

WINGS FOR THE KING

A Crash Carringer Adventure

By Arch Whitehouse

IT WAS a strange combination, this partnership of man and machine. As for the machine, it was beautiful, in line and movement. Glistening and gleaming, it had a fascinating poetry of motion to everything it did. It was swift and deadly in action. A Hellion!

But the man who flew this sleek job was far from handsome. He was tough and he knew it. His nose had contours like the edge of a slag heap. His eyes, cold as steel, bored out from beneath bushy thatches of eyebrows. There was a perpetual hint of a snarl on one corner of his mouth where, years before, a poor piece of surgical embroidery had drawn a torn upper lip together after a brawl in a Singapore side street. His chin, a sturdy prow of belligerency, jutted out and displayed patches of badly shaven beard and scar tissue.

But his hands on the elaborate control column of the Hale Hellion were a strange contrast to all this. They seemed to belong to another figure entirely. They had fine proportions as well as firm strength. The backs were broad, the fingers long, the knuckles bold. Here was both artistry and power. At one and the same time these might have been the hands of a welterweight, a diamond setter, a yacht helmsman, or a concert violinist.

This was Crash Carringer, American aircraft salesman extraordinaire, adventurer, and soldier of fortune in any Army that came along. He was top man in the field for the Hale Aircraft Corporation of Long Island, the despair of those he selected as his enemies, the envy of those he aided, and at present the particular pal of the British Royal Air Force in the Near East. How much of a pal he was to be this night he could not know, for he was still unaware that the Second World War had broken out in Europe.

CARRINGER was reflecting on his recent adventures in the Trans-Jordan. He had helped wipe out a couple of Arab uprisings. He had blocked off a threat by one of the European powers to drive the British out of the Near East and cut the Empire Life Line. But he had also

obtained the right signatures on a wad of orders for Hale Hellion fighters.

It was night now and Carringer was clicking off the miles from Lydda to Cairo. It was his intention to see His Excellency Ahmed Hamdi Seif El-Nasr Pasha, the Egyptian Minister of War and Marine. He had a letter of introduction decorated with some very flattering remarks concerning the Hale Hellion. This was his endorsement from Wing-Commander Mount of the British Trans-Jordan forces.

Below, the sand rolled and billowed like a gigantic model of some mysterious sea. The moon was out, throwing weird shadows across the dunes. And the stars were blinking as he sped on toward the Bitter Lakes that form a link in the great Suez Canal below Ismalia. It was the blinking of the stars that betrayed him—for he had not noticed the blinking flashes of exhaust that came up from behind him and now took up a position aft and above.

Ahead, the great ditch slitting the throat of the 100-mile isthmus gleamed between the Mediterranean and the Red Sea. Crash was interested in that ditch through which the sea traffic of the world steamed—so interested in studying it that he did not notice the three planes which tailed him fan-wise.

He was pondering on whether to head for Ismalia and stay there that night or to go on through to Cairo, when suddenly he sensed that something was radically wrong. He tried to turn his head to peer back. But there was a strange iciness at the base of his skull—which prevented him from moving his head!

Instinct—that strange power—then made him carry out a move that for the time being saved his life. He somehow managed to get his hands up and snap in “George,” the robot pilot. Then he just sat there sensing that his joints were stiffening. He could still see plainly, but his muscular movement was gradually freezing up. He tried to reach up for a bracing member to twist his body around, but it was now impossible to get his hands up at all.

“Good Lord!” he muttered, staring straight ahead to a point over the nose of the ship. “I’m paralyzed!”

A cold, grim fear clutched at his stomach. He tried to flex his muscles against the belt, but his body wouldn’t obey him. He could do nothing but

remain immovable, suffering that peculiar freezing sensation.

His other faculties were normal. He could see perfectly, he could hear, and his mind was as clear as a bell. He tried to speak, however, and found he could only mumble. He blew out through his teeth and then through his nose. Everything worked but his primary body and limb muscles.

He forced his eyes down toward the instrument board. Everything there was normal. Engine revs normal, altitude the same—4,600 feet. He had fuel for many more miles, thanks to the clever tankage system in the Hellion. But how long would this condition prevail? This was serious—but what exactly had happened to him? Had his heart folded up? Had he suffered a stroke of some sort?

“Is this death?” he asked himself. “Have I been struck by a bullet in a vital spot so that everything suddenly stiffens up like this? Do people die like this while still knowing what goes on around them?”

But he knew death stopped all sight, speech, and hearing. He could still make garbled speech. He could see. And he was positive now that he could hear. He could hear plenty! He could hear other planes somewhere. But they were behind him. If he could only turn his head around and look—just once.

He glanced down at the compass again, sensed that the ship was turning slightly. He had evidently switched the robot pilot in while his foot had stiffened on one rudder, so that the automatic pilot had taken up a new course, a course a few points off his original line of flight. The ship now was heading south-east toward the upper shore of the largest of the Bitter Lakes. At that point in the Suez waterway, there was a short 13-mile stretch of man-made canal connecting the larger Bitter Lake with Lake Timsah.

HOW LONG he sat paralyzed he had no idea, for his mind was tormented with the fact that at any minute something might go wrong with the robot pilot. Meanwhile, someone in those planes behind him might shoot at him and he would have to sit there helpless and take it. He wondered if he would be able to feel the impact of the bullets or the horrible thud of a crash in this condition.

As the ship approached the fringes of Deversoir on the upper shore of the Bitter Lakes, he fumed in his crippling bonds and sensed that perspiration was pouring down his face and dripping like a waterfall down his chest. He struggled to force his way out of the terrible vice that gripped his muscles, and finally by sheer force of will he managed to get the lower portion of his jaw twisted slightly. He breathed deep and blinked as sweat blinded his eyes. But he kept fighting.

With the loosening of his jaw, he gradually forced some life into the sinews of his neck. Those initial movements were torture. His straining felt like the rubbing of the edge of a dry clam shell against a blacksmith’s rasp.

“But it’s wearing off! It’s wearing off!” he argued with himself between partly clenched teeth. “If I can get my arms loose, I might be able to get this Hellion down and figure something out.”

He went to work again, painfully flexing his shoulders until he sensed that the cold spots were gone. But there was still a certain rigidity to the muscles. He glanced down at “George” and was thankful that the old boy was still loyal to his trust. He fought on to unlimber his stiff legs and finally discovered that he could move his toes. He now tried to touch the rudder pedals, but he could sense no feel in his feet as yet. But he worked on, disregarding the clammy perspiration that drenched his body.

Now he was winning the fight! Whatever had struck him was beginning to wear off! His fingers now clenched and unclenched before his amazed eyes, then his elbows began to loosen up.

He glanced about, saw that he was almost over the old city now. He strained his wracked body until he was able to look back. He could see the exhaust flashes of the planes behind now, and he thought he could discern the red, white and blue cocardes of the Royal Air Force. He struggled again and gradually gained enough muscular movement to risk reaching for “George” and trying to take over himself.

“I’d give plenty to know what came over me,” he growled. “I’m going to look up a medico in Cairo and see if he can tell me what’s wrong.”

He gingerly tried the stick and rudder pedals. Then his curiosity got the better of him and he

brought the Hellion around in a sloppy, over-controlled turn to get a look at the planes around him.

As the Hellion came around, Crash saw that the planes were American Vultee attack planes!

“What the devil!” he cried. “What are they doing out here?”

But there was no time for further pondering. The two upper Vultees suddenly nosed down from sharp angles and spouted machine gun fire dead at the Hellion.

SOMEHOW, Crash jammed his rudder over and cleared. He nosed down and almost smashed headlong into another Vultee ship. He tried to do something about his guns, but his muscular faculties were not all there yet. He was lucky to be able to direct the plane, yet he dreaded that at any moment that horrible paralyzing force would overcome him and write the final chapter to his dramatic life.

The two Vultees above swerved wide and came back at him. Crash frantically rammed his nose down, headed back for the desert. He raced a mad torrent of machine-gun fire speckled with flickering tracers and he had to pedal his feet in a mad fandango on the rudder to keep himself out of the line of fire. As he hammered away, his limbs became more supple and he decided that if the chase continued he might even take a chance and fight back. He was yearning for a smack at these babies, whoever they were.

He led the mad pack over the dunes for a few more minutes, then suddenly swung over, stood the Hellion well into the muzzles of the Vultee guns—and gave them a dish of their own dessert. His heavy caliber guns up front barked hard. His Browning guns in the wings chattered madly. He sprayed the sky and forced the three Vultees to break up their formation to keep from being blasted from the sky.

Crash was in his element now. He poured it at them from all angles, flying the Hellion like a demon possessed. He was in and out like a bobbin. He practically cut the tail section off one Vultee with a long burst, then flipped over suddenly and snapped a long-range blast at another. The heavy air-cannon stuff spanged across the sky and one projectile forked its copper nose into the dural and steel of the second

Vultee’s 900-h.p. “Cyclone” engine, to put it completely out of commission.

The first raider was going down without a tail, spinning and wailing all the way to the desert. The other, clipped off its power, nosed up, belched smoke, then recovered to slither into a long glide toward a stretch of sand 3,000 feet below. The third climbed and swung over. Then its gunner poured a long burst of lead from the under-belly tunnel as the Vultee screamed at full speed away from the scene.

Crash shook himself again, made certain that the strange stiffening would not return.

“Those swine had something to do with that paralysis,” he muttered, circling over the two Vultee planes that were going down. “They threw some sort of a devilish, muscle deadening power over me. But how, I don’t know.”

Crash peered across the heavens. The third Vultee had disappeared. He glanced about, took a bearing on the canal, and figured he was at some point due east from the southern portion of Lake Timsah.

He banked, shut off the Allison engine, and allowed the Hellion to glide gently back toward the ridge of rolling sand dunes near where the two damaged Vultees had gone down.

“I don’t know where I’m going, but I’m on my way,” he sang, still shrugging his shoulders to make certain the strange paralysis was not creeping over him again. “Anything can happen around such an important site as the Suez Canal.”

But as he held the Hellion in its glide, he wondered just what damage could be done to the canal by ordinary means. Being quite wide, there were only a few places where any real damage could be done by landslides. There were no great locks, such as are found at Panama. This canal had been dug to a depth of about 30 feet and to a width of about 200 feet so that ships may pass going in opposite directions. On the curved portions of the canal, the width had been brought out to some 240 feet. If there was any idea of damaging or blocking this canal, something unusual would have to be considered. A mere bombing would be out of the question. And now, what did three American Vultees carrying British markings have to do with this—and with the sudden paralysis Crash had experienced?

The Hellion was singing her low wail as the glide lengthened and she was almost down before Crash remembered to lower her wheels. He jerked with a start, lowered her flaps, and finally dropped down in a long narrow stretch between two dune ridges. He was thankful for the moonlight which provided the necessary shadows to enable him to judge his distance.

The sleek pusher plane dropped beautifully and rolled to a stop. Crash hoped his landing was as quiet as it seemed.

HE SAT THERE a minute after snapping off the idling engine and waited. The night was cool and clear, yet there was a certain electric tenseness about it. He slid back the hatch, got out a massive automatic and slipped it into his breeches pocket, and also took out a flashlight.

He had one leg over the side when a hunch caused him to slip back into the cockpit. He picked up the radio ear-phones, clamped them over his head, and snapped the panel switch. In a few seconds, the hum of carrier waves came in.

He worked well down the band and caught several routine reports in clipped British speech and sensed that they were messages from ships in the Mediterranean or from R.A.F. dromes nearby. Then his hand slipped, the lever went farther down the dial, and he caught a strange, yet familiar, jargon of speech in which he heard such names and words as "Bitter Lakes," "furious," "tussum" and "hyena."

He frowned, tried to recognize the language. He attempted to group the words he had heard into a phrase such as, "furious hyenas having a tussum at Bitter Lakes." But what was a "tussum?" It didn't make sense.

"What the hell sort of language is that?" he fumed. "I've heard that lingo somewhere before, I'm sure."

Then he recalled that Tussum was a small town on the canal a few miles south of Lake Timsah. It was on the short 13-mile stretch of man-made waterway connecting the Bitter Lakes with Lake Timsah. That much he was certain of now. But the rest meant very little.

Crash snapped the switch, slipped off the headphones, and climbed out. He poised lightly on the balls of his feet. He was wearing stout brogue shoes, medium weight golf stockings, and

khaki drill breeches. Somehow he now felt strangely electric and vibrant. He moved lightly across the sands, shadow boxing as he went. There was a grim smile of anticipation on his rough mug.

"I'd like to sock the bird who played that freezing trick on me," he muttered. "I'd like to feel my fist connect just once with his button—if only to make sure I haven't lost the knack."

He clambered up the dune on the west, and at the top he dropped to his hands and knees and peered out across the subdued silver of the moonlight. His eye caught a glint of something partly hidden behind a lower dune not two hundred yards away—and he was certain it was the dural and Plexiglas covering an airplane cockpit.

"One of my Vultee friends," he muttered. "Perhaps they can give me a fight."

He trudged forward, his shoes filling with harsh grating sand, then began to move carefully until he was in a strategic prone position peering over at the damaged Vultee that stood broadside to him.

Two men stood near the leading edge of the wing. They were talking in low tones, but from the cockpit came a louder voice barking a staccato message of some sort.

"That's the baby I blew the engine out of," Crash mentally observed. "They're talking to someone on their radio set. I wonder—say! I'll bet that's who I was listening to! That carrier wave was especially loud and clear."

He peered about, dropped back below the rise of the sand dune, and ran about twenty yards to his right. Then he cautiously peered out again and clambered over on his belly. Carefully he moved along like a snake, working his way to a point dead behind the Vultee's rudder. Waiting a minute or so, he then crawled along silently to a position beneath the tail plane and lay there. He could hear the voices clearly now. They were still talking in the same strange language.

He lay trying to figure it out. He still caught those strange names, and finally he sensed what he was listening to. It was a language he had studied as a hobby years ago when, in his youth, he was intrigued with codes, underworld language, and secret patois. It was Esperanto, the universal language!

He beamed to himself as he finally understood phrases concerning men hidden in what the speaker called the Quarry of the Hyenas. That, at least, accounted for one of the mysterious words. Then he caught a sentence concerning an aircraft carrier off Tussum.

“Sure! That’s what they meant by the Furious. But wait a minute, I thought the Furious was a part of the Mediterranean fleet. What’s she doing down here in the Suez Canal?”

THE JANGLING MESSAGE went on as the anxious operator barked his words, and Crash now sensed that they were calling for assistance, since they had been brought down in the desert. In another minute the man switched off and jumped out to join the others at the wing root. Now he was speaking in another language—German!

“Holy Moses!” Crash growled to himself. “What is this? They got American attack ships with Limey markings. But they send their messages in Esperanto, talk German, and are all tied up with a British aircraft carrier that isn’t supposed to be in this neighborhood! Cripes!” He pressed farther forward—and it was his undoing! He had flicked up a small cloud of sand and some of it filtered across his nose. Before he could do anything he was constricted by the preliminary spasm of a sneeze which he figured would blow half a sand dune away. He clutched at his nose, but that only half stifled it and the blast went off like a klaxon.

Crash was on his feet in an instant and taking matters into his own hands. He quickly met the first man who darted toward him, and it was a chance too good to miss. Crash’s knee came up under the man’s chin with a crack that brought a crunched grunt that sounded like the rupturing of a blacksmith’s bellows.

From the other side of the wing a blinding flash and a loud report rang out. A slug roared past Carringer’s head. But he clambered up the smooth wing root and hurled himself with wild abandon at the figure with the gun.

Another shot half blinded him. But it missed and he hit the man full in the chest. They went down together clawing at each other like wildcats. Crash found the man’s throat, hung on while he thumped short hooks at his head.

From somewhere beneath the wing the third man hurled himself at the two on the sand. His foot caught Crash in the ribs, almost broke him in two. The Yank relaxed his hold, rolled away, and drew his feet up. The man, wild and explosive, then aimed another cruel kick at Carringer’s neck, but the American was faster. His left foot came up and hooked the man’s instep, blocking the kick. Then with a deft movement Crash twisted, spilled his assailant on his face, and caught his toe behind the man’s Achilles’ heel.

Crash was to his knees in a fraction of a second and he dived for the man. But he only ran into two mulelike thuds from the man’s feet. He stopped them in his chest and went back on the sand with a pained grunt.

For what seemed minutes, the two sat there helplessly out of breath. Then Crash, seeing the man’s eyes twist to something black in the sand, moved like lightning.

He hurled himself like a pole-vaulter sliding over a bar and the man who was moving toward the gun could hardly figure out just what hit him. Carringer’s knee caught him in the neck just below the ear. There was a dull ominous crack and the man fell back, limp. Crash scrambled up—only to fall into a clutch with the third man, who planted a cruel upper-cut under Carringer’s jaw. Crash saw stars, clutched at his face with sand-covered hands. But he plunged back into the fray and sent his shoulder into the man’s midriff.

Another grunt, another growl, and they both dropped together—out cold!

CRASH CAME TO struggling. He was clutching at a man’s legs, preventing him from butting him back into unconsciousness. Finally, with one last gigantic effort, he got to his feet, drew the man up with him, and hurled him like a sack of flour over his shoulder.

The man hit with a crash across the metal wing of the Vultee. He struggled once like an indistinct fish, but then he lay still. Crash stood faltering on his wide-spread legs, then drew a deep breath and steadied himself.

“Nice fight!” he muttered through sandy lips. “I certainly got all I wanted.”

He glanced about, getting his eyes back into focus, and assured himself that he had completed a thorough job. One man was out with what

amounted to a broken neck. Another lay cold on the wing. And the third had at least a fractured jaw. Certainly he was in no condition to add to the festivities.

Crash shook himself into some state of mobility and went around to study the layout of the plane. It was a normal V-11GB export type job on which British cocardes had been hurriedly daubed.

He was certain they had been placed there for some special underhanded reason, but in his present mental state he was in no shape to attempt to figure it out. Then he re-remembered the puzzling business of the paralysis that had struck him. Could this ship have anything to do with that? He made a further investigation.

He staggered drunkenly, steadied himself against the side of the fuselage, and then caught sight of the outline of a heavy armored cable. His hands followed it down beneath the body of the ship. There, the cable connected with three bright copper rods that forked outward from a point ahead of the tail-wheel to insulated sockets beneath the center section. The rods were tubular and perforated.

"That's a new idea they use over circuits where heavy voltage is carried," he muttered to himself. "They are using that sort of cable in connection with all the big dams in the United States, where they relay high voltage from the big generators. This is a tip-off, anyway."

He peered inside the cockpit and flashed his torch around. The layout, at first glance, was normal in every respect. The navigator's compartment contained a small folding desk, a radio set, and a panel carrying instruments and maps. And behind, the gunner's compartment was much the same as he had expected.

But a glance beneath the gun-turret disclosed a strange black instrument panel with a gaudy assortment of switches, knobs, and dials. Heavy-headed bolts on the outside of the fuselage also indicated that inside was some sort of a heavy platform.

"They got a generator of some sort in there," he argued. "Maybe they got batteries and a booster coil. Anyway, I'm beginning to get the idea. Somehow they are able to stiffen guys with this thing. It must be some sort of electrical discharge."

But now there were other things to worry about. The Furious in the Suez Canal—where she was not supposed to be. Guys who talked Esperanto and then German. Anyway, whoever was behind this electrical business didn't want him in the air in this sector.

"Oh, no?" he growled glancing around again at the carnage he had wrought. "Well, you guys try and stop me!"

He reached inside the cockpit and grabbed all the maps and papers out of the navigator's rack. Then with a last glance around, he headed back for the Hellion.

He now felt strangely alone, and there was a dull suspicion of the unknown bothering his brain. But he trudged on up the slope toward the point he believed the Hellion had been left. He had approached the Vultee by a circuitous route and he was making something of a guess as to where the Hellion rested. Then as he came up over the edge of the dune, he drew back suddenly and let out a low whistle.

"Now what?" he demanded peering ahead. "There's another plane down in these dunes!"

BELOW HIM, its whale nose apparently rammed into a narrow gully of two dunes, stood a queer-shaped aircraft of some sort. It appeared to be a biplane mounted on a strange form of fuselage. Crash dropped back a moment, patted his thigh to make sure he still had his pistol.

"More Limey markings," he mused studying the plane. "An even span biplane with some sort of a radial engine mounted as a pusher between the wings, and pontoons under the wing tips. Say, that's a Royal Navy Walrus! One of their amphibians! What the deuce is that doing down here?"

He glanced about again and studied the layout. The British Supermarine Walrus was as quiet as though it was tucked away for the night in a hangar. Carringer watched for a minute or two more, then decided that something was differently wrong this time. Or was it?

He palmed his gun in one hand and took his flashlight in the other. He approached the Walrus in a direct line with strides that were deliberate. On the side of the hull, just under the windows framing the pilot's cockpit, he saw in the half light of the desert night the numerals "076". Aft

of the numerals was a small oblong window, which, as he remembered the layout of the plane, was fitted into the navigator's compartment below and behind the control pit.

"Don't tell me these guys got what I got," he mumbled, fully expecting a 48-caliber welcome from one of the windows.

But nothing happened. There was only the crunch of the sand beneath his shoes to break the stillness of the night. He glanced about and saw that the plane had been rammed into the Vee of two sand dunes, and he sensed that the landing had hardly been planned that way.

"These guys made forced landing—and were plenty lucky," he observed, moving back toward the nose of the plane.

He fingered around and discovered a stirrup hole. With another glance about, he stuck his foot into the step and lifted himself up. His light spiked into the compartment—and came full into the puzzled face of a British flying officer!

"Hello! What's up?" asked Crash.

"Nothing. But haven't you any seats farther back?" the grinning Englishman inquired with a grimace against the glare of the flashlight. "I don't like sitting this close to the cinema screen. All the people seem to have long legs and appear to be falling over backward. But where's Keyhole?"

Crash drew back, puzzled. What in the name of heaven was the fool talking about? He drew close again and listened once more.

"And you know," the English pilot went on, rubbing the back of his neck, "there's a draft here somewhere, too. I'm getting a stiff neck—or at least I've just had one."

"Yeah?" answered Crash, beginning to sense it all. "You got it, too—and you had a beaut! You're lucky you got this boiler down."

"Boiler? A nice way to talk about an old Walrus. 'The time has come the Walrus said, to speak of many things.' That was in Alice in Wonderland, wasn't it? Silly sort of a book, eh?"

"Never mind. You'd better get out of there and start walking about until you get your brains back to normal," argued Crash. "You've been given the works. But who's Keyhole—and where is he?"

"Keyhole?" husked the Britisher, cocking his head to one side. "You mean to say you've never heard of Keyhole? Why everyone knows

Keyhole—from Singapore to Portsmouth. He's my gunner."

Crash now realized that he was up against one of these amazingly silly Englishmen who can never be taken serious, but who, in their own ridiculous way, somehow make a great Empire. After all, one couldn't laugh off that row of ribbons on his service tunic. This guy had seen things and done things.

Carringer mopped his brow and wondered what was next on Lady Fate's program.

"LOOK," he snapped, reaching in and shaking the Englishman. "Where were you going when you started out on this show? Where did you come from? And how the devil did you get down in here—between these dunes?"

"You know," the Englishman answered, staring peculiarly at his instrument board, "that's just what I've been wondering. But come in, won't you? We'll make some tea, or something."

"No," said the Yank. "You climb out where we can talk proper. We got to get things straightened out. Something screwy is going on around here."

"Right! That's how my neck feels. Draft somewhere!"

Then as the Englishman rammed the sliding roof to the cockpit back and stood up on his seat to get out, a bellow of thick Aberdeen brogue thudded out against the night sky: "We sailed from the Downs in a ship called the Li-i-ion! Wi' fufty brass guns oor men could rely on. In addition to which we had a brave crew, Who no equal numbers oor force could subdue. Also some passengers fro the West, An' wan was a Quaker most curiously dressed."

"That's Keyhole," explained the Englishman, with a look of despair. "He always goes on like that. Recites the confoundest poetry at the most unusual times. Keyhole McKenzie's—that's him!"

"I think you're both nuts. But a guy can never really be sure with you Limeys," muttered Crash as the Englishman came down from the hull deck.

"Muster Blodgett, Surr!" the McKenzie howled from inside the rear turret Scaarf ring. "Whut in the divil we a'doin' doon here in Egypt? Ah fooght in Egypt wie the Royal Scots. We took Alva, Inkerman, and Sevastopol. We were known as Pontius Pilot's Bodyguard. Nemo me impune

laccessit, ye ken. An' if ye remember yer Latin, Muster Blodgett, Surr, ut means, 'No one may touch me with impunity'. Ah ken a claymore an' Ah ken a dirk, Muster Blodgett, Sur, but Ah no ken a weapon called the 'impunity'. Musta been a furren weapon, eh, Muster Blodgett, Surr?"

Without waiting for an answer, Keyhole McKenzie placed his hands on the edge of the Scarf ring, bowed politely to Carringer, and set his Navy pork-pie hat at an even more dangerous angle.

"You're a liar, Keyhole!" blazed Lieutenant Blodgett. "Last night you were in the Black Watch and the night before it was the King's Own Scottish Borderers. And I'll have you know, Keyhole McKenzie, that Alva, Inkerman, and Sevastopol were fought in 1860. That would make you something about 90 years of age."

"Ah canny argue wie ye, Muster Blodgett, Surr. Ye always bring in yer Aggers and Ah dinna ken figgers. But Ah was wie the Black Watch at—"

"—at Ticonderoga and Montreal. That was somewhere about 1762 to 1776," growled Blodgett. "Come down out of there now and stop bellowing."

"Hoot, an Ah wuz in the Black Watch at Martinique and Guadaloupe and along the Hindenburg Line, Muster Blodgett, Surr," argued the Scot as he climbed down.

"Well, you're along the Suez Canal now—and you'd better try to figure out how you got here," snapped Crash, realizing what a swell packet he was up against.

"He helped dig the Suez Canal," broke in Blodgett, beating Keyhole to it.

"No. I wuz at Sevastopol that year," countered the Scot.

Crash laughed and glanced at the gunner man. He was short, stocky, and built like a gun carriage. He wore regulation Navy kit, and he bulged everywhere so that one wondered how he ever got his trousers and shirt on—or off. He was sandy of complexion, had hands as big as the scoop of a fair sized steam shovel, and one could picture him standing broad-legged in kilts and sporran, swinging a claymore amid his enemies. On his sleeve, however, were a row of good-conduct stripes and the winged-bullet insignia of a Navy air-gunner.

"What's the 'Keyhole' gag?" asked Crash. "Is he a peeping Tom?"

"No. It simply means he can get through anything, no matter how small—especially if he shouldn't be there. He can get through keyholes, they even say."

"With a stomach like that?" demanded Crash.

"Aye! I'm a mon who can control his constitushion, Muster—Muster—Ah didn't catch the name, Surr!"

"Carringer!" explained Crash.

"Not Crash Carringer—the American pilot?" spoke up Blodgett. "Not the Carringer?"

"Yes, I'm that Carringer," added Crash. "And now we'd better start thinking—and acting. There's something wacky going on around these parts."

THE CHUNKY SCOT and the dapper Englishman stood staring at Crash as they continued to rub their necks and wriggle away the last effect of the strange paralysis that had forced them down. Crash noted the ribbon on McKenzie's hat. On it were gold letters reading, H.M.S. Norfolk. The Norfolk was a 9,800-ton cruiser, and it was obvious that the Walrus had been catapulted from the vessel—to land here in the sand dunes.

"Now listen," began Crash again. "Do you remember flying along somewhere near the canal and then seeing three low-wing monoplanes?"

"Right!" said Blodgett after a moment. "We took off from the Norfolk at the other end of the Bitter Lakes. We went out to—Um! What did we go out for, Keyhole?"

"Fra tae look for the torpedo-bombers—the Sharks, ye ken?"

"You went looking for Sharks—Blackburn Sharks with torpedoes? Where were they from?"

"Off the Hermes—the aircraft carrier, you know. They went out early this morning to do a patrol along the canal. They were supposed to stop in at Port Said for a general re-fit and to have their wireless sets checked. Then they were to go back aboard the Hermes once she was in the Mediterranean."

"And you went looking for them. But why?"

Blodgett rubbed the back of his neck again and tried to think.

“They just nevaair got tae Port Said, Surr,” broke in Keyhole, “That wuz it!”

“Never got there? Good Lord! And did you find any trace of them?”

“No. We never got a chance.”

“We got stiff necks and Muster Blodgett had tae get doon.”

“You got nailed with that, too, eh? I also went through that experience. But I stayed upstairs on my robot pilot until it wore off. But how the devil did you get down?”

“These . . . er . . . ‘boilers’ as you call them practically land themselves. I shut the engine off, dropped the wheels—and let her go. There was nothing else I could do. The sand came up and I did something about the switch—but after that I was tight as a board.”

“Me, too,” added the McKenzie. “Ah could’na move. Ah could’na twist. Ah was like bein’ drunk o’ a Saturday nicht. Stiff—and verra helpless.”

“All right,” said Crash. “You were given the works by some form of electric charge discharged from those Vultees working somehow in series. There’s one of them down on the other side of this dune. I shot it down, and I found a lot of high voltage electrical equipment aboard. But that matter can wait. Because what I’m worrying about is the Furious and those Blackburn Sharks.”

“Furious?” gagged the Britisher. “What about the Furious?”

“Isn’t she with your flotilla coming through the canal?” demanded Crash. “She’s supposed to be somewhere in the canal.”

“The Furious?” asked Blodgett, slowly rubbing his chin. “But that can’t be. The Furious is—well, she’s not in these waters.”

“But she is. I heard one of those Vultee guys talk about her. Wait a minute,” said Crash taking a new tack. “Those Sharks? Do they carry their torpedoes all the time?”

“Certainly, under circumstances like these. The only difference is that the torps are not fitted with warheads. They’re fixed for ‘safety.’ But the Sharks always carry them. That was one of the things they went to Port Said for—to get their torps checked.”

“Wow!” Then there are a lot of British Sharks around somewhere carrying torpedoes—and there’s a carrier in the canal that does not belong there.”

“That’s right,” agreed Blodgett fumbling for a cigarette. “And there’s the Far East flotilla coming through the canal!”

“Eight behind this mysterious aircraft carrier? Baby! I’m beginning to see their game now,” cracked Carringer. And immediately he was all for action, though he was not certain just what to do.

He glanced at the two English Navy men and tried to find an answer in their eyes. Blodgett was calmly lighting a cigarette, the Scot was seeking a short butt from the inside of his cap.

“Don’t you see?” Crash carried on. “There’s some sort of a gag going on. Someone has a faked vessel in the canal. They plan to do something dirty with it—no doubt to block the rest of your ships off.”

“But where do the Sharks come in?” asked Blodgett.

“They forced them down somewhere. I’m sure of it! And they’re going to use them somehow to—Well, look, Blodgett. Suppose there is nothing aboard that carrier. To do any real damage in this canal, they have to block it at a narrow spot, and this canal isn’t particularly narrow. They could take the carrier in near the high ground at El Gizr, then blow it up there and hope for a landslide of some sort. Or they could get it into a blocking position across the canal—and then blow it up. That would take months to clear away.”

“It would take a lot of explosive, too,” muttered Blodgett.

“Now how about those torpedoes on those Sharks? How many Sharks are there, by the way?”

“Sharks—eighteen! Whew! All with torpedoes, too!”

“You see, they planned this swell. They knew about the Sharks. They will bring up the fake carrier—it’s undoubtedly loaded with explosives—to a certain point and the Sharks’ll blow ‘er sky high with the torps. Then, with what they have left, they could fly back and damage the ‘Hermes.’”

“Right! She’s last in the line coming through from Suez.”

“So—if they manage all that, they not only block out the canal, but they might bottle up the whole of the British Far East flotilla!”

“Have a cigarette,” said the Englishman calmly. “That’s probably their game—but I’ll soon stop all that.”

“Swell. But how?”

“How? Why, I don’t quite know just now. First, we’ll take off from here and land on this carrier thing and take charge. We’ll show those blighters which side their beards—I mean their bread’s buttered on!”

CARRINGER let out a loud laugh and slapped his thigh. “Swell! That’s a grand idea, and I hope you get away with it. Personally, though, I think you’re thoroughly nuts!”

“Nuts? What’s wrong with the idea? They can’t do that sort of thing in the canal, you know. I’ll fly aboard and order them to stop and stand by for searching. Keyhole will search her, you see, while I take command on the bridge.”

Carringer could hardly believe his ears—and yet Blodgett was absolutely serious. The Scot gunner was sucking on the end of a short cigarette butt and contemplating nothing in particular. In his mind’s eye, Crash could just see this crazy Englishman landing on the fake carrier and with calm dignity go to the bridge and order the skipper to heave-to for a search. It was a glorious picture—and the craziest of gambles.

“When Ah was at Jutland—” the McKenzie guy began.

“You were with the Seaforth Highlanders leading a stirrup charge near Wipers during the Battle of Jutland,” broke in Blodgett.

“That wa ma father—Lieutenant-Colonel Fraser McKenzie—who led that char-r-rge. He captured twa’ Jack Johnsons sungle handed an’ went back later fra the extra breech blocks. His Majesty wanted ta gie him the Veektoria Cross, but unfortunately ma father had ta go ta the Caledonian games to toss the caber fra the honor o’ the Clan McKenzie.”

“And he tossed it all the way across the Firth of Forth and sunk a German submarine that was submerged outside Kirkcaldy,” added Lieutenant Blodgett. “All of which’ll be enough of the adventures of the McKenzies, Keyhole. Personally, I’ll wager your old man couldn’t toss a coffee bun from one end of the table to the other.”

“Ye’ll be besmirchin’ the name o’ McKenzie, Muster Blodgett, Surr?”

“Enough! Enough! Keyhole. Let’s get going. Swing this thing around. We’ve got to go to work again.”

The mournful Keyhole swallowed his clan pride and went to the tail of the Walrus. Alone and unaided, he hoisted the tail of the amphibian, dragged it back ten yards or so, then swung it around down the open space. All to the amazement of Carringer. Then without a word he clambered up, made his way along the top of the hull, and somehow managed to squeeze his gigantic belly down inside the Scaarf ring.

“You’re really going to try to get on that carrier?” asked Crash, unbelieving.

“Why not? There’s something about all this, and we have to—”

“Muster Blodgett, Surr! Muster Blodgett, Surr! Queek, Muster Blodgett!”

It was Keyhole peering over the edge of the gun ring. His face was queerly framed in a set of earphones. His face looked like a Scotch boiled pudding that had been rudely disturbed. “Muster Blodgett, Surr!”

“What’s up now, Keyhole? Why don’t you settle down and stop messing about?”

“Ut’s Wor, Muster Blodgett, Surr! WOR declared, Surr! Th’ vessels are all on wor standin’. Far East Fleet is to carry oot Emergency Program Z-109. Ut’s here on the wireless, Surr!”

“War? WAR declared?” gasped the Englishman. He turned and stared at Carringer. “You know anything about this, Carringer?”

“Not a thing. I knew things were getting hot over the Polish situation, but I never figured anything would happen this quick. You’d better make certain. Is that guy really Okay above the ears?”

“Who, Keyhole?” the Englishman asked with a pained grimace. “He’s more okay than the Bank of England! I wouldn’t go to any war without him.”

“Well I guess he’s been in a few, the way he talks. But you’d better make certain of this war business.”

The Englishman climbed up the plane, crawled over the hatch, dropped inside, and scotched on the folding seat before the radio set. He pulled out Keyhole’s ear-phone plug and snapped over a

switch which cut the message back into an overhead loud-speaker. Crash lay on his stomach across the hull and listened through the open hatchway.

There was no question about it now. The jangle of news coming over a commercial band substantiated what the Scot gunner had said. Great Britain had declared a state of war with Germany. They listened attentively for some time, then Blodgett snapped the Marconi set over to a service band and listened to a series of crisp statements and orders. They all referred to vessels and planes of the Far East Flotilla. And it was obvious that if anything was to be done about the canal it would have to be done now.

"It's war," he said. "War at last." "And you can have it," muttered Crash. But there was a strange tingling down inside him as he lay there and looked down on the head and shoulders of the Englishman.

THE ENGLISHMAN peered back. "What are you going to do now?" he asked. "I realize you are in a tough place—neutrality and all that sort of thing. Of course, you can check out of this region now. You can buzz over to Cairo and sit back and read the war news on the front porch of Sheppard's Hotel. Rather nice, Cairo, at this time of the year. Anyhow, a neutral fellow like you shouldn't go barging into other people's wars now. I think our friends the enemy would raise a kick about it."

"If they caught me—yes."

As though he had not heard Crash, the Briton went on: "So if you don't mind, Keyhole and I will now shove off. A spot of bother to attend to, Carringer."

"You're going to that phony carrier?"

"Of course! We'll take over. Order the blighter about and clear the canal. It ought to be sport—while it lasts."

"And, I am to shove off?"

"You can't stay here, can you?"

"I could go along with you," persisted the Yank. "After all, I told you what was up. Say, now, couldn't you swear me in some way? For the—well for the duration of the time the Far East Flotilla is in the canal? You're a commissioned officer of His Majesty's forces and should be able to do something about this."

"Ah, but you see I know you're an American and I can't do that."

"How the devil do you really know I am?" argued Carringer. "You don't know any such thing. I haven't shown you my papers."

The Englishman looked a bit un-comfortable. Then he peered back at the Scot. "What about this bloke, Keyhole?"

"Hae ye got two shillings?" the Scot asked.

"What for?"

"Ye could enlist him wieoot benefit o' records. Then ye could gie him a shillin'—thot's the King's shillin', ye ken—and he'd be in 'fra the doora-tion!"

"Yes, that might work," agreed the Englishman, fumbling in his pocket and jangling some coins. "But look here, Keyhole—what's the other shilling for?"

"Aye! Thot's fra me tae witness the tronsaction. Tae make ut all clear and legal, Surr."

The Englishman blinked at the unusual explanation, and managed to swallow an accusation of usury. "What about it?" he said to Carringer as he tossed the two British coins up and down in his hand.

"What's this all about?" asked Crash.

"It's like this: When you enlist in the British Army or Navy you get a new silver shilling from the Recruiting Officer. That's symbolic—the King's Shilling they call it. It binds the transaction."

"Gimme one of those shillings," spoke up Crash, reaching down. "I'll bet that's all I will get out of it, too."

The Englishman placed one shilling on his thumb-nail and flipped it up toward Crash, who caught it with a quick snatch. Then the Briton spun the other one off toward the Scot, who calmly raised his bluejacket cap and caught it dexterously.

"Noo when Ah enleested in the Scottish Borderers in neenty-five, we weer gi'en a red rose on Minden Day—because we broke through the enemy cavalry an'—"

"Shut up! Take post for action," snapped Blodgett. "Now you, Carringer. What's your job going to be?"

"I'm going to cover the landing of the Pilgrims," laughed Crash. "I'll take my Hellion and stick over you until you get down safe, then

I'll stand by until I get your okay that everything's under control. Eight?"

"Eight! And your plane is on the other side of the dune, you say?"

Crash answered in the affirmative, then slipped down off the hatch as Blodgett started the Bristol "Pegasus" engine. Keyhole leaned back in the Scaarf ring and studied the blustery revs of the engine with dour interest. Then he turned, fumbled with his Lewis gun, and finally threw a cocky salute at Crash, who was standing clear of the sand blast.

"I'll be seeing you," waved Crash in return. He backed his way up the dune as the Walrus began to crunch the sand with her wheels. The Englishman waved, then leaned forward and drew on an expression as though he was trying to lift the Walrus off the sand single-handed.

At last she began to move. Crash watched her rumble like some enraged monster that had lost its way in an unknown continent, and finally, she thumped her gear up a friendly slope and thundered off it with a solid cushion of air under her wings. The Englishman kept her nose straight for a bit of altitude then roared back over the Hellion.

Crash waved again, climbed in, checked his controls, and snapped the starter. The big Allison answered quickly, bellowed through her steel nostrils. The Hellion struggled against her brakes and only relaxed when Crash eased her down. He spun her around by holding one brake pedal lightly, then poised her for a take-off.

As he fingered the stick, he suddenly realized that he still had something in one hand. He held the stick between his knees, opened his palm, and under the dull gleam of the instrument board light saw the single shilling Blodgett had given him. He stared at it a minute, smiled and flipped it, muttering "Heads I win!"

It came down heads!

He let out a wholesome roar of laughter that must have startled the Gods in Valhalla. "Let's go, baby!" he beamed. "I want to see this goofy act of a lone Englishman with a crazy Scotchman boarding and taking over a phony aircraft carrier. This show should be a beaut—and they might get away with it!"

THE HELLION taxied away into the semi-darkness, raced up a low slope of sand, and literally hurled herself into the air. Crash held her steady to make sure she had caught well, then swirled around and sought the Walrus. He overtook the amphibian heading out for the canal at the point where the thirteen-mile stretch connected the upper end of Bitter Lakes and the Tussum end of Lake Timsah. The American realized that the main body of the British Far East Flotilla would be in the Bitter Lakes and might soon enter this dangerous stretch. If the fake carrier were sunk or exploded at the upper end of this portion of the canal and another vessel was so damaged as to block the southern end, the whole of the Flotilla would be blocked in there for months.

"Maybe you can do it, baby," he said, glancing down at the thundering Walrus. "But it will take a lot of nerve and brains. Maybe between the two of you, you have enough. I wouldn't know—but we'll soon find out!"

The Walrus headed on toward the sluggish gash and Crash, in the faster machine, had to do a series of S-turns to stay back with it. They moved on in this strange formation, with the American, now a semi-official and sentimental member of the British Fleet Air Arm, curling back and forth and keeping a sharp eye out for possible enemy aircraft.

They finally approached the lower end of the thirteen-mile cut, and now they could see the glinting features of the Flotilla out in the main bulge of the Bitter Lakes. The vessels were in perfect line-astern formation, with the giant carrier Hermes bringing up in the rear.

Crash cocked his eye at this and realized the full possibilities of a general trap. He surged back to watch the Walrus turn and follow the canal north toward Tussum. Then he raced on ahead of it to search for the fake aircraft carrier—and any other possible evidence of treachery.

He zig-zagged back and forth over the wide gash, eyeing the low banks from side to side. There was nothing but rolling sand, sparse vegetation, and occasional craggy elevations.

Then, as he approached the broken ridges that led toward the high ground at El Gisir, he suddenly caught the tell-tale movement of something gigantic. It was undoubtedly a large vessel of

some sort. It was moving slowly into the deepest section of the El Gisir gorge. He watched it for some time, circling high until the Walrus came up. Then he went down toward the vessel and studied its outline.

“It is a carrier all right,” he observed. “And it certainly looks like the British Furious. It has no island superstructure, it has the funnels trunked over the side, and it has the same general hull design. Boy, this is something!”

He eased back and let the Walrus pass him again. Then he suddenly remembered his small book containing naval vessel silhouettes. He took it out of a small cockpit locker and flipped the pages until he came to a special section on the world’s aircraft carriers. He found the details of the Furious—and they did check very closely with the strange vessel in the canal below. Then he ran his eye over the carriers of the other nations—and finally came to the Japanese list.

At the Amagi he stopped, stunned by the startling resemblance to the Furious! He glanced over the printed details, then drew in his breath. He read:

The Amagi was laid down at the Yokosuka Dockyard and launched late in 1922, but it was so badly damaged by earthquake and fire in September 1923 that her construction was believed abandoned, and the Kaga’s hull was assigned to replace her. No details of the actual scrapping of the Amagi are to be found in any Japanese naval records, however.

“So! This may be the missing Amagi! They may or may not have faked that damage business. But they could have moved the remaining hull off the Yokosuka stocks and refitted her somewhere—or sold the hull to someone else, who then refitted her. For a job just like this!”

Crash wanted to inform Blodgett, but sensed that there was very little he could do now, even by radio. In any event, the Englishman was determined to board her, as mad as the idea sounded.

He watched the Walrus work her way into a position for a deck landing. How the Briton expected to get on—and stay on—was more than Crash could figure, since the carrier was not moving at more than four or five knots and wasn’t heading into the wind. An aircraft carrier taking planes aboard usually steamed into the breeze at

about thirty knots. The Walrus, he figured, would surely go tail over tincup over the bow under these circumstances.

But at this point it was too late to do anything about it. Crash hoped they could both swim. The carrier was heeling into the shore now, her stern apparently being maneuvered toward the wall of the canal. It left very little room for the Englishman to get on. The swine were, to all accounts, trying to swing the carrier across the canal.

Crash S-turned back and forth again and watched the Walrus screwing down to get aboard. The Englishman practically flattened her against the wall of rock at the side of the canal, then let her sideslip wildly and drop like a winged grouse toward the stern of the unknown carrier. Finally, when it seemed the amphib would surely slither deep into the canal itself, Blodgett gunned her, hoiked and forced her nose up toward the stern lip of the carrier deck.

Carringer would have given ten bucks to have seen the expression on Keyhole McKenzie’s mug at that moment.

The Walrus fluttered into a stall as she came up and over the deck level. Then, as the Hellion followed down closely, the amphib lunged wildly at the deck. Her wheels hit and she bounced. Then she lunged back at the deck again, sending a dozen dim figures scattering in all directions. Finally, she dropped again, her tail wrenching back and forth as the Englishman fishtailed her to halt her forward speed, and then—

Crash let out a yell! He sucked in his breath and watched, a low dull cry finally completing his drenching of fear.

The carrier’s forward lift suddenly dropped—leaving a wide black squarish gash in the deck! The Englishman tried to clear the trap which had been laid for him; for the Walrus ran wide toward the deck safety netting. But there was not enough room. The Walrus’ starboard wheel dropped in the square blackness, the wing followed, and the whole plane then tumbled in with a loud clatter!

For a moment Crash fought a crazy desire to let out a roar of laughter. Under other conditions, this might have been exceedingly funny.

But considering the present circumstances this was a tragedy. “The swines!” he snarled. “They dropped that lift and gobbled him up like the

whale swallowed Jonah! Heaven help those two fellows!”

He curled dangerously close to the carrier, and it was all he could do to resist the grim desire to pour a long burst at the group of figures on the deck. But as he came around, with his wing-tip almost scraping a short stub deck-light standard, he saw a figure come crawling up out of the nothingness of the lift shaft—and that figure poured a wicked cascade of fire at the group of figures that were huddling near a long gangway which had been slung out to allow the crew to get from the deck to the shore, prior to blowing up the carrier.

The man with the Lewis gun was Keyhole McKenzie!

CRASH let out a bellow of delight as the portly Scot waddled across the deck and stopped the men from getting ashore. Then young Lieutenant Blodgett, a Webley Scott pistol in his hand, also climbed out and strode on rubbery legs toward the group.

“They did it!” boomed Crash. “They did it! But what they’ll do now, I have no idea.”

There was no time for ideas, anyway—for there was a sudden concerted roar from somewhere and a wide-winged biplane, with a scarlet nosed torpedo between her undercarriage legs, abruptly came out of nowhere and hammered toward the carrier below.

“They’ve got a war-head on that torp,” Crash yelled. “She’s—”

But Crash knew there was no use shouting. He whanged the Hellion over and set her nose dead on the diving Shark. He pulled his gun releases once, then quickly yanked the Hellion away in frantic anticipation.

He was none too soon with, his yank. For his fire was accurate.

WHORRONG-F-F! BR-R-ROOM!

The very foundations of the heavens rocked in that titanic, blinding explosion. For heavy caliber stuff from Carringer’s guns had pierced the scarlet tipped war-ahead of the torpedo and blasted her in mid-air! The Hellion went over on her back against the thud of rushing air. Chunks of Shark slammed all over the sky. Wings, wheels, hatch-covering, and engine metal slammed in all directions. A feathery counterpane of fiery

gasoline slithered out of it all, and Carringer fought to get clear as he came out of a slow stall.

“There’s more Sharks, too—somewhere,” he growled. “There’s one right above.”

The Hellion then sped all over the sky to get a line on the rest of the captured Blackburn Sharks which must be at hand. Crash knew now that they had been picked up, run somewhere out of the way, and refitted for actual torpedo attack. Then he remembered the words “Quarry of the Hyenas,” or something like that. He promised himself he would check that sometime.

But now the Shark he had spotted above came at the Hellion, spluttering and growling. Crash kicked his rudder, whipped over fast, and spat a direct burst full into the cockpit. The Shark seemed to stagger a moment, and he knew he had winged the pilot. A rear gunner tried to get a weapon on him, but Crash flipped his nose around again, pressed another trigger and sent a salvo of .30 caliber stuff that battered the gunner away from his breech handles. The Shark nosed down, wriggled wildly as the pilot, making a final dying effort to save her, wrenched her over. Crash let them have another long burst and she fluttered away, slowly slithered across a protruding hillock, disappeared for a minute—then marked her final resting place with a thunderous roar that indicated another red-head had exploded.

DOWN BELOW ON THE DECK of the carrier, Lieutenant Blodgett and his one-man offensive bearing the Lewis gun stalked up to the Carrier crew and covered them. Blodgett’s nose was bleeding, sending two red streaks down his face that gave him a musical-comedy Manchu bandit appearance. Lieutenant Blodgett was undoubtedly angry. “Who ordered that lift lowered?” he demanded.

There was no answer.

“I asked,” Blodgett bellowed, “who ordered that lift lowered?”

“They need a little persuasion, Muster Blodgett, Surr,” suggested the Scot. “A few slugs i’ the right spot, Surr.”

Blodgett ignored Keyhole, stalked up to the largest gent he could find, calmly switched his gun to his left hand, and like lightning belted the man across the jaw. The man went back on his knees, spinning like a shapeless top.

“Now what’s all this business about?” Blodgett bawled. “What’s that gangway for? What do you blokes think you’re doing here?”

Keyhole now dropped to one knee and sent three short bursts at the head of the gangway. The shots drove a number of the men, who had figured on escaping, back to the deck.

“Leaving the ship, eh?” Blodgett roared. “Probably set a short time fuse on the ship’s magazine, eh? A hellish game you’re playing!”

He watched Keyhole round the men up. Those in front of him were a non-descript lot dressed in greasy dungarees and with stokers’ sweat swipes around their necks. One or two had Navy jackets on, but they carried no recognized insignia of rank. There were no brass buttons.

“Well, you’re all staying here to see what it’s like to be on a vessel that blows up,” barked Blodgett, holding his Webley Scott steady. “Of course, you won’t like that idea. But you started all this—and now we’re going to stay and see the finish. Lovely, eh?”

The men before him began to whimper and shift about with frightened jerks. Some spoke in German, some in a Lascar patois, and some in broken English.

“So you have ‘fixed’ her to blow, eh? Well, I hope you’ve done it right. It will probably be quite a blow.”

“But, Sah,” a big greasy engineer guy came forward, “we can stop it. There is a time fuse set from the midships companionway.”

“Oh, never mind. I’m rather interested in seeing what this is all about,” Blodgett replied calmly.

The big greasy guy stuck out his arm on which was strapped a large wrist watch: “But we still have three minutes, Sah,” he pleaded.

“You can fix it?” demanded Blodgett after some consideration.

“Sure! Yes, I can fix it—a switch in the companionway, Sah.”

“Go ahead. Then come back when you’ve turned it off. If your idea fails, we’ll see what happens when a magazine blows up.” Blodgett then yelled: “Keyhole! Go with this blighter to the midships companionway. He’s going to turn off the juice. See that he does. And don’t another one of you move.”

The cowed crew huddled together and made plaintive pleas to the greasy engineer to surely throw off the switch and to make no mistakes. Then they continued to stare bewildered at Blodgett and his black revolver. They also stared up at intervals and watched the Hale Hellion skating about the sky driving Blackburn Sharks away from the carrier.

All in all, it was quite a mad situation—but Mister Blodgett and Keyhole McKenzie had it well in hand.

IN THE MEANTIME, Crash Carringer sensed by what he saw below that Blodgett and Keyhole McKenzie had the carrier crew put to rights. They might even take over sufficiently to have the vessel anchored safely so that the Far East Flotilla could get through with plenty of room to spare.

But what about the Flotilla—especially, the Hermes. The ships were now entering the thirteen-mile length of canal between the two lakes. Yet where were the rest of the Sharks?

Carringer turned and hammered back toward the south, yanking out his mike meanwhile and snapping on the radio set switch. He set the band for the Royal Navy wave length and started bawling for the Flotilla Commander. He got a response in a few seconds.

Crash reported: “Carringer, American pilot flying Hale Hellion, reporting to Senior Officer, British Far East Flotilla. Have important information.”

He got a crisp British Navy reply and a request for the message.

In hurried sentences, Crash warned them about the captured Sharks that had been refitted with war-head torpedoes. Then he explained the movements of Lieutenant Blodgett and his Walrus and gave details concerning the carrier he believed to be the Amagi.

He received a hurried repeat message and thanks. Then almost at once, searchlights began to fan back and forth across the skies from the bridge decks of the destroyers and the Hermes. A number of 3-inch guns began to bang away, and Crash went farther upstairs to go to work on any more captured Sharks he could find.

A blazing sword-blade of light picked out two Sharks moving south. Two splashes of anti-aircraft blapped out in front of them—and they

parted. One flew across Carringer's sights. He quickly flicked his triggers and the ill-fated Shark staggered off, dragging a fractured wing behind it. The other tried to reverse the field, but twisted in the wrong direction. It ran smack into a British 3-inch shell and exploded in mid-air.

Crash flew over the welter of wreckage, smoke, and flame, and cut back into the darkness again. He waited until the searchlights nailed another raider plane, and while the pilot twisted and turned to get out of the blinding gleam, he sneaked the Hellion in and cruelly forked her with .50 caliber stuff from below and behind—until she blossomed into a twisted, flaming cross.

HOW LONG this all went on, Crash had no idea. He bashed the Hellion in and out, driving more renegade Sharks into the searchlights and battering them to smithereens. He swished back and forth like a winged demon until there was no evidence that there were any more raiders left. Two had actually got through the searchlight barrage and made for the deck of the Hermes, but Crash, flying like one possessed, cut them off and made them jerk into hoiked turns with such violence that they ripped their wings off and splattered themselves across the sands of the canal bank.

One gave a grand exhibition of gameness by braving the 8-gun mountings aboard the destroyers and trying to get at the carrier. But Crash shot across his front and caused the pilot to zoom to avoid a crash. That gesture was just enough to carry the lone Shark clear of the Hermes. She bashed herself with a roar into the canal bank, leaving a crater large enough to bury a coastal motor boat.

That was all.

Crash was weary now. "Hello, Hermes," he called on his radio. "May I come in . . . Carringer speaking."

"Come in, Carringer, if you can make it. There's a spat of brandy awaiting you," a British voice answered.

Crash somehow got the speedy Hellion onto the narrow deck by calling on flaps, brakes, and a lot of nerve. A gang of bluejackets literally tackled her as she rolled toward the forward lip of the deck and threatened to roll off.

"Thanks! Nice tackling, boys," grinned Crash. "How's the war going on?"

"Well, the action's started, anyhow," a young pink cheeked officer beamed. "The Skipper's compliments, Sir. And will you join him in the Chart Room?"

Crash accepted, grinning like a gargoyle.

The scene in the Chart Room would have made four stars for any movie. But it was nothing compared to that which met the Far East Flotilla when they steamed past the captured pirate carrier just outside El Gisir.

Lieutenant Blodgett, complete with Webley-Scott and a broken nose, stood to attention on the deck of the carrier, now anchored along the canal wall, and took the salute of the Flotilla Commander. Along the net rail of the deck, the captured pirate crew stood dejected, while Keyhole McKenzie, still carrying his Lewis gun like a set of bagpipes, bellowed: "Wull ye find oot hoo the Black Watch are makin' oot at Wipers. They's a powerful lot o' McKenzies in the Black Watch, Surr!"

"Yeah," said Lieutenant Blodgett out of one corner of his mouth, "and I'll bet they're all tied up to gun carriage wheels doing field punishment."

The Flotilla Commander returned the salute while Carringer stood beside him.

"If you can send a small party ashore, Sir," Carringer suggested, "I am sure you will find one of those Vultees and get some idea how that paralysis ray business works."

"Yes. And I shall have to send a crew aboard that carrier and bring her through to Port Said. We'll know then what it is all about. But first we must take off Blodgett and McKenzie and bring them aboard here. They should have quite a report to make."

"I'll bet that McKenzie guy will," grinned Crash.

"Yes, and Lord help us," gasped the Flotilla Commander, "for this time we will have to listen to every word of it." And he hurried off to give his orders.