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**PHINEAS
PINKHAM**
howl

Lights! Camera! Action! Phineas "Carbuncle" Pinkham goes into the movies in a big way! But a lot can happen to a roll of film when Phineas gets up in the air posing as . . .

THE REEL HERO

written and illustrated by **JOE ARCHIBALD**

THE DROME OF THE NINTH PURSUIT Squadron was cluttered up with visiting brass hats, a trio of demon war correspondents and a pair of flicker camera men who had received special permits from the powers-that-be in the A.E.F. to film an actual combat between heaven and earth.

The pilots of the outfit, keeping their personal opinions anent the proceedings strictly to themselves, wandered about aimlessly and stared at intervals up into the sky in the hope that a mess of Gothas would come over and lay some eggs. From Captain Howell,

who was senior of the Ninth, down to the lowliest grease monkey, there prevailed a sneaky feeling that this bit of horseplay would come to no good end.

Major Rufus Garrity, flattered by the attention shown his layout, stalked about the place with his chest shoved out a foot and indulging in a lengthy dissertation on G.H.Q.'s rare judgment in sending their representatives to a real squadron to see some genuine air tactics. Not that the coming show would prove anything but that all work and no fun made Mars a dull sort of a bird. And if the folks back home could see an American airman shoot down a Boche

ship on the screen, they would get more patriotic than ever and run out to buy a dozen more Liberty Bonds.

The idea of the thing was something like this. The day before, a Pfalz ship had been brought down intact just eight miles from Bar-le-Duc. This ship was to be flown over by one of Sir Rufus' war buzzards, and a Spad would be high over the drome to meet it in mortal combat.

Of course, the pilots would have to be very careless with their aim, as it was all to be in fun. The pilots chosen were our friends, Phineas Pinkham, and his hutmate, Bump Gillis. A lengthy argument as to who would fly the Pfalz was still hot and smoking in the big room of the Frog farmhouse where headquarters was cached. Howell suggested that they draw lots out of his hat. Phineas grinned, stopped arguing immediately and gestured his approval.

"Go ahead," he said. "You draw first. Bump, ya fathead!"

"Sure," agreed Mister Gillis and, shutting his eyes, plunged a hand into Howell's skypiece. Bump looked at the little slip of paper and his face cracked with glee. Phineas drew a split second later and his eyes opened quickly. He did not look at that which he had in his hand, for Bump's chuckle had told him plenty. Instead, he looked at his hut-mate and, to the amazement of the watchers, there seemed to be a swift movement on the part of the hand of the great Pinkham, yet not one of the gallery could swear that the extremity had budged an inch.

"Haw-w-w-w!" guffawed Phineas. "I fly the Spad."

Bump Gillis' eyes widened. He looked at the slip of paper again. It said "Pfalz." He gulped, looked at Phineas and waxed angry.

"I drew the Spad!" he yapped. "I swear I did. You've pulled another dirty, rotten, scurvy trick an'—"

"Seein' is believin'," chuckled the wizard from Boonetown who boasted of being expert in the "Quickness-of-the-hand-deceives-the-eye" racket. "I leave it to you bums," he said, turning to the sidelines, "don't this say 'Spad,' huh?"

"It does," spoke Captain Howell grimly, "but I still think you're a liar."

"Well, that's settled," grinned Phineas, taking a seat. "This is all the bunk, anyways. Here it is the Sabbath, an' we got to play Punch an' Judy for a lot of brass hats an' some bums that write a swell *guerre* for themselves. I heard one of the newspaper guys got a wound stripe las' week. A typewriter fell on his foot! Huh!"

ONE of those present shifted nervously in his chair and let his jaw harden.

"I've heard about you, Pinkham," the man rasped. "Think us guys never get near the Front, maybe, huh?"

"I didn't say that," chuckled Phineas, "but I bet you git a lot of close-ups of generals. Haw-w-w-w-w!"

"Well, if you think we can't fight, I'll show you—you—"

"Sit down!" snapped Howell. "I'm running this outfit while the C.O. is out. There'll be no arguments here."

"No hard feelin's, huh?" Phineas thrust at the correspondent "Can't ya take a joke? Here, have a cigar. Got 'em from dear ol' Lunnon, an' if ya don't think it is the most different smoke than you've ever had before. I'll—"

"Thanks," grinned the man sheepishly. "Guess I got hotheaded." And he accepted the weed gratefully. Howell moved his chair back a little. Over in the corner a cameraman massaged a badly singed mustache and waited hopefully. Misery loves company.

Bang! The war correspondent's pants left the chair. To sensitive nostrils came the obnoxious odor of burning hair. The newspaper man pawed at his head and did a war dance. Another correspondent, indignant all over, got to his feet. Bump Gillis saw that he was a head taller than Phineas. Bump gave the fellow a push and he crashed against Lieutenant Pinkham.

Whap! The Pinkham fist arched over and collided with a mouthful of teeth. "Gang me, will ya?" he yowled. "I'll—"

"Attention!" Bodies tensed, then straightened. In the doorway was Major Garrity, accompanied by a brigadier-general and a colonel. The faces of the trio were in perfect accord. Phineas told himself that they would sour a cucumber in the blink of an eye.

"What does this mean?" erupted Sir Rufus. "Pinkham, you—"

"Go ahead," interrupted Phineas, "blame me! It's in the regulations of the air force. You—"

"Shut up!" barked the Old Man. "Whoever drew the Pfalz starts out immediately. Take a mechanic in case the engine needs attention. The other man will see that the Spad is in shape for the air. Snap into it! I want a good show—and understand this, the Spad must win. You understand? I'll look into this brawl later."

"Sure," grinned the irrepressible Boonetown flyer. "I'll show 'em what a Spad can do. I'll make that Heinie bus dizzy an'—"

"Oh, so you drew the Spad, *eh?*" Major Garrity's voice seemed to lack enthusiasm. "Well, I want no damn foolery, you understand? One little piece of funny business and I'll put you under arrest."

Phineas and Bump went out together. The Scot still fumed under his undershirt

"If I hit you upstairs, you halfwit," he purred to Phineas, "it'll be an accident an' you know that."

"Yeah," grinned Phineas, "I make a lot of mistakes, too. Look out for your pants."

SEVERAL minutes later Bump Gillis chug-chugged away with a mechanic. Major Garrity pointed out to the picture shooters and correspondents the fact that the Pfalz would be back over the drome in about an hour. Phineas glanced sidewise at the cameras and their tripods which were set up at the eastern edge of the field. He smiled his inane grin and walked to the hangar where A flight's battle wagons were housed.

"Well, my ma's grandchildren will be proud when I show 'em me fightin' a Heinie after the *guerre* is over," Phineas observed to Sergeant Casey. "Them movin' pitchers is great stuff."

"I figger ya'll git a swell write-up from them newspaper guys, too," opined the groundman significantly. "Ya better make it a good show or else—"

"Uh-huh," answered Carbuncle the intrepid. "I invented flyin'. How's the bus?"

"Tuned to a dime," declared Casey. "Ready to howl."

"Wait'll ya see me scare Bump out of his socks," grinned Phineas as he watched his ship being trundled out. "It's about time we had a little fun. I guess G.H.Q. figgers they've been too tough on us. Cripes, Casey, I can't wait!"

In due time a little speck was seen in the haze toward the lines. It was the signal for Phineas. Contact! The Hisso gargled its steel throat and then roared at the top of its cylinders. The brass hats stood goggle-eyed. Cameramen began to turn their cranks. Correspondents ran to strategic points to witness the spectacle.

Phineas pushed the Spad up to five thousand, seven, ten. But still the Pfalz floated above him.

"Ya damn fool!" he roared at Bump. "We ain't fightin' out of sight, ya fathead!"

As if in answer the Pfalz swooped down. Phineas dropped his nose to slide in under and then come over again in a great loop. As the Spad dipped, machine guns coughed. It was a grim, hacking cough and bits of steel phlegm sprayed Phineas' top wing. The Boonetown flyer yelled with rage and turned in his

pit. He shook his fist at the Pfalz, a piece of skin was nicked out of one of the knuckles. All around him bullets whined and the smell of phosphorus crawled into Phineas' big proboscis. The lower wing looked like a cigar store punchboard that had been well patronized.

"Bump Gillis, ya big bum. I'll show ya!" roared Phineas, and he wrenched his ship out of its stride to gun toward the Heinie bus.

"Marvellous!" was the unanimous opinion on the ground.

"Hell!" whipped out Garrity. "The Pfalz is not supposed to win. I'll put Gillis where he belongs. I'll—"

Upstairs, gnashing his teeth, Phineas whistled down past the Pfalz to see if Bump had gone crazy. Wing to wing, Spad and adversary flew for a moment. Phineas Pinkham looked across space and saw something that made his stomach act like a whirling dervish. He wished that he had brought a bottle of smelling salts. For, staring over at him, lips twisted and eyes blazing with grim joy, was *Hauptmann* von Bissinger, leading Jerry ace and his more than arch enemy!

Where in hell was Bump? What— why? Phineas slipped away, lost a thousand feet and then straightened out. The ground beckoned to him, but the brass hats were down there and they wanted a show.

Pulling himself together, Phineas determined to emulate the greatest Thespian who ever trod stage or cloud, and give the gallery their money's worth. He slid in on the Von from the port side, tripped his Vickers and tore pieces of Pfalz from just behind the Junker pilot's shoulder blades. Another death-defying maneuver, and Phineas was in the hole again, with von Bissinger unloading more Spandau cargo.

"Gorgeous!" exclaimed a brass hat as he stood petrified near Garrity.

"The most thrilling sight I have ever—"

"I congratulate you, Garrity," croaked the brigadier. "Those men are great flyers. That man in the Pfalz—"

"I'll kill that Scotchman!" reiterated the C.O. as he plowed up the tarmac with his boot heels. "I'll show him that orders are orders!"

CAPTAIN HOWELL, gazing aloft, seemed uncertain about something. His lower jaw fell away bit by bit until it hung far down over his larynx, and said organ immediately became paralyzed. An excited cameraman crashed to the ground, his machine, falling on top of him.

A great roar went up as the Spad fell out of the duel. It came down in a series of long jumps which would have made a great big green bullfrog turn pink with envy. The Pfalz was streaking away toward Germany, its pilot lifting it higher and higher toward the frothy ceiling.

Major Garrity swore and pulled out tufts of hair. "He'd better run! The big bum! I should've known better than to send him up with Pinkham. Gillis, you wag-tailed buzzard, don't show your face here again or I'll mash it up!"

"Wh-why, major," the brigadier admonished Garrity, "I can't understand. It was a glorious show. It—"

Howell came staggering to his superior's side. "M-major," he gulped, "th-that wasn't G-Gillis. Th-that—"

But the C.O. was beyond hearing anybody. The Spad was wobbling five hundred feet above the tarmac. A crash siren shrieked. The meat wagon was taking on passengers. Pilots, brass hats and newspaper men sought cover.

Phineas came down like a crab. The Spad wavered a bit, got its belly parallel with the ground, then dropped. An over-zealous cameraman was kicked, contraption and all, against the ammo shed. There was a sound like a regiment of men breaking kindling wood and Sir Rufus covered his eyes. When he looked again, it was to see something that had once been a Spad. Crawling out of the remains, face obliterated by oil, was Phineas Pinkham.

"Gad" jerked out the brigadier. "What? Say, this is no longer sport, Garrity. By gad, that's overdoing the thing a bit."

"Y-yeah?" blubbered Phineas as he scrambled to his feet. "I want the C.O. broke. I was framed. Bump never sh-showed up. Th-that was v-von Beestinger."

Major Garrity saw the tarmac become a merry-go-round. Hangars seemed to join hands and dance all around him. When he had snapped out of it, he looked cross-eyed in Phineas' direction.

"Y-you mean—"

"Yeah," growled the Boonetown jokesmith. "Funny, huh? And—" He paused, and with difficulty extricated a piece of strut from his nose. "Well, I'm gonna git satisfaction. I—"

"A real German, *eh?*" interrupted the colonel. "Well, you made a sorry showing against him, lieutenant. Beat you to a frazzle. Huh, great flyers you have here, Garrity."

"Is that so?" blazed Phineas, sticking the tip of his

jaw close to the brass hat's nose. "I only had three bursts in them damn guns. Well, maybe I should've spit at the Von like a cat an' scairt him away. Go ahead an' take yout air corps! I quit. Make me a buck private. An' when President Wilson hears about this—"

An alien sound cut in—an unsteady, growling sound. The actors in the drama looked up. Another Pfalz was lumbering in with a flock of knocks in the Mercedes job. Not more than three hundred feet up it labored and an arm waved from the pit. Incapable of speech. Major Garrity and his guests watched it land sluggishly. Bump Gillis jumped out of the pit.

"I'm sorry as hell," he apologized, "but she wouldn't git started. We worked—my God, what happened?"

PHINEAS PINKHAM limped toward his hutmate, both fists flailing the air.

"You hippercrit," he exploded, "ya did it on purpose, I bet. Ya saw the Von comin' over an' crawled out on me. I'll kill ya—"

"I've seen about enough of this farce, Garrity," exploded the brigadier. "If this is an example of your efficiency, you ought to be running a sawmill. No ammunition in the Spad's guns! You put a man in a Pfalz that could get about as far up in the air as a turtle. A Spad cracked up and a cameraman was half-killed! Well, I'll be going. You'll hear from me later."

"It's a lie!" yelled Bump Gillis into the menacing visage of Phineas. "You look at the damn Heinie bus an' see if—"

"What a story!" breathed a war correspondent, sidling close to the irate Boonetown flyer. "The great Pinkham's fight with a Boche ace! Oh-h-h-h-h, what I'll send across the pond!"

A cameraman with a singed upper lip thrust in his oar. "An' these pictures, I wouldn't sell them for a million bucks. Well, I guess who laughs last—"

"An' that'll be me!" supplied Phineas, grinning through the oil on his homely face. "Try an' develop that cellerloid. Ya-a-a-ah!"

The cameraman gasped, swore and ran toward his contraption. A few seconds later he had hopped back and was crying for justice and remuneration from the harassed Major Garrity.

"Somebody—Pinkham—poured acid in that camera of mine. I had the film all ready in the thing early this morning."

"Now ain't that too bad?" cracked the Old Man, and he pushed the movie man square in the face and walked away.

"I still think you're a liar," Phineas barked at Bump. "I bet you saw von Beestinger—"

"Give ya my word, Carbuncle, so help me!" wailed Bump. "I wouldn't play such a lousy trick—"

Lieutenant Pinkham watched the brass hats load themselves into an imposing gas buggy. He shifted his gaze to the irate cameraman, then let his eyes finally feast on the wreck of the other film machine strewn on the ground near the ammo shed. Those brain cells inside the Pinkham cranium which manufactured all ideas pertaining to trickery began to click. Phineas limped toward the ammo shed, wiping big gobs of oil from his face. The staff car from G.H.Q. rolled close and stopped. The brigadier hailed Phineas.

"So you're the great Pinkham, *eh*, what?" he said derisively. "Hraph! Where'd you learn to fly?"

"Borneo," replied Phineas testily. "In an Eskimo air force."

"Wha-a-a-at? Dammit, what d'you mean talking to me like that?" sputtered the brass hat. "I'll—*er*—have you—I'll—"

"Make up your mind, make up your mind!" retorted Carbuncle. "I don't care what in hell you do!" And as he let other scathing threats roll down off his back, he noticed that a trench coat hung over the side of the car.

"Ya better look out," advised Phineas, "or ya'll have to cough up more bewcoop francs for another coat!" And he pushed the trench coat into the car, where it fell in a heap at the brigadier's feet.

"The fresh cheese!" a colonel stormed. "Now I know why we don't get results from the Air Corps. I'd prefer serious charges, Sir—"

HOWEVER, Phineas went on toward the ammo shed, one fist clenched and a chuckle in his throat. At the cross marking the spot where a movie man had almost been washed out, Phineas stooped down and pawed at some intriguing wreckage. A few minutes later he entered his hut with something tucked under his arm. Bump Gillis looked up and began to assert his innocence once more.

"You're still a liar by the clock!" grinned Phineas. "But the Pfalz won't go to waste. I have plans. An' maybe a certain brass hat will wish he hadn't taken the trouble to insult me before he rode back to his plush armchair."

"The Old Man is in a hell of a mess," opined Bump.

"Well, let him be an' like it!" snapped Phineas. "I should bust out crying! Maybe I ain't been in plenty,

huh! Say, Bump, we ain't had rain for almost three weeks, did ya know that?"

"Who in hell cares?" growled Lieutenant Gillis. "It rained for about six months straight when we first come over an'—"

"An' the sun has been hot, too, lately," mumbled Phineas as he sat down on his cot and examined a twisted ball of paper he had taken from his pocket. Flattening it out so that he could read it, the flyer gave his attention for a few moments, then burst out into gleeful hysteria.

Bump looked at him and shook his head in disgust. He addressed the wall. "At a time like this he laughs. Well—"

"Sleight of hand is great stuff," remarked Phineas. "Well, I'll git cleaned up an' go git some grub. What fun we had, huh, Bump? Say, what ails the Pfalz?"

"The radiator is on the bum," the Scot informed Phineas, scratching his head as he tried to read his hutmate's thoughts. "Why?"

"Oh, nothin'," answered Phineas cryptically. "Nothin'."

Three hours later the Boonetown flyer was in a hangar with Sergeant Casey, mooring a roll of celluloid in the cockpit of the Pfalz. The celluloid was on a spindle and several feet of the film had been let out over the side and run through a little metal ring fastened to the fuselage.

"Must be more'n a thousand-feet of the stuff," guessed Phineas.

"Yeah," agreed the groundman, "but how in hell can a guy take pitchers 'thout the camera to go with the stuff? I've seen you do some damn fool stunts before, but—"

"You are dumb," interrupted the jokesmith, "else you would be a pilot, too, Casey. Do ya think the radiator is okay?"

"Sure, when I fix somethin', it stays fixed."

"That's all," said Carbuncle. "Now I got to practice on these squarehead controls. Don't bother me."

"Nuts," commented Casey and gladly got out of the place.

In a short time Phineas was crossing the field to his hut when hailed by Major Rufus Garrity himself.

"Well, don't blame me," Phineas tossed out quick as Garrity's mouth was about to open. "I didn'—"

"Who said anything, you mush-face?" barked the Old Man. "We got a tough break, that's all. We're in a mess and—"

"It's that damn Von's fault," growled Phineas. "I'll git even with him. That was a hell of a way to have to

spend Sunday, anyways. Didn't them Heinies even git taught about the Bible? Well, I'm goin'—"

"Keep your shirt on!" yelled the C.O. "We've had trouble enough for the time being. I'm in a sling. Do you know who that brigadier was?"

Phineas laughed. "I was gonna ask you!"

"He's got a friend whose name is among the big stuck-ups of society back in Washington. He's been trying to get the bum my job for the last three months. Brigadier James Welton Vanderpool, that's who our friend is. His wife gets her picture taken every time she pushes a doorbell. Huh! Well, not that I care a damn, but I hate to see these buzzards taking orders from a little half-pint who has never been higher in the air than a trolley car. I—"

"Haw-w-w-w-w!" chuckled Phineas. "Maybe I'll write the society dame a letter an'—"

"Wha-aa-at?" gasped Sir Rufus. "You'll do what?"

But Phineas had saluted and was walking hurriedly toward his hut. The C.O., madder than ever, stood rooted in his tracks, watching the Boonetown enigma until he was out of sight.

"Maybe Vanderpool is doing me a favor and I haven't sense enough to know it," speculated the major, and felt much better.

FOUR o'clock in the afternoon, and the Ninth Pursuit had the drome very much to themselves. The camera man who had escaped casualty was gone, leaving threats to the effect that Pershing would hear about the abominable treatment he and his friend had received during their official visit. Newspaper correspondents had left without saying goodbye and, all in all, the Sabbath had not been very kind to Major Garrity's outfit.

However, Lieutenant Phineas Pinkham was not sharing the woe of his mates. He had something up his sleeve besides his arm, and we find him out in the hangar ensconced in the pit of a battle chariot made in Germany. For four hours Casey and his rebellious crew had been working on the Pfalz. It seemed in fair shape when finally wheeled out to the tarmac.

Major Garrity looked out of his window at the German ship and his brows knitted. Then he shrugged and turned away. If the groundmen wanted to tinker with the thing instead of spending a quiet day that was their own business. Five minutes later, however, he was out of the door of headquarters in two jumps.

The Pfalz roared across the field full-gun, the Mercedes engine clattering as if it were going places.

"Who's in that damned thing?" the major bellowed, his voice carrying to every corner of the field.

"Pinkham!" yipped Captain Howell. "I thought he was just fooling around. But he's going toward the lines. What in hell?"

"I know where he's going!" exploded Garrity, jumping up and down as if he were skipping rope. "He's going to von Bissinger's drome. Every Archie gun and Yankee plane will take a smack at him. Well, let 'em! I wash my hands of the whole damn business. I'll retire or shoot off a hand—anything."

Both Yankee anti-aircraft and Yankee ships took shots at Phineas as he rode high over the Allied lines. With shrapnel holes in his wings and one in his coat collar, the Boonetown avenger threw the Pfalz up fifteen thousand and met up with two French Nieuports. The Frogs had Phineas ready for six feet of consecrated ground when a trio of Fokkers bounced out of the ceiling and came to his aid. Phineas waved a hand to one Boche and streaked toward Germany.

"Haw-w-w-w! That's the ol' teamwork," exclaimed Phineas appreciatively. "The Kaiser'll give ya all leather medals fer that one. Yow!" And Phineas felt for the bricquet in his pocket as he slipped down nearer the map of France.

In the headquarters of von Bissinger's staffel, merry gentlemen were still rehashing the story their famed leader had related to them earlier in the day. Von Bissinger himself sat back and basked in the sun of his flock's praises.

"Ja," he exclaimed after he had been hoched with a round of beers for the twentieth time, "you shouldt see yet the great Pingham! Ho-o-o-o-o-o-o! I bring him down *zwei* times already yet *und* the next time he down stays. *Und* the Yankees below, they were all vatching budt dit nod dare to coom oop."

"So mooch I laugh, *Herr Hauptmann*," one of the Junkers gurgled through a spasm of mirth. "He thingk we sleep yet on the Sabbath, *ja*? *Ach*, Baron, kolossal it iss you are. *Prosit!*" And the flyer lifted another stein of beer.

"If but Hans vas here, gentlemen," said von Bissinger a trifle wistfully. "*Ach*, how he would haff enjoyed it. A *gut* flyer, he vas, Hans. But I meinself saw him go down the other day *und* toward the Yangkee lines. *Schwein!* I bet they haff him kildt. Yet *ein* more score to efen up with Pingham's staffel, *ja!*"

"His ship, *Herr Hauptmann*," cut in another Boche, "it was not damaged. *Und* Hans he iss *gut* at playing

what the American *Schwein* call *der* possum.”

“Tomorrow, gentlemen,” said von Bissinger with a melodramatic gesture, “we take the air *und* wipe them oudt. *Gott mit uns!*”

The door of staffel headquarters burst open. A Teuton messenger stood stiffly in the doorway.

“A Pfalz high overhead, *Herr* Baron,” the man announced.

Junker pilots sprang to their feet. “*Gott!*” cracked out von Bissinger. “Hans yet, maybe.” The flyers stampeded into the open and looked up into the skies. An arm was waving to them.

“Hans it iss!” yipped the Baron. “*Ach—*”

WITH his heart in his mouth Phineas Pinkham slipped lower and lower toward the Jerry drome. His eyes took a swift inventory of the terrain surrounding the Boche nest. Two sides of the field were formed by a scrubby, wooded area, and the other two rolled close to Frog meadows where tall, sweet dry grass rippled in the wind. The Boonetown worker of miracles reached overside and drew up the end of the strip of celluloid.

Holding the stick between his knees, he drew out his bricquet, got it to functioning, then touched the light to the inflammable material. This he dropped overside and swiftly spun the spindle to give the strip of celluloid plenty of play. Soon the yellowish stuff was streaming out behind his ship like a pennon.

Phineas circled at five hundred feet and waved to the Boche milling below. Then, to the surprise of those on the ground, he banked steeply until one wing seemed to cut branches from the treetops at the edge of the field. The Pfalz thundered around and dipped close to the grass on the south side of the drome.

Von Bissinger saw a little flicker of light come from the dry, wooded area. Then smoke curled up. Tongues of flame licked at the foliage hungrily. A dead pine began to emulate a torch. The Baron screamed out a warning and pilots made a dash for the hangars. Soon a machine gun mounted on a wheel began to spit at the banking Pfalz.

Lieutenant Pinkham circled again and let the burning celluloid brush against a virgin stretch of dry grass. The belly of the ship almost kissed the ground and Phineas gulped as he wrestled with the stick. All around the Boche drome fire crackled. And not far from the burning wood crouched four great hangars. Out of them rolled Pfalz ships, groundmen acting as locomotive power. Junker pilots howled impatiently and jumped into the pits.

Phineas tried to figure out how soon the celluloid would burn up close to his Pfalz, decided that he had accomplished enough havoc, and tore the spindle away from the side of the pit. The film went floating down directly over the head of von Bissinger.

Five Pfalz ships were up. Phineas threw a heavy object overside and jammed in his own Pfalz throttle until it could go no further, then pointed his prop boss toward home and friends.

“*Ach! Gott!*” wailed von Bissinger as he hopped aboard his Pfalz. “The fire!” he shouted last orders. “It must be put oudt!” Something hit him a whack on the side of the head and he went into the cockpit, face first. Another excited Boche picked up the missile, which proved to be a good-sized rock wrapped and tied in heavy paper. He tore the paper away and read a hastily scrawled message.

“Ledt me oudt, somebody, *Dumkopf!*” roared the Baron in a muffled voice. His man reached up and pulled the *Hauptmann* von Bissinger clear. The superior officer’s face turned red, purple and green as he struggled to recapture his dignity. A paper was shoved into his hand. The message read:

“*There, you big cluck, I’ll teach you to respect the Sabbath, you heathens! Hope the fire spreads to Berlin and burns all the Kaiser’s two-pants suits. Mud in your glass eye and a sty on the other!*”

—Lieutenant Pinkham.”

Von Bissinger howled. The sight of a great hangar going up in flames made him roar louder. Phineas was more than two miles away by that time, but as von Bissinger got the Pfalz off the ground and lifted it in a steady climb toward the Allied lines, he looked back and said, “*Himmel!*”

The drome was ringed with fire, the woods a veritable incinerator for hangars and whatever ships which must be left behind. And the Kaiser was oh, so short of ships, as well ah money to make more!

PHINEAS looked over his shoulder at his pursuers and two of them were too close for comfort. Their Spandaus were having an appetizer out of his tail assembly, and once they got a little closer, it would mean that they would be getting soup. After that, the cold-meat course, so Phineas tried to get more speed out of the Mercedes. Suddenly a cloud of steam appeared in front of his goggles and he cursed Sergeant Casey as only he knew how. The radiator would stay fixed, huh? The big bum!

Well, it was downstairs for Lieutenant Pinkham. A long glide lost a big slice of altitude for him and carried him down near to a lot of rooftops. Of all the places to land in France, he had to pick out a town! As the scenery came up, war-torn and wreathed in smoke, Phineas easily identified the location as having been a spot coveted by two armies. He hoped that the German side had been licked.

"Look!" yelled a doughboy to another as they crouched behind a barricade. "A German ship an' it's shot to hell. It's gonna crash!"

"Who cares?" growled the dough addressed. "I hope he gits scrambled. Look out! Here comes an ash can!"

Whe-e-e-e-e-eee-blam! The exploding shell kicked Phineas and the Pfalz over three houses and deposited them in a canal with a great splash. Lieutenant Pinkham, half-drowned, finally extricated himself from the wreckage and crawled ashore.

"Well, I'm saved—" *Blam!* A shower of dirt half-buried Phineas and he got to his feet and started running. Into the cellar of a ruined house he dived, and saw several men lying on the floor. Too weary to bother mouthing a greeting, he flopped down with them and shut his eyes. The day had been a trying one. The night before he had been up until four A.M. Phineas slipped into profound slumber.

When Lieutenant Pinkham opened his eyes, he stared up at an oblong patch of sky. There were walls of dirt all around him. He heard voices. Then a shovel full of dirt was thrown on his face. Phineas spat some of the soil of France out of his mouth and sat up.

"Hey! What the hell?" he roared.

"My Gawd!" exclaimed a voice from above. "He ain't dead!"

Phineas gathered his wits about him and took stock of his position. He was in the ground. It was a grave. They had been about to plant him. Glowering, he climbed out and confronted a bunch of infantrymen.

"Why, ya lousy bunch of—"

"Well, we found ya with the rest of the stiffes we put in that cellar, so we figgered ya was croaked. Mistakes'll happen, lootenant. We—"

"Cripes!" breathed Phineas in a scared voice. "Let me git outa here. Is this Monday?"

"Yeah."

"We'll take you to the regimental P.C.," offered another man, who was an officer. "It's over on the other side of town. Say, how'd you get here, anyway? You're an aviator—"

"I'll tell that to the brass hats," grinned Phineas.

"You guys wouldn't believe me."

LATE that day Lieutenant Pinkham arrived at another town full of doughs waiting for the word to move up to the Front. The place was overloaded with discipline, cleanliness and M.P.s. Phineas wondered why everybody was so polite. And then he found out. A car stood outside of headquarters of the new outfit and Phineas Pinkham recognized it from radiator to spare tire. He climbed out of the motorcycle and lighted a fresh cigarette.

"Wires are buzzin' in that joint," he overheard a dough enlighten a crony. "Somethin's happened an' the brass hats are slappin' each other on the back. I bet they didn't have nothin' to do with it if it's good news."

Phineas grinned and walked toward headquarters. A doughboy stopped him at the portals.

"Hey, ya can't go in there!"

"Don't talk to me like that!" snapped Phineas. "I'm an officer an' I rate a salute, too, ya fathead! Tell the bums in there that Lieutenant Phineas Pinkham of the Air Corps wants to see 'em."

The message was relayed. When Phineas was allowed to enter, he looked into the astonished usage of James Welton Vanderpool, Brigadier, and late guest of the Ninth.

"Well?" he barked. "What're you doing here?"

"Just slummin'," drawled Phineas with rare sarcasm. "I thought I'd tell ya I burnt up the Baron von Beestinger's airdrome. Haw-w-w-w-w! An' in a Pfalz! That Pfalz that was supposed to fight me yesterday morning, Vandy—*er*—sir."

"Y-you did that?" the officer gasped. "We just got word from an observation squadron. We—well, Pinkham, I guess I was wrong. I'll admit it. Now I'll let you in on a little secret. A friend of mine is going to take over your squadron. Now—*er*—I imagine you'd like to be greeted as Captain Pinkham. We'll see that you get rewarded for this in other ways, too, Pinkham. Garrity was a good man—"

Phineas wanted to slam Mister Vanderpool in the nose. Instead, he winked and gestured toward the door. The Brigadier walked out, his face mottled. Such familiarity was distasteful.

"Seen Madymaselle Fifi LaRue lately, sir?" queried the irrepressible Phineas. The brass hat almost took a nosedive, and a series of gulps came through his larynx.

"What do you mean, Pinkham? You have your nerve—dammit. I'll—"

"Awright, awright," smiled Phineas, "I'll send the letter back to Missus Vanderpool. Giss she don't understand that we got to have our fun in the *guerre*. Ya dropped a letter, sir. It said somethin' about you bein' her great big brave Americain an' how she loved her fatsy-watsy general, oo-la-la! Haw-w-w-w-w! She's tol' that to every brass hat in France, the li'l gold digger. Once I saw her—"

"Why—*er*—blast it, Pinkham," sputtered the Brigadier, "y-you stole that letter, y-you—"

"Yeah?" Phineas was menacingly casual. "Them's fighting words, an' if ya was a shavetail like me, I'd bust ya one. I got the letter, though, so it don't matter. Now it stays right in my possession while the *guerre* is goin' on. Major Garrity gets transferred, does he? Like hell he does! After the war the letter is yours. Ya have a Pinkham's word—"

"Very well," croaked Vanderpool, "very well, but for cripes' sake keep your word, Pinkham. The missus will get a divorce and—and you see the idea is—that is, she has the money, Pinkham, and—and—" He turned redder than the label on a tomato can and stumbled back into his office.

THE Brigadier saw to it that Lieutenant Pinkham was given comfortable transportation back to the field. Words of praise came to Major Garrity ahead of Phineas. The Ninth welcomed the ever-prodigious son with a binge. The major soon learned that James Welton Vanderpool's predilection for playing the sheik had saved the head rooster's job among the war-birds of the Ninth.

"Maybe I didn't fool von Beestinger," boasted Phineas in rehashing his story. "An' them cameramen

sure come in handy! That cellerloid sure burns fast, an' no backwash from the crate blew it out like I was afraid it would. Well, as I said to Bump, it's sure dry weather we're havin'."

"Say," whispered Garrity into one of Phineas' floppy ears as the party grew mellow, "let me read that letter. I want to have a good laugh. It ought to be worth reading."

"Sure," agreed Phineas. "Here it is." And he slipped it into the C.O.'s hand when nobody was looking.

Major Garrity finally excused himself and went to his sanctum. He chuckled and opened up the letter. For a few moments chuckles continued to bubble from his throat as he read the *billet doux* which had more than likely saved his job. Then his feasting eyes bulged and he swore a big round oath.

"Fifi LaRue of the Folies Bergere," he growled, "and I let her nick me for a diamond bracelet! That's a dame for you. You can't trust 'em. Dammit, I ought to have had more brains!" And he crumpled the letter into a ball in his huge fist and shoved it into the pocket of his pants. Something told him to turn his head. The door of Wings stood ajar just enough to let the Pinkham countenance in. It was battling with a mixture of expressions, uppermost of which was utter joy.

"Haw-w-w-w!" guffawed Phineas. "A diamond bracelet? Why, ya ol' rooney!"

The major howled with plenty of anger and even more chagrin and reached for a heavy stick. With this clutched in his hand he chased the incurable jokester toward the hangars. Howell and all the other buzzards wondered what in the name of all that was holy Phineas would have to do to remain a hero more than five minutes at a time.