



ERRANT FLIGHT

by F.E. RECHNITZER

*Washed Up, the Instructors Said He Was, Because Garner Couldn't Land a Spad—
and Then Fate Gave Him Something Worth While to Play With*

HE SAT IN THE SHADE of a hut at the pilots' pool in St. Omer, a fledgling, staring off into space with dreamy eyes. Far off in the east, where the blue dome of the heavens met the hot earth, he saw visions.

Day dreams, in which he was the central character, slipped across the screen of his mind.

He saw a grey Spad flashing across the cloud-flecked heavens, tearing and slashing at black-crossed ships with fangs of smoking lead, twisting and turning,

tearing through Hun formations with the skill of a veteran.

A slow frown crept across his weathered cheeks, twisting round freckles into odd shapes. His lips curled from his even white teeth, as the vision of a burning Fokker registered, with the aid of a keen imagination, on his fertile mind. A sigh welled from his broad chest, as he visioned his fifth victory grinding into the blood-soaked earth in the arena of war.

"That's the one that would have made me an ace," he growled. "I was gonna tear 'em to bits when I got assigned to an outfit." A frown crossed his face. "This waiting around gets my goat. If they are gonna send me home, why don't they get it over with? Everybody's laughing at me behind my back—I'm a washout."

Suddenly he jerked erect on the hard wooden bench. His head, with its tousled crop of reddish hair, was cocked to one side. A look of anticipation flickered across his face.

Once again the call came loud and clear down the dusty path between the huts.

LIEUTENANT P.T. GARNER—Lieutenant P.T. Garner."

Garner leaped to his feet and turned toward the direction from which the hail came.

"Sounds as if I'm being paged," he muttered, a bit dreamily.

"Lieutenant Garner—Lieutenant P.T. Garner." The cry came from in back of the huts.

"Right over here, in section three!" Garner yelled, now fully awake, with day dreams swept from his mind.

He saw a stubble-faced orderly come around the corner of the far hut and stand looking up and down the lane.

"Here you are, orderly," said Garner apprehensively. "Looking for me?"

"You Lieutenant P.T. Garner?" the little orderly stood in front of the six-footer, fiddling with a slip of yellow paper.

"That's me," snapped Garner, eyeing the paper in the orderly's hand with suspicion. "What is it, a letter?"

"No, sir," answered the orderly. "It's an order. The car is waiting for you."

Garner snatched the paper from the surprised orderly's fist.

"Let me see that," he growled. "Bet it's telling me what boat I'm going home on."

He tore the message open and read the typewritten words. A grin spread across his face.

"Listen, orderly," he laughed, grabbing the little man by the shoulders. "It says that they are assigning me to Squadron 18. Gonna give me another chance. I'm getting a break."

The orderly tried to smile.

"I don't understand, sir."

"Neither do I," laughed Garner, waving the slip, "but here she is. You know, they were washing me out—said I couldn't fly Spads—set them down too heavy. Wouldn't give me the fourth shot to show that I could set one down without crashing it. Said I'd cost them too much already."

"Well, I'm glad," grinned the orderly, trying to shake himself loose from the bear hug which Garner had clamped down on him.

"Boy," shouted Garner, "they're sending me to the front! Maybe it's only as an observer or machine-gunner—but I'm gonna see action!"

The orderly slipped from the American's grasp and stepped back, still a bit puzzled over the crazy actions of this pilot who had been moping around the pool for the past three days.

Garner swung away and started for his hut.

"I'll get my kit together right away," he shouted. "An' I thought I was gonna be shipped back home to sell Liberty Bonds." He paused and turned to the orderly, who stood scratching his head. "Where is this 18 Squadron?"

The orderly shrugged his shoulders.

"All I know is that it's a British outfit. They use American pilots, you know. Sort of break them in and send them down to newly organized American squadrons."

"A British outfit," gasped Garner. Then he smiled. "Oh, well, I'll see some action, anyway. Maybe I can be transferred after a while. I got another chance—that's all I wanted. I'd even fly with the Portuguese. Action's what I crave."

PRESENTLY a tender, with P.T. Garner riding a bunch of mess stores in the back, rattled over the cobbled road leading out to the flying field where 18 had its nest amongst the sand dunes.

Brakes sent their shrill cry out into the gathering dusk as the car came to a grinding halt.

"Here we are, sir." The driver was reaching into the depths of the car for Garner's kit bag. "Better hop in an' see the Old Man right away. He's all in a lather, and it's because you're so late."

Garner crawled out of the car, straightened his cap and turned to the driver.

"All worked up because I'm late, did you say?" He touched a match to his cigarette. "I just got my orders this afternoon. Came right out with you. Don't see that he's got anything to get burned up about."

A queer smile crossed the driver's face.

"I only know that he's very angry, sir. Expectin' you since this mornin'. Better report to him right away. Office is over there." He jerked his thumb toward a shadowy building, where a ribbon of light was crawling out into the gathering darkness from under a door.

Hunching his shoulders, Garner walked briskly up the path and tapped at the door.

"Come in!" a voice bellowed from the other side.

The American smiled and pushed the door open and stepped into the lighted room.

"Lieutenant Garner reporting for duty, sir."

His heels clicked and his brown hand flashed to his visor in a snappy salute. He knew that the English were sticklers for that little formality.

"So you finally managed to get here?" The C.O.'s voice was scathing as his eyes bored into those of the man standing in the doorway. "Shut the door! Can't you see that the light is streaming out across the airdrome?"

"Sorry, Major," said Garner soberly, as he pressed the door to behind him. "And about being late—"

"Silence," roared the C.O. "And another thing. When you address me, be so kind as to call me Major Larkins."

The major fooled around with a batch of papers on his desk a moment and then looked up at Garner, who still stood at attention, more than a little puzzled over his reception.

"So you are Garner," growled the major. "The wonder pilot. Why this Major Crawford couldn't handle the likes of you I can't understand. I thought by the time a man got to be a major in the American army, he understood a little bit about discipline."

"But Major Crawford is—" interrupted Garner.

"Silence!" bellowed Major Larkins. "Speak when you are spoken to. You're not fooling around with this Major Crawford now. You'll find that you can't get the last word in with me; I'll teach you what real discipline is. Pretty turn of affairs when a man has to allow another officer to drum something into the heads of you young upstarts."

"But, Major Lar—" Garner tried to speak again.

The C.O.'s hard fist crashed to the littered desk. The pen rack trembled and the ink bottle jumped as if frightened.

"Not a word out of you. I'm giving you your orders, and whether you like it or not you're going to obey them to the letter. You're not here to give me advice on how to run my squadron. I'll break you of that habit. You'll learn to keep your mouth closed around here."

The grizzled old officer paused and wiped his mouth with a big khaki silk handkerchief.

"Trouble with this war," he blustered, "they give young whipper-snappers like you a pair of tin wings and you think that you are tin gods."

Garner's mouth opened and clicked shut under the threatening glare of the major's steely grey eyes.

"I want to tell you, Lieutenant Garner, that it is a fortunate thing for you that you got here in time—even if I wasn't anxious to have you as a member of my squadron." The major stuffed some papers into a drawer and swung around to face Garner again. "If I had my way, I'd ground you for a month. That's what you need. But I'm short of pilots just now."

"On the ground?" gasped Garner in surprise. "Then you mean I'm going to fly again. Why, I thought—"

"Did I ask you what you thought?" blasted the C.O., jumping to his feet. "I just informed you a moment ago that I would give you orders when to speak." He stepped closer to the perplexed American and stood glaring into his eyes. "Now, young man," he continued, "let me tell you for the last time that if you open that mouth of yours just once before you take off, I'll court-martial you the minute you set your ship back on the ground. Then you'll be through for the rest of the war. You'll be sent back to the United States, where you belong. Just try it, and see if Major Larkins isn't a man of his word."

The red-faced major walked back to his chair and slumped down behind his desk, where he sat and stared at Garner for a full minute before he spoke again.

"Sit down, Lieutenant Garner," he finally growled as he pointed to a chair. "And remember, I'll do the talking. And if you know what's good for you, you won't bother giving me any advice about how to run this show."

The young American pilot sat down, sorely puzzled over this reception. For a moment the two men sat in silence, and then C.O. spoke up.

"Lieutenant Garner, you've been absent without leave for two days and a half." The major picked up a paper, and before Garner could shake off his surprise, continued: "I am informed that you were assigned to my squadron three days ago. Where you've been in the

meantime the Lord only knows. I'm going to overlook that, being's you got here in time for the biggest and most important show we've ever put on. If you'd been another day late, I'd have broken you."

GARNER'S lips began to form words, but those steely eyes on the other side of the desk seemed to paralyze his vocal cords. Not a sound came out of his mouth.

"Now," said the major, picking up a slip of paper, "here are the preliminary plans for tonight's show. Five ships are to stand on the alert. They're on the line now, tuned up, loaded with bombs, ready to go. Their pilots and observers are to remain in their huts until Q hour, which is some time tonight. They've done that to eliminate any chance of a leak about the show. The bombs are to be five hundred pounders."

Garner half arose from his chair, stifled an exclamation, but settled back without saying a word, as the major turned the slip of paper over on his desk.

"The remaining racks are to be filled with sixty-pound fragmentation bombs and incendiary stuff. Q hour will be given to me by phone. You will get sealed orders from me just before the take-off. You will open yours when you reach a five thousand foot altitude. You and the other pilots will follow out those orders."

The C.O. picked up five envelopes with great red seals, shuffled them a moment and then reached over and put them in the safe standing by the side of the desk.

"Wing certainly is making a big secret of this show," he added.

"Then I'm to—"

Garner could contain himself no longer. He started to his feet, but the major held up his hand and waved him back again.

"I think I gave you your orders about speaking a minute or two ago. They still stand. "There was menace in both the hard eyes and the stern face of the burly C.O. "Don't forget, I'm not Major Crawford. I mean what I say. I refuse to be run ragged by your everlasting gab."

The major turned to the orderly who had just come into the office. "Take Lieutenant Garner to his hut and see that he gets something to eat," he ordered.

The orderly saluted and motioned the more than puzzled Garner toward the door.

"That guy's either mad, or I'm crazy," he muttered under his breath as he followed the orderly out into the night.

Q hour had come. Garland was walking down the path leading to the flying field. Already he could hear the thrum of powerful motors coming from the line.

"More than five ships there," he growled, as he stepped around the corner of the hangar.

He stopped short at the sight of five great, towering Handley Pages, which loomed ahead of him in the darkness. Before he could even say anything to himself a figure had stepped to his side.

"Late as usual," was the sarcastic greeting of the major. "Get into your ship at once. Number six over there—the one at the end of the line."

"BUT, MAJOR, I—" Garner tried to speak.

"I'll appreciate it very much if you'll keep quiet, Lieutenant," snarled the major. "I've just about reached the limit of my patience with you. Your job is to fly number six tonight and not to tell me how to run this squadron. Now get into your ship. You only have a few minutes left."

The American turned from this Britisher, whom he had learned to hate in the few short hours he had been on the tarmac.

"I'll crack it up for him and then maybe he'll learn his lesson and give a fellow a chance to open his trap," he vowed. "He'll be on the wrong side of that court-martial he was talking about."

Garner squared his shoulders and walked under the towering wings. He swung on a figure at his side.

"How do you get into one of these crates?" he husked.

The man in the shadows laughed softly and pointed toward the fuselage.

"Ladder under there, sir. Lieutenant Potter, your bombing officer, is up in the cockpit. I'm one of your gunners. Corporal Lacey, here, works the guns in the rear office.

Garner growled and turned away. As he did, the two gunners laughed.

"I've heard how he's always trying his bloomin' funny work. Always tryin' to make out he doesn't know how to fly. Scares a new man half to death with his foolishness. But they say he's one of the best."

"When he's sober," muttered Corporal Lacey. "Looks steady enough tonight. Come along—about time to shove off."

GARNER found the ladder leading into the ship. Up ahead of him he could see the dim glow of the instrument lights and made his way along the catwalk.

He entered the pilot's cockpit and stood breathing the cool night air.

A solitary figure sat hunched over a map in the roomy cockpit. The officer looked up as Garner stepped through the door.

"Hello, there," he said. "I'm Potter, bombing an' all that."

"H'are ya?" growled Garner, without holding out his hand. "I'm your pilot—if I can get this crate off the ground. Get those sealed orders the Old Man was talking about?"

"Get them later," replied Potter, giving his pilot a keen look as he settled into the seat.

For a moment Garner sat behind the Dep control, staring first at the instrument board and then at the two throbbing motors on each side of the cockpit. His hands dropped to the wheel; he pushed it forward gingerly and then pulled it back, as his feet touched the rudder.

"I flew a Jenny with a wheel like this, once," he finally said, leaning closer to Potter.

"No use trying to spoof me, old man," Potter laughed. "I've heard all about you. I've heard about how you can throw one of these busses around." He turned back to his maps.

"Crazier than loons, the lot of them," Garner muttered.

He slumped lower in the cockpit and watched the gunner crawl to his place in the front of the ship. His eyes dropped to the instruments again, and then landed on a group of knobs marked "Throttle." He grasped one of them and moved it forward. The port motor increased its beat. He pulled it back and tried the other one. The quiver of the starboard wing increased slightly as the throttle moved up the quadrant.

He watched his bombing officer out of the corner of his eye while he fiddled with the throttles, but Potter was busy studying the map on his lap.

A shout sounded from somewhere below, and Potter stood up and reached over the side as the motors of the first ship on the line broke into a rhythmic roar. He dropped back to his place again, clutching one of the envelopes Garner had seen in Major Larkins' fist. He glanced at the slip of paper pinned to the corner of the envelope.

"We take off last," the little bombing officer shouted, as he tore open the sealed order.

Garner nodded and then discovered that his heart was throbbing, struggling as if it were bound to keep time with the pulsating motors.

One by one, the big Handleys lumbered away from the line, rolled across the darkened tarmac and bounced slowly into the air.

"We're next," grinned Potter.

But the American was sober-faced as he leaned over the side and watched the men yanking the big chocks away from the wheels.

"All clear," he heard some one below him shout.

His muscles tensed and then quivered as he eased the throttles along the quadrant. The motors on each side of him sputtered a moment as the gas poured into the cylinders, and then took up their deep-throated song.

Garner's lower lip slid between his teeth as the big crate began to move. The tendons in his legs tightened and the muscles quivered as he pressed his insteps hard against the rudder. His hands ached on the wheel of the Dep control as the trucks began to rattle across the dewy sod. His arms pressed tight against his sides, holding the wheel in neutral position.

And before he realized it the big bomber was in the air. The quivering needle on the dial of the altimeter left its post and began to travel upward. Garner held the head of the man in the forward gun position slightly above the horizon and waited with bated breath for the shimmering needle to hit the five-thousand-foot mark.

Three, four and then five thousand feet slid under the trucks. He saw Potter tear open the envelope, read the order and then try to hand it to Garner. But the American refused to let go of the wheel.

"You read it to me," he said. "Just tell me where we are going."

"Wittmundhaven—to bomb the new Zep sheds," shouted Potter.

Garner was about to ask him where Wittmundhaven was, when Potter leaned closer, held the map under the tiny light and pointed to a blue circle he had just marked. The pilot nodded, as if he understood perfectly, but made sure that he kept the tail light of one of the other Handleys in sight.

Bit by bit, Garner became accustomed to the controls of the big ship. He found it fairly easy to handle in straight flight. Now and then he tried a gentle turn, to familiarize himself with the ailerons. Some of the turns bordered on skids, and took no little effort on Garner's part to straighten out again. But no matter how clumsy his efforts seemed, Potter only sat back in his seat and smiled.

Suddenly the tail light which he had been following

was blotted out. A few seconds later, Garner found himself staring into an enveloping wall of clinging grey mist. His hand dropped to the throttles. He felt the nose of the ship drop as he pushed the wheel away from him.

“Going to be a low ceiling,” shouted Potter. “Just your type of weather,” he added confidently.

“My type of weather,” moaned Garner. “Boy, if they only knew!”

Presently the ship dropped away from the bank of wet stuff, and Garner found himself in the open with the right-hand wing low. A turn to the left of the Dep control and the wing tip came up, and as they hit an even keel, a sigh of relief slipped from his chest.

The needle on the altimeter now said two thousand, and just over the wings the thick blanket of blinding mist still scudded along, splitting now and then as a cluster of searching Archie smashed into the night.

“See any of the other ships?” inquired Garner, searching the skies anxiously for a guiding tail light.

Potter shook his head and grinned. And now that self-satisfied smile was beginning to get the American’s goat.

“He’ll drop that grin when I try to set down,” he growled, and then straightened in his seat as Potter pointed frantically ahead.

“THERE’S our objective!” the officer shouted, trying to make himself heard above the roar of the motors and the incessant crackling of the anti-aircraft shells which were beginning to sprinkle the low-hanging clouds with whining steel. “See the sheds?”

Garner nodded and braced himself against the controls, his heart beating at a merry clip under his flying suit.

Following the signals of his companion, he eased the lumbering ship in toward the long row of buildings which showed up like faint blurs against the ground. A searchlight knifed the blackness, wavering to the right and left until it caught the big ship in its grasp. He shielded his eyes, as he saw Potter doing, and watched the bomber give the signal which sent a giant egg hurtling through the air.

Beyond the huge field, where Zeppelins were berthed, poised to float over the channel to England with a load of death and destruction, Garner made a wide, skidding turn. He felt Potter slap him on the shoulder and looked to where the excited bombing officer was pointing.

A great red glare was added to the light shed by the

withering fire streaking heavenward from the guns of the defenders. Garner smiled, for the first time since he had taken off, as he watched great tongues of flame leap into the sky. Their first bomb had found its mark.

“THERE’S a Zep in that one!” screamed Potter, bending close to Garner. “See how the hydrogen is flaring up.”

“But where are the other ships?” Garner yelled anxiously. “We seem to be alone.”

Potter didn’t hear him. He was leaning over the bomb sight preparing to give the signal to the man inside at the toggles. A few desultory bursts of Archie smacked around them, during the lull in the storm of flaming steel, as Garner kicked his rudder gently under the guidance of Potter’s left hand. The hand jerked downward, and the ship lurched a trifle as the second big steel bomb slid out of its rack.

The bombing officer straightened with a smile.

“Think we got the corner of the end hangar that shot!” he yelled. “If it catches fire the wind will fan the flames along the whole row.”

While Potter was yelling and waving him back for another go at the line of hangars with their sixty-pounders, Garner was scanning the murky skies above for the other ships. Since they had gone into the cloud he had not seen a single one of the ships which had taken to the air just ahead of him.

The bombing officer was busy with his sights, and presently five bombs whistled toward the conflagration, to add their bit to the show. The pilot saw the new glow added to the already burning building. Hot gusts of air leaped into the night as gas cells let go in the shattered Zeps.

“We’re cleaning them up! They’re finished with their flying ships from that field,” Potter yelled as he held his hand poised, ready to signal for the dropping of the last of their load.

Garner started to make a gentle left turn, but threw the wheel to the right instead on seeing the gunner in the forward pit struggling to bring his guns to bear over the top wing. Already tracer were snickering through the darkness, streaking between the wings.

Queer looking growths of spruce appeared on the riddled struts, and long gashes in the fabric along the fuselage allowed tattered bits of linen to waver back in the slipstream. He held the wheel against his chest, forgetting for the moment that he wasn’t flying a single-seater, and went into a tight turn.

The acrid smoke from the front gunpit was drifting

back and biting into his quivering nostrils. The fabric along the lower left wing was puckering as slugs sprayed across it.

Straightening out of the turn to allow his gunner a clean shot at the unseen enemy ship, Garner cut in low over the burning hangars. The big ship rocked and tossed in the eddying air, as great plumes of smoke sought to engulf him.

As he flattened out low over the field, he saw Potter flinch and reach for his arm, where a dark spot was already beginning to spread across the khaki flying suit.

A cluster of smoking slugs ate their way along the leading edge and jumped into the cockpit, crashing against the instrument board. Garner kicked on the rudder, cursing against this mad flyer who clung to his shadows.

Potter reached over and snapped out the lights on the dash, and the American kicked his rudder first one way and then the other in a frantic effort to shake off their pursuer.

Ahead of him, he caught a glimpse of a pair of unfinished wireless masts, towering behind a billowing wave of smoke. Gritting his teeth, his feet steady on the rudder, his hands clutching the wheel, all nervousness a thing of the past, Garner hurled his ship into the heaving mass of smoke. That fleeting glimpse of the masts, through a rift in the smoke, had given him a wild, desperate idea.

He flew on, straight through the stinking, lung-searing mass of faintly glowing smoke. He came out on the other side. His lips a thin straight line across his determined face, he watched the forward gunner crumple, grab for the Scarff mounting and then slide out of sight, as a mass of fiery sparks buried themselves in his body.

Garner's foot hit the rudder. The ship seemed to halt in mid-air as it careened to the left. His right wing tip appeared to graze the top of the mast, and for a moment his heart stood still. He was sure he had felt the wheel jerk in his hand.

Then the smoke eddied in on him again, curling in great hot tongues through his wings, making him gasp for breath.

Leaning far over the side in an effort to spot the Hun, he saw Potter frantically signaling with his good arm and pointing toward the ground. A laugh escaped his tensed lips as he, too, saw the thing at which Potter was pointing with a bloodstained hand.

THERE, one wing a crumpled wreck, twisting until it finally smashed into the ground at the base of the wireless mast, was a Fokker. Already it was adding its feeble bit to the mounting fire.

"Clicked its wing against the mast!" shouted Potter.

Garner laughed and laid the ship over on its left wing, just in time to let a slithering burst of tracer waver past from a gunpit on the ground.

One-pounders and then flaming onions whimpered by.

Another split-S turn, and they were weaving around the end of the bending column of smoke. Potter, pale-faced but still smiling, leaned closer.

"What do you think you're flying, Yank, a ruddy Spad?" he shouted.

Garner had no time to answer. It was taking every bit of his skill with the strange ship to weave it in and out of the fountains of tracer which snaked their way up from the shadows.

Then something plucked at his shoulder. He looked down and saw the torn cloth, where a slug had cut its way through. Another hole appeared a bit lower on his Sidcot suit, and a searing pain took hold of his body. Something warm and sticky was trickling across his chest.

He looked across the cockpit and paled. Potter was gone. But the next minute he felt better as the gritty little Englishman came back through the opening which led to the rear.

"Lacey is gone; got a burst right through the head!" the bomber shouted, and Garner noticed that his voice was weaker. "We've got to get back fast. Head for that bank of mist."

Garner swung his ship around, gritting his teeth as every effort sent burning needles of agony through his body. He looked across at Potter, who sat leaning against the side of the cockpit.

"Hold out until we get back?" he called.

Potter lifted his head. His right hand was stained with crimson where it clutched his left arm. Another blotch showed just at the edge of his collar. He smiled faintly and leaned closer to Garner.

"If you fly a nice straight course, I can. Try any more of your weird maneuvers, and the ship will go to pieces—I will, too."

Garner gritted his teeth and tried to find a position which would ease the strain on his drilled shoulder. Under him the dark land was beginning to disappear as wisps of mist curled under his trucks. He reached for the switch and snapped on the dash light. Only

his compass and tachometer were left untouched. He set his course. Bracing himself in the blood-soaked cockpit, he flew on toward the west.

At last he swung under the ceiling and found himself in sight of a group of petrol tins set out in the shape of an L, all of them flickering as the soaked waste burned. He banked carefully over the edge of the field, yanked the throttle back and waited for the crate to settle on the sod.

It seemed to drift forever in the night air, and for one frantic moment he thought he was going to overshoot his mark. But the four-wheeled trucks hit the ground just over the short leg of the L. The Handley bounced awkwardly, just once, then rattled across the hard tarmac and came to rest with the left wing crushed slightly against the recording office.

Then everything went black.

A few moments later he found himself lying on a stretcher in one of the hangars. At his side, and raving deliriously about wild flying, lay Potter. Over in the corner he could see two more stretchers, each covered by a blanket. The M.O. was fussing over him, giving him a shot of anti-tetanus.

"Can I speak to him now, Doc?" somebody in the shadows kept asking. "I've been through hell since you took off, lad."

Garner looked up and saw the C.O. bending over him. A kinder-faced C.O. than the one he had left on the field.

"I've been through a little hell myself, Major—I mean Major Larkins," said Garner, with a crooked smile playing across his blood-flecked face.

"I can see that, son," husked the major, "but I'm still a bit foggy about the whole thing. Lieutenant Garner appeared on the scene just a few minutes after you took off. He was dead drunk. Thought sure you were a spy."

"BUT I'M Lieutenant Garner," muttered the American. "Look in my pocket, and see my papers." He tried to struggle up on one elbow, but the M.O. held him back.

"Take it easy, son," smiled the C.O. "Somebody's blundered. Now, did you say that your name was Lieutenant Garner?"

"Lieutenant P.T. Garner is the name, an' I can lick any man that says it isn't. Lieutenant Patrick T. Garner."

"Patrick!" exploded the major. "That clears everything. "This other fellow's name is Paul. If I'd let you talk when you wanted to, I would have caught the mistake—but I'd heard a lot about this fellow Paul Garner. Ruddy gabber. He's under arrest now."

"So that's what it's all about?" grinned Garner. Then his face clouded. "So I haven't been transferred here at all. All a mistake. Be sent back home on the next boat."

"Not if I can help it," chuckled the major. "I need a man like you in the outfit. You're the only one that got through. The rest got lost—been setting down all over France—two crackups. You're due for a ribbon and a promotion."

Garner lay silent for a while and then turned to the major:

"Wish the birds at training school could hear you say that," he said. "Instructors wouldn't let me have another chance at landing a Spad."

"Did you say Spad?" asked the major, bending closer.

"Sure, I tried to tell you that I never flew a Handley Page before in my life. Nearest I ever got to one was a picture they had in training school. Say, Major, when I get out of the hospital, could I get a chance to put in a little time on these folding-wing crates, and come back here? I'll promise I won't talk too much."

POTTER leaned across the space between the two stretchers.

"Anybody that can toss a Handley around like you did tonight, Yank, doesn't need any more time." The bombing officer paused and looked up at the C.O. "Just before we hopped off he told me that he's flown something they call a Jenny with a Dep control. That would count as Handley-Page time, wouldn't it, Major?"

Garner and the major were still laughing when the two wounded men were put into the ambulance, and it was a long time before Potter found out from the American just how much a Jenny resembled a Handley-Page.