



# HALF-SHOT AT CHAUMONT

*written and illustrated by* **JOE ARCHIBALD**

*There was something pretty harsh in the U.S. Army regulations about a private impersonating an officer. But even Phineas "Carbuncle" Pinkham was bright enough to know that an officer couldn't get busted for impersonating a private!*

**I**T IS HISTORY THAT THE AIR FORCE came in very handy indeed during the argument with the Hohenzollern family not so many years ago, and the prowess of the patriots who fought upstairs has been written about all over the place. But one important fact has never been sufficiently stressed, and that is that when things went haywire with the brass hats at Chaumont, whether it was their own fault or otherwise, they called up the nearest air squadron and gave it hell.

There were a lot of C.O.s in France upon whose

heads indignities could have been heaped, but invariably the brass hats singled out for their target one Major Rufus Garrity, esteemed Old Man of the Ninth Pursuit Squadron, that brood of buzzards which did more to put the little town of Bar-le-Duc on the map than any Frog chamber of commerce since Joan of Arc.

At the particular hectic moment we speak of, Major Rufus was holding the receiver of a field telephone close to a crimson, vibrating ear. On his grizzled visage was the happy expression of a man whose mother-in-law has

just moved into his flat with a new husband who is out of work. G.H.Q. wanted to know, and damned quick, why a Salmson could not stay in the ozone over the lines long enough to direct at least one salvo for the artillery. Before the Old Man could inject a single word into the outburst from Chaumont, a rare blob of sarcasm came over the wires to the effect that his war birds should brush up a bit on their boy scout manuals.

The Air Force, it was impressed upon Sir Rufus, was a liability and a needless expense to the government—it was a crowd of lead-swinging Congressmen's white-haired boys who thought the war was a good place to work their way through college. Artillery officers, the voice of Chaumont continued, had expressed their willingness to go up on the wings of the Spads and point out Fokkers to the pilots in case they didn't know what a Fokker looked like. There came a pause.

"Look here, sir!" roared Major Garrity, throwing his words in fast. "You can't insult me like that. I don't give a damn if you're Pershing. You can bust me to a potato-skinner, but I'll tell you what I think of you all first. Now this is the best damn squadron in—"

*Click!* The sound was convincing, very emphatic. The brass hat had hung up. Major Garrity almost smashed the instrument of communication between himself and Chaumont to bits. Then he kicked back his chair and stamped up and down until all the furniture in the room was doing the same. And then, at this moment of all moments, came an interruption. An orderly stood on the threshold and behind him a nervous, squat man in khaki gazed at the Presence with awe and fright in his eyes.

"Well?" bellowed the C.O. "Say something, for cripes'—"

"Sergeant Casey wants to speak to you, sir," gulped the orderly. "Says he—"

"Awright, awright. Get out. Well, Casey, if you want leave, you've got as much chance of getting it as a celluloid dog has of chas—"

"No, sir," put in Casey, "it's about one of the officers, sir. Lieutenant Pinkham, sir, it seems—"

"Pinkham?" The blast of air with the word rocked the sergeant against the door jamb. As he ripped out the name, the Old Man seemed to be well beyond the age limit for military service. He braced himself, shoved out his jaw and motioned to Casey to get it over with. Whatever it was, he knew it was going to be worse than bad.

"W-well, I don't like to say nothin', sir," apologized the mechanic, "b-but I giss a groundman has got a

right to some peace, ain't he, sir? I got trouble enough as it is, sir. I got hell from the flight sergeant this mornin', sir, an' he says he was gonna see you an' have me broke or else I wouldn't tell. I ain't no squealer, but if I git busted, my girl back—"

"Shut up about your girl!" yelled the Old Man. "Spill it!"

"Well, ya see all the groundmen was late this mornin', sir, an' some had to git the ships ready for the early patrol in their bare feet. Lieut—*er*—some guy—*er*—somebody come into the barracks durin' the night, sir, an' tied all the shoes together an' some of 'em was full of molasses. So—"

"That's enough, Casey," roared Major Garrity, homicide getting a strangle hold on his better self. "Get out of here! I'll attend to this. I'll—"

"Ya won't say where ya got it, sir?" stammered the groundman.

"Get out!"

NOW everyone who has the slightest knowledge of the national pastime of the U.S.A. remembers the great triple play combination, Tinker to Evers to Chance. It could not hold a candle, however, to the one known as Chaumont to Garrity to Pinkham. All the grief that came from the brass hats to the C.O. generally found its ultimate resting place on Lieutenant Pinkham's shoulders whether he deserved it or not—but he generally did. The Old Man sent an orderly on the double to find the Boonetown flyer, then sat down in his chair and placed various heavy articles on the table before him within easy reach.

A few minutes later, just as the Pinkham boots sounded in the big room outside, the major had made up his mind just what was going to happen to his black sheep. The door opened slowly, swung shut in the same manner and there, in the flesh, stood Lieutenant Phineas "Carbuncle" Pinkham, flyer of note, if not great ability, trickster extraordinary and the bane of the brass hats.

"Well, I'm here, sir," Phineas announced himself with a grin.

The Old Man was about to launch an appropriate response when his eyes fell upon the thing the flyer held in his hand. It was a long sword with a bright, glittering hilt.

"So?" blazed the C.O. "Thinking of attacking me, eh, Pinkham? Well, damme, I'll show you—"

"I was not!" protested Phineas. "It's only a collapsible sword. I was practicin' swallerin' it an' I fergot to leave it behin'. Do ya think I'd—"

"Yeah?" blazed Garrity. "Well, swallow it now and

do me a favor, you fathead! Didn't salute me either, did you, Pinkham? Don't give a damn for the rules and regulations they made in this man's army before you had the audacity to be born? But we'll forget that for the present. Now, listen! How much do you think ten pairs of army issue shoes would cost, eh? When you get the answer, subtract it from your next month's pay, if there's anything coming! I—"

Lieutenant Pinkham's sword hung loosely in his hand and the grin vanished from his homely face. For tense seconds he and the Old Man tried to outstare each other, but both got tired of it. Phineas coughed, but there was no tickling in his throat. Then he grinned once more and the Old Man saw red.

"Don't deny it, eh?" he stormed, his fingers itching toward a big bottle of paste. "Went into the groundmen's barracks and had a lot of fun, didn't you?"

"Well, Casey squealed, huh? The louse!" Phineas was indignant. "I'll punch his nose. He went all over France sayin' as how I owe him fifty francs an' that I was a welsher. I don't know what it means but I bet it's dirty. Anyways, they can't prove it was me. It's circumstantial evidence. I know. Oncet my ol' man stole a couple of pigs an' went to court—"

"Shut up, you bat-eared whoozle," exploded the major, balancing the bottle of paste in his hand. "Laugh this off. Besides buying some new boots, you're grounded!"

Phineas' face fell almost to his belt line. "H-huh?" he gulped. "Ya mean—well, ya can't. It wasn't a grave offense. It—"

Major Garrity grinned with all the amiability of a timber wolf and slammed the paste bottle to the desk. "You're grounded because you're supposed to be dead, Pinkham!" he pointed out. "And we've got grief enough on our hands without all of the air squadrons in Germany coming over to look for you. Until von Holke gets out of this sector, you're grounded."

"B-but how will the krauts know unless somebody tells 'em?" persisted Phineas. "I kin disguise myself an'—"

"Haw-w-w!" The laugh was not funny, nor was it a compliment to our hero. "How can they tell? By your lousy flying! There are two pilots in this squadron who ought to be chauffeurs for wheelbarrows, and you're both of 'em. That's all. And don't leave the drome, either, Pinkham, understand? I'm taking no chances of your going out and swiping a Nieuport or a Bristol. I'll show you who's running this squadron. I'll—"

Overhead rose the song of a Hisso. The chorus

became a sporadic clatter as the pilot cut it and swooped lower. Another hummed over. Phineas did not wait to be excused but started on the run for the great outdoors. The Old Man followed, but not in a hurry. Trouble always waited for him.

WILLIAMS, leader of B flight, taxied up and looked back at the sky as if he should return for something he had forgotten. Phineas saw that two ships were missing and he looked at Captain Howell, his own sky boss, and shrugged.

"Bet we got to go up an' finish it," speculated Phineas. "Them crates look like they was used for punch boards, huh?"

"We?" scoffed Bump Gillis, anking up to Phineas' side. "When the great Carbuncle is here? Why, I thought this was your war—"

"You're as funny as a bottle of embalmin' fluid!" interposed Phineas. "An' say, where'd you git off wearin' my wrist-watch? Take it off, ya bum or—"

"Gave us hell!" declared Williams, and all eyes and ears of the pilots became alert. "Von Holke is still upstairs and he knocked another Salmson off this mornin' quicker than you could spit. We tried to stop 'em, but they came down through us so fast it was almost funny. Wait'll the Old Man hears—"

"I heard, Williams," roared Major Garrity, pushing an ungente way through a quartet of flyers. "And wait until the brass hats hear about it! All of you bums'll be ferryin' crates for new guys to fly in and I'll be over in a big house, cuttin' up paper dolls! And the sooner the better!" he concluded, looking at Phineas. "Damn brass hats! Wonder if they think this is the only flying squadron in France? They never—"

"Giss I ain't grounded now, sir, huh?" proposed Phineas hopefully. "Giss ya'll need every guy to show them Heinies up an'—"

Major Garrity teetered on his toes like a great pine tree ready to fall. Bump Gillis thought he heard something snap inside the Old Man's head.

"You're grounded, Pinkham!" he roared, and Howell feared that von Holke might have heard him. "And if you open your face once more, I'll go you one better. I'll bury ya!" And as if he were afraid of what he might do if he stayed around another second, the C.O. of the Ninth turned and ran for solitary.

"Well, awright," growled the Boonetown flyer. "Awright. If he don't want to win, well—" And he glowered at the grinning pilots around him as he plodded indignantly away.

The brass hats raved again. The Old Man swore at them and called them everything in the mule-skinner's dictionary that was not fit for print, then locked himself in his own cubicle to look around for something to drink. There was nothing to be seen, so Major Garrity coined some new blasphemies and swore to high heaven that it would not be long before he got some.

Two hours later he climbed into the squadron car, told those next in rank that he did not know whether he would ever be back and barked at the driver to step on it. From the door of the big stone house Lieutenant Phineas Pinkham looked on, and a broad grin spread over his face. He watched the car until it was out of sight and then hied him to his hut, where he ferreted out a big tin box from the depths of his trunk. Snapping back the lid, Phineas bared to view a complete make-up for those who trod the Thespian circuit. One hour passed and Phineas Pinkham sneaked out back of A flight's hangar, got on an antiquated bicycle and rolled out of the drome.

LEST our readers be shocked by what follows, we needs must declare that Major Garrity was human like everyone else. Such great immortals as Caesar, Napoleon and General Grant sought the wassail bowl for consolation when a limit to their endurance had been reached, and if you don't believe it, buy a history.

In the Cafe of the Red Cow in a dark neighborhood of Bar-le-Duc, Major Garrity tried to climb out of the vat of woe. The corner in which he sat was in semi-darkness, and those who ventured to disturb his privacy were lucky to make a retreat without getting a piece of leg bitten off. There was a motley group of revelers present that night—officers, non-coms, privates good, bad and indifferent. Conversation from the nearest table began to sift into the eardrums of Major Garrity.

"Lousy outfit!" a voice was saying. "Getting along on Pinkham's reputation. Garrity's all right but he's getting too old. Ought to get some young blood there. Spoken to Wings about it. The second Salmson was knocked off this morning. Damned Spads quit cold. We—"

So many things happened in the next few moments that the naked eye could not be expected to take it all in. Major Garrity pounded the table in front of him with a balled fist and rose to his feet. The man who had set off the spark sensed that hostility was at his elbow and he, too, kicked back his chair. A third man appeared apparently out of nowhere, and then came a sound as if somebody had hit a steer over the head with an axe. One hundred and ninety pounds of officer folded up and

hit the floor. Everybody scrambled for the clear. Fumes of strong drink joined up with the scant illumination to throw them into momentary confusion, and nobody saw a man roll under a table in a big hurry.

Fist doubled up, Major Garrity stared in amazement as two officers reached down and pulled their sputtering companion to his feet. Cold sober, the officer looked around wildly and his glance fell on Major Garrity. His beetled brows beetled some more as he looked at the hamlike fist of the Squadron Commander. One knuckle was badly skinned.

"Sir!" the man roared. "You struck me. You had the colossal nerve to strike a general, sir! I—"

"Hu-huh?" gasped Garrity. "You say I—why, I certainly did not. But I had the idea!" he added wrathfully. "You can't trump that charge against me! You—"

"Look, men!" the man shouted at his companions. "This man's knuckle "bears the evidence that he struck me. Sir!" he bellowed at the major. "What's your rank? Your—"

"Major Rufus Garrity, Ninth Pursuit Squadron, Air Force," blazed the Old Man indignantly. "And if you want me to send for my birth certificate—"

"Hold your tongue, sir!" came the retort. "I'm Brigadier-General Wolfe from Chaumont. Major Garrity, *eh?* Swore at me today, didn't you? Now you assault me. I'll have you put under arrest. I—"

"Beg your pardon, sir."

The brass hat whirled. A man in a private's uniform had arrived on the scene. "I'm Private Willie Shirtzinger," he said. "Came here with orders for Colonel Brooks. I saw everything, sir. There was a man struck you and rolled under the table there, it was not this officer, sir. I could swear—"

Major Garrity beamed and favored the buck as if he had been a long-lost son. The man, perhaps, was not the loveliest thing in the world to look at, for he had a huge, ugly red nose, a shock of yellow hair that stuck out in all directions from under his tin hat and eyebrows arched so as to give him a permanent expression of astonishment.

"You'll swear to that, son?" put in Garrity eagerly. "If—"

"Sure, sure I will," grinned the man. "I—"

"We'll see about this, Garrity," stormed the brass hat as he gathered up the skirts of his trench coat, preparatory to departure. "We'll see. Consider yourself under arrest. You are confined to your quarters at Bar-le-Duc on your honor! Heard us putting you on the carpet, *eh?* Evidence is conclusive, isn't it? Come on, men."

“What’s your company, Shirtslinger?” asked Garrity desperately. “I’ll want you around, you know.”

“Shirtzinger, sir,” corrected the man with a grin. “Company A, 69th Infantry, only four miles from here, sir.”

“Very good, Shirtflinger,” said the Old Man. “I’ll communicate with your commanding officer tomorrow. Thanks. And here’s twenty francs. Have a good time!”

“Sure!” enthused the private. “Thank ya, sir.” And he edged away, tracing a hurried path toward the exit.

IT WAS after midnight when Major Garrity rumbled back onto the drome. Most of the pilots were either snoring in their bunks or getting ready to do that thing. Among the latter was Bump Gillis. That gentleman knew that there was no use to try and sleep until Phineas Pinkham had bedded down for the night. Bump’s eyelids were as heavy as sash-weights as he looked at his watch for the fiftieth time when the door opened slowly to admit a bedraggled-looking Carbuncle.

“Well, I had a narrer escape,” explained Phineas. “I was pedallin’ along on the bike when I heard a car comin’ behin’ me an’ I figgered it might be the Old Man. I run into a ditch an’ went over the handle-bars. The ditch had about a foot of water in it. Look at my uneiform, lookit it!”

“It was the Ol’ Man, ya lucky stiff!” growled Bump. “Now shut up an’ git into bed. Cripes, I been holdin’ my eyes open with sticks. An’ I’ve stayed up so long I’m hungry as hell. I’m goin’ to see the Ol’ Man and git a transfer. I’m sick of livin’ with a nitwit like you. I—”

“Yeah?” smiled Phineas. “Look what I brung ya. A coupla them cinnamon buns ya like so much. Now ain’t ya ’shamed, ya fathead?”

Bump Gillis grinned. “I was only kiddin’. Carbuncle,” he said. “Let me git my teeth in one.”

As he undressed, Phineas watched Bump masticate one of the delectable pastries with great gusto. Considering everything, he mused, the night had been a successful one. The Old Man could stop him from seeing his *mademoiselle*, could he? Well, he would have to get up before he went to bed to get ahead of old man Pinkham’s brightest boy. Phineas seemed to get even more relish out of the nocturnal repast than did Bump, who was now attacking the second bun. He ate half of same, then wrapped the remainder in paper and left it for the morrow.

Contrary to his usual habit, Phineas Pinkham was up before Bump at the crack of dawn. He looked at his

stirring hutmate, glanced at something on the table, grinned a yard wide, then hurried to the stone house, whistling a carefree tune as he went. The inimitable exponent of everything that is meant to fool the gullible was munching at a piece of toast and washing it down with hot coffee when a wild-eyed Lieutenant Gillis, his Scotch blood boiling, dashed into the house and held something under Phineas’ nose. It was the remains of a cinnamon bun.

“Y-you f-fathead!” howled the almost inarticulate Bump. “L-look at them th-things! They-they ain’t currants, ya louse! They’re flies!” As he uttered the last word, his face screwed up with nausea and rage and he reached for a plate. Phineas was already running when Bump whirled it around his head.

*Crash!* The crockery spun across the room, missed Phineas and broke into bits with a loud smash against the door of Major Garrity’s quarters. It was incredible that the Old Man could have wakened, jumped out of bed, pulled on a pair of pants and appeared in the doorway of the room in so brief a space of time.

“What in hell’s going on, you bunch of crackpots?” he bellowed. “Who threw that dish?” His red-rimmed eyes looked through another open door. They caught sight of Bump Gillis in pursuit of Phineas. “Cripes!” he erupted. “Pinkham again! I’ll kill him yet, so help me! I’ll—” He sputtered like a pan of frying fat and turned back into his room, slamming the door behind him.

SEVERAL minutes later Captain Howell led a bunch of Spads out over the lines. A flight was going up to see what could be done without the great Phineas Pinkham. It is doubtful that his presence would have made any difference. Von Holke got in their way over the turbulent area of conflict and sent them reeling back to the tarmac. Howell was in no mood for levity when he got out of his Spad. Bump Gillis, having missed the hereafter by the width of a control wire, had lost what little sense of humor he had been blessed with. However, Lieutenant Pinkham showed very little respect for their feelings in the matter.

“Well, I giss you guys are handcuffed when I ain’t upstairs,” he opined with a grin as they trod by him. “Ya better speak to the Old Man for me. If he wants to beat them Heinies, he’s got to have a Pinkham. There’s been a Pinkham in every *guerre*—the Revolution, the Sp—” Howell and Gillis stopped. The grinding of teeth could be heard above the sound of the last two ships coming in. They seemed set for a concerted rush but groaned instead and dropped their hands in despair, continuing on their way.

Later that day success deigned to notice the long-suffering Ninth. The Spads of B and C flights managed to smack down four Fokkers which tried to blind the Yank artillery's eagle eye, a Salmson ship. Guns roared out and reached their objective. At last a Salmson went home and reported progress.

But in the operations room of the big house there was no joy on the face of Major Garrity. Success had ignored him entirely. Misery sought his company and huddled close to him like a faithful hound. For all that day the Old Man had tried to locate a private known as Willie Shirtzinger. A company, 69th Infantry, had never even heard of him. Neither had a dozen other units within range of the Old Man. He was sunk up to his neck. Fate had played him a mean and dirty trick.

At the mess table, pilots looked up hopefully as the Old Man came in. They were looking for some kind words and a pat on the back, but instead they received a dirty look and a throatful of growls. Phineas Pinkham grinned and did not share in the disappointment. He ate his evening repast with his usual robust appetite and seemed to revel in the gob of gloom that hung over the place. And then the C.O. sighed deeply and scanned the faces about the festive board.

"You buzzards might as well know the worst," he snapped. "You'll have a new boss here damn soon. I'm up for a general court martial. You can lay to that!"

Captain Howell dropped his fork. Grunts of incredulity floated in the air. Major Garrity let the first burst sink in, then followed it up with a brief account of the episode at Bar-le-Duc.

"Got me hooked, that bird has," he went on to say. "Didn't hit the fathead but I wish I had. Nothing but circumstantial evidence, that's all. They—"

"Sure," horned in Phineas Pinkham. "Jus' like me and them groundmen's boots. They can't convict ya. Once I was in a court when my old man—"

*Bang!* Both of the Garrity's fists hit the table. Dishes bounced and crashed overside. "Shut up!" he roared. "Y-you fish-faced, half-baked nincompoop! My last official act will be to bust you, Pinkham. Put that in your hat!" He swore, then began where he had left off. "He's out to get me, that brass hat. And I haven't got a chance. That Willie Shirtstinger—*er*—Shirtwinger—*er*—that damned private—"

"Haw-w-w-w-w-w-w!" guffawed Phineas Pinkham, unable to hold in his mirth any longer. "Haw-w-w-w-w!"

"Shut up, ya big stiff!" barked Bump Gillis, cracking Phineas across the knuckles with a cup.

"That's funny, is it, Pinkham?" purred Major Garrity

and there was a smile on his face that boded more evil than one of his worst scowls. "Think you'll get rid of me that easy, do you? Like hell! I've promised myself that you're going to spend a lot of this war being cuffed around by a lot of gorillas at Blois who think nothing of breaking off a guy's arm to get the tattooing that's on it. You're as good as a buck private right now!"

"Ray-y-y-y-y-y!" cheered the Ninth to a man.

"A nice lot of friends I got, huh?" commented the irrepressible Phineas. "We'll see who ya cheer for nex' time. The trouble with all you bums, ya ain't got no sense of humor. It's worse'n not havin' a pair of lungs. Well, I giss I'll go an' practice on the sword. I swallered part of the hilt this noon."

"You'll stay here until I say you can go!" roared the C.O.

"Awright! Awright!" agreed Phineas hastily. "I was only foolin'."

TRUE to his word, and just as Major Rufus had expected, Brigadier-General Wolfe issued orders three days later to the effect that the C.O. of the Ninth Pursuit was to report to Chaumont immediately. His command for the time being would be placed in the hands of Captain Howell. The news came like the falling of a double-yoked Gotha egg on the tarmac of the squadron. And just after the news had spread to every ear on the field, the war birds rallied around the wrathful Major Garrity and promised him that no one else would ever be their boss. Still wearing his omnipresent grin, Phineas hovered on the outskirts of the assembly, content to hold his tongue and listen.

"No, sir," declared Howell. "You're the Ninth, sir. Without you there will be no Ninth. Let 'em spread us around but they won't keep us here, the dirty—"

"Fine spirit, men," said the C.O., "but I'm afraid it will not do you much good. When the judge-advocate-general and all those lieutenant-colonels get through with me, I'll be just an ordinary cluck. Well—" And he stopped suddenly as his eyes rested on Pinkham. "Pinkham," he said, "you go up with the rest tomorrow. A flight is going out to cover a spotter. It'll be a hot scrap and I'm hoping you get your pants burnt. No use to let you fatten up on the ground while the rest risk their necks. And you're already dead, so you haven't anything to lose. Ha! Ha! That ought to tickle your sense of humor!"

Phineas grinned. He knew there was not an iota of malice behind the words. Not that he expected the C.O. to kiss him before he left, but that was the way of Sir

Rufus. He would leave the Ninth Pursuit with nothing on his conscience and everything in order. Phineas' jubilant cry, strangely enough, died almost at birth. Something had occurred to him—a sudden thought that made him gulp and push his way to the Old Man's side.

"Bu-but I can't take the chance to-morrer, sir," was the Boonetown flyer's strange outburst. "Ya-ya see, I've gotta go some place. I got—"

"Wha-a-a-a-a?" gasped the Old Man. "Y-you're not getting the wind up, are you, Pinkham? Hell, no! Not you. What's eating you? That French dame in Bar-le-Duc, is it? Well, you fly with Howell in the morning, understand? Now shut up!"

"Awright!" growled Phineas in assent. "I'll go up but when ya—" He stopped short as if he were afraid he'd already said too much. Silently he walked away.

Major Rufus Garrity watched the dawn patrol take off the next morning, and his heart was as light as a hod of bricks. He wondered if it was the last time he would see Howell and his bunch skim away into the mists. Phineas Pinkham's heart was perhaps an ounce lighter than the C.O.'s as he rode his ship toward Germany. A fine kettle of fish? This would be just the day to get tagged by a Heinie slug, and in his bones was the feeling that there would be another funeral for him soon. But this time he would not hear the nice things they say about a guy, no matter how much of a cluck he has been, when they lay him down to sleep the sleep of the righteous or otherwise.

Guns were booming when Howell and his flock slipped over the Yankee back area and far ahead, slightly below them, a Salmson ship hovered. A flight began to circle, and for once Lieutenant Pinkham's heart was not in his work. His thoughts also were far away. They came flocking back to him in a panic a few minutes later as the Junkers of von Holke's squadron arrived in their working clothes. A flight threw their Spads over the Salmson and dared the Fokkers to try and get through.

NOW on this day it must be said that Lieutenant Phineas Pinkham fought and flew better than he knew how. That was one scrap he had to get out of with at least two legs and a head. One arm and an eye he could spare, but that was all. And do not forget that the sky riders of the Ninth Pursuit were well peeved at the world in general. Von Holke should have stayed behind his lines and minded his own business, but here he was, and of course it was too late.

Howell started the scoring with a burst through the fuel tank of a Fokker. The Tripe blew up almost in

front of von Hoike's face and the blue-blooded Boche leader spun out of the way in time to get hell kicked out his tail assembly. Bump Gillis howled as he came tearing around again to complete the ruin, but two Tripes got in his way and shot a strut away from his Spad. Howell cancelled another Fokker and then led two squadron ships down to wipe out an energetic Tripe which had somehow slipped through to fight a duel with the Salmson's rear gunner. After knocking a Tripe bowlegged, Phineas Pinkham looked around for a hole in the *mêlée* and found it. Full-gun, he slammed toward it, rode a gauntlet of Boche lead and then was away, eating up sky miles toward the south.

Howell saw the Boonetown flyer's hegira from the scene and swore at the top of his lungs. The shock of seeing Lieutenant Pinkham, of all men, running away, almost cost the flight leader his equilibrium, also his mortality. Diving in the nick of time, he escaped von Holke's discharge of venom and immediately forgot Phineas.

Outside of Bar-le-Duc, Lieutenant Pinkham landed his Spad. From the pit he removed a tin box, shoved it under his arm and walked to the village. An hour later he arrived back at his Spad, but in the interim Phineas seemed to have undergone a complete metamorphosis. Even those who had been very close to our hero would have looked at him ten times and then would have reached the conclusion that they had never seen the gentleman before in their lives. The Spad made a hazardous take-off and the pilot pointed the nose toward a spot on the map where a Frog squadron was spread out. Coming down on that field, Phineas brusquely demanded a tank of gas or petrol as the French would have it. It was forthcoming without argument and then the Spad was in the air again, still flying south.

In the little village of Chaumont the following day, Major Rufus Garrity of the Ninth sat facing five august superior officers, the most superior of whom was a judge-advocate-general whose duty it was in France to exact justice in the least possible time. No one under a lieutenant-colonel was present and Major Rufus already was making plans to change his name and start life anew in Australia or even in a more remote corner of the earth, if he could find it.

Brigadier-General Wolfe sat facing the major, his visage as dark as Sir Rufus' chances. Department G, G.H.Q. was ready for the busting. The general court martial was in full swing. Hitting a superior officer, and one such as Mr. Wolfe, was a very grave offense indeed. Murder was on a par with it. As the trial waxed

hot and all evidence was turned in, it became apparent that the brass hats would be excused early and that Sir Rufus was even now well tied up in a sling.

"This Private Shirtstinger," growled the judge-advocate, "is your only hope for a defense, is he not, major?"

"He is, sir," responded the C.O. "I'm afraid my word is no good at Chaumont. I—"

"Your case is black enough without adding to it, Major Garrity," reprimanded the court. "Your story is a bit thin. You do not deny that you had had words with your superior over the wires. You—"

"I do not," answered the Old Man. "But I insist I did not strike the brigadier. That knuekle he refers to was skinned when—"

A COMMOTION outside suddenly interrupted the proceedings. There was much scuffling and a high-pitched indignant voice. The door seemed to strain on its hinges. Abruptly Major Garrity's rugged frame quivered from north to south. An insistent voice ripped out.

"I am Private Willie Shirtzinger," it announced. "I've got evidence—"

Major Garrity appealed to the judge-advocate. "That's he, sir. I knew he would be here. I ask that the Court—"

The dispenser of military justice barked to a guard at the portals. The door was opened, and then those present stared at a wild-eyed, disreputable-looking dough who struggled against the clutches of two brawny M.P.s.

"Send him in!" was the crisp command.

Seemingly scared out of his wits before the awesome court, the soldier was herded in. Major Garrity looked at him and had to fight down the impulse, to gather the witness to his bosom and implant a kiss on his cheek. That big red-nosed and corn-colored-haired buck was a welcome sight. Now he would see what he would see. The preliminaries dispensed with, the judge-advocate began to work on Willie Shirtzinger.

"You say you were an eye witness to the attack on Brigadier-General Wolfe?" he barked at the dough. "Y-yes, sir."

"Explain in detail!"

"W-well, I come in to find a orfiser," the man began, "an' just as I come toward them tables in the corner, I see a guy git up an' crock the brass h—*er*—the orfiser on the chin, an' then he rolled under the table. I beat it almos' to the door, but when I heard 'em sayin' that Major G—*er*—this orfiser here did it, I come back, sir,

an' stuck up for him. I ain't a guy to see another guy git a raw deal, sir, an'—"

"Where was Major Garrity standing at the time of the attack?" put in the inquisitor.

"Behind the orfiser what was hit," came Private Shirtzinger's reply. "I seen him an' he didn't do nothin'. I giss they had all been drinkin' a lot of booze an' they didn't git things straight an'—"

"That's enough!" erupted the judge-advocate, his brows beetling. "You just answer my questions, understand?"

"Yes, sir," answered Willie Shirtzinger. His nose seemed suddenly to harbor an itch and a big freckled paw went up to scratch the member. Brigadier-General Wolfe half-rose from his seat and his jaw hung down as if it had fallen from its hinges. His eyes became as big as goldfish bowls as he fixed their gaze on the witness for the defense. The room was as soundless as a morgue. Major Garrity turned slightly to see what had disturbed his accuser and pearly had a stroke. For Private Willie Shirtzinger was holding his nose in his hand and still his nose was still very much in evidence on his face.

"So!" Brigadier-General Wolfe's voice was synonymous with his name. He leaped at the mysterious witness and pulled his yellow hair from his head. Then Major Garrity almost fainted as he recognized Lieutenant Phineas Pinkham. "Framed an alibi, did you, Garrity?" Wolfe bellowed. "Well, I guess there's no need to go further!" He faced the court. "I demand that—"

"Jus' a second, sir," yipped Phineas. "Major Garrity didn't frame nothin'. I am Lieutenant Phineas Pinkham, sir. That night in Barly Duck I was Willie Shirtslin—Shirtfling—well, I was a private, sir. I saw just what I said I saw!"

"Damn you, Pinkham!" roared the stunned C.O. "You've done it now. You've—"

"Silence!" bellowed the judge-advocate. He glowered at Phineas.

"So you're the great Lieutenant Pinkham, are you?" he snarled. "Well, I'm afraid your attempt to help your commanding officer is useless. In fact, the case appears blacker. You have the impudence to come before this court and insult their intelligence in this manner? Why, you—"

"I am tellin' what I know," argued Phineas, apparently little fazed by this imposing officer of the Tribunal. "Them orfisers was all cock-eyed an' didn't know what was goin' on. How could I fake Willie Shirtst—*er*—whatever my name was, if I didn't know what he looked like an' had the make-up to make myself



look like him, huh? I got a dame in Barly Duck an' wanted to see her so I fixed myself up like a dough so's I wouldn't gif reckernized by my commandin' orfiser in case he come in to town. An' I saw it all, yessir!"

NEVER before in the history of court martials had such disregard for high rank been known. So stunned was the great judge-advocate that he could not find voice to cut off the Pinkham diatribe. Brigadier-General Wolfe leaned against a table for support. Major Garrity shut his eyes and wondered if he would face a firing squad like a man. Lieutenant-colonels marvelled. At last the judge-advocate-general found speech. And to the amazement of all, he let his glance stray to the brigadier and his witnesses.

"General Wolfe," he said, "you and your fellow-officers had been drinking, had you not?" Phineas looked at Major Garrity and grinned.

"W-well, sir," the officer replied hesitatingly, "of course. It is not the first time officers have taken a drink or two. But we were not—"

"You are absolutely certain that you were struck by Major Garrity?"

"Why—*er*—" stammered the brigadier, "it must have been the major. He—"

"Must have been? That hardly could convict a man. This man's word—" and he gestured toward Lieutenant Pinkham, "must have some consideration from the court. This is a grave charge. We cannot convict a man on circumstantial evidence. Witnesses have attested that the cafe was illy lighted as a safeguard against a possible air raid. Major Garrity could not have arranged for a witness at such a short notice. I ask the officers of this court martial to bear that in mind. As for Lieutenant Pinkham's disregard for the dignity of this court, I—"

"B-but, sir," interrupted Carbuncle, "I was excited, sir. I didn't want to see a innercent man—well, ya ain't got no charge against me. I was a orfiser impersonatin' a private an' I never heard that that was a crime, sir. I giss, though, I'll gif my pants burnt anyways by Major Garrity when I git back, so it don't matter who busts me."

Somebody stifled a burst of mirth. The judge-advocate was human and wiped at his face with a handkerchief. Major Garrity, shaking like a leaf, waited for the worst. In the next moment the general court

martial had assumed its super-serious mien. A few questions anent the gentleman or otherwise who had been seen rolling under the table, and the trial came to a close. Major Rufus Garrity and Phineas were taken outside while the officers decided the result.

Twenty minutes later Major Garrity stood in front of the judge-advocate-general and was presented with an acquittal on the grounds that circumstantial evidence had had too much bearing in the case. He received a stern reprimand, however, and was told that in the future he should keep a civil tongue in his head when G.H.Q. called him up or there would be a new commanding officer in the Ninth Pursuit. The status of Phineas, however, was still in doubt when he and the Old Man departed from Chaumont.

Two ships landed on the drome near Bar-le-Duc late that day. One had ferried Major Rufus from G.H.Q.'s lair. The other contained Phineas Pinkham. Pilots anxiously flocked around the Old Man as he stepped to *terra firma*. Howell glared at Phineas and hinted broadly that guys who turn and run from the Boche sometimes get hung. Phineas was impervious. He grinned and took his place beside the C. O.

"You buzzards," Sir Rufus roared, "hurry up and thank Pinkham for saving your Old Man. I want to talk to him alone. Hurry up!"

"Wha-a-a-a-a-a-a-a?" gasped somebody. But the C.O. and Phineas were on their way to the stone house.

"Well, Pinkham," began Garrity several minutes later when he had his bearings, "so you were the bum I gave those twenty francs to, huh? I ought to have known. You homely, bat-eared—" The major became inarticulate.

"Haw-w-w-w-w-w!" guffawed the intrepid Carbuncle. "Giss I fooled ya, huh? I oughta have tol' ya, but it was a good joke to make ya think—"

"I ought to wallop you one on the nose!" yelled the major, his jaw thrust out. "Left the drome against my orders, did you? I'll attend to that later. And shut up! I want to ask you just one question. That guy who rolled under the table in Bar-le-Duc! I suppose you know who that was, *eh*? Or was that a cock an' bull yarn, too?"

"Nope," grinned Phineas, as he helped himself to a cigar on the Old Man's table. "There was a guy—it was me. Haw-w-w-w-w-w!"