



# SHOWER KRAUT

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*They'd threatened Phineas Pinkham with Blois before—and he'd lived to laugh at them. But this time the future of the ace of Boonetown, Iowa, was in the hands of a Brigadier who didn't exactly like being pushed in the face.*

**A** MUD-CAKED MOTORCYCLE with tin bathtub attachment leaped across the flying field of the Ninth Pursuit Squadron in a series of drunken hops and zigzag broad jumps. A groundman literally dived head foremost into the sanctuary of the ammo shed. Another reached the limb of a tree with a superhuman zoom and from his vantage point shouted a warning to everyone.

The driver of the motorcycle attempted to skid the

machine to a stop in front of the big French farmhouse which housed squadron headquarters. But his judgment of distance was far from up to snuff and one mechanical bug was written off the books, having lost an argument over the right of way with a huge stone doorstep.

There was a sound like a wagon load of old pots and pans being dumped into a large tin vat. A figure catapulted from the seat of the motorcycle and shot through the open door of headquarters.

"My God!" gasped Bump Gillis. "It's that fathead, Phineas 'Carbuncle' Pinkham himself!"

The ace from Boonetown, Iowa, raised himself on one elbow, accomplished a grin and looked up into the faces of his fellow buzzards.

"I thought I'd drive the thing home," he explained. "I tol' that corporal he was too reckless. He almos' killed me on the way in."

"How do you stop motorcycles," inquired Major Rufus Garrity, who had just jumped out of Wings, "when there're no houses around, you halfwit?"

"Haw-w-w-w-w-w!" guffawed Phineas, rising to his feet and feeling at his carcass gingerly. "That's a horse on me, haw-w-w-w! Somethin' must've happened to the thing 'cause I couldn't make it stop. Giss you better go out an' see if the corporal has got out of the bathtub. Well, I was in a hurry to git here as I've got somethin' to tell you bums an' is it funny?"

"It'd better be," growled Howell menacingly. "If you ever brought back anything you took out without smashing it all to hell, you would give us all—"

"I was over to see von Bissinger," proceeded Phineas, unperturbed. "They let 'im out of the hospital this morning, an' has he been a mean squarehead? He's been so ugly they're goin' to ship him out with a lot of Heinies—privates—in one of them Frog box-cars. Oh boy, is he fit to be tied! I says to him, 'Hello, von Beestinger, are they givin' you a upper or lower berth?' Well, he picked up one of them saws the doctors cut off a guy's leg with and heaved it at me and it bounced off a colonel's dome. Haw-w-w-w! Well, I giss he'll git turkey with all the trimmin's, huh?"

"Well, that's kind of fanny at that," agreed Major Garrity reluctantly. "That stuck-up von—"

"An' they drove me out of the place for aggravatin' enemy prisoners," Carbuncle resumed his story with indignation. "I told the bums I had a hell of a time shootin' him down and I figured I had a right to do anything I wanted to with him and a colonel got nasty an' said to git out or he'd git me arrested. That's the thanks I git for knocking off the Von, and if the Heinies find another tough ace, well, him and me is going to be pals."

"You and von Bissinger wrote mash notes enough," remarked Bump Gillis maliciously.

"Well, you big loud-mouthed—"

"Shut up!" snapped Garrity. "Go out and see if that corporal is—"

A flyer came in just then. "I've seen him. He can walk all right, but not straight."

"Huh," grunted Phineas. "They oughta give them bums that drive motorcycles at least one lesson. Oh, well—" And with a manner that denoted closing of the incident as far as he was concerned, Phineas picked a small booklet out of his pocket, subbed a fleshy igloo that was welling up over one eye, and sought a chair near his hutmate.

"If that corporal has a fractured skull, you baboon," howled Garrity as he walked away, "I'll hold you for manslaughter."

PHINEAS chuckled and opened his book. The cover bore the title, "The Wizard's Manual."

Bump Gillis winked at Howell and looked far over Phineas's shoulder. "I figure it's a swell idear to know in advance whether you are goin' to git poisoned or not," he said. "Huh, what boloney! It—"

*Swish!* Bump Gillis swore and pawed at his face, backing away. A watery substance trickled through his fingers and spotted his tunic. The Scotsman sputtered and dug his knuckles into his eyes.

"Haw-w-w-w!" burst forth Phineas. "That was vinegar. If there's anythin' I hate, it's to have a guy read over my shoulder. That is a swell trick. A tube comes out of my pocket an' all I do is press a bulb an'—well, it is for pests that look over a guy's shoulder."

"I'm through," spat out Bump. "I'll git my things out of your lousy hut. I'd sooner bunk with a jackal. Look at this uniform, you nitwit! It set me back more francs than your hide is worth. I'll git hunk if it takes me a million years."

"If you live that long, you still won't have brains enough to think a way to beat me, you bum," laughed Phineas, and he got up to saunter out of the house.

"Take it from me," roared Bump Gillis, "I'll kill that guy some day!"

Suddenly there came a rumbling from outside the door. The door flew open and a tall, stout man, clutching a stick as though his life depended on it, stood glaring at the occupants of the big room. The man's uniform bore mute evidence of close contact with muddy water and not long before his arrival.

"Where's your commanding officer?" he demanded to know, ignoring the salutes.

Howell got up and respectfully offered his help.

"Major Garrity," the visitor stormed as he slammed the door of Wings behind him, "one of your upstarts ditched me out on the road not eight miles from here. Oh, don't look surprised. I saw what was left of the motorcycle out here. I demand that that man be

brought to me this instant, understand? By gad, he deliberately put us into a ditch. He skidded to the side of the road and stopped long enough for me to get out of the machine and collar him. Then he pushed me, Garrity, pushed me! Pushed me in the face and I slipped and went into a ditchful of mud and water. Assault, major, that's what! As sure as I'm Brigadier-General Wilkes, I'll spread-eagle that upstart. Where is he?"

Major Garrity groaned. "I think I know the man," he had to admit. "Orderly!"

A few momenta later the orderly returned with the information that Lieutenant Pinkham had suddenly departed for Bar-le-Duc.

"Lieutenant Gillis said, sir," the orderly explained, "that Lieutenant Pinkham had an ulcerated tooth. He went to—"

"That's all," barked Garrity. "Well, sir, I'll put him under arrest as soon as he gets back."

"I'll wait," snapped Wilkes.

"I'm afraid it'll be too long," cracked out the major. "That man—"

"What? Is that the sort of discipline you have here?" roared Wilkes. "Well, by gad, I'll look into this. Goodnight, sir!"

"Cripes!" moaned the Old Man.

Phineas Pinkham got back from Bar-le-Duc just as A flight was getting ready for early patrol. Howell looked at him with a jaundiced optic.

"I hear you're cooked," he hurled at Phineas, "but I've got no orders about you yet. Better die a hero today as when you get back—oh, boy, I hate to tell you."

"Oh, yeah?" drawled Phineas with admirable sang-froid. "Well, that brass hat don't own the roads. I'll charge him with reckless driving and—"

"Oh, hell, git into your Spad an' shut up," growled the leader of A flight.

Upstairs the sky was full of Boche planes. The downing of von Bissinger had further galled the High Command, and the reward on Lieutenant Pinkham's head was doubled. Every Von in need of cash was prowling along the sky trails with one increasing purpose in his mind. Get the *Leutnant* Pinkham!

It might be said that on that particular day five or six of them almost got the feel of marks in their digits. Garrity's flight was ambushed over the Meuse and four ships barreled the Pinkham Spad before the Boonetown winged warrior could organize his wits. Howell and Gillis, as well as three other buzzards from the Ninth, hammered their way to the joker's aid and succeeded in prolonging his life at the risk of their own.

"I don't know why I do it," complained Bump Gillis to himself as he tipped a Pfalz on its nose with a well-aimed burst. "The bum! Well, it'll be fun to see him pack up for Blois—take that, you Heinie fathead!" And Bump Gillis changed the mind of another Junker who had had an idea of sneaking up on one of Phineas's blind spots, and the Boonetown flyer had many.

"Well, he's out," rasped Howell as Phineas streaked for the Allied lines. Then the flight commander wagged his wings and summoned his Spads for the run home.

BACK on the field, Phineas wiped his steaming brow with a dirty brown handkerchief. "They're sure sore at me," he declared. "Did you see 'em hop on me?"

"No, you crackpot," seethed the white-faced Bump Gillis. "We were all over the Alps lookin' for eagle eggs. The next time, you kin git shellacked for all I care. To hell with you!"

"The motion is seconded an' I make it unanimous," put in Howell as he spat into the dirt and walked away.

"He draws Boche lead like a mule draws flies," opined another buzzard. "Why don't they transfer him? Our skins ain't worth a dime with him around."

"Don't worry," said Phineas with scorn. "I'll be sayin' adoo by nightfall. I'm goin' up to Chaumont to traffic court. Well, it's been a swell *guerre*. I broke up the Von ace trust and I figger I'll git a monument even if I graduate from Blois. An' I hope some Heinie invents a crate which'll fly four ways, have twenty guns an' armor-plate four inches thick."

Major Garrity collared Phineas several minutes later and advised the unquenchable flyer that he would get shot at if he attempted to leave the field. So far as he could make out, the major told his pain-in-the-neck there was little or no chance of a writ of *habeas corpus*. The Boonetown hero's future was in the hands of a brigadier who did not like to be pushed in the face.

"Oh, awright," was Phineas' acknowledgment of the major's remarks. "But I'll insist on a lawyer. I've got some rights even if I am only a looeey. I'll—"

"A looeey?" repeated Sir Rufus wolfishly. "You flatter yourself. If you're more than a buck private in a month. I'll eat my hat."

"Look out, you might have to," retorted Phineas. "A guy never should count his chickens before some eggs are laid. Well, I want that corporal as a witness."

"He'll be laid up for a month," snapped Garrity. "And anyway, he swore before they took him away that he'd testify against you."

“Nice guy,” snorted Phineas and took his departure.

The war birds of the Ninth were glad when dusk began to pull down the shades on a waning day. The Boche had been practically living among the clouds since dawn. In fact, they had been dropping down just long enough to get refueled as to tanks and stomachs. The man-hunt was on. The bloodhounds from the Rhine were sniffing the ethereal lanes for the Pinkham scent. Twenty thousand marks! If Germany won, that would be a neat nest egg for some Junker and his *Fraulein*.

The night proved to be a momentous one on the palpitating Front. G.H.Q. called up and wanted Major Garrity to find out where a certain German long-range gun was located. Shells were dropping too far behind the Yankee lines—big shells that tore up great gobs of France when they hit. The brass hats wanted to know if the big Bertha of the St. Gobain forest had a sister. It meant a hedge-hopping bat flight over the Jerry back area.

“Fine!” was the Old Man’s growling comment. “Are all the telephone lines down between you and the rest of the airdromes in France? Of course we need excitement here as—what’s that, sir? Sarcasm? Not at all. You must have heard somebody cutting in, ha!” He slammed the instrument on its hook and rammed the stem of his old briar pipe between his teeth. Then the major got up slowly, steeling himself as he walked toward the door. He opened it and stepped into the big room in which the war birds were gathered.

*Squish!* The thing hit him squarely on top of the head, settled there momentarily, then plopped to the floor. The Old Man’s hair stood on end and he jumped up and down as if treading on fire.

“An egg!” he howled. “Who threw—”

“I was practicin’ my disappearing egg trick,” explained Phineas Pinkham, backing away toward an open window. “Bump Gillis, the bum, nudged me an’ it slipped an’ flew out of my sleeve an’—”

“He’s a liar,” interrupted Bump.

“By cripes!” bellowed Garrity. “I was sorry a minute ago when G.H.Q. called up. Now I’m laughing. You bums can match nickels to see who goes over to find the big German gun. When the loser is ready, he may come in and see me.”

“Haw-w-w-w-w!” guffawed Phineas. “Is it swell to be arrested!”

The Old Man picked up a three-foot log from the fireplace. In his impotent rage he did not comprehend that the end of it was smoldering until his indignant fingers flashed a protesting message to his brain. With

a howl he dropped the log and stamped out of the room, swearing profusely.

Within ten minutes Bump Gillis, the loser, sighed and crossed his fingers as he turned his steps toward Wings.

TO ANOTHER part of the Front we now turn your attention. Over the rails south of Vitry rumbled a string of Yankee side-door pullmans. The occupants were mostly of Teutonic descent and were headed for barbed-wire stockades until the Kaiser tumbled to the fact that his supply of opium would not last forever. Huddled in the corner of one of the cars was an indignant, irate, fuming Junker who answered to the name of von Bissinger.

“Vun hundret years yedt I should look for *Leutnant* Pingham. For him *und* me yedt there vill be no peace, *nein!*” he was groaning. “Him yedt I follow undtil the earth end it iss reached. *Und* then—*ach*, I cudt him oop, *ja! Donnervetter*, here I ride *mit Schwein* yedt, the *Hauptmann* von—”

*Blam!* The rails underneath the sorely tried von Bissinger seemed to ripple up and down like a wriggling rattlesnake. A red flash lighted up the rude interior of the car. Von Bissinger got to his feet, shoved his head out of a door, and his face became the color of a slab of fresh tripe.

“*Donnervetter! Gott im Himmel! Donner und Blitzen!*” he roared gutturally. “Gothas, they drop bombs down already yedt. *Dumkopfs!*” He shook his fist aloft. “You drop bombs on your own countrymen, *Dumkopfs! Ach!*”

*Blam! Blam! Crash!* Von Bissinger felt the rails give way beneath the boxcar. The thing careened to one side, tipped over and rolled down an embankment to come to grief, a great heap of twisted metal and wood, against a huge pile of stones.

How long the Junker ex-pilot was in the throes of lethargy he did not know. When he came to, he was crawling out of the wreckage automatically. Then he promptly fell into a slimy pond of water. The coolness of the place revived him, and once his head popped above the surface again he looked about. Yankee guards were running hither and yon herding their prisoners into a compact mass. Rifles and sidearms cracked. A burning boxcar served as a torch to illuminate the scene. Von Bissinger, his face screened from view by marine foliage, laughed and scooped down lower. There was a chance, a slim chance. *Ach*, the Gothas!

Bump Gillis returned from the bat patrol an hour after he had taken off. The Scotsman had a hundred holes in his ship and two in his flying coat.

"Them bums stopped shooting that big gun as soon as the observation posts spotted me," he reported. "And then I met about a dozen Heinie owls and I turned tail an' run like hell. Let 'em blow up Spain from here if they want to. You kin tell the brass hats from me—"

"I'm giving orders, you fathead," barked the C.O. "I'll—"

"Better let me go," put in Phineas. "It looks like a Pinkham has to be the whole show in every war. Once in the War of 1812 they wanted to capture a Limey warship, and a Pinkham swam out an'—"

"Shut up or, by cripes, I'll—" The Old Man clenched his fists and took a menacing forward step.

"What did I do?" Phineas wanted to know. "So now it's against the rules to volunteer to risk life an' limb for—"

*Br-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r!* The Old Man ran into Wings and slammed the door. It seemed five years before he came out. There was a great cold and dreary grin on his visage and it was directed at Lieutenant Pinkham.

"Well," he said, "I have great news. *Hauptmann* von Bissinger is missing. The Gothas bombed the train carrying a load of prisoners near Vitry. Wrecked the works and they can't account for the Von. Let me see you laugh, Pinkham, you homely, speckled baboon!"

"Cripes!" yipped the intrepid Carbuncle. "So they let him git away? Well, that's what you git. I ought to've led him to the hoosegow with a rope, like you do a mule. Of all the dumb armies I ever heard of—"

"Well, there was a lot of the Heinies who got messed up in the little spree," said Garrity. "Maybe he was one. And then maybe—"

"Haw-w-w-w!" laughed Bump Gillis. "Sit down and write the bum a letter, Phineas."

"Aw, hell!" growled the Boonetown prodigy, and he dragged his heavy boots away from the farmhouse. He sought the solitude of his hut and he needed a lot of it.

IN THE darkness of the hut many hours later Bump Gillis was wakened from a sound sleep. He rubbed his eyes with big fists and raised his head from his pillow to listen to the voice of Phineas Pinkham.

"Another ten yards an' I start shootin'," rasped the incurable humorist. "Think I'll pull up, hey? Well, you hunk of moldy sauerkraut, a Pinkham never rides backwards on a bicycle. Come on, I eat Spandau

bullets for breakfast. Whe-e-e-e-e! Now I'm go-in' to shoot!" A long gurgle sounded; then a frightened squeak from Phineas.

"B-Bump," the jokesmith forced out. "B-B-Bump! Where in hell?"

Bump Gillis reached up and yanked the string attached to the electric bulb. The room lit up and the Scotsman looked over at Phineas. He was sitting up in bed, holding a boot in each hand, clutching them by the toes as if they were a brace of dueling pistols. Big beads of sweat were glistening on the Pinkham brow.

"Hey!" yelled Bump. "What ails ya, nitwit?"

Phineas started violently. "The g-guns won't sh-shoot, B-Bump," he explained shakily. "I—I—" His eyes cleared gradually, then stared foolishly at the boots in his hands. "Gosh," he grinned, "I musta had a nightmare. I saw von Bissinger, Bump, an' he was comin' at me an' I—"

"Aw, cripes," groaned Bump, "throw them leather Vickers out of bed and go to sleep. If ya wake me up again, I'll crack you one."

"The Von ain't dead," declared Phineas. "He's some place around. I—" He fell back on the pillow, drew a hand across his clammy forehead and tried hard to recapture sleep.

Dawn found a heavy-eyed Phineas sipping coffee and nibbling toast in the mess room. His request to go out and patrol the Yankee back area for his arch enemy had met with a fiery refusal.

"Well, I'd still be grounded, wouldn't I?" he had urged. "I could take a bicycle an' a couple of guns an'—"

"You'll take your homely face out of here," the Old Man had ordered. "And put it where I can't see it for the rest of the day."

Rebellion smoldered in Phineas's bosom as he drained his coffee in a hurry and went out to watch Howell and his flight take off.

"If we see the Von," grinned Bump Gillis, "we'll give him your very bestest love."

"Do me another favor," snapped Phineas, his hand making a queer pass close to Bump's physiognomy, "git in the way of three bullets."

The flight took off and droned into the soupy ether. "Well, Bump," grinned the grounded flyer, "I hope them red ants crawl out of your pocket an' git into your neck. Haw-w-w-w-w! That bum'll kid me, will he?"

The days passed, as is the natural course of events. The big mystery gun still hurled big projectiles far

into the back area, shaking the morale of green troops getting ready to move up. The blasting continued in a huge arc, a distance of five miles from point to point. Airmen reported that they had seen the great shells hurtling through space at a great height.

The Ninth called the gun Bertha's sister, Gretchen. It was most certainly a tremendous piece of ordnance, yet G.H.Q. had scathingly told Major Garrity that it might just as well be a child's camouflaged toy gun so far as the Air Force was concerned. Sir Rufus's reply had been one unbecoming to an officer, but what was more important, he did not care a damn. He had fourteen pilots on his hands as clubby and happy as so many dogs with the rabies. He had another one grounded, another losing his mind from scratching at ant bites, and he himself was fighting the inclination to pull a gun every time the door of Wings swung open.

EXACTLY one hour after the Old Man had spoken with G.H.Q. the siren of the Ninth Pursuit blared out and rocked the hangars with its hellish, raucous shriek. Out of the skies came the Boche, three formations of brazen Pfalz ships, raiding the Old Man's drome in broad daylight. C and B flights were over the lines. Howell ran across the field, howling like a madman, then changed his mind about getting into his ship and veered off toward a bombproof shelter.

Phineas Pinkham looked out of the door of his hut, yipped and dived under his cot. The roar of props blotted out every other sound. The bloodhounds were after him, trying to smoke, him out. Anti-aircraft shells whined and crackled. Spandaus swept the tarmac of the Ninth and pocked it with leaden slugs. Major Garrity got a heel shot off a boot just as Howell pulled him to safety. Incendiary bullets smacked into the hangars.

"The lousy—" Phineas's teeth clamped shut as a great explosion shook the hut housing him. Bullets ricocheted from the elephant iron roof. *Crash! Blam!*

It was all over in five minutes, yet Phineas wondered if he had grown a white beard. He crawled to the door and looked out. In front of a hangar the top wing of a Spad lifted and a groundman crawled into view. The Old Man was staggering across the field with Howell at his heels. Sergeant Casey and his men, hair standing up straight, were trundling Spads out of a smouldering hangar.

"Well, they didn't git me," howled Phineas as he ran toward the C.O. "Where were the rest of the Allied Air Corps? This is a great note. Right in the middle of

the day. Them Heinies were celebratin' somethin', the fatheads. They never would've had the guts to do this if—"

"Keep your trap shut," barked the Old Man, "An' get to work. Ow-w-w-w-w! Look at the house. There's a hole in the roof."

"And it looks like rain," grinned Phineas, overjoyed. "Well, I don't sleep there an' you're welcome to be a major. I'm satisfied—"

Lieutenant Phineas Pinkham was right. There was joy in the bailiwick of the Pfalz squadron where von Bissinger was wont to hang his extra shirt. Word had come from a mysterious V-3 behind the Allied lines to the High Command. The High Command had relayed the information to von Brahm's Pfalz jagdstaffel.

"V-3 reports—"

*"Ach, Gott sie dank!"*

"V-3 reports—von Bissinger—safe. Attempting escape via Channel ports—von Bissinger—"

*"Gott mit uns!"* exclaimed von Brahm. *"Und here the Pfalzes they coom, ja! Maybe they blow up the verdammt Pingham. Hock!"* He lifted a mug of evil-looking brew. *"Hock der Kaiser—hock von Bissinger!"*

*"Hock!"* chorused his men, and they proceeded to irrigate their Junker gullets.

B and C flights came down to the still palpitating flying field and pilots tumbled out of the ships to ask what had happened.

"Nothing," smiled Major Garrity so sweetly that it was nauseating. "Just bingeing some Boche. The whole German Imperial Air Force has been here and you fatheads didn't see one of them, I'll bet. How's the scenery over in the Italian Tyrol?"

Wilson, leader of B flight, was very docile and obedient as a rule. But even a worm will turn when something steps on one end of it. "Nuts to you, sir!" he howled and slammed a pair of heavy flying gloves to the ground, daring the Old Man to bust him. The gloves landed in a pool and splashed up muddy water, of which Major Garrity received the lion's share in his face as he opened his mouth to toss out an appropriate retort.

"Haw-w-w-w-w-w!" exulted Phineas. "What a nice bunch of pals! Looks like we're doin' everything to help the Heinies. Well—"

"By cripes," thundered Sir Rufus, leaping about with flailing fists sweeping through the ozone, "I'll show you smart alecks, you young snipperwhappers, you hatfeaded nacka—jackanapes! I'll go over and find that gun myself. Lieutenant Wilson, you're grounded, by cripes! I'll lead B flight over and we'll find that gun

or we won't come back. I'll show you! I flew ships before you bums were born." He revolved several times in a tight circle, then yelled for Sergeant Casey. "Get the Spads ready for the air in fifteen minutes," he roared. "I'm flying No. 518."

"Gawd!" moaned Casey. "The whole outfit's nuts."

"If I live to be a million I'll never forget today," grinned Lieutenant Pinkham as he hurried toward his hut.

"Pinkham!" The word actually seemed to slam him in the back of the neck. Phineas pulled up fast, turned about and saw the Old Man stabbing a shaking finger at him.

"You're going with me," he was yelling. "I'm not leaving you here to raise more hell when I'm gone. And I want to show you the hottest time you ever had in the air. Anyway, I don't like that fatheaded brigadier and I expected him over here this afternoon to pick you up. Hurry up, you—"

"I'm kissin' ya," yipped the Boonetown hero and started running.

FEVERISHLY Sergeant Casey went about getting a flight of Spads together. The flights which had just come in were full of holes. Wires were loose, fabric ripped. The Boche raid had washed up three good ships and shaken up as many more. Sweating and swearing groundmen finally got seven ships as near to airworthiness as could be expected by the time the pilots came striding across the field.

"The Old Man," said Casey in a choked voice, "will git killed as sure as—"

One of the groundmen looked up and grinned evilly, then resumed his work.

Phineas Pinkham climbed aboard a Spad as Casey gaped. "Hey," cried the flight sergeant, "ya forgot your flyin' coat. An' another thing, I want to tell ya this bus—" He stepped up to the stirrup and thrust his head over Phineas's shoulder.

"This bus—" *Squish!* Sergeant Casey yowled and lost his balance, pancaking to the dirt.

"I don't like guys to look over my shoulder," explained Phineas with a tantalizing grin. "Contact!"

Major Rufus Garrity slipped away as the blocks were pulled, and the watchers on the ground said a prayer as he missed by a spilt hair the top of a tree at the edge of the field. Sergeant Casey, prone on the ground, shook his fist at the tail of Pinkham's Spad as it sped away. He mouthed something that most assuredly was not a blessing.

"It's the craziest flight that ever went out from

here," groaned Howell. "The Old Man and Phineas Pinkham and—"

"Huh, you better start gittin' your major's uniform, Howell," put in Bump Gillis. "And I'm not jealous a damn bit."

You will remember that Casey had tried to tell Phineas something before the take-off. The flyer from Boonetown, Iowa, found out when he reached a height of twelve thousand feet over Clermont that his Hiss had a bad case of laryngitis. It coughed and spat and refused to climb another foot. Phineas swore and dropped out of the formation.

"The dirty bum!" raged Garrity as he watched the jokester-flyer go. "That's the thanks I get for giving him a chance to cheat Blois. Well, to hell with him! If he ever comes back and if I ever do. I'll—" His words tumbled back down his throat. Far off to the left four spots danced in the sky. Boche! Well, he'd show these young squirts. The major waved a hand and headed toward the enemy.

Halfway downstairs, Phineas Pinkham found that things are never so bad but that they might be worse. The engine conked.

"I've been framed," he announced to the ozone. "I bet the Old Man—" Teeth set tight, he skimmed down across the grumbling front lines and picked out an airdrome. By a miracle he landed the ship wheels to the ground and taxied up to a little group of men. They were Limeys.

"I want some gas," Phineas said. "And if you've got a mechanic here that is any damn good, I wish he'd dig into this bus a minute. I got work to do upstairs and I can't stop to play checkers."

"Phineas Pinkham!" exclaimed an officer. "Well, I've jolly well wanted to meet you—here, Weems, get busy with that Spad. Make haste!"

The mechanic named Weems approached with celerity. He looked Phineas over with a lively curiosity for several seconds before hopping to his job.

"The best mechanic in the squadron, lieutenant," declared a Limey pilot. "A new man, but certainly up to stuff. No, I won't have a cigar, thanks."

"Haw-w-w-w-w-w!" grinned the Boonetown trickster. "Ya can't fool all the people some of the time, like Lincoln said. Well—" He turned toward his Spad and looked at Weems.

"Have it fixed in fifteen minutes easy," declared the mechanic with a grin.

"Say 'sir!'" barked the British officer.

"Sorry, sir," apologized Weems.

THE work on the Hisso completed, Phineas climbed into the pit. The Limey officer suggested that he take a short flight before going toward Germany. Weems could hang onto the pit to give a trained ear to the Hisso's voice.

"Sure," agreed Phineas and the Spad slid away, Air Mechanic Weems on the stirrup, one arm braced against the back of the pit.

"Sounds swell," yelled Phineas a few moments later as he reached a thousand feet. "I guess—"

Suddenly a chilly something pressed against the side of Phineas's head. A cold chill wriggled the length of his spine as a cold voice pumped orders into his ear. That voice!

"Keep on flying, *Leutnant*," purred the threatening voice. "*Ach*, vunce more ve meet. Me you bring down, *ja*? Vun moof *und* I blow oudt your brains. I take you back alive *und*—"

"Cripes!" squealed Phineas. "Von Beestinger!"

"*Ja*," gloated the German. "Weems I am. A mechanic from England, *ja*. Now I take you back to my squadron. *Ach*, I escape, capture the gross Pingham, vun Spad *und mein* freedom! *Ach*, ve Germans, ve are smart, Yankee *Schwein*. Coom now, ease back the stick vunce, ve vill climb oop, *Leutnant*. Twenty thousand marks! I gedt that *und* you gedt shot full *mit* holes."

"Cripes!" groaned Phineas, and desperately summoned his scattered wits. The Von's gun was pressed against the side of his head. Von Bissinger's face was over his left shoulder, the German ace having eased his body over the fuselage to insure against being dislodged by a quick maneuver. Slowly Phineas's left hand crept away from his knees.

"*Ach*, vun more moof *und* I shoodt," warned von Bissinger. "This time I take not vun single chance yedt, *Leutnant*."

With his heart in a spin, Phineas continued to climb toward Boche skies. His eyes roamed anxiously, and for the first time he felt a great yearning to see a dozen Pfalz or Fokker ships. They came, but not a dozen, only a trio of them. Von Bissinger swore, tightened his grip on the Spad and pressed the gun closer to Phineas's head. A Pfalz dived and spattered the Spad with lead.

"Haw-w-w-w!" enthused Phineas with effort "We'll tour through hell together and I hope I'll git a chance to slug you there."

"*Schwein!*" howled the Von and twisted a bit to get a look at the attacking ships.

*Squish!* Von Bissinger sputtered and let out a

surprised curse. With lightning swiftness Phineas reached back and twisted the gun out of von Bissinger's hand. As it hurtled overside, his right arm came up, encircled the Von's head and then with superhuman strength the Boonetown flyer pulled von Bissinger forward until his head and shoulders were crammed into the pit and his legs stuck up in the air. *Kerwhap!* Phineas brought up a knee and it made contact with the Von's chin. The legs stopped flailing the ether.

Meanwhile, Spandau slugs were whining around Phineas's Spad. In his cramped position the jokester found stunting almost an impossibility. With his left hand he fired his guns and steered the ship, but it looked like a washout for the Pinkham heir. One Pfalz came in from right angles, smashed a strut loose and zoomed just as another Boche slammed a burst close to Phineas's short hairs. He took time out to laugh as he saw a slash appear in the seat of von Bissinger's pants.

"Well, anyways, I got the Von again," said Phineas with complete resignation. "I hope they have a sense of humor where I'm goin'."

*Rata-tat-tat! R-rata-tat-tat-tat-tat!* Phineas pawed at his eyes with his free hand and took another look. Spads! The Old Man and his bunch. Whe-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e! He banked steeply, straightened out and looked back. The seven hellions from the Ninth were bottling up the Germans. *Blam! Blam!* Black smoke clouds took shape all around them. Archie fire. Boche archie! The skies shimmied with the bursting of the old scrap iron.

VON BISSINGER stirred. A groan came out of the pit Phineas's foot left the rudder bar again, a convulsive, vicious jerk of his knee! *Kerwhap!* Again the German ace subsided. Phineas grinned, patted the pocket of his tunic wherein nestled the rubber container filled with spirits of ammonia.

"That's the ticket, von Bissinger," chortled the amazing Carbuncle. "Don't take no chances." He pointed his nose toward home.

Men rushed out of every structure as Phineas Pinkham's ship, throttled down, slipped in for a landing.

"He's upside down," howled Gillis. "He's flying—"

"Huh?" gasped Howell. "No, I see his dome. There's another guy in the pit with him. His feet are stickin' up. What in hell has he done now? I bet it's the Old Man. I bet—"

The Spad nosed in, hit hard, bounced like a rubber

ball, then deigned to settle down on wheels and skid and roll up to the hangars.

Captain Howell climbed aboard as groundmen yanked it to a stop. "What you got, fathead?" he demanded of Phineas. "Where is—"

"The Old Man?" supplied Phineas with a guffaw. "Look up there. He's comin' now with the rest of the bums. I want him to see me unload. Well, he ain't such a bad old termater. He saved my hide awright, awright, awright!"

"Is that man dead?" asked Bump with distress. "If he ain't, he will be, if you don't haul him out of there. Upside down like that—"

"He'll keep, the fathead," answered Phineas.

The pilots all milled around the ship as Garrity and his six roosters dropped down. They bit off fingernails and fretted like old women until Garrity himself climbed out of Spad 518 and walked up to Phineas.

"Good work, Pinkham!" gloated the major. "Led us right over to where the gun was. We've spotted it! Let that damn Brigadier—"

"I led you over?" repeated Phineas in surprise.

"Baloney! It was von Beestinger. Here, you bums, haul him out of my lap!"

"V-von B—" The Old Man pushed up his goggles. His mouth swung open as he climbed up to Phineas's Spad.

"Yeah," said Phineas, as they dragged the man out of the pit "I picked him up on a Limey drome. He hopped aboard and stuck a gun close to my brains. Them Vons is tough babies. He escaped and must've got a-hold of a Limey mechanic going up to the Front. Swiped his papers an' shaved off his mustache. Take him away an' chain him up, the fathead. He's gettin' to be a pest."

"Well, how—" croaked Bump Gillis. "H-how did you—"

Phineas patted the pocket of his tunic. "I hate a guy that looks over my shoulder," he explained with a grin. "I can't stand it. I'm so nervous."

On the ground von Bissinger stirred and pawed at his red-rimmed optics. Finally his brain began to function. His vision cleared a bit and the first thing that took tangible shape before it was the ugly countenance of his arch enemy, Lieutenant Phineas Pinkham.

"*Donnervetter!*" he gurgled. "*Ach*, you Yangkee *Schwein!* Better iss it I go away undil the var it is ofer. Insane yedt I vill be iff I look at you *und* hear you

vunce more, *ja!* Quick, take me away! *Ach*, for some peace *mit* quiet." He dug at his smarting eyes. "He spits fire like a cat. It iss not fair efen in such a var, *nein!*"

"Cripes!" breathed Garrity. He leaned weakly against his Spad.

"Well, you're the berries upstairs," Phineas complimented his C.O. "I got more respect for ya now an'—"

*P-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r!*

"Hell!" groaned Phineas. "The brigadier—"

"I'll talk to that stuffed owl," spat out Garrity. "I'll show him whether he'll bust you—*er*—any of us. I'll—"

THE car disgorged Brigadier-General Wilkes. He strode over to the scene of action in the manner of a man who is going to mop up an unsightly spot on the landscape.

"Well, sir," Sir Rufus began before the man could open his mouth, "we've spotted Gretchen and have recovered your escaped prisoner, von Bissinger. I judge that that ought to be enough work for one day, or isn't it?"

Wilkes seemed to deflate like a punctured balloon.

"Well," he drawled, "that's great work, men. Flying yourself, I see, Garrity. I thought—"

"You're damn right I flew," the Old Man hastened to inject, allowing his chest to bulge a bit further. "Got to hold up the morale. Got to have these buzzards realize why I'm the commanding officer here."

"Now, now, major," said Wilkes placatingly, "I might've been a bit hard on this squadron, but that gun—well, now that we've spotted it—" His gaze shifted to the homely face of Lieutenant Pinkham. The dour look returned to his own physiognomy. "So this is the man who—"

"Recovered von Bissinger," continued Garrity. "A miraculous feat that should overshadow a little thing like pushing—*er*—your slipping into the mud, sir. I'll wager—"

"Of course, of course," Wilkes made haste to say. "I was coming to that I have no further complaint to make."

"Sure," grinned Phineas Pinkham, "let's all be friends. Have a cigar."

In a quarter of an hour heads poked warily out of doors. Brigadier-General Wilkes was walking across the field with Garrity, a halo of smoke over his head.

"Haw-w-w-w-w-w-w!" burst from the enthusiastic Pinkham. "I fooled you bums. That stogie was a real one!"