



GOOD TO THE FIRST DROP

written and illustrated by **JOE ARCHIBALD**

*It was just too bad they hadn't started the Caterpillar Club away back in 1918.
But you can't blame them—they didn't know they were cheating Phineas "Carbuncle" Pinkham
out of his one and only chance to join!*

THE CITY OF NANCY is the ancient capitol of Lorraine. It has a public square called Place Stanislas and a museum full of ancient relics once dear to Charles the Bold, the most snooty of the Dukes of Burgundy. Once upon a time Charlie went to the outskirts of Nancy with a lot of army and demanded the key to the city. Instead, the town fathers sent out the young generation and handed him a lily. So much for history.

Lieutenant Phineas "Carbuncle" Pinkham parked a Spad on the outskirts of Nancy in the year of our Lord 1918, and, unlike Charlie, did not hesitate but walked

boldly into the town. Phineas had been on a look-see around Metz, where the Kaiser's air wagons were collecting like flies about a deceased dobbin.

As a matter of course, he was long overdue back at the drome of the Ninth Pursuit Squadron, Bar-le-Duc, Major Rufus Garrity commanding. However, no lines of worry were visible on the homely Pinkham physiognomy. On the contrary, Phineas whistled merrily as he trudged through the streets toward the Hotel Angleterre, one spot of the town which miraculously had escaped the shells which Jerry had been throwing over for almost four years.

Three blocks from the edifice Phineas paused and reached into his trench-coat. His hand came out of the pocket and journeyed to the middle of his face. Resuming his way, the flyer passed under a light. If the Boonetown marvel's own mother had met him at that moment, she would simply have lifted her skirts to insure them against the contamination of mud splattered from the boots of the passer-by and continued on her way. For Phineas' unlovely proboscis had been transformed into a straight aquiline face decoration, and beneath it rested a rusty mustache, carefully pointed at the ends.

Phineas ventured into the lobby of the Hotel Angletterre and favored the loungers with admirable sang-froid. Among the habitués were several American infantry officers parked here and there, a trio of feminine ambulance drivers and a colonel of the French Army. The adventurer desired anything but sociability but it was thrust upon him in the person of a very imposing brass hat with maple leaves riding his shoulders.

"Evening, lieutenant," said the officer, with interest "I'm Town-Major Brill. You've been in flight?"

"Yeah," said Phineas, unimpressed, "that's what the U.S. Gover'nment pays me to do. Well, I'm tired an'—"

"Guess von Dissinger and his men are making it hot for you fellows, what?"

Phineas stifled an oral eruption in the nick of time. "Ye-yeah," he laughed with scant mirth, "but wait until Pinkham starts workin' on the bum. He'll—"

"Most Remarkable man, no doubt," commented the major. "Know him? Er—your name—I don't believe—?"

Phineas' thoughts were not riding on snails' shells. "Oh, sure! Ah—er— I'm Lieutenant Hector McGoogle from over near the Meuse. Sure, I've met Pinkham an'—"

"Mostly lucky, this Pinkham," growled the major. "I've heard he does not rely on his flying ability but resorts to—"

Phineas' freckled fist itched to merge with the major's nose. "Yeah, I guess so," he agreed, fighting down his homicidal impulse. "Well, I'm tired an'— here, have a cigar, major."

"Thank you, lieutenant, believe I will," was the reply. "Don't use them myself but—"

"Bon swar," interjected Phineas hastily and went to the desk. There he inquired about a room. A few minutes later, on the third floor, Phineas was chatting with a *femme de chambre*, a woman of doubtful

pulchritude but one who was all aflutter in the company of an officer of the Air Corps.

"So this is where I bunk for ten francs, huh?" he snorted. "I bet they didn't soak Lafayette that much to stay in a U.S. hotel when he come over. Well, if that's gratitude, I been wastin' my time. Where's that suite where the U.S. Secretary of War slept, huh? I bet that cost bowcoop *argent*, wee, *ma chérie*?"

The chambermaid was anything but annoyed by the pleasantry, having welcomed forty summers and kissed them goodbye. "You weesh eet to see, *n'est ce pas*? Seelk sheets, *M'sieu*, an' ze bed, oo-la-la!" She waved her arms in appropriate emphasis and beckoned Phineas, who, wearing a grin on his face, followed down the hall. The woman swung open a door.

Phineas said "Cripes!" and stared.

"Ze bed ze President of France he once, twice, sleep in," the guide enthused. "Once ees eet the bed of Louis the Fourteenth, *M'sieu*—"

"Yeah?" said Phineas, his face strangely alight. "Well, I'm a looey, too, but I have to sleep on a board." And he noted out of one alert eye that the woman did not lock the door. It was worth a pair of francs to Phineas.

"Here," he said to the maid, "buy yourself a pair of mules." So far as the grateful Mam'selle was concerned, this American officer owned the place. She bowed until her vertebra creaked, and finally withdrew.

FOUR hours later Lieutenant Phineas Pinkham unostentatiously evacuated the city of Nancy. He flew to Bar-le-Duc, where he stopped and held a brief tryst with Babette, his lady fair. Business for the day was completed, so the Boonetown, Iowa, wizard hopped to the drome.

In the old French farmhouse, headquarters of the Ninth, Captain Howell, Bump Gillis and company lifted their heads as the sound of the Hisso reached down out of the nocturnal ozone and pushed through the roof. Bump heaved a deep sigh and shot a glance at a fellow buzzard, then swore.

"Well," he said, "the bum must be hungry. He's comin' home."

The door of Sir Rufus' sanctum opened with a jerk. The irate features of the C.O. peered out. Came a grinding of teeth, a curse, and the slamming of the door as he pulled in his head again.

"Oh, boys," chuckled Bump, enthusiastically. "Is he in the pink! Wait until Phineas—"

"Where d'you think the crackpot's been?" growled Howell. "He's been actin' nutty for weeks."

Droppin' letters over the lines. He's borrowed every old addressed envelope he couldn't steal. Then writing letters of his own in the best forgery of the handwriting on those envelopes that he could muster. Signed a different name to each one. Each of three Limeys from the British outfit carries one. He's handed four to the Frog squadron and the Lord only knows how many others are doing him the favor. As far as I know, nobody here has got one planted on him. They'll be taking the fathead away yet to see if he can walk a chalk line or remember where he was born. Well, cripes, I give up! He—"

"That ain't all," offered Bump Gillis. "He seems to have got a sudden grudge against the balloon outfits. The other day a Yankee jumped from a basket and he follered the guy down until he saw him land, then he shot up again. He did the same thing today. I thought he was going to pump lead at the bums. I think I'll move my things out of his hut. I'll wake up some night and find that he's cut my throat or somethin'. That big ape ain't human. He don't act—"

The door of the farmhouse swung open. Phineas entered, his face split wide open with an extra broad grin. "Hello, nitwits," he greeted the pilots. "How's every little thing? Well, I got my gas line fixed, but just in time, as maybe eight or nine companies of Boche was—"

"You're a cockeyed liar," snapped Howell. "You ran out on purpose and if you think—"

"Pinkham, get in here damn quick!" The voice rendered every other larynx in the room impotent. Major Garrity stood in the doorway of Wings, fists clenched on the ends of the arms hanging at his sides. Phineas would have liked to bet that he could hang his hat on Sir Rufus' outthrust lower jaw at twenty paces. However, a warning voice told him that this was no night to suggest games of chance.

"Yes, sir," grinned Phineas, "I'm comin', ain't I? An' I've got an alibi, too. I—"

"Shut up!" The door slammed. The Ninth Pursuit pilots exchanged significant glances, voiced their hopes that the Old Man had a job for Phineas like flying over the Rhine to bomb the Berlin Chamber of Commerce, and then lapsed into silent waiting.

"WELL, you half-baked woozle," began the Old Man to Phineas in the privacy of Wings. "Where've you been? Don't answer. It'll be nothing but a damn lie, anyway. What I want to know is what in hell have you been doing playing tag with observers who have bailed out of the baskets, what? A major was in here

this afternoon raising hell. Says he'll take it up with G.H.Q. You almost hooked your wing in one of the chutes, he says. And furthermore, you fathead, you—"

"Awright," thrust in Phineas, "blame me! How'd those bums know who it was? Maybe they carry telescopes an'—"

"Maybe they do, I don't know!" yelped the Old Man, slamming both fists on the table until a leg wobbled under the onslaught. "But I do know this! The next time—"

"That's all the thanks I git," interposed Phineas. "I slam down the kraut who was pokin' the sausage and they want to bust me. I figgered maybe the guy would bust a leg or an arm an' I would pick him up. Awright, I'm through tryin' to cooperate. I'll just laugh at the bums when I see 'em up there again, an' I hope moths get in their chutes. I'll—"

Major Garrity dug at his scalp with splayed fingers and gnashed his teeth like a neurotic chimpanzee. After the spasm had passed he rose to his feet and glowered at Phineas.

"You'll do nothing but wear out your boots on the ground," he roared. "Breaking formation and scaring the liver out of ballon observers is enough for the present. There's a lot of other things I'll think of before morning, you homely baboon. Now, get out—"

"But ya can't ground me," protested Phineas. "That bum, von Beesting, will think I've got cold feet an'—"

"You'll be cold all over if you open your yap just once more," howled the Old Man, advancing with one big fist, ready to explode.

"Get out!"

"I'm goin', ain't I?" snapped Phineas. "I don't git no appetite bein' in here with you, anyways!" He turned and bolted for safety.

Bump Gillis looked up from a checkerboard as Phineas catapulted into the room and skidded to a stop, then walked nonchalantly toward the exit. The Scot was about to hurl an appropriate bit of sarcasm when a muffled voice came from the door of the Old Man's sanctum.

"And when you get to Paris, stay there for a month," it said.

"Paris!" yipped Captain Howell. "Paris! That bum goin' to—"

"Yeah," said Phineas as he turned briefly in the doorway. "The Old Man says, 'Well, Phineas, I giss you're just gittin' a little high-strung an' need a rest, so—' The Boonetown flyer shrugged and walked out. On the tarmac he put two fingers into his mouth and

pulled a little object from his palate, chuckled and slipped around the corner of the house.

Major Garrity slid into the room as Howell was voicing his opinion anent the way the Ninth Pursuit was being conducted. The flight leader, in very indignant outbursts, let everybody know that if Pinkham could go to Paris, then he could damn well go, too, or somebody higher than a major would hear about it.

"Tsk! Tsk!" admonished Bump Gillis through clenched teeth. "The Ol' Man—"

"Paris?" howled the C.O. "Paris? Pinkham goin' to Paris? Why, who in hell said anything about—"

The flight leader choked, then managed to sputter some words. "B-but I—we heard you, sir, and—"

"Haw-w-w-w-w-w!" The jeering laugh came from a window. In a split second the pilots saw the light. Howell swore and reached for a bottle.

Crash! Glass and wooden sash splintered. Major Rufus groaned, and spun around to grope his way back into his sanctum. He promised himself that in the morning he would send for a strait-jacket and four very strong M.P.s.

JUST before noon of the following day. A Flight returned from the wars, looking like a flock of turkeys that had been driven through a barbed-wire entanglement. Von Bissinger was well on the way toward making good his threat that Lieutenant Phineas Pinkham and the Ninth Pursuit would be just a memory by the next full moon. Phineas got up from his seat on an empty petrol tin and sauntered over to where the returning pilots were taking inventory of their persons before venturing to walk across the tarmac.

"My, my," he grinned at Bump Gillis, "lookit the holes in that crate! Well, they'll have to throw anvils at ya this p.m. if ya go up, as no more bullets could hit what's left. Haw-w-w-w! Giss the Von thought you was me an'—"

Lieutenant Gillis snatched a wrench from a mechanic's pocket.

"Hit the bum," Howell encouraged Bump. "We'll hold him, and no court-martial would convict us."

"I'll lick ya with my bare hands," challenged Phineas. "The whole kit an' caboodle of ya."

Across the field came a motorcycle. In the side-car was the Old Man just returning from Bar-le-Duc. The driver swerved toward the scene of disturbance with a breath-taking maneuver, then almost snapped the Garrity head from its shoulders as he brought the mechanical bug to a sudden halt.

"What in hell did you drive before you enlisted?" barked the C.O. "A trolley car?" Then he glared at the group of pilots. "What is all this damn—"

"Murderous assault," supplied Phineas promptly. "They—"

"Who?"

"Bump Gillis, here," said Phineas. He had a wrench an'—"

"Sure," admitted the irate Scot, "but on second thought I didn't smack him, as von Bissinger would be sorer than ever and would lose all the marks the Kaiser put on this bum's head. Then he'd borry maybe a hundred more Pfalz busses some place an' make life more miserable for us than it is already. So—"

"Shake, Gillis," grinned Garrity with no more mirth behind it than one would see in the eyes of a dyspeptic boa constrictor. "You ought to be mentioned in general orders. I see your point. Lieutenant Pinkham will be in the air on the Flight's next patrol. All right, let's get out of here!" he flung at the driver. "And don't forget, you can't loop these motorcycles."

"All against me, huh?" grinned Phineas. "Well, I'll show ya why all the Pinkhams have been famous in U.S. history!" With a gesture of disdain he walked toward his hut. There he sat and held communion with himself, wondering how Babette was progressing with a certain chore in Bar-le-Duc. He also wondered if any stray letters had been picked up around the German trenches.

Poignant pangs pierced his bosom as he thought of the rumors that were rife anent the apparent superiority of von Bissinger over the famous Pinkham. Moreover, it had been bandied about that a Limey ace had moved into the sector to match his prowess against the pestiferous von Bissinger.

THE day wore on. Late afternoon found Phineas and A Flight high over the Jerry trenches, but von Bissinger and his Pfalz ships were busy in another part of the sky. The Von had pounced upon a trio of Bristols and was kicking them all over the sky. Two got away to their own lines but the third was escorted down into German acreage and captured intact.

At the Staffel of von Brahm, who was von Bissinger's commanding officer, the Junker ace presented his prisoners. They were questioned and searched. On the person of the Bristol's pilot was found a letter, the contents of which set von Bissinger to kicking his heels with joy.

"*Ach, Herr Oberst,*" he exulted. "What a discovery,

hein? The great Leutnant Pingham, the vind up yedt he hass, ja? I read—so listen vunce. *Ach!*” The excerpt he read from the letter follows:

“I have heard that Phineas Pinkham of the Ninth Pursuit was grazed by the undercarriage of a Fokker and has had the wind up ever since. Well, every buzzard has a weakness and I guess Pinkham can’t stand near-collisions in the air, eh, Bert? Not that you can blame him. When you see a ship tearing at you until it looks as if it is going to crash you, you get weak and your stomach turns over. Well, Pinkham is only human. Next week I hope to see you in . . .”

Von Bissinger left off there. “The rest it iss not of interest,” he chortled. “Undt the letter it iss signed, ‘Lieutenant Hector McGoogle.’ *Ach*, the Yangkees haff the funny names, ja?”

“Him you haff now, *Herr Hauptmann*,” grinned von Brahm. “You gedt him now *und* you know vat to do. A chink in the great Pingham armor, ja?”

“Ja,” agreed von Bissinger. “We dringk to *Leutnant* Pingham. You *und I und the Englander Offiziers. Hoch!*”

To tell this story we must be in a dozen different places at the same time. While Howell and A flight were out over the lines a staff car pulled up in front of the big stone house of the Ninth Pursuit Squadron and two brass hats unloaded themselves. They walked in on Rufus Garrity.

“Well, bless me!” shouted the Old Man. “Old Brill! How’s everything in Nancy? How’s the Town-Major, what?”

“Hello, Garrity,” growled Brill. “Can’t stay long. Been looking all over the salient for a man named Hector McGoogle. A flyer. Went into Nancy last night and put up at the Hotel Angleterre. This morning he was missing. Never paid his bill and got away with all the silk bed sheets from the Louis Fourteenth bed chamber. Damned outrage, Garrity! Damned outrage! Have you a flyer here by the name of McGoogle? Had a long thin nose and a red mustache.”

“Never heard of him,” declared the Old Man. “Why, did he say—”

“No, he didn’t,” answered Brill. “Not a word. Well, I can’t stop. Got to—” He took a cigar from his pocket. “Here, Garrity, don’t use them myself,” he said. “Well, if we ever find that damn McGoogle we’ll make it hot for him. Sure I’ll have a drink—two drinks.”

The automobile was taking Brill and his fellow officer away when Howell, Phineas Pinkham and the other sky riders nosed onto the field from their uneventful patrol.

“Brass hats! Cripes!” This from Phineas.

AT MESS that night the Old Man relayed the story of the escapade of one Hector McGoogle for the benefit of his down-in-the-mouth brood.

“Went into the hotel in Nancy to steal bed sheets,” he chuckled. “Bet his name wasn’t Hector McGoogle any more than mine is Santa Claus. Brill’s chasing all over France for him, ha!”

“Well, I guess there’s somebody in France even nuttier than Carbuncle,” offered Bump Gillis. “Hell, beatin’ a hotel bill an’ stealin’ sheets, haw-w-w-w-w!”

“Haw-w-w-w-w!” chimed in Phineas. “Is that a laugh? I bet—” he straightened in his seat as little needles suddenly began to prick up and down the length of his spine. Slowly he hitched around in his chair as his eyes focussed on a big black cigar the Old Man was ramming between his teeth.

“Some cigar,” said Garrity. “Brill is no piker. Bet it’s worth four bits if it’s worth a dime. Corona C—” He applied a match to the end and settled back in his chair.

“Well,” grinned Phineas, striving to be calm, “I’m off my feed tonight. Giss I’ll git me some oil of peppermint.”

“Thinkin’ of the Von, maybe,” proposed Bump maliciously. “Giss he’s one squarehead you don’t bring down with mirrers an’ books of tricks, ya-a-a-a-ah!”

Phineas offered no repartee whatsoever. As his boots crunched the ground outside there came a sound from the mess hall like the explosion of a small firecracker. Phineas started running for the hangars.

Major Garrity, eyebrows partially cremated, the lower part of his face powder-blackened, a few shreds of tobacco dangling from his teeth, sat rigid in his chair while little voices whispered in his ear. Hector McGoogle! Major Brill! The Hotel Angleterre! Like a bolt out of the sky realization hit his brain pan. With a leonine yell he jumped to his feet, spat out the remnants of the cigar and tore out of the place. Pilots milled behind him.

“Phineas!” yelled Bump Gillis. “Why, the damn duck! I bet he was Hec—”

Out on the tarmac a Spad leaped to life. It tore across the field with three groundmen running after it.

“Come back here, you—you—” With his voice drowned out by the whirring plane the Old Man resorted to feverish pantomime. As the ship lifted and droned into the gloom, Garrity collared Flight Sergeant Casey.

“What d’you mean, giving him that ship?” he bellowed. “I’ll bust you wide open! I’ll—”

“Cripes, sir,” objected Casey, “I didn’t give it to the

bum. I tried to stop him and he cracked me one on the jaw, sir, and says something about nobody is gonna blame him fer somethin' or other an' he gits aboard an' jams in the throttle. An'—an'—there he goes an' they ain't even a single clip in his guns!"

"What?" snapped the major. "Ha! Well, it looks as if we've gotten rid of the fathead for keeps this time. He loves jokes. Wait until he tumbles to that one. Hector McG—— Lord, I might've known!"

"Well, they ain't got no proof," said Bump Gillis. "An' anyways. I'm goin' after him. He might be a nut an' he is a pain in the neck, but no Heinie tramp can use my hutmate for—"

"You stay on the ground, see!" howled the C.O. "Casey, if another buzzard goes near those Spads shoot him, understand, or I'll have you shot."

There came a rumbling sound and the murk was stabbed by two big headlights. Major Garrity footed it into a hurry toward headquarters.

"You'd think they'd all move up here, them bums, an' save gas an' tires," complained Bump. "I used to think there was nothing I hated worse than spinach, but them brass hats—"

"Looks like a dirty job," opined Howell. "Some bird'll lose some sleep tonight."

THE flight leader's prognostication was correct. A colonel imparted the news to the Old Man that they had been unable to drag the information from a pair of German prisoners as they had hoped. A fast ship would have to go over in the wee small hours to ferret out the Heinie dump and the narrow-gauge railroad that ribboned into it.

"All right," growled Garrity with disgust, "but have a wreath ready for the funeral tomorrow, colonel. Is that all?"

It was.

One Lieutenant Halley volunteered to take the job, then hied to his hut to look over his belongings and write a letter.

"I'd like to see Phineas," said Bump. "I'd just like to see him long enough to find out why he was aggravatin' observers who had bailed out an' why he was plantin' all them letters. Well, I giss that is one thing we'll never know."

At that moment Lieutenant Phineas Pinkham was finding out that he had no ammunition in his Vickers. Three Tripes were hard on his tail over St. Bassaunt, Spandaus crackling like a brush fire. He shot over toward Limey and drew a collection of Yankee anti-

aircraft iron upstairs. The red bursts convinced the Boche that their quarry was not to be bagged that night and so they twisted their way through shrapnel back to their own backyard.

Planning dire vengeance against all ground men, Phineas nosed down and landed in an old wheat field outside of Limey. It was clogged with troops of the 82d Division. A sergeant took him to "Division P.C. and there Lieutenant Pinkham found two captured German privates being questioned by perspiring and swearing brass hats.

"They act dumb, huh?" grinned Phineas knowingly. "Well, I bet I kin make them open up."

"Take a try," snapped a colonel. "I'm sick of hollering and threatening. Let's see how smart the Air Force is on the ground."

"Sure," said Phineas and he grinned some more. Without more ado he approached a little bespectacled private who sat hunched defiantly in a chair. His eyes popped as the flyer pulled out a big pocket knife. Phineas opened the blade carefully and hooked his left arm around the German's neck.

"Ach!" exclaimed the other prisoner. "*Gott im Himmel—*"

"Then you want to speak, eh?" cracked the colonel. "*Nein! Nein!*"

"Awright," said Phineas, and he pressed the blade of the knife against the nose of the man in the chair. To the horror of the other German the knife was seen to sink into the man's nose and a red stream of blood trickled down Phineas' fist. Moreover, the little man with the cheaters over his eyes squealed horribly.

"See here," weakly protested an officer, "good God, we can't allow this to—"

"I talk," yipped the uninjured prisoner eagerly. "I talk, *ja*, I the place show. Giff here the map, *ach!*"

"Hurry up an' point out what they want to know," grinned the unperturbed Phineas, "Or off comes the bum's nose."

"I say," insisted the colonel who had protested, "this is barbarous. This is—"

However, Phineas held onto his man until the desired information was forthcoming. Then he stepped back, and hoarse cries of amazement issued from a dozen throats. There was nothing wrong with the prisoner's nose.

"Haw, I fooled the kraut!" enthused Phineas. "This knife blade has a piece hollowed out and it fits right over a nose. An' that wasn't blood. I squeezed a little sponge an'—"

"But the man screamed," insisted the colonel, "he—"
"Well, I would, too, if a guy almost pulled one of my ears off. Well, adoo, I got to ally."

"Call up the Ninth Pursuit Squadron," yelled the colonel to a subordinate. "Tell them to disregard the orders we—"

"The Ninth?" croaked Phineas. Then he laughed uproariously. "Tell them Lieutenant Hector McGoogle got the desired information," he flung over his shoulder as he went out of Divisional Headquarters.

By this time there ought to be some gas in his Spad and he wanted to get to Bar-le-Duc in a hurry. Babette was doing a great service for France and the Allies—and Phineas Pinkham.

PHINEAS landed outside the little town, halfway between midnight and dawn. He found Babette still toiling at her appointed task and assured her that Joan of Arc was a slacker compared to her.

"Eet ees a vairee fooleesh t'eeng what you do," she declared. "Eef she not *beaucoup* strong she go pouf! Then poor leetle Babette she nevaire see mebbe Boonestown, Ioway, *non!*"

"Haw-w-w-w!" guffawed Phineas. "How many times have I toldja a fortune teller said I was gonna die in bed, huh? Comprenny voose?"

"*Oui*," said Babette resignedly, but as she worked the dubious look would not desert her dark, luminous eyes. "I steel theenk you are what you call cookoo!"

"Well, bum sour," said Phineas airily, "I got to git goin'."

"Tomorrow she ees *fini* some time," Babette promised him. "*Bon soir*."

The new day found Major Garrity still doubting his right to be among rational folk. One Lieutenant Hector McGoogle, the brass hats had buzzed him the night before, had rendered them a most valuable service. He had attended to the business of ascertaining the location of the Jerry supply dump and had sent Major Garrity his compliments.

"If it was that damn Pinkham," the befuddled Garrity had asked himself and everybody around him, "how did he know they were looking for the dump? Hell, he couldn't have known!" The major had fumed and sputtered, and even had gone so far as to give his gun to Bump Gillis for safe-keeping until the wary Scot should think it wise or safe for his superior to be armed once more. "And if any buzzard so much as whispers 'Hector McGoogle' around here again," he had declared menacingly, "I'll knock his ears off!"

On morning patrol the pilots of A Flight anxiously scanned the ozone for some sign of Lieutenant Pinkham. So, too, did *Hauptmann* von Bissinger, who was cutting through the ether with a cocksuredness he had not enjoyed for many weeks. Once he, von Bissinger, managed to down the dread *Leutnant* Pinkham he felt sure the Kaiser would let him try on one of the royal uniforms and might even let him ride the wooden horse.

Phineas Pinkham, however, was not in the air this fine morning. We find him in a dark corner of a cafe seldom frequented by officers. His Spad was resting in a field outside the town, and over it had been placed a netting made of burlap and wire, a well-known invention of the astute Frog *camafleurs*. Babette was to meet him there at the stroke of twelve. With a donkey and cart she would arrive, and in the cart would be the fruit of hours of tedious toil. Another man sat at the table with Phineas, an inebriate dough who had somehow strayed, as buck privates do, from where he belonged.

"So that's why ya went A.W.O.L., huh?" growled Phineas. "Ya hate orfisers. Well, I wouldn't kiss a lot of 'em myself. How'd ya like to be one for a day, huh? Listen, after ya git through guzzlin' that brandy I'm goin' to give ya my trench coat an' sky-piece, an' then ya can go over to the Cafe of the Pink Cow an' stand up alongside of the bar an' drink right side of 'em, an' you can go around bossin' the M.P.s an' callin' 'em names an' make 'em salute ya, huh?"

"H-ha, thatsh shwell!" gurgled the Dough. "Great joke, huh? Been wantin' to live like a orfisher for a day. I—*hic*—alwhysh wanted to be shaluted, yep. How do I—*hic*—"

"Here," and Phineas handed the Dough a strange-looking object, "put this on over your face an' nobody'll ever git wise. Throw away your dog tag an' tell 'em you're Hector McGoogle, a flyer, if they ask ya. But they won't. See?"

"Great pal, huh!" grinned the Dough, and slammed Phineas between the angel bones. "Great fun! Shtick aroun' an' shee it, huh? Don't care how long the war lashts now, no, sir. Got a new noshe an' mushtache, wheel!"

"Better git sobered up a little, first," suggested Phineas, albeit he knew that it was a waste of good advice. "Here's the coat an' the skypiece. I'll trade my boots for your puttees an' kicks."

And a few minutes later a man was weaving out of the gloom of the corner of the cafe and trying to

line up the door. “Whoopee!” he yipped as he crabbed through. “I’m—*hic*—Hector McGoogle!”

“Well, adoo!” grinned Phineas, flipping a hand in farewell. “I hope the bums believe it.”

THREE hours later wires were buzzing. Town-Major Brill got the news in Nancy that Lieutenant Hector McGoogle, the pilferer of bed sheets, had been picked up in Bar-le-Duc. In due time the phone in Major Rufus Garrity’s sanctum jerked him out of a heap of detail. He cursed and yelled into the mouthpiece.

“Well?”

“Just arrested Lieutenant Hector McGoogle, drunk and disorderly. Does he belong to your outfit?”

The Old Man almost bit the instrument before flinging it from him, then pounded his boots on the boards of the floor. “Cripes!” he spat out, then retrieved the phone from its festing place. “I’ll be there to look him over!”

Grabbing his hat and equilibrium, the C.O. stamped out onto the field. As he yelled for his motorcycle, a Spad swooped low over the field and then went up in a wild zoom. A missile just missed Sergeant Casey’s head. It was a big block of wood with a penciled message scrawled thereon.

“Won’t be home until I’ve smacked down von Beestinger. Feeling fine. Wish you were here! Lieutenant Pinkham.”

“My God!” groaned Major Garrity. “I’m nuts. The bum can’t be Hector McGoogle. Hector’s locked up. But—” He turned and ran into Wings and looked into the glass. As far back as he could remember, his family tree had never been overrun with squirrels. But then none of his forefathers had ever run an airdrome.

While the Old Man gave himself insanity tests, Phineas went back to Bar-le-Duc and kept his appointment with Babette. Midafternoon found him taking off with a bulky object strung under his fuselage. Babette waved from the ground, shook her head, and wondered disconsolately where she would find another prospective American husband.

High over Pont-a-Mousson late that afternoon *Hauptmann* von Bissinger circled with a dozen of his well-born Prussians. A few hours before they had soundly trounced a flight of the hated Ninth Pursuit Squadron. But ‘Pinkham,’ the *verdammt* scoundrel, still had the wind up. But the Baron would get him yedt, *ja!*

Von Bissinger looked hopefully toward enemy skies. The *Hauptmann* Howell and his Yangkees generally came out to get revenge. And then the Jerry leader saw them, tiny specks dancing in the misty ether to the south.

Yes, Howell and his tight-jawed Yanks were on the way. They had mayhem in their eyes and murder in their hearts. Howell looked overside as gobs of mist rolled under his trucks. A sixth sense told him that something was coming up. His eyes finally picked it out—a lone Spad was boring toward the ceiling, a Spad with a crazily painted fuselage. The flight leader nearly fell out of his ship as he saw painted in large letters on the Spad’s top wing, “Phineas Pinkham—Vermin and Von Killer!” Howell recovered with effort and let out a howl. A mile ahead he saw von Bissinger’s Vons drilling in.

The Junker’s eyebrows arched as he, too, looked down at the single—Spad. Then a yell of rage and frustration tore from his throat. Immediately it gave way to one of grim glee, and von Bissinger hurled his Pfalz straight down at the climbing ship. Howell and his flight fused with the Boche ships as every pilot in the sky sensed that the great Pinkham and the German leader wanted to be left alone.

“*Donnervetter!*” yipped von Bissinger in guttural enthusiasm, as he dived. “I vill turn to water the upstart’s heart, *und* then I fill him full of holes like the Svitzer cheese. *Ach*, he does nodt like almost-collisions, *nein!*” And the Junker straightened out and whistled over Phineas’ leather casque with but inches to spare. “*Das ist gut!*” howled the Von in wild glee. “Now vunce more yedt I play at the game *und* then comes yedt the master stroke, *ja!*”

IT WAS fortunate that a certain Teuton prisoner back of the Allied lines could not take wing like a swallow and fly into the sky to whisper a word of warning to *Herr Hauptmann* von Bissinger. For in his pit Lieutenant Phineas Pinkham was grinning savagely and worrying the stick until it appeared to the Von that the Spad pilot had forgotten a lot he had known about flying and was scared out of his skivvies.

Again the Von came gunning in, from right angles this time, and sent a burst through the Spad’s superstructure as he came on to add to the fright he was sure lurked under the great Pinkham’s diaphragm. The German leader laughed with delight as he pulled up the Pfalz nose just as it seemed to be on the verge of merging with the Pinkham wings.

A Boche pilot overhead chuckled as he skipped out of the path of Bump Gillis' battle bus. "*Ach*, like a mouse yedt he plays with the *Leutnant* Pingham. *Ja*, like a m—" His jaws clamped shut and froze tight. For without warning the snout of the Pinkham Spad jerked up as if it were the head of a trout striking' for a bright-colored fly.

Crash! Von Bissinger's tail assembly was kicked askew in the twinkling of an eye. The Pfalz kicked over and went into contortions.

"*Donner und Blitzen!*" croaked the Junker, and wrestled with the bucking ship. Even in the midst of his woe, with the Boche happy hunting ground making a great bid to welcome him, the great von Bissinger realized that *Leutnant* Pinkham had played him dirt.

And Phineas? He was going toward Allied real estate in a great hurry, but he was not with the propless Spad. Howell, trying not to look, but somehow forced to do so, watched the black shapeless blotch that was Phineas spearing at the map of France. Something trailed out behind him. Then a great white flower blossomed. The falling figure snapped up and swung in circles in the sky. Von Bissinger saw this, too, as he nursed a motor and some wings toward the ground, and wished that he could turn the calendar back at least two years.

"He iss nodt human, *nein*," groaned von Bissinger. "*Ach*, und nodt efen a bullet yedt did he fire! A parachute he hass, *Donnervetter! Gott*, und vunce yedt I could haff joined the artillery, *ja!*"

Meanwhile Phineas Pinkham floated through space, hoping that Babette had sewn the bed sheets together strongly. If some of the ropes gave way, or if she had not fastened those little rings tightly—if the seams split open—then he would not be Phineas but Finee!

His heart almost turned to custard as he felt something give. A rope was dangling free. Cripes! His body jerked sidewise as a gust of wind began to play savagely with the unbalanced and improvised lifesaver. Phineas twisted his neck and looked-earthward. Only another thousand feet. And just then von Bissinger, the wreck of his Pfalz and the ground engaged in an argument and the ground won.

Five hundred feet—three hundred—two hundred. Overhead Howell and his Spads circled, the buzzards' hearts edging down into their boots. Bump Gillis squawked as he saw a great hole appear in the falling chute.

"Well, a guy like that couldn't expect to live forever," he mused, and shut his eyes.

Phineas heard the ripping of Babette's handiwork and said a prayer, folding his arms across his chest piously. Well, he would save the U.S. the cost of a shroud! Then something whacked him in the seat of the pants. He bounced into the air, grazed another something with his ear and then stopped remembering things until late that afternoon.

WHEN Phineas awoke, he was in his bunk back at the field, and all around him were familiar faces. His eyes strayed over them all until they rested on the rugged visage of Major Rufus Garrity. Phineas swore and tossed the covers from him. Bump Gillis held him down.

"Awright," barked the intrepid flyer. "Awright. Tell them who took the damn bed sheets! But all them lousy balloon guys had nine lives and I couldn't get me a chute. So I went—"

"I know," said the Old Man. "You've been raving for hours. You told us you chased those balloon observers down, hoping they would get knocked cold so you could swipe the chute. And then you went to Nancy because you heard they had silk bed sheets there and you swiped 'em and took them to the dame in Bar-le-Duc to sew them together. You crackpot!"

"Well, I got the Von, didn't I?" argued Phineas with his usual grin. "I bet he wishes to hell he never found that letter written by Hector McGoogle on that Limey flyer. Haw-w-w-w-w-w! Well, that's the trouble with them Vons. It's their own fault if they like to aggravate a guy before they bump, him off. And I think I'll send that dame of mine to sewing school! Where's von Beestinger?"

"In a hospital getting pieced together," answered Garrity. "He's wild enough to eat raw meat. Now we have to go out and have a burial."

"A whaa-a-a-a-a?" gasped Phineas. "Those damn bed sheets!" explained the Old Man with a growl. "You won't get any medal if the brass hats find you used a chute, and what Brill wouldn't do to you! And you know damn well they'd court-martial you for deliberately wrecking a Spad, you halfwit! But as you actually rammed the Von—then—well, I guess those balloon outfits will stand a fat chance of busting you."

"Haw-w-w-w-w-w!" laughed Phineas. "When you bury them bed sheets, put up a cross over 'em and paint on it 'Hector McGoogle!'"