crew'll be getting up to next," was Major McKelvie's laughing reply.

