

The Frying Suit

By Joe Archibald
A Phineas Pinkham Tale

Phineas Pinkham had given Major Rufus Garrity two cigars in a week—and they'd both been good—something was very wrong at the drome of the Ninth Pursuit.

LIEUTENANT Phineas “Carbuncle” Pinkham had been acting very strangely for days. To the pilots of the Ninth Pursuit the Boonetown wizard of the ozone had seemed nearer to normal than at any time since misfortune had ordained that they meet up with him. Major Rufus Garrity, however, was alarmed. Phineas had given him two cigars in a week, and both of them had been good. Bump Gillis, the jokester’s hutmate, was more than alarmed. He was scared out of his wits, so he went in to see the Old Man.

“I want either to move out of the hut,” he declared, “or git a transfer to Turkey—any place! That bum is actin’ almost sane, an’ that means he must be goin’ crazy.”

“Don’t bother me, Gillis,” growled the Old Man testily. “I am trying to figure it out myself. He’s out there with Howell and Wilson now, and maybe the Boche will settle him for us.”

Lieutenant Pinkham was indeed out over the lines, but not with Howell and Wilson. He had left them flat when the opportunity had presented itself. Three was a crowd, anyway, so Phineas piqued toward Bar-le-Duc and ran into a Hanover two-seater.

“Is this my lucky day?” the Yankee grinned. “The Kraut in the back seat looks as big as a garage. I wonder if my prayer is answered at last.”

Rat-a-tat-tat-tat-tat! The flying Yank hit the Hanover broadside and the pilot, after fighting for several seconds to hold the ship in one piece, gestured wildly and let Phineas know he was through with the war.

The Hanover did not land with the grace of a falling ostrich feather. It hit the ground as if it had a long grievance against it. Phineas saw the observer pop loose from his moorings and arch over into a clump of bushes.

Garrity’s stormy petrel picked himself a place on which to set down his Spad, and then ran over to the wreck. He pulled the pilot into the clear and set him up against a big stump. The Boche was mumbling and making passes at the air with both hands. Out of the bushes burst the Boche observer, and Phineas’ eyes widened. He was the biggest German Phineas had seen since he had arrived in France to fight for the Allied cause.

“Just what I been lookin’ for,” yipped the intrepid Yank.

“*Ach, Himmel!*” growled the big man. It was evident that he did not know a word of English. Phineas’ shining orbs feasted themselves on the man’s leather flying gear.

“It’ll fit me like a tent,” mumbled Phineas to himself, “but it’s what the doctor ordered.”

Some Yanks came running. Phineas ordered them to take the Kraut pilot away. He would take care of the observer himself. The last the Yanks saw of Phineas was when he was ushering the big German observer toward a Frog barn which squatted in the shade of some trees a quarter of a mile away. If they had tarried long enough, they would have seen the Boche come out of the barn, fifteen minutes later, clad in nothing but queer-looking woolen underwear and a pair of boots.

“Go ahead an’ yelp,” Phineas said as he herded the kraut toward Bar-le-Duc. “*Nein sprecken Doitch*, anyways. You have no more use for the suit, so why holler?”

Phineas got a ride to the drome with an obliging truck driver. He unloaded the big Kraut in front of the big stone house and yelled for everybody to come and see. Major Garrity lost no time getting out of the house. The big German immediately singled him out from the others and

tried in vain to tell the CO. how Phineas had stripped him of his dignity.

“Talk English!” roared the Old Man. “How in hell—”

“Haw-w-w-w-w!” guffawed Phineas. “That’s what I say. Look at the way them Boche wear pajamas. Is it a panic? I—”

The Old Man looked at the Boonetown flyer.

“You think I believe that this squarehead was dressed up like that, you fathead? What did you do to him? Where are his clothes?”

“Ask him,” grinned Phineas complacently. “If you think I’d steal a guy’s clothes, well—”

“Anybody around here understand German?” Garrity howled.

“*Donner und Blitzen!*” snorted the prisoner.

“I read Hansel and Gretel once,” explained Phineas, “but I forget—”

The Old Man clawed at his hair, swore and stalked back into the house.

“C’mon,” the captor said to the still raving Kraut. “We’ll fatten you up an’ ship you out to a pen.”

THAT night Phineas walked in on the Old Man. The miracle worker from Iowa had a strange expression on his face. He saluted, then stood for almost five minutes, shifting from one foot to the other. The Old Man did not say a thing for almost ten minutes. He was stunned. Phineas Pinkham had actually saluted, and what was more, had seemed to enjoy it. And what was the reason? “What do you want?” Garrity finally thundered. “Ah—er—oh, yeah,” stuttered the lieutenant. “I thought I’d come in, as I’ve got somethin’ on my mind. I’ve been thinkin’—”

“Don’t let that bother you,” interrupted the major with fine sarcasm. “It might be only a little fever or—”

Phineas snapped out of his trance and waxed indignant. “This is a very vital idea I’ve got,” he declared. “It’s for the good of the Allies. I been thinkin’ how swell it would be if maybe we could all fly thirty thousand feet when we go over the lines, as then the Boche couldn’t spot us and we could do plenty by surprisin’ ‘em that way. Why, we could even fly to Berlin at that altitude and—”

“Well, Pinkham, it’s been good to have had you with us as long as this, anyway,” interposed the C.O. “Just sit down and I’ll call up the nearest

bughouse.” He picked up the phone, held it for a second, then slammed it down where it belonged. “Even if we could get our planes that high, where would we get Eskimos to fly ‘em, huh?” he lashed out. “By the time we taught them to fly, the war would be over. And where would we get seals and walrus meat to feed the Eskimos? Pinkham, get out of here.”

“Is that so?” blazed the inventor of strange things. “Awright. They laughed at Columbus once, too. Us pioneers—”

The Old Man buried his head in his hands and groaned.

“Awright, if you won’t listen,” growled Phineas.

“But wait until you see what I’m goin’ to invent. I’ll show you. A Pinkham always has stepped into a war an’ turned the tide.”

“Go on,” sneered Garrity. “You’ve never been funnier. Ha-a-a!”

Lieutenant Phineas Pinkham sniffed and made for the door. When he got outside, he heard the roar of a prop. A dark shadow flitted across the yard in front of the French farmhouse. A two-seater was landing. It circled the field twice, then munched down. The pilot stepped out, introduced himself and said that he needed gas. He had to get his passenger to Chaumont within the hour. Phineas sauntered casually across the field to look the visitors over. The man in the rear pit made no move to get out. He sat there, smoking a cigarette, while Sergeant Casey yelled to the greaseballs to wheel up some petrol.

“This is the Ninth Pursuit, isn’t it?” the pilot asked. “Garrity’s squadron?”

“Yeah,” was the response.

“Pinkham around?” the man in the back pit suddenly asked. “I’d like to meet him.”

“Well, here I am,” said Phineas. “In the flesh. Maybe ya want my autograph or—er—what’s your—”

“Colonel Smith. One of the Chicago Smiths,” was the reply.

Behind Phineas sounded some snickers. He turned and saw several pilots grouped nearby. Something told him that he was being kidded. He looked at the man in the pit. Smith’s collar was pulled up around his ears. All Phineas could see was a big nose and a pair of goggles.

“Want to congratulate you on getting the Rittmeister last week,” said the man and reached down a big, gloved hand.

“That was duck soup,” beamed Phineas. “I—” He took the hand.

Squish! Yellow goo seeped through the Pinkham fingers. Phineas held up his hand and contemplated it with bulging eyes. A piece of egg shell fell away from it. The man in the pit took a handkerchief from his pocket and nonchalantly wiped the palm of his glove. Howls of glee shook the night air.

“I’ve been waiting for this, Pinkham,” a voice ripped out, “for six months. One time you handed me a cigar in Nancy. An—”

“Ya big fathead!” yipped the victim. “Git down an’ I’ll knock ya—”

“That’s enough, lieutenant,” retorted the man. “You’re talking to a superior officer. One more word and I’ll have you—” His words failed and he shook in the pit with laughter.

“As ye sow,” yelled Bump Gillis, “so shall ye reap. Ha! I been waitin’ for a worm to turn and—”

Phineas swore and tramped away to his hut, shaking more of the remains of a perfectly good egg from his fingers. In the hut he waited until the ship took off. As it soared up into the dusk, he stalked across the field and yelled at Sergeant Casey.

“Who was that bum?” he demanded.

“Colonel Smith,” grinned the master mechanic. “Just Smith. All you have to do, lieutenant, is look in a phone book an’—”

“You’re smart, huh, Casey?” yipped the man on whom the tables had been turned. “Look out or you’ll git busted.”

Gnashing his teeth, Phineas sought the solitude of his hut once more. There he brooded for almost an hour. That brass hat! All he knew about the fellow was that he had a big nose. Well, it was a long lane that had no road crossing it, mused the Boonetown flyer. And then his thoughts turned to the Boche flying suit which he had cached out near Bar-le-Duc, and he was comforted. The flyer went to his trunk and fished out a lot of wire which he had been gathering for weeks. The insulation on some of it needed fixing. Other pieces of the wire had to be twisted into little coils with a pair of pliers. Phineas toiled away industriously until he heard the crunching of boots

on the ground outside. When Bump entered the hut, Phineas was cramming his mysterious belongings into his trunk. He hurriedly slammed down the lid and snapped the lock.

“What ya doin’, Edison?” greeted Bump. “Or are you Mr. Macaroni in disguise?”

“Two more words are all you need to get a fight,” snapped Phineas.

“Ho hum!” yawned Bump with unconcern, and made ready for bed.

AT that very moment the Old Man was getting news over the wires from the Wing. News that was all bad as usual. The Spads of the Ninth Pursuit had been in poor shape for days. Three of the sky chariots had folded up and refused to perk even enough to get the wheels off the ground. An S.O.S. had gone in from Major Rufus Garrity and he had been promised new ships as soon as they could be shipped to the sector. They had been due on the morrow, but something had happened.

“Blown up!” repeated the voice over the wires. “Are you getting deaf, Garrity? They were in cases on flat-cars. The train was going over a bridge, and then—kerflooy! The Boche found out. Fixed that bridge. The *Herr Kapitan*, Garrity. That’s my guess. Only that Kraut could’ve pulled a job like that. We found a couple of wings. You might tie them onto your pilots and—”

“Is this a time to tell jokes?” bellowed the major. “Huh! Well, this outfit is keeping its feet on the ground until we get something to fly in. What’s the matter with the Intelligence Corps? *Herr Kapitan*, huh! He’s all we need around here to make us bust out laughing. You heard me. I want some ships.”

“I’ll make some tonight,” was the caustic reply. It was followed by the metallic click.

“Hello, hello!” barked Garrity. “Oh, go to hell!”

At dawn, while Howell, Pinkham and the rest of A Flight were getting ready to take over the first patrol. Major Rufus Garrity barged out of Wings and stood looking at them.

“We get no new Spads,” he announced. “Ha! Ha! The *Herr Kapitan*, the big brain of the Boche snoopers, blew them up. You’ll have to wire up those you have so they’ll hold together. Pinkham, you were going to invent something. Why don’t you make a pitfall out in the country and bait it

with *wiener-schnitzel*? You might catch *Herr Kapitan*. You've tried dizzier stunts and gotten away with it." He turned about and left the room. "He's a swell C.O.," commented Phineas with a grin. "He's always cheerin' a guy up. My heart warms right up when—"

"Come on," growled Howell. "Let's get it over with."

The Pfalz ships which once had followed the tail feathers of von Schweinknochel were not to be seen in the skies that morning. But when Garrity's buzzards reached a certain sky shelf, they found it clogged with Fokkers led by Heinz, the Mad Butcher from Hamburg. Phineas got set to make a run for it, but Howell's ship did not waver from its course.

"Gripes!" groaned the hero from Boonetown. "An' they call me nuts!" Just then three Fokkers piled on him and it looked as if the Pinkham menace was to be washed up. But the marvel from the Hawkeye State paid no attention to his guns. In fact, if it had been possible, he would have torn them loose and tossed them overside to make the going lighter. In a wide climbing turn he shot across the sky and ate up a mile in jig time. The three Boche tripes swept after him, guns stuttering. In a mad circle went the hare and the three hounds. On the third lap around the celestial bowl, Phineas took time out to look around. Howell and his Spads were fighting their way back to the protection of anti-aircraft guns on the Allied side. White pompoms were blooming around the Fokkers. One cracked close to Phineas' port side and the Spad kicked and bucked. The Yank saw a loop-hole and skidded through. He slipped into the clear with the aid of a burst of shrapnel which shredded the tail of a Fokker.

When Phineas landed, Flight Leader Howell was walking around his Spad, trying to spot a place where Boche lead had failed to puncture. "Some fight, huh?" exclaimed Phineas. "You were a lot of help," snapped Howell. "Started running quick, didn't you? Gettin' cold feet, Pinkham, you homely—"

"Is that so?" cracked Phineas. "Them's fightin' words, but I'll let it pass. I'm too valuable to the Allies at the instant to risk life and limb in a hopeless fight. I have got somethin' I'm doin' for posterity an'—"

A mechanic looked at one of his fellows. "Another dame he's got, huh? But what a hell of a name for even a Frog!"

"Yeah, he must've ditched the one he calls Babette," mumbled a greaseball.

Howell saw the Old Man coming and set his jaws.

"If you need screens for the windows an' doors," he said to Garrity, "take the wings off these crates."

"Don't get fresh," growled Garrity. "I wasn't expectin' good news. If you ever come back the winner, I'll drop dead. Where's Lieutenant Grubb?"

"I saw him heading for the Yankee trenches,"

Phineas informed him. "I think he was goin' down to speak to somebody he knew. Haw-w-w-w-w!"

"I said don't get fresh!" yipped Garrity. "I'll bust you, you freckled gaboon."

Phineas Pinkham, scion of the Iowa Pinkhams, grinned and hurried to his hut. He got out of his flying gear and then opened up his trunk. Fifteen minutes later he was chug-chugging out of the drome on a motorcycle. The side car was filled with certain articles necessary for a job he had at hand near Bar-le-Duc.

For three days at odd times Phineas labored in the Frog barn where he had relieved the Boche observer of the Hanover two-seater of his flying suit. Phineas worked feverishly with heavy needle and thread. He inserted wire in the lining of the heavy leather war regalia and packed strips of asbestos around it. It was a tedious, laborious task. One afternoon, when he was shoving a coiled wire into the sleeve lining with great difficulty, a shadow fell across the floor of the barn. Phineas dropped his pliers and looked up. A Frog farmer stood peering at him. He looked older than Rip Van Winkle and had a dirty white beard three times as long.

"*Bon jour*," squeaked the peasant. "*Voila, mais c'est ze strange zing M'sieu do, oui?*"

"Haw-w-w-w-w!" laughed Phineas. "Eet ees, *oui*, monsewer. For *la belle* France maybe I do eet, comprenny?"

"*Vive la France!*" enthused the Frog.

"It's a flyin' suit," explained the Yank. "With this you can go up maybe fifty thousand feet and

still feel like you was sittin' under a date tree, *nest pa*?"

"Ah, *sacre bleu*," exclaimed the Frog. "*M'sieu* he mus' be ze great Peenkham, *oui*?"

"Phineas to *vous*, papa," grinned the flyer. "Well, *allez*, as I don't want to be disturbed. Keep this ze secret, papa, *oui*?"

"*Oui*," chuckled the Frog as he went out. "*Vive la France!*"

"An' a cup of coffee," added Phineas as he returned to his work.

THAT night Lieutenant Pinkham, inventor of parts, went back to the drome and carried his finished product into his hut. The pilots of the Ninth were at mess. Phineas had anticipated this and had bided his time. He stripped down to his skivvies and then struggled into the heavy leather flying suit. At first he got tangled up in all the wires that hung from it, but soon he got them straightened out. When everything seemed as it should be, Phineas walked out of the hut toward the big stone house. Two groundmen saw the bulky figure moving through the gloom.

"What in—"

"If I was full of coneyac now," said the other, "I'd say it was Tarzan of the Apes. But I'll bet it's Pinkham. I seen him come in. You'll hear the Old Man in a fit in no time."

The door of the house opened slowly.

"Hello, bums!" said Phineas.

Chairs scraped on the floor. All eyes fixed themselves on the arrival. They widened, then bulged, strained at their sockets.

"What is it?" gasped Bump. "Ya look like a cross between a deep sea diver and an Eskimo. What in the name of all the—"

"I know," said Howell. "It's a one-man signal corps. Or have you come to fix the telephone? If you take a deep breath, you'll go out of sight in that get-up. What're all the wires? Are you a floor lamp waitin' to get plugged in, or what?"

A door opened. Major Rufus Garrity peered out.

"Pinkham!" he cracked. "What're you supposed to be? Wait a minute. I got a guess, too. You're a—"

"Awright, awright," interrupted Phineas. "Make fun. Ya laugh when I sit down at the planner, huh? But wait until I start to play. Haw-

w-w-w-w! I am the first heated flyer. I'm ready to demonstrate to you wise guys. Follow me, as I'm going to plug these connections into the power plant that's on that truck outside. C'mon an' be convinced."

"Where d'you want your ashes sent, Mr. Pinkham?" inquired Garrity compassionately.

"C'mon, I'll show you." And Phineas, wires scraping along the floor, turned as gracefully as a truck and stepped out through the doorway. Pilots followed him. The Old Man brought up the rear, head shaking from side to side.

"With this I can fly to fifty thousand feet," pronounced Phineas, "It's warm as toast. C'mon an' I'll let you attach these two wires I got trailin' me, Bump, to the power plant."

"Not much!" refused Bump. "Even though it'd be fun, I wouldn't want to have your electrocution on my conscience."

"I'll do it myself," declared Phineas. "Help me up onto the truck." Willing pilots lifted him up to a spot where it would be convenient for Phineas to be hooked up. Just as the experiment was about to begin, a car rolled onto the drome.

"Duck!" yipped Garrity. "Throw canvas over Pinkham. We'll get into a sling if—"

"Let 'em watch," interrupted Phineas. "I want to demonstrate. If it's a success, I'll get a patent out an' the U. S. Government can—" It was too late to get away. Two brass hats came stalking up.

"Major!" one barked. "What's this? Power plant broken down?"

"Worse than that, sir," replied the Old Man meekly. "Phineas Pinkham has invented a heated flying suit. He insists on a demonstration."

"Wha-a-a-at?"

"Greetin's," grinned Phineas. "You're just in time. Now watch." He connected the wires and then began to explain his invention. "I got two switches here. One goes on first an' if that's hot enough, okay. If it ain't, I switch on a double current."

"Garrity, what nonsense is this? He's liable to kill himself!"

"So what?" somebody interjected.

"Who spoke?" cracked the major. "Who said that?"

"Haw-w-w-w-w!" exulted Phineas. "It's gittin' warm. Oh, boys, it's a success!"

The brass hats peered up at Phineas. One stroked his chin and seemed to evince great interest.

“Egad, major,” he exclaimed, “it may be one of the greatest developments of the war. Let me look.”

“I got it insulated,” the inventor explained proudly, “with asbestos. The wires run up in the lining. I even got a helmet wired, too, to connect on. I guess I’m not the cookies, huh?”

The pilots who expected to see Phineas cremated before their eyes were disappointed. For twenty minutes he sat there with plenty of voltage running wild in the lining of the Boche flying suit. Then he turned off the current, unhitched the wires and stepped down.

“Pinkham,” exclaimed one of the higher-ups, “give me your hand. It’s a marvel!”

Bump Gillis groped his way out of the group. “What’s the use?” he mumbled.

The news spread over the Allied area. But into Boche territory the word had traveled hours before. In the cellar of a house in Bar-le-Duc sat a man crouched over a wireless set. He had been sitting there since dusk. Close to his elbow there was a table and on it lay a long white beard with a string attached to it. There were other articles spread about, such as one would see on the dressing table of a burlesque comedian. And in a chateau north of Metz a quartette of Boche brass hats crowded about a little bespectacled Kraut who was translating dots and dashes.

“*Gott im Himmel!*” a *Herr Oberst* exclaimed. “*Herr Kapitan*, he iss kolossal. Der Yangkee, der *verdammt* Pingham, he invents der flying suit mit wires. *Und Herr Kapitan* follows efery moofe, *ja!* T’ink, gentlemens. Mit that suit, *die* Rumpler pilots go away oop. Efen our combat ships we giff them yedt more ceiling. *Ach, Herr Kapitan!*”

The little Teuton at the instrument held up a hand. “More he giffs me. Listen vunce.” Dots and dashes clicked all over the place. “Joost vait, he says. I find oudt when *der* experiment in *der* sky it takes place. Leaf der rest to *Herr Kapitan*. My instructions to der letter obey. Vun Rumpler vill fly ofter Allied territory tomorrow. It vill land where I say, between Bar-le-Duc *und* Commercy. Forced down, understand? Tomorrow I deliver der flying suit *und der verdammt* Pingham to *der* Kaiser. *Das ist alles, ja.* For *Gott und Vaterland!*”

The little squarehead with the cheaters squinted up at the four Boche officers. He spread his hands.

“*Hoch!*” grunted one of the officers. “*Hoch Herr Kapitan! Hoch der Kaiser! Ach, ve Germans!*”

FATE began to spin a crazy web. Came the morning, when the Rumpler, short of petrol, landed on Allied soil and was immediately surrounded by a lot of the A.E.F. The Germans got out of the ship and put their hands up. The news went into Bar-le-Duc fast, thence to Chaumont. An astute brain at Allied headquarters put two and two together and found an answer that was a long way from four.

The Rumpler was gassed up and flown into the drome of the Ninth Pursuit Squadron. The ship was capable of attaining a high ceiling. In it Phineas Pinkham’s heated suit would stand the test. The hand of Providence, it seemed, was with the Allies.

Major Rufus Garrity came back from Chaumont, all agog. He had been there conferring with superiors and smoking very good cigars which had not been loaded. No sooner had he set foot back on his domain than Phineas Pinkham came running to his side.

“Well, when do I put it on, huh? I been perfectin’ it more since and—well, did ya see Pershin”? What did he say about me?”

“You might go up and pilot the Rumpler,” the Old Man said dryly, “but you won’t be in the heated suit.”

“I’ll see Pershin’. I’ll—”

“You’ll listen, you ugly-looking bum,” interrupted the C.O. “Naturally they would want somebody else to test it out. You’d say it felt comfortable if you were gettin’ broiled in it. They want an unbiased party to sample it. You’ll pilot the Rumpler. You’ll have the switches where you can turn them on or off in your pit. You’ll have to lengthen the wires a bit but you’ll have time. Tomorrow the test is going to be made. Early, when it’s cold.”

“Well, gimme Bump Gillis,” growled Phineas. “I’ll be glad to have that bum where I—”

“I said an unbiased party,” the major reminded him. “We’ve got the man. A colonel from Chaumont—an old-time flyer.”

“What’s his name?” the inventor demanded.

“Smith, John Smith,” grinned Garrity. “Ever hear of him?” He walked away, chuckling.

“Crackin’ wise again, are they?” yelled Phineas. “Well, someday I’ll kill myself a Smith.”

The night before the big event Lieutenant Pinkham went into Bar-le-Duc. He picked out his pet cafe and hid himself in a dark corner. He felt exuberant, intoxicated with something stronger than Frog brew. Fame! Fame was knocking at his door. When a French officer with a carefully waxed mustache sat down at his table, Phineas was delighted.

“Congratulations, M’sieu,” said the Frenchman. “I have heard of what eet ees you have done. Ah, I envy you.”

“Huh,” enthused Phineas. “It’s a gift. A Pinkham—”

“Pardon me, lieutenant,” came a voice over Phineas’ shoulder. “I want to introduce you to the man who will wear your flying suit tomorrow on the historic flight. Colonel Smith, Lieutenant Pinkham.”

The hero of the moment rose. His knees caved a bit. He was sure there was something familiar about the face of the man whose hand he was shaking, but he could not be sure. Then the officer turned to speak to the man with him. That nose! Phineas choked down a cry, but his fists doubled up. The French officer tugged at Phineas’ sleeve.

“Wan dreenk before I go, *oui*?” he proposed. “You geeve to me ze honaire. We dreenk to your so great success tomorrow, *oui*?”

“*Oui*,” consented Phineas through gritted teeth. “To the success of the suit, yeah. Haw-w-w-w-w!”

Soon the Frenchman slipped away. Phineas had lost his desire to wrestle with his cups. He, too, left the place and hurried back to his drome.

The crazy web was almost finished. Just after midnight Colonel Smith drained his last brandy and soda and walked out into the street. A man fell into step with him. Colonel Smith was in the mood for companionship.

“Ah, ze night eet ees yet young,” argued the French officer. “We go where we meet ze beautiful ladies. To a hotel you mus’ go already? Pouf! *Chez moi, m’sieu*. My wife she have ze beautiful seester. I inseest you pay me ze call, *oui*!”

“Why not?” grinned Colonel Smith.

An hour later the colonel with the big nose entered his hotel and went up to catch up on some sleep. The job of testing out the Pinkham invention would be a strenuous task, without a doubt.

The new day dawned perfectly. A car came onto the drome early, carrying Colonel Smith. He had the collar of his coat turned up over his ears. Soon another car rumbled in, loaded with brass hats. Then came a Renault with the Frog delegation. The Limeys turned up last.

Colonel Smith’s face was covered with a thick grease.

“To keep out the cold,” he explained. “My face won’t be covered. The idea is from a man who tried to swim the English Channel once. Where’s Lieutenant Pinkham?”

Phineas clumped in, his face an expressionless mask.

“Ought to go right away, sir,” he said to the Old Man. “If the colonel is ready, I’ll take him over and get him into the suit. I fixed the wires last night, like you said. It ought to work swell.” He turned his head quickly and smiled at the wall. Smith, huh? They weren’t kidding him, after all.

TRAILED by goggle-eyed pilots, infantry officers and what not, Phineas escorted Smith to his hut and soon had the wired air regalia wrapped about the colonel’s frame.

“Here’s a helmet, too, with wires runnin’ through it.” Phineas held out the headgear. “It connects with the rest of the suit. Is it a swell job, huh?”

“Maybe,” growled Smith noncommittally. “We’ll soon see.”

Phineas himself was bundled up in every article of flying gear imaginable. “If it gets too cold, I come down. I git chilblains easy. Well, is the Rumpler ready?”

The Rumpler was. Across the field went Smith, Phineas and a large gallery. The Boche observation ship ticked over prettily. Colonel Smith had to be lifted into the ship. He found himself wedged tight in the over-sized suit. Phineas reached up a hand to him.

“Hope ya have a swell time—er—colonel,” he grinned. “Well, here we go! Bum sour, bums! I go up to make history.”

As the Rumpler skimmed over the ground, Colonel Smith hitched around in the rear pit. He found that he could reach the dual control stick that hung in a slot, and then he breathed easier. This man might have recognized him. Pinkham was a bad man to play jokes on.

Up, up, and up went the Rumpler. At twelve thousand Phineas threw on a switch that sent the juice from the Hisso ignition system through the flying suit. Colonel Smith soon felt a warm glow.

"How is it?" yelled Phineas into a speaking tube. "Your tootsies feel warm?"

The voice that came back to Phineas was charged with venom. It shocked him stiff as a poker in the pit.

"*Herr Leutnant* Pingham," the voice ripped out, "I have a gun trained on your skull. *Herr Kapitan* it iss. When I say let go of the controls, you let go or I shoot, *ja!* Ha! Ha! Ha! Keep on going up until I say '*Nein!*'"

The crazy web of Fate was practically spun. Over in Bar-le-Duc, an outraged, indignant Colonel Smith was writhing at his bonds and trying to roll across the floor of a small apartment to kick at the door.

Phineas' sudden fit of alarm slipped from him. He reached down and threw on another switch. Twice as much heat rolled up from the Hisso into the flying suit wrapped around the great *Herr Kapitan*. Phineas looked at the altimeter. Fifteen thousand. It was getting colder by the minute. His face was numb. His hands and feet were thoroughly chilled. Phineas shivered and waited for the voice to come to his ear once more.

Then it came! "*Ach, Gott!* Burning up I am. *Herr Leutnant*, switch off *der* current or I shoot!" In his excitement the German lapsed into broken dialect.

"Go ahead, ya squarehead, an' roast like a chestnut. I bet if ya do, a worm'll crawl out. Try an' git down. Haw-w-w-w-w! Too bad a guy named Smith squeezed an egg in my hand, or you'd have gotten away with it, ya fathead! I fixed that suit. Took out some asbestos an' put cotton batten in its place. With one current on, it wouldn't have burned the bum much, but you git the works. Kraut! I hope it braises your ribs, haw-w-w-w-w! Well, let's go higher, huh? You were the Frog that called on me in that barn, weren't ya?"

The German got the stick out. He suddenly let out a howl and it slipped from his grasp, flipped overside and shot down like a plummet.

"Why don't ya shoot, Heinie?" yipped Phineas. "Warm enough for ya?"

"*Himmel!*" yelled the Boche. "Down, down. Please, *Herr Leutnant*. I am on fire!"

"Throw the gun away, ya bum," yelled Phineas, "or I go up to the moon."

"*Ja*, I toss it out," agreed *Herr Kapitan* feverishly. "See?"

Phineas turned. The German was in the act of throwing the gun overside. His tormentor laughed and front-sticked, and threw off the switches that sent the current through the suit.

Down on the ground an amazed group watched the Rumpler descending in a long series of spirals. The ship seemed in an awful hurry.

"Somethin' went wrong, I know it," wailed the Old Man. "Look at Smith. He looks all folded up."

The Rumpler landed, rolling up. Phineas waved and started to climb out of his pit.

"A flop, huh?" Garrity raged at him. "Burned him up, I'll bet. Oh, you'll hang for this!" Scared-faced men surrounded the machine—brass hats, pilots and groundmen. Then the major gasped. The nose of the man in the observer's seat was melting away.

"Pinkham, look what you've done, you damfool! Look—help get him out."

"Haw-w-w-w-w-w!" guffawed Phineas in keen enjoyment. "Help him out, sure. Stick a fork in him an' see if he's done. Help out the *Herr Kapitan*, the big brains of the Kaiser's snoopers. Sure, drag him out. He got too hot an' his nose started to melt—his fake nose. Sometime last night he must've busted the real Colonel Smith over the dome an' laid him away some place. *Herr Kapitan* was an expert with make-up. He fooled me last night. That time he was a French officer, and he must've met Smith afterward. It's a good thing I fixed that suit up. Took some asbestos out an'—"

"Y-you did what?" bellowed Rufus Garrity. "How did you know who this man was, you fish-face? Why didn't you grab him when he showed up this morning?"

"I—I—er—well, I didn't know until I got upstairs. I thought it really was Smith," Phineas

explained clumsily, while astounded officers yanked *Herr Kapitan* to earth. “I—er—that is—well, I have nothin’ to say.”

“Pinkham!” roared the C.O. “Look me in the eye. You were out to get Smith, eh? Oh, I heard about that guy squashing an egg in your hand. You were going to singe him a little to get hunk, huh?”

“Awright,” sniffed the culprit, “it was that guy Smith that I was goin’ to roast a little. I’ll own up, but I would’ve only put on one current for that bum. In time the cotton would burn, anyways. They can’t fool with a Pinkham an’ git away with it. Well, you got *Herr Kapitan*, anyways. I guess Smith can bust me, huh? I hope that Boche conked him good. Well, was the flight a success or wasn’t it?” he shot at a dumfounded brigadier,

“It certainly was, Pinkham,” mumbled the brass hat, still befuddled, “but we can’t call the invention practical, of course, as—well—er—it seems as though it had a short circuit or something, if you get what I mean.” He winked at Phineas.

“Yeah,” grinned Phineas. “Accidents’ll happen. Anyways, maybe it’s not worth foolin’ with as it would take until 1980, maybe, for the Allies to build a ship that would go as high as thirty thousand feet. That’s the trouble. A Pinkham brain is always two jumps ahead of science.”

“Ah—er—if you’ll excuse me, sir,” said the Old Man to the brigadier, “I—I think I’ll go and get a headache pill, sir. Glad to have had you here to witness this extraordinary—er—event—ah—” He staggered away toward his quarters,

“Haw-w-w-w-w!” enthused Phineas. The Pinkham guffaw beat a tattoo on the major’s weary and aching brainpan.

“*Herr Kapitan*,” muttered the Old Man, “and all because that guy Smith shook hands with Pinkham. Ah-h-h-h-h-h-h!”