



THE Casket Crew was trapped—and they knew it! Instinctively, every man aboard first looked over his shoulder and searched that section of dural and oil-spattered steel near him for an answer. Wherever they looked, a blast of German machine-gun fire slapped through the panels and secondary covering from still another angle.

From the front Fraser-Nash gun turret where Andy McGregor sat behind his flaming K-guns, all the way back to the automatic turret in the tail, men fought, swore and wondered. Brave men screamed at the slashing Messerschmitts and the hornet-like Heinkels, but somehow amid their tangled emotions of rage and frustration, there burned a thin electric line of sane reasoning that cut through all the rest like a hot wire.

Who gave the show away?

Why were these Mess-ups and Heinks here—just at this particular minute? At this particular altitude?

Andy McGregor tugged his Balmoral bonnet down tighter over one eye, let another short burst rage out of the rifled barrels of his K-guns, watching a Messerschmitt shake its shark head and stagger off out of the play. Somewhere behind, Horsey Horlick's guns answered and sent a comforting message vibrating along the metal longerons. Something horrible exploded and threw a jagged giant spot on the sky above and painted the wings of the raider in scarlet.

"Someone did the dirty on us this time," growled Phil Armitage, the Harrow pilot. "I'd like to get two thumbs and eight fingers around his neck."

He grabbed the mike and brought it up to his face to bark a code sentence.

"Bletchley Raid! Bletchley Raid! . . . Calling Willesden Depot. Willesden Depot. . . . Blockage on the line. . . . Impossible to proceed. . . . Bletchley Raid!"

He waited and stared up at the speaker just above his head on the left. In a minute he got an answer: "Willesden Depot ... to Bletchley Raid. . . . Jettison goods at nearest siding and return with empty car. . . . Willesden Depot to Bletchley Raid. ... Go ahead!"

That would be Squadron Leader Bowman back at St. Avoid advising the Casket Crew to get rid of their stuff and return with empty racks.

Young Phil Armitage caught it too, and tore out of the radio compartment behind and crawled along under the floorboards of the pilot's compartment. He would get rid of the stuff damned quick.

He stared at the small row of instruments on the board near his head and set the Wimperis sight. He barked into the phone and bellowed at Townsend to hold a true southeasterly course. He could get rid of the stuff on the unfinished earthworks running between Weiskirchen and the railroad running out of Kaiserlauteu.

"Jees!" he bellowed. "The first time we get a chance to do some real bombing, we get trapped. I'd give a grand to know who spilled the noodles. I'd bust him smack in the nose!"

He watched the outline of the earth below run along the drift wires of the Wimperis sight. He set his eye to the rubber sight-tube and began pressing the Handley Page release gear buttons. The bombs below scrawnched out of the guides, the belly flaps opened and they chugged out on their missions of destruction. One by one, they went, coughing out of the metal trimmers and screamed as the slip-stream slashed at their nose fuses.

YOUNG Armitage didn't bother to watch where the stuff was going. He was only interested in getting rid of it. Like all men aboard a bomber, he hated the stuff when it was in the racks beneath his feet, as safe as it might be there. He always considered it as high explosive and damned dangerous.

He crawled back, little realizing how the gunners had had to fight to keep off the snarling Mess-ups while they were maintaining a true course over the target below. He could hear Sergeant Ryan barking in thick Celtic as he manned the guns in the amidships gun turret. Townsend was ripping the big Handley-Page Arrow all over the sky. The Pegasus engines wailed and roared as the throttles were jazzed in an effort to doll-dance the big bomber out of the Knott-Bremse fire of the defenders.

"I don't like it," snarled Armitage, scotching up close to the pilot.

"Who does?"

"Someone ratted, somewhere."

"That's what I think . . . but who?"

"Well, outside of Bowman, the Recording Officer and the gang aboard; who knew where we were going?"

"The guy who tipped them off," winked the Englishman. "Name him and you can have him."

"If I could," the young American growled, "I'd tie him on the end of a five-point-nine and jerk the lanyard myself."

"Nice thought, anyway," agreed Townsend.

But there was no time for idle chatter. The guns aboard the big Harrow were flaming away at Heinks and Messerschmitts. The rattle of automatic weapons ripped along the metal parts of the ship and bounced their decibels from the metal plates and jangled across the heated space of the fuselage. Two men hung on grimly while the big Englishman slammed the Harrow through a series of factor-defying maneuvers that threatened to rip her wings off.

It seemed to go on for hours. It punished muscles, nerves and all the normal faculties of the men aboard, more than the possible blast of enemy bullets. Townsend stuck it out as long as he could and finally had to give up and let young Armitage take over.

He staggered out of the big control seat and let the wheel slither out of his hands. He watched Armitage grin with glee at the prospect of being able to do something, and leaned back against the dural wall of the companionway and then moved deeper down the catwalk.

Whatever Townsend had been doing to the Harrow to evade the German fighters was an aerial minuet compared to what young Armitage did to her once he took over.

The big bomber executed a series of brain-numbing fish-tail gestures that threw the crew from one side of the bus to the other. Then she went into a series of violent switch-back gestures which smashed the crew from catwalk boards to the ceiling but somehow the guns continued to chatter.

Then with the prospects of the line somewhere ahead young Armitage really began to celebrate. The Handley-Page bomber went completely cock-eyed and skated about the sky on one wing-tip.

The gunners gave up at that and simply hung on.

"Steady up! Steady up, you damned young fool!" yelled Townsend, hanging on to the narrow rib of the catwalk. Then he moved further along toward the tail.

Young Armitage was in his glory now. He figured they might as well go out taking a chance, and he was taking all there were in the book.

The Handley-Page Harrow tried the other wing-tip for a time and then slapped over and went down, nose first, at express speed. She ranted with a bellow of Pegasus engines out of that and ripped her joints until they just managed to cling to the rivets.

How she hung together through that will never be known. But she got through. A flight of rambling Hurricane fighters came out of nowhere and arrived just in time—as usual—to see the German fighters clear off, literally fingering their noses.

THEY crossed at Teterchen and rambled the rest of the way in to St. AVOID. Young Armitage was bubbling with enthusiasm over their escape, but Townsend soon put a quick end to that.

He came back into the control compartment with a face as long as a wet week. He gave Armitage a queer glance and then turned his face away and fumbled sheepishly with the folding navigation board.

"What's up?" demanded the young American.

"Nothing."

"You look like someone swiped the bottle. Come clean!"

"I don't know. I'm just not sure, but it looked suspicious."

"What? What are you driving at?"

“Forget it. I must have been seeing things—the way you were slamming this bus around. Forget it.”

Townsend sat down on the folding seat, folded the table down and rested his arms on it. He was the picture of puzzled frustration. He stared out of the last section of cockpit glass and his face gradually assumed the lines and dubious satisfaction of a retriever that had bitten into a wooden duck by mistake.

Armitage watched him out of the corner of his eye while he brought the Harrow in to the St. Avoid field for a landing. He wondered what had happened in those few minutes Townsend had gone down that catwalk. He had been standing in the narrow compartment near the radio cabin once, but the swinging of the plane had swung him farther down and out of sight. How far down the catwalk had he gone . . . and what did he see . . . or thought he saw, that brought him back so deep in the dumps?

Then young Armitage stiffened and let his eyes constrict into slits. Was it the way he had been heaving the Harrow around that had worried Townsend? Had anything happened to make him believe that he, young Armitage, the young American who had volunteered; had pulled something back there in the radio cabin, which had resulted in their being caught before they had made Essen?

“What happened?” he demanded again.

“I don’t know. I just saw something that made me wonder, that’s all,” the Englishman said without turning his head. “You take her in, will you? I’m too upset.”

That was all he could get out of Townsend, the senior man aboard No. 7, and he had to be satisfied. Besides there was the business of getting her down.

Young Armitage plugged in his phone jack, raised the mike to his mouth and reported to the field below.

“Bletchley Raid coming in. Bletchley Raid coming in. Password Zero-Hour-Splendid. . . . Password, Zero-Hour-Splendid. . . . Bletchley Raid coming in.”

He got a snap from an Aldis lamp below and Townsend nodded.

“They’re ready. Go on in.”

Young Armitage brought the big Harrow around and set her steady on the indicator and waited for

the mobile flood light truck to rumble out and give him a beam. The fan-shaped beam spread out like a golden cascade of welcome. There was a narrow shadow bar through the middle of it and it was into this young Armitage guided the Harrow so that he could see without being blinded.

The Harrow sat on her flaps and lowered herself in gently. The Pegasus engines just ticked over and then suddenly she was on the ground grumbling through her oleo legs and scrawning her tail-wheel into the turf.

“Nice landing, Armitage,” Townsend said naturally, gripping the young American’s shoulder. “Very nice landing.”

“Thanks!”

They rolled her around with a bellow of power, fanning the double rudders and then letting her ease gently up to the partly sheltered hangars. The mobile flood light snapped off suddenly and the truck followed them up to the apron.

Then everything happened and happened in a lump!

TOWNSEND saw them first and let out a sound that was something between a curse and a hiss. He turned and glared at Armitage who was busy with the throttles and ignition adjustments. McGregor came up from under the instrument board, his face a puzzled mask of interrogation.

“There’s a guar-r-r-rd oot, there, sor! An ar-r-rmed guar-rrd!”

“I see it,” muttered Townsend. “Wonder what’s up.”

“An armed guard?” gagged young Armitage. “What’s the idea?”

He, too, moved over when Townsend went back into the cabin where he could get out through the side door. There were eight men with rifles bearing fixed bayonets. There was a ramrod-backed sergeant and a young infantry lieutenant. Nearby stood Squadron Leader Bowman, his face a puffed mug of bitterness.

“What the deuce? We all pinched?” young Armitage asked the Jock.

“Ah dinna ken, sor. That’s a guar-r-r-d fra a prisoner. Eight men looks serious, sor!”

Armitage waited to turn the ship over to a flight sergeant who would run it in and take over for servicing. Andy took his guns and went out. Townsend was on the apron now, questioning the squadron leader, who appeared very brusque.

Then Sergeant Ryan waddled out, blinking against the lights of the hangar. He was passed up.

There was a quick shuffle among the men with rifles. The sergeant bawled: "Guard . . . 'Shun! Left files one pace to the left. Right files one pace to the right. . . . March!"

Armitage stared out on the tableau, unable to figure it all out.

The two ranks opened up and Horsey Horlick stepped out cuddling two Vickers K-guns to his chest. He looked bewildered when the infantry sergeant stepped up and relieved him of the weapons and stood aside while the young lieutenant read something off from a paper.

Someone took the guns from the sergeant and he bawled: "Prisoner! . . . Two paces forward. . . . Quick march!" The bewildered Horsey shuffled forward into the middle of the double rank of fixed bayonets and stood there. He tried to look at McGregor but somehow his eyes wouldn't react to his demands. "Prisoner. . . . About face!" The infantry sergeant stepped up to Horlick, removed his leather helmet, requested that he climb out of his flying coveralls and relinquish his belt. Someone handed him a cap and Horsey, with a painful glance around, placed it on his head. The sergeant stepped back, clicked his heels to the lieutenant and reported: "Guard and prisoner ready, sir!"

The young lieutenant returned the salute and replied: "Carry on, Sergeant!"

The sergeant, all beef and bluster, threw out his chest and bawled: "Guard and prisoner. . . . Right turn. . . . Quick march!"

Young Armitage caught himself humming: "And they're hanging Danny Deever in the morning!"

The guard, complete with prisoner, sergeant and lieutenant, clacked across the apron, turned at the end of the hangar and disappeared into the night. They waited to see if Horsey would look back—even once.

The jumble of suety faces followed the clack of the guard and then turned back on the door of the Harrow. Andy McGregor was standing there, his face a mask of flaming rage. The Irishman caught him just in time. The Jock was about to swing one of his guns around and blast hell out of that guard.

Andy simply let Mike Ryan take the guns from him and dropped his hands to the sides of his kilt. He raised one foot and his great fingers instinctively fingered the jeweled dirk that gleamed from the top of his Black Watch hose.

"Take it easy, Andy," warned the Englishman. "Take it easy, man!"

McGregor stepped forward, threw his clenched fists into the air and bellowed: "Coir a' chlaidheimh!"

"Wot the 'ell?" gasped a little Cockney fitter, who stood nearby.

He couldn't know what Andy McGregor meant when he hurled that McGregor clan cry to the skies.

Then McGregor stalked away. Once around the corner, he began to run.

"WHAT'S that all about?" demanded young Armitage when he finally made the concrete apron. "What did they take him off for?"

The S. L. was upstage and cool. He was really trying to control his jangling emotions.

"This is no place to talk about it. Shall we go into my shed?"

Young Armitage tried to get some condolence from Townsend, but the Englishman was equally puzzled. They all trooped off to the S.L.'s hut and clumped inside and squatted on whatever was available.

"I'm sorry this happened," the S. L. said quietly, fingering some papers on his desk, "but it has been coming for days now. I'm surprised none of you caught it."

"Caught what?" demanded young Armitage. "Horlick. . . . He's been communicating with the enemy!"

"Horsey? . . . Horsey Horlick?" gagged young Armitage. "That's crazy! He wouldn't have brains enough! Why would he do that?"

"Doubtless for the same reason they all do it. . . . Money!"

Young Armitage stood up like something electrified and stared about the room. He glared at Townsend, who was cupping his face in his hands. He glared at Mike Ryan, but the Irishman could only hook a tear from his left eye with his forefinger and make glug noises. Andy McGregor was not even there to glare at.

"Are you birds going to sit there and stand for that?" young Armitage flamed. "What sort of an outfit is this, anyway?"

"There's no use going off the handle about it, Armitage," Bowman said quietly. "We appreciate your feelings, since he is an American, too; but the fact remains that Horlick has been communicating with the enemy, and getting money for it."

"I don't believe it!"

"Look, Armitage!" the S. L. said in a friendly tone. "What happened a week ago tonight?"

"A' Flight went on a night reconnaissance, and we lost Gilbert and his crew. So what?"

"And the next night?"

"Well, 'B' Flight went to Essen to look around and try to cut the Essen-Mulheim railroad line."

"What happened?"

"They were nailed cold and only three got back," admitted the young American.

"And Thursday night. . . . What happened?"

"All I know is that we got a pasting over Coblenz doing a paper raid—dropping Clergymen's Bombs," growled the young American.

"And last night?"

"Oh, forget it. Why blame that on Horlick?"

"And again tonight, Armitage?"

"What about it?"

"You went out alone. I gave the job to the Casket Crew still trying to believe in Horlick. You went out to bomb Essen. The munitions works. I figured one plane could do it better than four. What happened?"

"We were trapped cold! But you can't tell me Horlick would tip them off to shoot his own machine down!"

"He took that chance, for the money. He could have bailed out at any time, remember, and he would have been safe in Germany. He could have got papers to clear out at any time."

"Are we going to start all this again?" young Armitage raged. "Is being an American volunteer in this lousy outfit sufficient to brand one as a spy? Can't we come over here and risk our lives without getting the blame for everything that goes wrong? It's not us. It's the brass hats who won't let us take the war and drop it in Hitler's lap."

"We think we're doing a good job under the circumstances, Armitage," the S. L. reproved, "You do. I don't. We've been on this lousy show

for weeks now and what have we done? Dropped leaflets and now they are going to let us drop a few bombs, providing we are absolutely certain we do not hit a civilian. What a chance!"

"That is most important. You know that Germany will leap at the chance to bomb London and Paris. All they need is the evidence to show the rest of the world that the Allies are not concentrating on military objectives."

"They killed and injured civilians at Scapa Flow, didn't they?" screamed young Armitage.

"Do you happen to know why?" asked the S. L.

"Because someone tipped the Germans off, I suppose. You're going to pull the spy gag. Someone tipped the Germans off that there were a couple of battleships in there getting a load of fuel oil. Go on. Pull that one!"

"That's exactly what happened."

"All right. That's part of the game of war," agreed young Armitage. "What about Horsey?"

"I'll tell you about Horsey," said Townsend, getting up slowly as though every bone and muscle in his body ached. "I'll tell you what I saw tonight now."

ARMITAGE gave Townsend a glance that had all the acidic tinges of accusation in it.

"I saw ... I actually saw Horsey throw a large envelope out of his turret tonight, Armitage. It had bright streamers on it, too. It was meant for someone in the German section of the Siegfried Line. I saw him, just before we crossed."

"What does that mean?" demanded young Armitage. "You don't mean to say you believe Horsey has been selling us out, do you?"

"I only know what you would think if you saw me doing the same thing," the Englishman said, trying to put over an argument.

"But is that all we have to go on? Are you crucifying the poor guy because someone caught him throwing a note into Germany?"

"That is the one someone saw him throwing. We have no idea how many he may have thrown. He's in the best spot on the plane to do it," the S. L. said with a weary gesture. He got up and went to a steel locker. "But that's not all, Armitage. I'd like to show you something else."

He drew out a khaki haversack which bulged. Across it in black stenciled letter was Horlick's name, number and rank. Bowman set it on the

deal table, carefully opened the straps and threw back the flap.

"Two days ago," he began, before he revealed what was inside, "Horlick came to me quietly, and I must say a little guiltily, and asked for three days' leave. He said he wanted to go to Paris. He said it was urgent, but he would not state what was so urgent about it. We know now!"

Bowman opened up the flap and took out several thick wads of regular United States currency. They were bundled together with heavy paper strips on which was printed the name of the Reichsbank of Stuttgart. Bowman drew several of the wads out and placed them on the table.

"Thirty thousand dollars," the S. L. said coldly. "We decided to search his kit, and found this tonight. Are you satisfied, Armitage?"

"No. I know Horlick, and I know he does not have brains enough to be worth thirty thousand dollars to the Germans," raged young Armitage. "Horsey is a damned good gunner, but not a spy!"

"Nevertheless, this is Horlick's money. That's why he was arrested tonight. That's why he wanted to go to Paris. The only reason I can think of is that he wanted to go there to bank it. He had the address of the American Express company, scrawled on one wad. . . . See, right here . . . and a bank in Arizona, too."

"Arizona? Why Arizona?" argued young Armitage.

"Why not? He came from there, didn't he?"

"I don't know. I thought he was a Colorado boy."

"I don't see how it matters. But, we did find out that he wanted to transfer it to a bank in Arizona, Phoenix, isn't it?"

THIS blow was too much for young Armitage. After all—the money, with a German bank wrappers around it. Then Townsend seeing Horsey throw out a big envelope. Horsey wanting to go to Paris.

Ryan was openly sobbing on a bomb box. Townsend was walking up and down the room, pacing like a caged jaguar. Armitage got up, placed his hands flat in the desk and looked over the haversack and said: "Listen, sir. Give me a drink before I fold up!"

The S. L. smiled. Pie was acting damned white about it all. He brought out the bottle and pulled the cork. Ryan stopped sniffing and peered up at

the prospects. Armitage poured a shot into a cigarette tin and stuffed it in the Mick's hands.

"Shut up, you big mutt!" he barked. "What's the matter, can't you take it?"

"No," said Mike, taking a swig.

"Who are you? Neither can I," said young Armitage, putting the bottle to his lips. Then he handed it to Townsend, who shoved it away.

"I still don't believe it," Townsend snarled suddenly. "I saw him throw that envelope out, but I still don't believe it."

"Who does?" moaned Armitage, "but you can't laugh thirty grand off. That's a lot of jack in any man's army."

"Why did he do it? He wasn't that sort of a guy!"

The door flew open with a crash and Andy McGregor stood framed there. He might have been a madman from the expression on his face. He just stood there beaming, a trickle of slobber running down one corner of his mouth. There were streaks through the dirt down his cheeks. He swayed like a drunken man, but he still grinned.

"He oscaped sor," he grinned. "Horsey oscaped . . . tipped the bloody car over . . . and oscaped, sor!"

The four faces about the deal table just stared at the man in the doorway. None could speak, so Andy repeated his announcement: "Horsey oscaped, sor. Os-caped in the fog. Tipped the bloody car oover. Grobbed the wheel, sor. . . . Horsey oscaped!"

"Escaped? . . . Escaped? . . . Where to?" demanded young Armitage.

"Across the line, perhaps, sor. In the fog, sor. Nasty fog oop there, sor?"

"You mean he headed into Germany?" gaged Townsend. "Whatever did he do that for, if he's innocent?"

"Cripes! That's right. He shouldn't have done that, should he?" young Armitage said, wiping his hand across his mouth. "That proves he's crazy."

"There goes the end of a beautiful friendship," mooned Townsend.

Squadron Leader Bowman stood up and drew on an expression of a horse that has been fed a dose of arsenic.

"How do you know, McGregor?" he asked coldly.

"I was there, sor! Ridin' on the back!"

"Riding on the back of what?"

“They tuk Horsey awa’ i’ a light lorry, sor. Ah ran after ut tae see whut was goin on. Ah wanted to tell young lieutenant thot Horsey was’na a spy, sor.”

“And while you were scotched on the back, Horsey grabbed the wheel and dumped the bloody lot over? Anyone hurt?”

“Rottled about a leetle, sor. Nabudy hurt, sor. Ye see, sor, Horsey pulled the wheel an’ she slithered intae the deetch. He were oot fust, sor, and awa’ before the guar-r-rds could get oot o’ the tangle o’ their rifles and rifleslings.”

“Pie means,” explained Townsend, “that Horsey snatched the wheel suddenly and ditched the lorry. In the tangle of rifles and legs, Horsey got away and disappeared in the fog. He’s probably heading into Germany.”

“What were you doing on the back of that lorry, McGregor?” the S. L. persisted.

McGregor’s face dropped, he gulped hard and then he grinned: “I wore going to try ta get Horsey oot, sor!”

“Damn it, man!” the S. L. growled. “Don’t you know he was under arrest? Don’t you know he had been communicating with the enemy? Don’t you know he sold us all out? What’s the matter with this balmy lot?”

“A’ Ah knoo, sor, is thot Horsey is in the Casket Crew, sor,” said Andy simply. “He could’na hae done anything like that, sor.”

“Casket Crew! Casket Crew!” half screamed the S. L., throwing his hands up. “That’s all the sense there is to this lot. For Heaven’s sake, try to tell him, Townsend, before we’re all shoved in the klink!”

Townsend really tried to explain, but he might just as well have been talking to a wooden dummy. All they could get out of Andy was mumbles about the Casket Crew.

“All right. You have it your way,” allowed Townsend. “All we know is that Horsey had thirty thousand dollars in American money, out of a German bank. I saw him dropping an envelope when we were crossing the line tonight. Doesn’t that prove anything to you?”

“Ay. Ut proves Horsey had thurty thoesand dollars, an’ ut belongs tae heem fair and square, sor. He’s still a member o’ the Casket Crew!”

“Thanks, Andy,” was all Townsend could say.

“Nice going, Andy,” added young Armitage.

“Lovely!” agreed the frustrated S. L. “Now you birds barge off to roost. We’ve got a lovely show for you tomorrow night. We’ll give you something to forget all about this.”

“What about Horsey, sor?” persisted the Jock.

“What about him? He’s on his way into Germany, where he probably belongs,” stormed the S. L. “I’ll get you another gunner!”

“We’ll take Horsey,” said the Jock.

“We’ll somehow or other manager to get him back, sor.”

“You’ll go to bed. Those are my orders. Buzz off!” the S. L. bellowed.

And the Casket Crew buzzed!

THAT was the situation at 2:30 a. m. with No. 127 Squadron, Royal Air Force at St. Avoird.

The Casket Crew stumbled out of the S. L.’s shack and stared up into the inky blue of an early morning war sky. They were homeless, friendless and minus one of their important members. Horsey Horlick, the American cowboy, who had been a member of the Casket Crew in the far-far better days of the Other War, had been caught entangled in espionage. The other American member of the group was the son of a man who had been a Casket Crew member more than twenty years before.

Queer how all this had happened.

Young Armitage had been on a vacation trip, cycling through Scotland, when the war had broken out in September. He had looked up the man his father had spoken of so often in the years that followed the Armistice. That had led to contacting Graham Townsend, the old Casket Crew pilot who was a First Officer with Imperial Airways. Then they had rescued Mike Ryan from durance vile, or the equivalent thereof, in Germany. Horsey just happened to be in London at the time, a bright and shining feature of an American rodeo show, then exhibiting at the White City Stadium. The rest had been easy, because the former C. O. of No. 127 was now an Air Chief Marshal of the present Royal Air Force and he had enough imagination to realize that this mob might be able to carry on where the old Casket Crew had left off in 1918.

“Well, what are we waiting for?” said young Armitage.

“We can’t go like this, in these togs,” said Townsend.

“Go? Go where, sor?” asked the Jock.

“Go? After Horsey, of course. We’ve got to stop him from crossing into Germany. There’s four of us, and only one of him. Besides, we can’t really accuse him of espionage until we hear his story.”

“And we can’t hear his story unless we stop him and grab him this side, eh?” beamed young Armitage. “This is gonner be fun!”

“Don’t bet on it,” warned Townsend. “It’s hell up there!”

And with that the four conspirators ducked back to their cubicles, threw off their flying kit, buckled on pistol belts and laced up heavy field boots.

They met at the back of the No. 1 hangar and then quietly started off. Andy led them to the spot where the lorry still lay in the ditch. From that point on they started across the open fields in the general direction of the Maginot and Siegfried lines.

“The man’s crazy, of course,” said Townsend. “What the deuce does he expect to do in Germany, if he gets there alive?”

“I’m not worrying about that.” muttered young Armitage. “What has me now, is who did contact the enemy and tip them off. After all, old Barlow was right. Someone was giving out information somehow. Now who could have done it, since none of us believe that Horsey did it?”

They had no answer for all that, so they plodded on silently but with trepidation. This part of the country had been completely evacuated of all civilians and their wandering took them through small villages, along country roads and through the fringes of towns that were as silent as the grave. No lights gleamed from windows. The only footsteps heard along the streets were their own. Now and then they came upon a silent British sentry who stood in a doorway and challenged them.

Mile after mile they covered with no sign or evidence of their man. Gunners were questioned in deep pits, but they were all sleepy or too busy to show much interest. A young captain of the Tank Corps crawled out of an armored car to answer their inquiries, but no one had seen a crazy American in Royal Air Force uniform.

Then they reached the shelled area behind the casemates of the Maginot Line. They staggered through the icy water in low sections and plunged

on through deep and muddy crevices and crawled along like men under the influence of some surging drug.

Star shells crawled up the sky, spat and blew themselves apart and then bathed the areas below in a silver sheen. Another and another until the sky was hung with festoons of parachutes from which dangled phosphorus glare.

“Over this way,” said Townsend, not knowing why. “There’s a small wood over here. He may have headed that way.”

They followed like sheep and then crawled a few hundred yards when a clatter of machine-gun fire whip-lashed across the open spaces around them.

“Remember High Wood?” said Mike Ryan to Andy.

“Reminds me more of the pot holes in front of Wipers,” the Jock replied, huddling close while a screeching burst of fire clipped the small hills near them.

“Come on. That was more than twenty years ago,” Townsend argued. “You’ll all give your ages away. Let’s get in the wood over there.”

“If this is trench warfare, you can have it,” young Armitage grumbled. “Now I know what they meant when they talked about the mud. Jeas, Slop!”

“Slop my eye! It’s a graveyard!” said Townsend.

“Here lies the body of poor Mary Mack. A trolley-car hit her a slap in the back,” gagged young Armitage.

“Wait a minute!” said Townsend. “We’re in what was an old churchyard. See the gravestones all over the place? Most of them are knocked down with concussion and shell fire. There ought to be an old church somewhere around.”

“Anyone bring a map?”

Andy McGregor dug one out of his sporran and they lay flat near a mound and studied it under a shielded light provided by Armitage’s pocket torch. There was no sense to any of this, but they simply had to do something.

TOWNSEND went over it carefully and then decided they were near the village of Lenigney, which had been practically blotted out by shell fire. The map disclosed a small square tower church and a large triangular churchyard. The church itself faced a small road in peacetime, and

they figured that most of the surface had been blotted out by gunfire.

"The church must be over there," said Townsend, pointing off to the northeast.

They crawled away and heard the slugs whistle through the trees but they were netting used to it now. They made their way carefully through the old sandstone markers and along the muddy grooves that separated the mounds of earth.

"There it is," half-whispered Ryan. "Faith be, it's hardly touched!"

"Queer! Like the old days. Somehow the churches were never damaged no matter how heavy the shell fire. It sometimes makes a chap wonder about Christianity," said Townsend when they reached a dank old wall.

They stood there quietly, their hands resting on the top of the moss-covered wall. The church itself stood gaunt and brave against the garish gleam of parachute flares off beyond. There was something eerie about it all and silence gripped them as they watched, uncertain what to do next. A German Henschel observation plane passed over, flying very low.

"Ah doon't like ut," the Jock muttered. "Niver did like them kirks that were not damaged, like that!"

"Yer an unbeliever, McGregor," snarled the Mick.

"Ah'm a guid mon o' the Kirk, Michael," Andy replied, "but Ah'll niver onderstond why kirks dinna cop shell fire. Ut's no natural!"

"I'll say it ain't," gasped young Armitage. "I'm beating it. Look at that!"

"Duck, for Pete's sake," husked the Englishman.

They ducked and then bobbed up as quick to peer over the low moss-covered wall.

"Holy Mither o' Moses," gasped the Mick. "Faith an' it's the Virgin!"

Four pairs of eyes simply popped at what they saw. A slim, quietly moving figure of a young woman appeared to come out of the earth, not ten yards ahead of them. She was dressed in a ghostly, shimmering cloak that gleamed with some ethereal fire. Her finger tips were held together as she walked gently along among some more stones. There was a distinct ring of fire a few inches above her sleekly drawn hair.

"Do you see it, Townsend?" asked young Armitage hollowly.

"Of course I see it. What's the matter with you?"

"But you didn't have any of the S. L.'s bottle."

"I can see that, anyway. You see it, don't you, Andy?"

"Ay, sor. Ah see ut. An' I don't like ut!"

"She came up out o' a grave," Mike Ryan quaked. "It ain't natural!"

"That's what I say. Come on, let's follow her," growled Townsend.

"It might be a banshee!" the Irishman argued. "We got no right, sir."

"I don't like it either. Townsend," said young Armitage, biting his nails. "I wonder if that Henschel had anything to do with it."

Townsend knew it was foolish, but somehow the reactions of the others caused him to steady up. After all, considering everything, he himself was not certain now. They were tired. They had tramped miles from St. Avoird. They were under certain mental strain concerning Horsey. They had suddenly found themselves in a graveyard. Machine-gun bullets were still whistling among the jagged branches of the trees. There was a low ground haze. . . . Anything could happen under circumstances like these. And yet—

Andy McGregor was over the wall first. He had started after the strange, slim figure which was now heading for a side vestry door of the church.

"Wait a minute, Andy!" husked Armitage. "Take it easy."

"Look, Armitage," said Townsend coldly, and his voice had the timbre of a cracked bottle. "That can only be one thing. It's not a ghost or some foolish apparition. That's real, and she don't belong there!"

"Don't belong in a church, sor?" the Irishman gaggled somewhere behind the Englishman. "By all the Saints, 'tis the Holy Virgin, sor?"

"Look, Ryan," the Englishman said. "I have all the respect in the world for another man's religion. I take my hat off to your reverence, but that woman does not belong there, and we're going to see what it's all about."

"An' me with me hat on," mooned the Mick.

The rest followed Andy over the low wall and then, in a twisted single file, they headed after the glowing figure which was now at the vestry door. A muddy-toned bell in the tower went. "Bong!"

WHAT happened after Horsey Horlick tugged that lorry wheel and ditched the truck, Horsey himself was not quite sure. He had reacted to all that as he would have reacted under like conditions had he been astride a cow pony, with a gang of bandits at the other end of a defile. He knew in his tortured mind that there had been a mistake, and yet he sensed that it was all his own fault. After all, the whole business was crazy looking at it in this cold, clammy surrounding.

The American rodeo man clambered over the tangle of arms and legs and threw himself headlong out through the rear oval of the canvas-topped lorry and landed smack on his chest.

Only normal muscular reaction carried him on. He somehow heard a voice and his own name called in a thick brogue, but that only frightened him. Horsey plunged away into the mist and headed toward the star-shell gleam in the sky beyond.

He plunged on, his long limbs eating up the battered mileage, his keen sense of direction keeping him clear of all habitation and guiding him into shelter whenever sentries or patrols threatened to block him off. He was tired, trembling and afraid in a hard sense. But he was more afraid of what he had done and what the Casket Crew would think of his crazy enterprise.

"I should have told Mister Townsend," he kept arguing to himself.

How long he plunged on, his legs crossing and re-crossing to make his course uneven and jagged, he had no way of knowing. Where he was going, he had no way of knowing. Yet, somehow his senses told him to get clear of the British lines where there were eight men with fixed bayonets, a pouter-pigeon sergeant and a disinterested young infantry officer with a Welsh Guards leek in his cap.

He watched the glare of the parachute flares increase as he approached the line. He began to wonder now just what it was he was trying to do or where he was going. Dead weariness brought on a new stability to his reasoning. His muscles were tired now and his physical movements were less violent. He was able to think clearer and as the tottering strides carried him on he began to realize the full responsibility of his act.

He rested by a low wall and peered over. There was a gaunt-cornered building over there. He had been arrested for something about spying—

communicating with the enemy. He listened to a burst of machine-gun fire whistle over the trees and it reminded him of the bullets that men are allotted when they are up against a wall. A churchyard wall.

"This is a church," he muttered. "This is a churchyard wall. A church over there. Maybe a priest or something who would take men in. Queer how a guy somehow gets to a church when he's in trouble. Never went to church much before, except to box socials or a wedding. . . ."

Horsey threw a pain-wracked leg over the wall and lurched after it. He steadied himself somehow on two feet and twisted his body in the general direction of the grim building and started walking again.

He staggered on across a few flat oblong stones and finally made it. He pawed at the wall and worked his way along until he found the front door. He looked up the ivy-covered walls of the tower and then found the big iron ring and twisted it gently. The door swung open quietly and he walked in.

He stood in the low glow of a sacristy light and swayed again. He pawed at the door that led into church proper and then halted . . . and listened.

The sound was familiar . . . and yet the sound did not belong in a church. It was nothing to do with a church. He listened again and pondered. It had a familiar buzz, a metallic beat, something electric.

"It's up there," he muttered. "Up there . . . above. Must be some stairs somewhere."

He pawed along the wainscoted walls again and found a flat battened door. His hands somehow opened it and he floundered on through a tangle of snaky things. Ropes, long, smooth-worn ropes that went up into the black nothingness above.

Bell ropes! Even Horsey could sense that. Ropes to pull the bells and make them ring joyfully, when Peace came again.

Horsey wanted to pull those ropes, just for the devilment of it all, but his eyes becoming accustomed to the light now, caught the twisted design of a stairway. He drew himself together again and breathed deeply. He would go up those stairs.

"Can hide away up there, anyhow," he muttered. "Can get some sleep and maybe see the priest in the morning."

He made his way up the winding wooden stairs that wound around the dangling maze of ropes. He was exhausted by now and stopped at the top and rested. He could see a faint bar of light that marked the lower part of a door. A large rat squealed, leaped across him and disappeared down one of the bell ropes. Horsey was too tired to even react to it.

Then he sensed movement somewhere beyond the door. He started to get up, but he was exhausted and just sat there when the big man came out with the Luger in his hand.

"It's all right, Padre," said Horsey with an effort. "I guess I'm lost and I figured I could get some sleep here. It's all right, ain't it?"

The big man wore the brown habit of a Dominican Brotherhood. He wore heavy shoes and a heavy cord about his waist. A heavy cowl was thrown back over his shoulders and he took two steps forward.

It must have taken superhuman strength but the big priest did it. He yanked Horsey to his feet with a jerk that made the American's teeth clash. He muttered a dull oath and rammed Horsey into the room and stuck the Luger muzzle deep into his belly. The door went shut with a clash.

"What are you doing here?" the cloaked man said with a thick Bavarian accent. "How did you get here?"

He was trembling with rage and jerked the gun ominously.

"Put it away, Padre," said Horsey with a weary gesture. "I'm just a Royal Air Force sergeant gunner. I'm just lost, that's all. Been beating about here for hours."

He sat down on a crude bench and rested his elbows on his muddy knees. He looked around the room and jerked with the realization that this was not just an ordinary and usual church tower room.

"Hey, wait a minute," he said suddenly, staring up into the muzzle of the Luger. "What side of the line am I on, Padre?"

The big man in the cloak did not answer. He was trying to figure Horsey Horlick out.

"You are an American," he snapped.

"Sure, Padre. Came back again to get into this one. Was in the last, you know."

"What's an American doing in this war?"

"You got me, Padre. It seemed like a good idea at the time."

"You have been wandering about . . . lost? Where did you come from?"

"It's a long story, Padre. I'll tell you in the morning. Put that gun away. I won't hurt you."

"You are quite right, my friend. You'll never hurt anyone again. You're an espionage agent. You just didn't stumble here, did you?"

"Look, Padre. I'm tired. We went on a long show over Essen tonight and I'm licked. We'll have it all out in the morning, eh?"

"I know you went to Essen. I know the Bletchley Raid went to Essen. I took care of that, my friend."

"You know? How do you know?"

The priest smirked and hooked a large thumb in his waist cord. He glanced around the room at the radio set, at the signal lamp, at the long coiled white cord, at the maps on the wall and back at Horsey.

"I guess I stepped into something, eh, Padre?" said Horsey.

"I'm afraid so. But that is the fortunes of war."

"I wish I knew how you do it, Padre," Horsey said.

"Listen. Listen, my friend, and you may have an idea. Listen!"

Horsey listened. The hum of a motor caught his ear. It came closer and circled the tower. Horsey listened and caught the beat of the Henschel B.M.W. engine. It swooped around gently and there was desultory machine-gun fire from somewhere and then the German observation plane came in closer and finally, with a roar, passed low over the tower of the church. The priest's eyes were fixed on a crude wooden indicator fixed against a white wooden panel on the wall over the bench built along the side of the tower room.

The arrow indicator jerked, flipped up to the top of the marked segment as the plane swept over and then dropped back to the zero mark at the bottom.

"They do very well at it now, my friend. Caught it first time."

"Caught what?"

"My report, for this evening. All about the British bombers that will attempt to raid the Dornier works at Friedrichshafen on Lake Constance, tomorrow night."

“Yeh? It’s news to me!”

“Of course. You never know until a few minutes before you start out, do you? That’s so you can’t do a little communicating with the enemy yourself.”

“Wait a minute, Padre!” said Horsey, standing up, but the priest shoved him back with the muzzle of the Luger.

“Look!” Horsey went on. “Do you mean to stand there and tell me you are communicating with those guys over the line? That they come here with a Henschel job and get messages?”

“You saw it yourself. Or didn’t you?”

“I don’t quite know what I saw, Padre.”

“Well, it doesn’t matter now. You’ll have to be put away, you know.”

Horsey sniffed. Somehow, he didn’t care.

YOU know, Padre,” he began again, “it doesn’t matter much, now. You see, I was escaping myself from a British military guard. I came back from the Essen show, which you gummed up, by the way, and walked straight into eight men with fixed bayonets. You see, Padre, they had me tapped for that tip-off job and they had good reasons, too.”

“You were communicating with the Germans?”

“Well, I’ll put it this way: I was communicating with a guy in Germany. It paid well, too. That’s why I’m here tonight. They must have got wise to me and perhaps found the dough I had collected.”

“Dough? You mean money?”

“Thirty grand in good old American bills, Padre.”

“Thirty grand? American money?” the Padre gagged.

“Yeah. That’s thirty thousand dollars. A lot of dough even in German marks, eh? But it was in American money, Padre. By the way, you got a drink of any kind? I’m real tired.”

The Padre backed across the room and put his hands on a bottle. He poured a drink of something pungent and strong into a large glass and offered it to the American.

“I’d like to know more about all this. I was not aware,” the padre said, still standing up.

“Well, it was very simple. A guy in Germany by the name of Mullheim knew I had something he could use. Well, the guy was in Germany, and I was in France, with the Royal Air Force. He contacted me through a guy he knew in

Switzerland,” said Horsey, taking a drink from the glass.

“Was it information?”

“Well, it was something written on paper. Figure it out for yourself!”

“And he paid you thirty thousand dollars for it?”

“Sure! It was worth it and I needed the money. He got plenty for it from the German government.”

“Just what was this you turned over?” the big priest said.

“Something written on paper,” taunted Horsey.

“It must have been very important, to be worth that much money.”

“Oh, I don’t know. I figure they got it rather cheap, but you see, I really needed money very bad, just then.”

“Was it something concerning a secret about the Maginot Line?” the puzzled priest asked.

“I’ll put it this way, Padre. It concerned a hole in the ground and several tunnels, and the paper explained it and— well, if they can’t get into those tunnels now, well, it’s not my fault,” grinned Horsey.

“And where is this particular point, since you have passed the information on?” the padre prodded.

“Why should I tell you. since you are going to bump me off? I’d like to go out having one thing on you, anyway, Padre,” said Horsey, swilling the liquor around in the murky glass.

“But, of course, this all makes things different. I had no way of knowing you were an agent. I can arrange for you to get into Germany, if you so wish, you know.”

“Now that’s real white of you, Padre,” agreed the musing Horsey.

“But where is this place you were referring to, this place of the tunnels?”

“Well, it’s at a place called Gila Bend. Queer name, eh, Padre?”

“Gila Bend? I know of no such town in France. I know the whole line very well,” the padre frowned after a minute’s consideration.

“France? I didn’t say it was in France. It’s in Arizona! Gila Bend, Padre. They do this in Gila Bend. . . .”

And before the amazed priest could frame a reply or gather his wits, Horsey had swished the contents of the glass full in his face. The liquor

was blinding and as he pawed at his face, Horsey brought his boot up and caught the padre on the wrist and the big Luger went spinning across the room.

“Now, you big thug,” began Horsey, but the man had darted blindly for the door. He opened it and charged out with a flutter of cowl and gown. Horsey stopped to pick up the gun and then charged after him, but halted when one of the big bells above him went “Scrawnch. . . . Bong!”

HORSEY halted and looked up. The big bell rang but once. He saw one of the ropes stiffen and sway slowly.

“Now what?” he muttered. “Where did that guy go to?”

He went back to the room, poured another drink from the bottle and drank it greedily. Then he went back, the gun in his fist ready, and he went down the steps one by one. Halfway down he stopped and peered into the tangle of hemp. Then he jerked back, for he saw the limp body of a man dangling from one of the ropes.

“Jees!” gasped Horsey. “The poor guy got tangled up in them ropes and hung himself!”

He was right. The pseudo priest had tumbled head-first down the rope well, and somehow had wound one of the ropes about his neck. The fall had done the rest. The body hung there and swayed back and forth gently. The rope creaked its dirge and Horsey sat down, twiddling the gun around his fingers.

He tried to figure it all out now. Somehow, the weariness began to ooze out of his frame. After all, he was still a fugitive from military justice. They would be looking for him all over France.

The rope creaked again and he turned and glanced at the body hanging there.

“Well, you had that coming to you, Padre,” he said quietly. “You were playing dirty, and playing dirty behind the cloth and in the confines of a church. That’s bad, Padre. That’s bad.”

THEN he began to wonder about the Casket Crew and what had been their reaction to his arrest. He remembered a voice when he dumped that truck, and now it seemed that it might have been the voice of McGregor. But how had McGregor been there? He was back on the apron, or with Ryan and Mister Armitage and Mister Townsend. Bowman would be telling them all

about it by now, and they would be wondering, or cursing him.

He pondered on all that and wondered how he could get news to them. They ought to know what was going on. Someone ought to know, and maybe they could nail this Henschel observation guy.

The rope creaked again and then there was an answering creak from below. He listened, stood up and then began to creep back up the stairs. He backed into the room and closed the door gently and waited . . . with the Luger aimed full at the knob.

There was no question about it now. Someone was coming up the stairs. There was a swish to it all and Horsey frowned. Could this be another padre in his robes?

The steps were light, though. They tripped lightly up the last few steps. Then the hand was on the door and Horsey drew himself together and watched the door knob twist.

The door opened and Horsey went: “Gup! Holy cattails!”

But he managed to move quickly and close the door before the vision could hack out. He held his back to the door, lowered the gun and said: “Sorry, ma’am! I don’t know what you are, but you shouldn’t ought to be up here, you know.”

The vision backed away toward the bench, stared around quickly and then calmly collected herself.

“Who are you?” she asked imperiously.

“That’s what he asked. The padre who used to be here,” Horsey said. “You know, ma’am, for a minute I thought you was something out of one of them holy pictures they have in churches like this. You sure look pretty!”

“I’m not interested in your opinions of me. Where’s Otto?”

“Otto? Who’s Otto? The padre gent?”

“Where’s Otto?” the girl snapped again.

“I guess he hurt himself, ma’am. He fell down there in the ropes and I guess he choked to death. It was his own fault. He was in too much of a hurry. That’s what comes of rushing about in the dark. Yeh, I guess Otto’s dead.”

The girl in the silver gown put her long slender fingers to her lips. Her pale blue eyes blazed fear. She glanced about the room quickly again and looked up at the arrow indicator on the wall.

"It's all right, ma'am," grinned Horsey. "He's bin, and gone!"

She did not answer. Fear was taking over now, but the same fear was only making her more beautiful in Horsey's eyes.

"What are you going to do to me?"

"Look," said Horsey, poking the gun toward the bench. "Let's sit down and take it easy. I guess we're both in a tough spot. Let's have a drink, anyway."

The girl removed the thin coated wire that glowed above her head. She unbuttoned the long simple gown, stepped out of it and stood revealed in a neatly tailored suit, modern sheer stockings and neat black pumps. Her hair was something between gold and auburn. A white jabot threw a subdued light up into her face and brought out the delicacy of her features.

She selected a small glass, poured wine from another bottle and watched Horsey replenish his own. Then she walked across the floor with all the grace of a manikin and sat down.

"You bin working with this man, Otto, ma'am?" asked Horsey, sitting on a corner of the bench.

She looked at him, puzzled, over the rim of the glass. "Why taunt me this way? Let's get it over."

"Well, don't get me wrong, ma'am. If you're a German spy working with Otto, I'm in the same mess. I'm a fugitive from a British military escort. I'm wanted for communicating with the enemy, only I didn't communicate with no enemy. I just knew a man over there."

The girl sipped her wine and considered all that. "Are you telling the truth?" she asked simply.

"Sister, it's only too true," Horsey said with a wry smile.

"All right then. Let's make a deal," the girl said hopefully. She had a strange compelling voice. A cultured German or Viennese voice usually heard in Strauss' light operas. She watched Horsey's face and the gun.

"Just what sort of a deal can we make, Sister?"

"You're really an American, aren't you? If you are in trouble why don't you try to slip through the lines into Germany where you can regain your national status and move about freely; even back to the United States, if you so desire?"

Horsey considered that for some minutes before he answered. Then he inquired, "And what are your plans, ma'am?"

"I—I don't quite know, now," she answered with a pained tone in her voice.

"Why don't you go back, ma'am?"

"No. I'm afraid I have spent too many weeks, months, on this side. I have mingled with the British and the French, and it all seems different to me. I had no choice about this, though. It was Otto ... my father . . . and the Gestapo. They held the upper hand over us."

"But your father is dead now. I didn't really mean it to happen that way. It was quite an accident, ma'am!"

She waved a firm hand and wiped all that out.

"I have no regrets. I only hope he died quickly, that is—without any pain. They do, don't they, when they hang?"

"I think so, ma'am."

"Well, here we are. We've got to make up our minds quickly. Neither one of us wants to go into Germany. I don't know your story, but I had to do all this," she said, indicating things in general. "My father trained me for it, but we never realized it would turn this way. . . . France and Britain. Then when it came, we had no choice. The Gestapo forced both of us into it. It all killed my mother. She was an American, you see. It broke her heart . . . after Munich. I was trained in Berlin. No, I shall go somewhere where I can forget all this. There is no fear, now."

Horsey listened and broke in with: "Then you are half American?"

"My mother married Otto when he was a young man with the German Board of Trade in Washington. I was born in Berlin and schooled there. My father never allowed me to visit any foreign country. I think he meant well. I was taught languages at Koenigergratzerstrasse, 70 in Berlin. That is the famous Intelligence Department of the old Imperial Navy. I learned practically everything I know there."

"It must have been a hard life."

"No. It was interesting, until it began to be real. Until we came here and set up this establishment. Then it became organized murder. Not war."

"What is all this?" asked Horsey.

"Well, we gather information behind the British lines. It comes in through a buried wire into a crypt out there in the graveyard. I was in charge there."

"In a graveyard? A grave?"

“Well, it’s hardly that now,” the girl smiled. “It’s rather warm and snug. The cloak and halo business was used just in case. If I was seen moving from the crypt to the church, the peasants or anyone else for that matter, just accepted me as something their subconscious mind had created. The Angel of Mons, the Albert Cathedral Virgin, any of those allegories, you understand.”

“I sure thought you were something,” agreed Horsey.

“Well, the rest is easy. Otto made up the messages from the news I had gathered and it was transferred to the planes as they came over.”

“I get all that, but how?”

“Oh, that part is easy. We just strung a cord across two lightning rods set on opposite corners of the tower. The Henschels come over, drop a pick-up hook and gather in the bag. That indicator over there just shows whether their hook caught and whether the message was actually picked up. It registers the tug on the cord.”

“Every day you learn something, don’t you, ma’am?” Horsey said dumbly.

“We sure do,” said a voice in the doorway. “We sure do, Horsey.”

THAT was young Armitage. He had a gun in his hand but he did not aim it at anyone in particular. He just stood there with an expression of bitter contempt and scorn. Behind him were the masks of Townsend, Ryan and McGregor.

“Take it easy,” warned Townsend. “It sounded bad, but we might not have heard right.”

“Whut ye doin’ here, Horsey?” pleaded Andy, coming into the room, his big bare knees muddy and bloody.

Horsey had stood up. His face was white and marked out in dull gray planes. His eyes blazed and his lower jaw had dropped and then snapped back belligerently.

“What’s your game, Horsey?” demanded young Armitage.

Horsey threw the big Luger down on the bench and walked over to the girl.

“That’s all there is, there is no more, Sister,” he said, and sat down.

Townsend was striding about the room, picking up things. Ryan just stood there, his knees sagging (and his face twisted into a mask of pathetic uncertainty. Armitage waited for an answer.

The girl sat uncertain, trying to get the straight of it from the faces of the five men in the room. Young Armitage betrayed and contemptuous. McGregor pleading and almost ready to burst into tears. Ryan, gangling, gulping and making dumb movements with his hands that meant nothing. Townsend coldly stalking about the room, inspecting books, maps, papers, charts, lists and signal lamps. Her friend, whom they called Horsey, chucking it cold and sitting down and taking it.

What was there to say or do?

It was Townsend who broke it up: “What is all this, Horsey?” he asked.

“German Intelligence station, complete with pick-up, beautiful girl spy, and me,” said Horsey with a dull grimace.

“How long has it been working?”

“You got me. I just found it, too.”

“You mean you just stumbled on it?”

“Sure! This young lady stumbled on it, too,” said Horsey.

“Don’t lie! What about that thirty thousand dollars, Horsey?” asked Armitage with an icicle accent.

“What about it? It’s mine. I got it from a guy in Germany. It’s straight money, sir.”

“How can money out of Germany be straight money, Horsey?”

“I sold my half interest in a copper mine in Arizona.”

“Arizona? What’s that got to do with a guy in Germany?”

Horsey sat there with a face that would have done credit to a cow that has suddenly been deprived of a pet calf.

“It’s gonner be a beaut when he spills it,” mooned Armitage. “I can feel it in my bones.”

“I know. I know, Mister Armitage,” Horsey finally went on. “It was crazy. I know all that now, but here’s what I did, and I did it straight, because I’m dumb, I guess. Look. I own half shares in an old copper working in Arizona. Suddenly it begins to assay high and the guy who owns the other half tries to find me. He hears cockeyed that I’m a prisoner in Germany. He’s an American and goes over there to get me and buy me out. I’m in France instead, but while he’s in Germany he sells tons of the darned stuff to the German government ... to be delivered through Italy, if they can get it across.”

"I told you this was gonner be a beaut," Armitage broke in again. "Only Horsey would even have tried it."

"The Germans find out he don't own it all, so they agree to help him contact me to get my signature, so that the contracts will be okay. Get it?"

"Not yet, but go on."

"Well, first they sent me, a letter and the necessary papers to sign through a guy in Switzerland. I get the papers all right, but before I sign, I wait for the dough. You see, I ain't done no wrong yet. I need the money. That is, my sister can do with dough like that while I'm away, so I figure if they can take the chance to get thirty grand through to me, I'll take a chance on getting the papers back to them . . . signed."

"It begins to clear, but you were crazy anyway," ranted Armitage.

"Look, Mister Armitage," pleaded Horsey, "I only figured on my hard-up sister. I didn't look at it like I was trading with the enemy. My partner was perhaps, but if he's willing to risk the chance of getting the stuff across, that's his hard luck. I took the thirty thousand dollars, like."

"How did he get it to you?"

"Through Switzerland, too. Through the Red Cross department somehow. It came in a comforts box, like what they send out to soldiers. He might have tried to get through Switzerland to me, but you know what it is for a civilian—a neutral civilian, to get up here into the battle area; so he used the Red Cross box idea."

"That sounds reasonable," agreed Townsend.

"It's the absolute truth, sir!"

"Why didn't you tell us, Horsey?"

"I don't know, now. I guess maybe it was the money that somehow made me go nuts, and stopped me from thinking straight."

"Then, that envelope I saw you drop over tonight was just these signed papers, for the release of the mine?" asked Townsend.

"Did you see me do that, sir?"

"I'm afraid I did. That's why we began to believe what Barlow told us later on."

"You must all think me nuts. Well, that's what I did all right. You see, the Germans had worked with this guy and had sent along a special military message envelope which was properly marked so that when it was picked up it was to be forwarded on to their headquarters and then through to

Berlin so that this guy would be in the clear to sign the contracts for the sale of the copper ore. But the papers had to be there by a certain time or the deal was off. I didn't have time to get 'em back any other way, so I thought I'd take a chance and send 'em back airmail—through old No. 7. It seemed pretty reasonable to me then, . . . along with the thirty grand which I already had, and I did it, but now I can see that it was, or looked crazy, and dangerous."

"HIS story is as straight as hell," agreed Townsend, "but how are we going to get the S.L. to see it straight?"

McGregor and Ryan had been silent all through this. They had listened intently, winced in spots and tried to keep their eyes off the girl. It was pretty hard for them to understand, and they left it in the hands of Horsey and the two officers.

"Don't you see, I did it for the thirty thousand dollars," poor Horsey tried again to explain. "For that dough, I think I would have taken a chance of creeping through the Siegfried Line, and back again."

"Well, you sure gave us a thrill, while it lasted," young Armitage said, still trying to figure a way out.

"That ain't all I got to worry about," Horsey said. "What about this young lady? I just made an orphan of her!"

"Orphan!"

"Well, her old man, Otto, who was running this outfit, tried to get away, but hung himself instead. He's still out there dangling in the bell ropes!"

"Bell ropes? Was that what we heard when the bell banged?"

"Sure! There's a guy who rang his own funeral announcement. I'm sorry, ma'am. This is his daughter. We got to get her out of here!"

"Get her out of here," gagged young Armitage. "What do you mean?"

"Look! She's a spy, for Germany. But she had to. They made her do it. . . . The German secret police. She's really half American. If they catch her they'll stick her up against a wall, won't they?"

"Who will?"

"The same guys who tried to get me. The British or the French will, anyway. She's a spy, I tell you. Been spying for Germany!"

"This guy's off his noggin," gagged young Armitage. "Now he wants to save her, too."

"Look," pleaded Horsey, getting up. "It wasn't her fault. Her mother was an American but her old man—Otto out there in the ropes—made her take up espionage. She came clean and told me the whole story. She's an orphan now."

"But don't you understand, Horsey?" went on Townsend. "You and your damned copper mine business are being blamed for what these people have been doing. That's why they arrested you tonight. They believed you had been tipping the Germans off about our plans so that we were being trapped all the time."

Then for the first time the full force of the whole situation dawned on Horsey Horlick. He let it soak in for a minute or two, looked at the girl and made a brave decision.

"Okay. I'll take my chance and beat it," he said. "I'm gonner get this girl somewhere where they can't shoot her. Anywhere. I don't care."

The girl just sat there staring at Horsey and his gaunt mug, utterly unable to understand any of it.

"But ye can't run off and leave the Casket Crew," reminded Andy.

"Ye've got to come back, Horsey," the Mick pleaded. "They're after picking out a new gunner, Horsey."

"A new gunner?" Horsey gulped.

"It's all very kind of you," the girl said, "but I am only getting you into trouble. If you gentlemen will give me a start of thirty minutes, I'll gamble on my chances of getting through somewhere."

It was a ticklish situation. The Casket Crew was in a quandary. They knew they had a job to perform, a show to do, a patrol to fly tomorrow. But there was this girl who had been brave enough to offer a fair gamble with them. Somehow she suddenly became an American, not a German spy.

"Let's be sensible," said Townsend. "You play the game with us, Miss . . . Miss . . . er"

"Miss Pamela Tondern," the girl offered.

"Miss Tondern. You play the game with us and promise to lay off the spy stuff and we'll get you back into Germany . . . or, well, where would you like to go?"

"I'd rather take my own chance, if you'll give me one. And I promise. My work here is done,

and I'm grateful it has ended as it has. Now I want to forget. I want peace."

"She wouldn't double-cross me. She's on the up-and-up," argued Horsey.

"Well, there it is," said Armitage, throwing out his hands. "Where do we go from here?"

The others just stood there staring at Horlick. He had risked being shot as a spy to get thirty grand, then he turns around and saves a girl he had just caught in the act of being a German spy.

"Let's get you in the clear first, Horsey. Let's find out how they were pulling all this stuff. Are you willing to help us, Miss Tondern?"

THE girl, much relieved, went over the whole setup and explained everything. She presented copies of the messages that had been sent into Germany and outlined the sources of their material. She disclosed that the movements of No. 127 Squadron came through Lieutenant Vigaud the French liaison officer connected with the R.A.F.

"I never liked that guy," said Armitage. "All right. Keep quiet and let's get on with this. Now this man Otto sent a message tonight warning them that we were to bomb the Dornier factory at Friedrichshaffen, eh?"

"That's right. The message was picked a short time ago and is probably there by now," the girl said, showing the copy of the message.

"Well, that can be fixed. We'll go all right, but we'll be backed up plenty. We'll show them who is to be trapped this time."

"What about Miss Tondern?" asked Horsey.

"Look! Here's what we'll do. You will have to stay here Horsey, for one more night, anyway. What about you, Miss Tondern? You have a place in the other part of the business?"

"Yes. It is very comfortable. I'll be all right there for another night or so." "Fine!"

"Why do I have to stay here?" Horsey bleated. He acted uncertain now, because somehow it had all untangled so fast and so satisfactorily. He didn't know who to look at or what to say, and he did his best to keep his eyes off the girl.

"You can't go back to St. Avoird until we straighten everything out, can you?" snapped Townsend. "You're still a wanted man, remember."

“But I can explain the thirty thousand dollars.”
“How?”

Horsey allowed his face to curdle into a muddy impression of bovine wonderment. He tried to figure out an answer, but there was none.

“Don’t you see, Horsey,” young Armitage tried to explain. “We believe you about the copper mine, but we know you. You’ll have a devil of a time making the Wing believe it, you know.”

“But Miss Tonern can clear me of the business of tipping the Germans off.”

“Sure she can! But we can’t let her or they’ll put her up against a wall, you see!” “Golly! That’s right,” Horsey moaned. “If we let Miss Tondern give her testimony, they’ll grab her. You don’t want that and none of us want it.” “Well, what can we do?” “We’ve got to make certain Miss Ton-der-n’s story is correct. We’ve got to use the same tricks to trap the Germans, as they have been using to trap us. That will satisfy the Wing blokes once we explain it, and you’ll be cleared. You can make up any story you like about the money once you clear yourself of the espionage charge.”

“I get it,” said Horsey with resolution. “Well, let’s get Otto unhooked and put him away somewhere until we need him for evidence, eh?”

“That’s right. We’ll get him out of the way. Any ideas, Miss Tondern?”

“I think there is an empty vault of some kind below the altar. It has been used for storage. It is quite cool and the body will keep until someone can arrange a decent burial.”

They went down the steps and released the body and carried it into the church and around the chancel to a side door. There they found a small vestment hall and a floor door which could be raised and offered entrance to a cellar below. They wrapped the body up and placed it on an old bench.

“All right. Now you buzz back upstairs, Horsey. Miss Tondern had better put on her cloak and beat it back to her crypt and stay there until we come and get her. Is everything clear now?”

“Not very, but I’ll have to stay, I suppose,” Horsey groaned.

“Of course you must. You can’t go back to St. Avoid. They’ll stick you in klink. As a matter of fact,” said Townsend, “we may all wind up that way yet.” Horsey mooned again and went

upstairs. “We’ll come and see you tomorrow night . . . after we get back . . . that is, tonight.”

They saw Miss Tondern stride across the churchyard and halt before a large flat stone. She hesitated a minute, stepped on one end of it and slowly disappeared into the ground.

“Boy! They sure had the business worked out,” said young Armitage.

“Stepped on a gravestone an’ ut just lowered intae the ground,” wagged McGregor.

“It’s defying the Holy One,” growled the Mick.

“Yeh, and we’re defying all human nature to stay here any longer. Let’s buzz off back and get some sleep. I can only just stand so much of this sort of thing,” said Townsend.

They left then and worked their way back through the fog and mist, each wondering what the rest of the night held for them. Again they had to sneak through patrols and past sentries and take to the open, but somehow they made St. Avoid, fooled the sentries again and finally as dawn began to fringe the horizon with a silver ribbon, they all crawled into their various bug-walks.

Sleep claimed them as soon as they put heads to pillows, but their rests were disturbed by frail maidens in silver gowns, thick-necked padres dangling in bell ropes, crypt stones that opened and closed, gobbling all before them, and Henschel observation planes hooking them out of their beds and leaving them to dangle on precarious wires strung across a graveyard.

But by mid-morning Armitage and Townsend had worked out a plan that would free Horsey, score a revenge on the Hun and provide an out for Miss Tondern . . . and make almost certain that their raid on Friedrichshaffen would be suitably protected.

From what they had learned, this would be most important.

THE pressure went on Squadron Leader Bowman just before noon. He had no idea of the tricks the Casket Crew had been up to all night at Lenigney. He was too worried and puzzled about this man Horlick. Bowman didn’t like that sort of business going on in his squadron. After all, the squadron had a history and a tradition to maintain. A dizzy history and a mad tradition, it must be admitted, but a history that was not besmirched with espionage and chaps tipping military guards out of motor lorries.

He was pondering on all that with a stack of petrol indents before him when the orderly sergeant, one "Knees" Nickleby, rapped gently, stepped in, clicked his heels and saluted.

"Could you see Sergeant McGregor, sir?" he asked.

"What's he want? Ought to be in bed asleep."

"He says it's a personal matter, sir."

"He still ought to be asleep. Send him in."

McGregor came in stiff and starched. His Black Watch kilt was neatly pleated and the hem line came to the center of his knee-caps. His sporran hung true. His hose-tops gleamed and showed their diamond designs correctly set. The dirk sparkled at his right calf. His boots glistened with brush-work and his buttons were advertisements for metal polish.

Sergeant Andy McGregor was neatly turned out, but his face would have frightened Robert of Bruce himself.

"What the hell's the matter with you, McGregor? You look like you've seen a ghost," snapped Bowman.

"Ah hae, sor. That's wot Ah wanted tae speak tae ye aboot, sor."

"Ghosts? What the devil are you talking about?"

"Nivver mind that, sor. Will ye help me wie m' weel, sor? I ha'na made oot me weel!"

"Made out your will?" spluttered Bowman. "You're supposed to write it out in the last two blank pages of your Pay and Mess Book, McGregor. Didn't you know that?"

McGregor fumbled doubtfully in his pocket and finally came up with the book. He thumbed it slowly and then finally found the pages marked "Last Will and Testament" and glared at it while a tear rolled down his cheek.

"See," explained the S. L. "You just write it out there. Make it out to whoever you want it, whatever you have, to go to."

"Ah didn'a ken, sor. Ah nivver made one oot before. Thank ye, sor."

"You're feeling all right, aren't you, McGregor?" the S. L. asked apprehensively.

"Ay, sor. Pretty well, but Ah'm a leetle worried aboot Horsey. It wiln'a be the same i' the Crew wieoot Horsey, sor."

"Oh, buzz off. I'll get you a good gunner. You needn't worry."

"Ah'll make oot ma weel, just the same, sor," said Andy, saluting and backing out. Squadron

Leader Bowman pursed his lips and watched the door close slowly. "S'truth," he mumbled. "The McGregor was in the other war for four years and he never made out a will. What the devil?"

"Mister Armitage to see you, sir," Sergeant Nickleby announced.

"Send him in," snapped Bowman, wondering what it was this time.

The young American was at his best. He clicked his heels and provided a parade ground salute, but nevertheless he looked pasty.

"What's up with you, Armitage?" asked Bowman.

"It's about my things, sir. My personal property."

"What about it? It's all right, isn't it? No one stolen it, eh?"

"No. I don't mean that, sir. I mean . . . in case I go West tonight."

"Go West? What are you talking about?"

"Well, this business across Lake Constance, and the aircraft factories. That's no joke, you know, sir?"

"It isn't that bad, is it? You can go down the line to Mulhausen and cross there and you'll only be over enemy territory for about one hundred and ten miles, less than half an hour each way!"

"Ah, but the place stinks with Mess-ups and Heinks and I wanted to make sure my personal belongings would be sent back to my parents all right. I've made a little parcel up and I hope you'll do me a favor in the morning.

"In the morning, in case we don't get back," added Armitage with a face like a duck in distress.

"How do you know the place is full of Heinks?" demanded Bowman.

"Everybody knows it. Anywhere you go, they tell you that. That French guy Vigaud says so, but no one takes any notice of him."

"Just rumors, Armitage," floundered the S.L. "Just rumors. Latrine rumors.

But if you feel that way about it, I'll look it up and ..."

"And you'll see that my personal belongings get home to my family all right, won't you, sir?"

Bowman chewed the rubber out of a pencil before Sergeant Nickleby buzzed in again.

"It's Sergeant Ryan this time, sir," Nickleby explained. "Is he standing up?"

"Standing up, sir?" "I mean, is he alive, on a

stretcher, being supported by two orderlies, or just tottering? Oh, hell, roll him in, Sergeant!” “What’s the matter with you, Ryan?” snapped Bowman. “You want a will made out, too? S’truth! What’s got into the Casket Crew today?”

“Faith, an’ I’d like an hour off, sor,” said Mike, blinking.

“An hour? What do you come to me for? You have off until you report for patrol tonight, don’t you?”

“Yes, sor. But this is something very special, sor.”

“Let’s have it. Pour out the grief while I get a new pocket-handkerchief, Mike.” “Into Nancy, I’d loike to be going, sor; to see a priest, sor.”

“A personal matter, Ryan?” asked Bowman.

“Sure an’ it is, sor. I’d loike to make a few amends for me past sins, sor. Me auld mither would like it, sor, if you’d tell her when ye write.”

“When I write? What would I be writing to your mother for, Mike?”

“Faith, an’ ye’ll be tellin’ her how we died, won’t ye, sor?”

“Died?” spluttered Bowman like a wet Catherine-wheel. “Who died? What is this?”

“We’re leadin’ the show tonight, ain’t we, sor? Over the Jarmin air factories, sor? We won’t get back, sor, what with Horsey gone and all the Heinks there, you know, sor.”

“Shut up, Ryan! Look, you can go to Nancy, Paris, Rheims, Albert, Amiens, Armentiers or Canterbury, for all I care. But you’ll be back here in time to go on that show, Heinks or no Heinks, and I’m sick of it all. Get out?”

“An’ ye will write to me auld mither, sor? Ye will tell her I . . .”

RYAN was faster on his feet than Bowman gave him credit for. He was out and had the door closed before the heavy piston-head ash tray crashed against the panels.

“Mister Townsend, sir,” announced Sergeant Nickleby when the ash cloud had subsided.

“Wheel him in, Sergeant! Wheel him in,” said Bowman with sardonic satisfaction.

“Wheel him in, sir?” gagged the puzzled sergeant. “He’s standing up, sir!”

“Is he? Well, be ready to wheel him out!”

Bowman reached inside the ammo box under the table and took out a bottle of Martel brandy. He

screwed the cork out and took a healthy slug as the big Englishman came in.

“Never mind,” the S. L. said, ramming the bottle down on the table. “I have it all down pat now. You want to make out a will. You want to arrange about your personal belongings. You’d like to see a padre and have your murky past wiped out, or else you’re reporting sick so that you don’t have to go to Friedrichshaffen tonight. Well, it won’t work. You are leading the show, Townsend, and the raid runs at ten-minute intervals.”

Townsend looked at Bowman in amazement.

“What the deuce are you talking about, sir?”

“Well, you’re the last one of your mob. They’ve all been in preparing me for the funeral. What’s your gag?”

“Well, nothing much, sir. I just wanted to talk about Horlick.”

“What about Horlick?”

“Well, we don’t like going without him.”

“All right. Where is he?”

“I don’t know, sir.”

“I’ll bet you do, you tricky swine. But he’s not here so you’ll have to take someone else. I have another gunner, don’t worry.”

“But it won’t be the Casket Crew, sir,” growled Townsend.

“So what? You’re leading that show tonight anyway.”

“All right, but I wish we could do something about Horsey. I can’t believe he would do anything dusty like that.”

“Right now, I don’t give a damn whether he did or not, but I’m going to see that you lead-swingers don’t crawl out of that show tonight. I’m going to have a million Spitfires and Hurricanes up there with you if I can work it, just to make sure you go. I’m going to see that they sit over you and watch you bomb Friedrichshaffen, or shoot you down if you try any funny business. I can’t somehow forget that other mess you birds ran me into.”

“I don’t like going, sir, without Horsey.”

“I don’t care what you like. You’re leading that show and by Jupiter, you’re going!”

“I feel that we’ll be trapped again, sir,” argued Townsend.

“This is one way to find out,” ranted Bowman. “If you are caught you can blame it on that

Horsey Horlick. You said that you saw him drop a message, didn't you?"

"Yes. But he couldn't know we are going to Friedrichshaffen tonight!"

Bowman blinked. Then he stood up as if some hidden spring had jerked him to his feet. "That's right," he blazed. "How did any of you know about this show? That's right! You were supposed to leave under sealed orders. How did you birds know?"

That left Townsend speechless. Of course, they were not supposed to know. But the girl had told them, or that Otto chap had spilled it.

"I don't know how we all know," he finally said, "but it must be obvious by now that everybody knows, and that if we all know, it is quite possible that the Hun knows. It looks like a delightful evening, sir."

"If you are trapped, you can blame it on that Horsey bird. You're going, just the same, if I have to get every Spitfire, Hurricane and Defiant on the front to escort and sit over you. That's all, Townsend. Buzz off. I have important business to do."

Townsend buzzed and Squadron Leader Bowman turned and picked up the phone and called the area Fighter Command A.C.M.

"I guess it worked," said Townsend, winking at Armitage who was waiting for him outside.

NO. 7 was out on the line, as battered and patched as any of her predecessors, by 9 o'clock. The bombing dolly groaned and creaked as she was bombed-up for the big raid on Friedrichshaffen. The long sand-colored eggs were wheeled out from the dump, moved into position beneath the belly of No. 7 and then cranked up into position where Sergeant Ryan could snap in the trap catches and then close the bomb apertures. One by one they were brought out, creaked into position, hoisted and clicked. Ryan twisted the detonator caps, withdrew the safety pins and stroked the heavy cases with an affectionate paw.

"Nice journey, chum," said Mike, closing his eyes and smiling in anticipation.

Then there were the guns. McGregor took care of those and saw that they were all properly mounted on the power-turret standards. He trooped from one end of the catwalk to the other, sneaking in extra magazines for the K-guns and

sliding extras behind panels, under seat cushions and under the catwalks. For a gang that expected a lot of trouble they were particularly cheerful this evening.

A new gunner, a rabbit-faced youngster with buck-teeth and a hair-lip who went under the name of Air Gunner Walter Plimsole, reported to Ryan and showed his enthusiasm by bustling about like a ferret. He had seen some action over Scapa Flow and was cheerful and brimming with confidence.

"You needn't worry about me, Sergeant," he beamed. "I allus wait for 'em to come close before I let fly at 'em."

"And if yer misses, I suppose you lean out and bite 'em with them fangs of yorn," taunted Ryan. "Yore mither must have been frightened by a disc-harrow to produce anything as funny as you."

"Never mind, Sergeant. I've got all my teeth, and they're mine. That's wot got me in the R.A.F. There's a lot of blokes who would give a pretty penny for my gnashers, no matter how they stick out." "Ah, they probably figured on using you for a cable-cutter in the balloon barrage." "No, they didn't. I can clear a No. 3 stoppage as quick as anyone."

"Well, clear off until we're ready to bung off," said Ryan. "I'm afraid you'll get excited and bite something."

"I won't get excited, Sergeant. I allus wait for them to come close before I 'ave a go at 'em. I don't waste no ammunition, Sergeant!"

"Well, look here," said Ryan, glancing around the cabin. "Buzz off back to the Armorer's Shop and get a drum of signal ammunition. Red, white and blue kind, and don't come back without it. We're leaving in about fifteen minutes."

"Red, white and blue, Sergeant?" the young air gunner gagged.

"Now don't tell me," said Ryan, his hands on his hips and his face a mask of incredulity, "that you've never heard of red, white and blue signal ammunition. And you were at Scapa Flow? What were you doing up there, taking lessons on the bagpipes?"

"No, Sergeant . . . but I'll go. . . ."

"And don't come back without it!" stormed the sergeant, looking around again.

FIVE minutes later No. 7 closed her cabin door with a crash. The big Pegasus engines roared and bellowed as she waddled away. Mike Ryan steadied himself by the cabin door and watched the others standing on the line warming up. Mechanics darted about with electric torches. The speaker above the pilot's head crackled and became officious with orders. Someone yelled: "Best of luck!" and someone else yelled: "Get that bloody bomb dolly out of the way!"

The lights from the wing-tips glinted on the gloss of other machines on the line. The exhaust flamed from the ports and painted undercarriage struts in garish gold. Hatches scrawnced and closed with a rattle as No. 7 waddled away and went out for her take-off.

Inside, young Armitage was in the doorway of the radio cabin. He was grinning along aft where Ryan was standing at the cabin door. In front McGregor was on his knees peering out through the Plexiglas of his gun turret.

Townsend waved to the S. L., who was striding up and down the ramp, a great froth of woolen scarf about his neck. He champed on a big briar pipe and blew enough smoke to choke a horse. He carried a short riding crop under his arm and returned Townsend's salute with it and scowled when the Englishman bawled out of a small sliding panel: "We'll bring you a nice little balloon back, Daddy. You make sure the Spitfires get there, however, won't you, Daddy?"

Then the big Harrow was in the blackness beyond the dull fanlight of glare from the hangars and engine exhaust. Townsend held her dead on the haystack beyond and then at the far reaches of the field he fanned the rudders, applied a wheel brake on one side and brought her around into the wind.

An Aldis lamp winked and flashed from a position well ahead, but No. 7 did not move. Her engines sang and the prop tips flashed off their sheen—but she did not move.

Then there was a banging somewhere aft. The cabin door was shoved open and Ryan let out a roar. Over the radio speaker someone was yelling about a gunner. "Machine No. 7 return. You have no rear gunner. Air Gunner Plimsole still here. Not aboard. . . . Return No. 7. . . . Return, Townsend!"

"Hurry up, Horsey!" yelled Mike Ryan. "What kept you?"

"I was farther up the hedge. Thought the wind was blowing more that way, Mike!"

"All aboard. . . . Take it, Townsend," yelled Armitage. "Take her away!"

No. 7 stiffened as the motors took over again. She was herself again and she preened and pouted in her new glory. Townsend let her rumble gently for fifty yards or so until he could get her tail clear. Then he grinned down at Andy McGregor, who came out from under the instrument board and yelled: "He made it, Andy!"

Then No. 7 was completely on her own. She got her nose down level with the turf and went out for flying speed. Townsend ignored the repeated orders blating out from the speaker above his head and let her take off on her own wing incidence. She was away beautifully and he circled once to check his temperature gauges and then reported to the ground: "No. 7 of Banbury raid in the clear. No. 7 Banbury in the clear. Ta-ta, Daddy!"

He grinned and turned No. 7 southeast and headed for the control point over Mulhausen down near the Swiss border.

"You're shy a gunner, you damned fool!"

That was Squadron Leader Bowman's voice coming over the Marconi set now.

"Ooo! If you only knew, Daddy!" taunted Townsend back into his throat flap microphone.

"Your man, Plimsole, is here on the ground. You went without him!"

"Not Mrs. Plimsole's little boy!" wagged Townsend. "He ought to be in bed!"

"I demand you return and take your full crew!" screamed Bowman.

"Shall I be an angel, Daddy?" sang Townsend into his mike. "An an-n-n-gel in the sky-y-y-yy!" Then he lowered his voice to a serious pseudo-Oxford accent and added: "This is the British Broadcasting Corporation. We will now sing Hymn No. 35 in the red books and No. 65 in the green books. Thank your mother for the rabbit, Daddy!"

"You damn fool, Townsend. I'll have you cashiered!"

"Toodle-oooooooo! No. 7 of Banbury raid! No. 7 of raid, Daddy!"

"Damn you, Townsend, and your whole damned mob! Go to blazes!"

"Nighty-night, Daddy!"

And No. 7 roared away into the night.

THEY settled everything long before they reached Mulhausen. Horsey Horlick, the fugitive from a church tower, had somehow managed to get back to St. Avoid and hide away in the darkness at the fringe of the landing ground. It had been decided by the rest of them, that since they had kidded Bowman to get them plenty of fighter escort, it would be unfair to leave Horsey out of it since he was the prime factor in their new venture. With that in mind then, Andy and Mike had sneaked back to the church at Lenigney and contacted Horsey.

Mike's invention of red, white and blue signal ammunition had sent young Plimsole on a fool's errand and cleared the tail turret for Horsey, so that by the time they were at 4,000 over Dieuze, Horsey had been provided with a stolen flying suit, a parachute and helmet. He simply took over aft and waited with anticipation for what might lie ahead.

They reached Mulhausen and were still alone as far as they knew. Townsend reported through at the proper intervals and got the check signal from the Bomber Command.

"Banbury raid . . . Banbury raid. . . , No. 7 at 14,000 feet. . . . Check point three. . . . Banbury raid!"

Young Armitage kept a close log of the flight and reported regularly to Townsend, who simply nodded and grinned. He was watching well ahead of him and made certain all gunners were at their posts once they crossed the line over Kandern.

They waited and watched for the expected, but the expected didn't happen. They could hear the other machines reporting through at the check points and they knew that the five-minute interval was already in order. From Kandern all the way back to St. Avoid swung a string of Harrow night bombers about ten miles apart, all heading for the same point in Germany on the other side of Lake Constance. Each plane carrying about two tons of bombs. Twelve planes with two tons of high explosive each—twenty-four tons of death and destruction for the Dornier works.

Lovely!

But it wasn't lovely. It was too quiet. No searchlights. No bracketing anti-aircraft fire from the Flak guns below. Townsend turned and caught the puzzled expression on young Armitage's face. The young American had moved up to the folding

navigation table alongside the pilot's seat and was staring ahead.

They checked at point 4 over St. Blasien and got a cold routine reply. Somewhere miles behind in a small, low building hidden away in a wood, a Leading Aircraftman with a telephone set strapped to his chest would be moving a string of black aircraft models over a massive white map set out on a table. The black models were set in a curve running from St. Avoid to St. Blasien and were being moved according to the reports coming from the pilots carrying out the Banbury raid. From a low balcony above the wide table, a second man with a black patch over one eye sat and stared down at the toy game below. He rested his arms on the rail of the balcony and watched the cold movement of the models below. He had three rows of ribbons above his wings and a memory that went back more than twenty years.

"Banbury raid! . . . Banbury raid! . . . Plane No. 7, Banbury raid over. Check point 5 . . . 18,000 feet!"

That was Townsend's voice coming out of a loud speaker above the head of the man with the black patch over his eye. He turned slowly and cocked his one eye at the grill, and smiled.

"Casket Crew?" he said to the Leading Aircraftman who was moving the wooden models.

"Yes, sir. Casket Crew leading the raid, sir. Jolly fine lot, the Casket Crew, sir," the Leading Aircraftman said without looking up. He was too busy moving the lead model up another few inches on the map.

"I wish I were with them," the man with the black patch said.

"So do I, sir."

The man with the black patch sniffed, huddled down closer on his folded arms and waited . . . waited for the other models to move out. The Leading Aircraftman had twelve more, smaller ones, ready near his left elbow. He was fingering them anxiously and continued to peer up at the man above him, as if to say: "Why the deuce don't those Spitfires report, sir?"

"It's tougher sitting here, isn't it, Crockett?" the man with the black patch said.

"We don't seem to be doing much about it, do we, sir?" Leading Aircraftman Crockett replied, making a report to somewhere else.

The man with the black patch sniffed again and blew his nose. He was an Air Chief Marshal, but there was nothing he could do about it.

"They'll be at it any minute now, sir," L/A Crockett said.

"Wish them luck, Crockett They'll need it."

"The Spitfires, sir?"

"They're there. Don't worry."

"Thank you, sir!"

BUT the Casket Crew was worrying. They were all the way up to the western tip of Lake Constance now, and still no opposition. No searchlight blades slashed at them. Not a testing shot from the Flaks. Not a Mess-up or a Heink in the sky anywhere. And not a Spitfire, for that matter.

Had old Bowman double-crossed them about the fighters? Had he had the last laugh after all?

Townsend wasn't singing now. He was swearing and he was letting plenty of it seep into his reports. The man with the black patch smiled, for he quite understood. He had suffered the same reactions many times years before.

"I don't like this, Armitage," Townsend growled. "Get below and be ready to shove the stuff clear. I still think we're being trapped. Get below on the Wimperis!"

"Okay! Taking it downwind or upwind?"

"Upwind if we are not bothered. Can you adjust in time if we have to switch?"

"I can do anything," grinned Armitage.

"Smart lad! Get downstairs and watch the corns on your belly!"

They were well along the north shore of Lake Constance now and still they were experiencing no hate: Townsend watched ahead and all around him, but there was not a gun-flash or an exhaust glare flag in the sky. He frowned and called for a gunner's report.

McGregor had nothing to report. Horsey wanted to know when the fun began. Ryan just yawned and said he didn't like it. "Well, you birds keep awake. This isn't jam, you know. They'll be there when we get there, if not sooner."

Young Armitage was out of sight in the prone-position bomb-aimer's chamber. He had set the Wimperis sight for 15,000 feet and for the upwind approach. He checked it once or twice and was satisfied. He lay there waiting and peering

through the square aperture that gave him a view of the ground below.

They passed another check point and Townsend reported briefly. They felt terribly alone now in spite of the comforting drone of the big Pegasus engines out on the wing. Townsend could see the railroad now streaming down from the north and winding into Manzell. Friedrichshaffen was only three miles farther on.

He reported again and gave the zero sign and the man at the Bomber Command headquarters stood up and stared at the loud speaker grille in the wall. He waited and then looked down and saw L/A Crockett move the lead model up to Friedrichshaffen ... on the map.

"There they go, sir!"

"Wish them luck, Crockett."

"I'm pressing 'ard, sir," grinned the Leading Aircraftman.

YOUNG Armitage was in charge now. He was well over his Wimperis sight and talking to Townsend above him through the inter-plane phone.

"Fifteen thousand. . . . Get down to 15,000, Townsend."

The engines were throttled back and the big bomber was on her way down. The sky was generally clear with a few wisps of cloud scarf flitting past the bomb-sight drift wires. Armitage watched the altimeter on the little board near his elbow and checked.

"Take course 301 after you turn back upwind . . . and hold it!"

"Check. . . . Course 301 after turn upwind," repeated Townsend.

They went down over the town and young Armitage caught the sawtoothed roof of the Dornier works along the lake. He waited while Townsend turned over two miles farther on and then checked his drift again and then set himself for the raid.

They were approaching now and the fear of interception was over. Young Armitage had his eye set just behind the rear sight and was watching the saw-toothed works below sliding into position along the drift wires. He had his fingers on the release buttons and was just about to breathe deeply when the target below came into line with the forward indicator when the world went mad.

He pressed instinctively and yelled. The Harrow leaped as the two big bombs charged out of the racks. He reached again for more buttons but the Harrow had hoiked up on one wing-tip and every gun aboard was blazing away madly. Armitage waited, and was blinded with the searchlight glare that came up from the target below. He lost all sense of position and gave up.

Now he could see swarms of strange pusher fighters with double outrigger tails. Small, compact nacelle fuselages with engines set aft driving pusher props.

"Jees! New Focke-Wulf Fw. 108s," he gasped. "Germany's latest and fastest fighters!" They were nosing up at them with four machine guns of the new Rheinmetall-Borsig type, chattering from metal chutes set in the sides of the bullet-like control nacelles. Then there were two Oerlikon cannon mounted in the wings in line with the metal outriggers.

"Where the hell are those Spitfires!"

Trapped again! They were full in the glare of the defense searchlights now. They fought well, but if those Focke-Wulfs got upstairs fast enough, they would be cold meat.

Aft, Horsey Horlick was fighting them off with his guns from the Thompson-Nash turret. He had a splendid position as long as they could keep the F-Ws below them.

But young Armitage was mad now. He felt he had wasted two good bombs. He was uncertain where they had gone anyway. They might have fallen in the lake.

In five minutes another Harrow would be over. They had to clear the way for him. Young Armitage made a great decision.

"Down. . . . Down, Townsend," he yelled into his tube. "Get down fast to about 2,000."

"Two thousand?"

"Why not? We won't hit so hard from there. Let's go. Through the whole damned lot of them. We can make Switzerland across the lake, if it's too hot. What do you say?"

"I always did like Switzerland," bawled Townsend. "Know a girl there who sells milk chocolate and sings. Bloody awful at times. If they only wouldn't yodel!"

"Get down, you dope!"

No. 7 went down, through the whole mob of them like a gigantic winged rocket. The Focke-Wulfs scattered as Andy sprayed a path for them

with his double K-guns. But he scattered them for a good reason, too. They scattered full into a swarm of green-and-black Spitfires that had dropped out of the upper layers and the battle for Friedrichshaffen was on.

The Harrow cleared the first layer of defense ships and screamed down for the 2,000-foot level. Armitage readjusted the Wimperis sight and called for an approach.

"Try upwind again at 310," yelled Townsend.

"Right! What happened up there?" "Spitfires came out of nowhere!" "Good! Let's make the most of it!" They rumbled through the Flak-88 antiaircraft fire, through the cross-blades of searchlight and into the welter of smoke from the guns below. A fire leaped up from somewhere and young Armitage wondered. Had he hit something after all, or was this to be another Isle of Sylt washout? He watched the altimeter and settled down again as they dropped through the 4,000-foot level. They shot through a formation of twin-engined Messerschmitt fighters and Andy daubed one out with a burst of K-gun fire as they passed. "There you are," yelled Townsend. "Two thousand. . . . course 310."

"Right. Try to keep her at 165 m.p.h. This Wimperis seems to click better at 165."

"All right. Let's go!" A burning Focke-Wulf rained down past them, vomiting a wing and a tail assembly. The Harrow went at the works below and young Armitage lay over the Wimperis, watching the factory slide along the drift wires. He caught her beautifully and pressed his buttons. The ship jerked as they fanged out of the chambers. The doors slammed back and then from below a roar. They turned back and Armitage yelled: "Okay! Downwind this time at same speed. Course 121 on downwind track. Let's have it!"

THEY let her have it and No. 7 went into the hell-fire again to get over the target. Armitage watched her again and let the factory slip along the drift wires. Then he pressed everything he had and drew back. The Harrow leaped once more with the release of the bombs.

"That's all!" he yelled into his tube.

"It's enough. Trying to blow the town all the way to Berlin? You haven't missed one, you young fool! Look at that mess back there!"

Armitage was weary and heavy-eyed now. He crawled back, up through the trap, and went along to the cabin window. The Harrow was turning now and he could see six distinct blazes gobbling up the sawtoothed edges of the roofs. The gunners at all three turrets were going mad. Streaks of flaming tracer spat from the Harrow and whiplashed at dull black shadows flitting through the glare, smoke and debris-patterned sky.

It was a lovely war now.

Armitage staggered up the walk and forced his way into the control cabin and screamed at Townsend.

"What are we waiting for?" he bawled.

"Can't go yet! Bloody gunners are having a holiday. Want to stay and see it out!"

"We're bombers, guy! Not fighters. Let's get out!"

Something wailed past them and went earthward. They cringed with the realization that they had only just missed death by an eyelash. That was a Harrow bomb . . . that was.

No. 2 ship was somewhere upstairs getting rid of her load. A belch of flame spanged up from somewhere below and another 500-pounder nosed into a glass roof, fanged its way through a battery of lathes and went on through two feet of floor concrete. Then it opened up when a short tube of fulminate of mercury ignited and set fire to the main charge. The bomb exploded eight feet in the ground, belched its wrath, hoisted gigantic slabs of concrete at the roof and blasted half a million Reichmarks worth of machinery into a tangle of bent iron and twisted steel.

But No. 7 was climbing back into the mad fray above now.

"Banbury raid! Banbury raid! Plane 7 over objective. Six hits so far on sheds . . . and let them fix this lot up by tomorrow morning. Banbury raid! Banbury raid! . . . We're staying to help out the Spitfires. . . . Banbury raid!"

The man with the black eye patch turned his head slowly and stared up at the speaker grille and listened to the last few words. They were intermingled with a delicious decibel salad of machine-gun fire, the scream of props, the bellow of high explosive and the justifiable profanity of men who were fighting and enjoying it.

"You were right, Crockett," he said with a smile.

"Right, sir?" the L/A inquired, looking up as he moved another model into Friedrichshaffen.

"Right! Of course you were right. We should have been with that Casket Crew lot, instead of sitting here moving bits of wood about on a map."

"Yes, sir. Fancy them staying to 'elp out the Spitfires, sir. Nobby, eh?"

"I must call up the Fighter Command and tell old Beckwith about that. Harrows doing the fighting for the Spitfires. Priceless!"

"Don't forget it's the Casket Crew, sir!"

"Ah, the Casket Crew. Right, Crockett. . . . The Casket Crew!"

IT was true, too. Townsend grabbed Armitage and jerked him toward the pilot's seat. He slipped away and let the young American drop in and steady himself with a full grip on the wheel.

"And stay there and keep us in this action as long as you can, young fellow!" Townsend said, yanking out his mike jack and ramming in Armitage's. "You fly her for the gunners. You're crazier than I happen to be just now."

The grip on the wheel sent strange rejuvenating jolts of energy along Armitage's arms and he went into action with a vim. The Harrow was flying low under the main level of the action between the British Spitfires and the Focke-Wulfs. The two groups of single-seaters had come down lower and lower in their circling and diving until now they were well below the 10,000-foot level.

Somewhere above more Harrows were coming through at 5-minute intervals to deposit their loads, but they were clearing off one by one in the general direction of the southern shore of the lake and skirting the border of Switzerland.

But No. 7 stayed and Andy, Mike and Horsey played their Vickers organs and put on a grand tune as they pounded lead deep into the bullet-bellies of the Focke-Wulf pusher fighters, which could be easily distinguished from the tractor Spitfires. Mike and Andy set up wicked cross fires that caught plane after plane and young Armitage was thankful his cockpit had a roof-glass above it so that he could see what was going on above.

Townsend darted up and down the catwalk, discovering the drums of ammunition Andy had secreted away, just for an event like this. He handed them out, slapped gunners on the

shoulders and watched another Focke-Wulf fighter crumble as it flew straight into the direct fire of Horsey in the tail turret.

"They will design pushers and take all the protection away from the pilots," beamed Townsend. "They never learn, these designer guys. They design planes for the photographers, because they don't have to fly them in action. There's what happens to them. They have to dive on enemy gunfire but they might as well be sitting in a tissue-paper turret."

The Spitfires were hammering it at the Focke-Wulfs and more belches of flame spanged up from the sawtoothed design below. Big bombs screamed as they spun down and raced through the layers of righting single-seaters. A British fighter went straight up in the air, hung there quivering like a partridge with a charge of shot under its wing and then fell away, a slight decoration of flame trickling along its wing-root. It nosed down, started to twist anti-clockwise and then exploded in mid-air and threw a fantastic curtain of yellow ochre against the night backdrop of blue.

Townsend saw that and went white. He raced up and down the catwalk again and checked the ammunition. There was none too much left and he bellowed into the inter-plane phone and prepared the plane for her retreat.

It was getting dangerous now. Bombs were being unloaded by the dozens from somewhere above. Fighters and parts of fighters were glutting the sky. Chunks of wings, pieces of tail assembly and wailing engines went hurtling down into Lake Constance from the mad melee above. Shot and shell raged and rang. Chunks of shrapnel were fanging through the dural wings of the Harrow and bullets sang and chugged through plywood and fabric. Metal jangled and the lights from below peeped through the gashes and left grotesque shadow designs on the ceiling.

"Right! Buzz off!" yelled Townsend.

"We're overstaying our leave."

"I kinder like it now," grinned young Armitage.

"All right. You stay, but I'm buzzing off, even if I have to take to the 'chute. Get me over the other side of the lake and you can stay here until the war's over for all I care."

"All right, Daddy. Little Phillip will take you home."

They fought a mad rearguard action and then caught the bellow of a speaker somewhere.

"No. 7 . . . Banbury raid.... No. 7....Banbury raid. . . . Report No. 7!"

Young Armitage reported: "Banbury raid! . . . Banbury raid! No. 7 reporting ... a beautiful evening, sir!"

"I'll 'sir' you, No. 7," the voice came back. "What the devil are you doing over there?"

"Helping the Spitfires, sir. . . Banbury raid. . . . No. 7 reporting a lovely punctured fuselage, sir!"

There was a sputter from the other end somewhere and an A.C.M. managed to answer again.

"Spitfire commander reports you refuse to return. All other bombers have left. Clear out, No. 7. . . . Clear out!"

"Jees!" gasped young Armitage. "We're the only one left . . . and we started first."

"Quote him the Bible!" gagged Townsend.

"The Bible?"

"Right. You know, the first shall be last and the last first."

"That's a bit involved, isn't it?"

"Report No. 7 . . . Banbury raid!" the voice bellowed again.

And together, Armitage and Townsend sang into the mike again:

"We're coming home.

My Mother's washed all the windows,

'Cause we're coming home!

Hip-hooray, yesterday,

She bought a brand new broom,

To sweep my room!

And she and Aunty Alice,

Are making the place look like a palace;

'Cause we're coming home.

They're making things so cosy,

That no more we'll roam.

It's the truth, the solemn truth;

And Mother—dear old thing!

Has promised not to sing!

Because we're coming home!"

Mad! Wild, but perfectly normal for the Casket Crew, and the Air Chief Marshal at the other end listened in absolute amazement. A dozen Aircraftmen radio operators listened in and for a minute believed they had wound a coil wrong somewhere and had picked up an Empire program from the B.B.C.

Long before the crazy music hall ditty had been completed, Armitage and Townsend were joined by two A.C.Ms., fifteen Wing Commanders, two Group Captains who were very drunk, but very self-satisfied; and the man with the black patch over his eyes . . . and L/A Crockett.

*"They're coming home!
They've busted all the windows,
But they're coming home!
Hip-Horray, yesterday,
The Harrows started off
Without their broth."*

And the lines were added as they fitted until old No. 7 was well over into safety and reporting in a more subdued and respectful manner.

"We'll get hell!" mooned young Armitage making certain his mike was "out."

"We bombed the works, didn't we?" argued Townsend. "We didn't lose a man, did we?"

"No," agreed the young American; "as a matter of fact we picked one up."

"Picked one up?"

"Sure! We started out with but two gunners. Now we have three!"

"S'truth! That's right. Horsey! What are we going to do about him?"

"There's only one thing to do about him. We've got to take him back now and make a clean breast of the lot. We can clear him."

"But what about that girl? Do you suppose she got away all right?"

"We'll have to see about that later. He's more important to us," argued Armitage. "After all, she was spying for Germany, no matter what you say."

"I'll go back and talk to Horlick," said Townsend.

OLD No. 7 wheeled over the field and waited for her signal to come in. They circled twice before they got the Okay and they were able to see that there was plenty of artillery action going on further north of St. AVOID. The sky was alight with glare and they could discern the twinkle of star shells and the flutter of parachute flares.

"Poor old gravel crushers are getting it again up there," muttered Armitage. "Who'd be in the infantry?"

"They would, or they wouldn't be there, would they? They wouldn't change with us for all the tea in China."

"They can have it. Hell of a bombardment going on up there. Hitler must have found another shell!"

"There's your signal. Take her in, Phil," ordered Townsend. "I'll cover Horsey this time, if they try any of the 'Prisoner, two paces forward' stuff."

They got down and landed safely amid a wild display of Very lights and scrambling figures. McGregor came up from under the instrument board grinning and covered with cordite murk. He pointed forward out of the windscreen and beamed: "They're celebratin', Sor! They'll be greetin' us wie Very lights, Sor. Whot's oop, Sor?"

"You got me, Andy," said young Armitage guiding the battered bomber up to the line. He counted the others. They were all back. Every one of them. Figures in flying kit were dancing in the glare of the portable lights. Aircraftsmen and Flight-Sergeants were arm-in-arm.

Armitage ran her up into line and they sat there and stared at the amazing tableau spread out before them.

Then it all spread wide and an eight-man sentry military guard marched through the lot. There was a beefy Sergeant, all belly and bounce. There was a young thin-faced Infantry lieutenant with a Welsh Guards leek in his cap. And there was a young pimply-faced French Captain, minus his belt; striding along with them. "Vigaud! They've got Vigaud!" "How did they know?" "Let's get out quick. This smells better." They shut off the engines and dismounted the guns and gathered on the catwalk behind the cabin door. Someone was pounding hard on the outside but they didn't unlock it until they had Horsey well covered.

Andy McGregor was out first, cradling two K-guns. He had his finger in the trigger guard of one and glared full into the suety mug of S. L. Bowman. Armitage was next and he dragged Horsey after him. Townsend and Ryan came next, carrying guns.

They stood there in a group near the trailing edge of the wing and challenged Bowman. Townsend took over from there.

"We took Horlick, Sir. He's innocent!"

"Horlick? Horsey Horlick?"

"Yes sir. We knew where he was and we picked him up. He went with us and did damned well, Sir. You've got to listen to the story."

“But you damn fools. I know it. We got the Frenchman . . . he’s really a young German Nazi. We caught him in the men’s cubicles going through Horlick’s stuff. We sensed something wrong then and in the excitement, he blurted out something in German and went crazy with a pistol. One of the batmen was wounded in the affray . . . but that young Plimsole chap, the lad you left behind; clipped him on the chin and floored the swine! We know all about it . . . about the church business.”

“You know about the church, Sir? What about the young lady?”

“Young lady? What young lady?” “You didn’t find a young lady up there?” asked Townsend.

“No . . . nothing, except the wires and the signaling business. Is there a young lady up there?”

“There was . . . but never mind now.”

“Well, if there was, there isn’t now. The place has just been shelled to hell! Awful mess, the whole place,” the S.L. explained.

THEY all nodded and looked at Horsey again, but the crazy American was smiling. He knew Miss Tondern had arranged for the internment of her father and had gone on through to begin her new life.

“Look, Skipper,” said Townsend. “We can explain Horsey’s thirty thousand dollars. It’s a crazy story but you’ll have to believe it.”

“Can’t do it, Townsend.”

“Can’t do it?”

“No. You see, I have a lot of important warrants to make out.”

“Warrants?” they all barked. “Who for?”

“All of you,” said the S.L. still trying to be severe.

“All of us? Warrants for search and arrest, Sir?”

“No! No you damn fools, no! Leave warrants. You’re all going to London on leave. The whole bloody Casket Crew. Decorations and all that sort of rot, you lucky devils! Take your Horsey and his thirty thousand dollars. You’ll all probably need it when you get there. You’ll have to stand the whole bloody Air Force to drinks when you escape from Buckingham Palace. Buzz off, the lot of you and get some of that muck off you!”

“She probably got through the lines tonight,” said Horsey practically talking to himself.

“What’s that fool jabbering about?” the S.L. asked. “Why don’t he buzz off and get cleaned

up. You know, you’re flying back. They want to see old No. 7 and get some pictures of her, or something potty like that.”

Then he stopped and grabbed Townsend by the parachute harness.

“No. Not yet. I just remembered. The Air Chief Marshal came up. He wants to see you birds before you leave.”

“What about?”

“It’s that song, you were singing up there. He wants you to write the words down.”

“Can you beat it?” said young Armitage. “I learned that from my old Gent who learned it out here in the other war. How do these Air Chief Marshals get their rank, anyway, when they didn’t learn that much in the last war?”

“That’s nothing,” growled Townsend. “I taught it to your old Gent and I learned it from your Elsie Janis. She sang it in a revue called, ‘Hello America!’”. Fancy the A.C.M. not knowing it.”

“That ain’t all he don’t know,” grinned Horsey Horlick. “Where’s my haversack. Sir? I’m gonner send some home to Sister, first.”

Just the Casket Crew!