



Abe Ginsberg wrecked the entire flight in one dramatic crash.

GINSBERG'S WAR

CRASH ON DELIVERY

by ROBERT J. HOGAN

Abe had medals on his chest and a yen in his heart to fly with a high-hat outfit. When he found they didn't want him he invented the slogan "Crash on Delivery."

VASTLY DIFFERENT were those two bombardment squadrons in the Charou sector, situated at their respective fields ten miles apart—oh, very. The Twenty-third were a hard lot of two-fisted hellions who had no love for their neighbors, the Seventy-sixth. For the Seventy-sixth—grand old number that—were a bunch of snobs. The heliotrope squadron, the Twenty-third

called them, among other things. And were they high hat? Goodness!

Fine old names in the Seventy-sixth. Yes, indeed. Names like Major E. Stuyvesant Jones, the C.O., and Captain Montgomery Parsons Smith, the squadron commander, and other names that ranked with these in equally elegant tone. No matter that the major had been christened Ezra Silas and that the captain

had started with the humble name of Morris Peter. The early part of the war, with its huge profits, had made small, struggling merchants and manufacturers suddenly rich above their fondest dreams, and with the money had come a new order of things. Rolls-Royces for flivvers. New high-hat names for old. Private schools and then the forming of the Seventy-sixth from their pupils with the help of one General Gilbert of staff, chief of assignments, and uncle of said Captain Montgomery Parsons Smith.

Then one day a change in staff and the position of General Gilbert had changed all that, and no longer could they pick and choose members of their squadron at will.

That was when Lieutenant Abraham Ginsberg barged into the mess.

"Geeve a look," he chirped. "I'm here, already. Abe Ginsberg's de name."

Men stiffened and glared into their cups. A rippling rumble floated about the room, a composite groan from many throats; Abe's eyes took in everything at a glance, with narrowed eyes and lips twitching at the corners.

His face was like leather, tanned by wind and sun and blasting prop wash of many flights. His uniform, ill-fitting and sagging at the knees, was in striking contrast to the finely tailored outfits of the favored sons of the Seventy-sixth. A long, leathery coat, smeared with grease and oil and stained about a hole at the shoulder, where a Spandau slug had necessitated a vacation for a time, hung perilously from his slim shoulders; it was held together at the front with a huge safety pin, that once had graced the blanket of a horse in a wind storm.

He seemed to hesitate before them. No one had paid the slightest attention to him. A puzzled look came into his eyes.

"Huh," he grunted. "Nobody home, maybe. Maybe de wrong number."

No one tumbled. He turned vacantly toward the door and, once outside, stared up at the sign in raised letters.

"Nope," he said. "No mistaking. Dis is de place."

"Yi-yi," he moaned, once more inside. "A rotten break. With a deaf and dumb outfit I'm. Oi *gewaltd!*"

He glanced about him. Still no one had looked up, and there were no vacant chairs. But the food on the table looked inviting. Without the slightest hesitation, he unfastened the pin that held his besmeared leather coat, tossed it across the vacant place on the nearest table, next to Captain Montgomery Parsons Smith,

and in a bound was seated on the table itself, hungrily devouring food with his hands.

Captain Montgomery Parsons Smith glanced venomously out of the corner of his eye, half-turned away and then stared agape. A Croix de Guerre and a *Medaille Militaire*, well-tarnished, gleamed dully back at him from Abe Ginsberg's breast, where the leather coat had hid them.

BUT if the Seventy-sixth heliotropes thought they had received a shock in that first meeting with Abe Ginsberg, they were destined to change their minds as to the meaning of the word.

In the four flights over the lines during the week that followed, the record of the Seventy-sixth rose with startling suddenness, but strangely enough, the name of Lieutenant Abraham Ginsberg was synonymous with everything the squadron did that was noteworthy. He continued to lounge on top of a table at mess when he ate, smiling with a wise gleam in his eye when no extra chair was brought for him. He knew these four-flushers for what they were and secretly laid plans.

He mimicked Captain Montgomery Parsons Smith and the horseshoe talisman he always carried in his ship and raised to his lips before each flight. Somehow he always got Smith's eye at that instant and waved a kiss at him and his upraised horseshoe.

The Seventy-sixth were smoldering like gentlemen, but it was beyond human endurance to hold in their rage forever. Mercy! Were they mad? Ginsberg should know—and did. The heliotrope squadron was close to a nervous breakdown. The old traditions were tottering. Something must be done.

On the night of the seventh day, Captain Montgomery Parsons Smith took it upon his padded shoulders to execute the doing. On this particularly warm evening, when the breeze was wafting sweet scents of lilacs and castor oil through the open windows of the mess, the gentlemen of the good old Seventy-sixth, by pre-arrangement with their S.C., tarried long after the meal.

Abe Ginsberg wiped his mouth and hands on Captain Smith's napkin with deliberate nonchalance, and wandered, with apparently aimless destination, out of the mess and into the fast-gathering shadows of evening.

A hush fell over the room and lingered for full three minutes. Captain Montgomery Parsons Smith rose and swaggered to the door, peering out cautiously. Then, with apparent satisfaction, he returned.

"Gentlemen," he began, in guarded tones, "it has happened. The very mission we've been longing for. But this time the obnoxious person of Lieutenant Ginsberg is not with us to hear the good news. For once, gentlemen, Ginsberg will have no part in our mission."

He cleared his throat. Gentlemen of the good old Seventy-sixth shifted their weight, turned the other rosy cheek, crossed one highly polished boot over the other, and waited.

"I have secret news from my uncle, General Gilbert," the speaker beamed. "A great drive is being planned near Ramou. Our intelligence has located the supply base of the enemy, but nothing is to be done until the appointed hour. Our drive will take place at five o'clock in the morning. That will be the morning of day after to-morrow, gentlemen. Five o'clock, mind you. At four o'clock, a bombing flight of five DeHavilands will drop bombs and completely demolish the supply base of the enemy near Ramou, thus allowing our ground troops to move ahead easily."

He smiled slyly.

"We will fly by compass in the dark to the spot. I will lead the flight, gentlemen. The rest of you, those who volunteer to go, will follow my lead. This is to be a secret mission, and only the men, you men here, will know about the plan. My uncle has arranged that. A secret mission for the good old Seventy-sixth, by George!"

He paused and swept the room with his half-closed, faded, green eyes that had a studied look of boredom. Men of the Seventy-sixth shifted uneasily, knowing what was coming, and each hoping the other fellow would beat him to his feet.

"I'm asking for volunteers, gentlemen!"

The breeze seemed to make a swishing sound through one of the windows at the back of the room.

Eyes flashed and stared.

A form resembling a monkey had hopped to the ledge and then to the floor inside.

The apparition might have been made more complete by a leather leash, running from the neck of the leaping figure over the window ledge and down to the jerking hand of an organ grinder. Then the figure stood erect—Abe Ginsberg, himself, in person.

"I'll go," he piped. "Geeve a look, captink. It's me, Ginsboig. I'm de first to voluntary, ain't it? You and me, captink. So far, it ain't so bad. Now, who is comink besides?"

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERY PARSONS SMITH groaned audibly and clutched the edge of the table for support.

"Come on, speak up some of you brave guys," urged Ginsberg. "Me and Smith and who?"

Somehow, at that moment, the S.C. found his voice. And was his face red? clear from his throbbing Adam's-apple to the vaseline on his black hair.

"Listen, you—you low, sneaking—" He gulped in his rage and tried again. "You, Ginsberg. You're not going with us. Understand?"

"Not—not goink, captink?" Abe half sobbed. "But, captink. I'm tellink you, I got to go. De two medals I got, dey're gettink rusty, and I got to get it new ones. Dis must be a game. You're jokink."

In spite of Smith's gentlemanly efforts, his face turned purple.

"Listen, you!" he barked. "You've done enough around here. You've made a bunch of fools out of us here at the Seventy-sixth. You—"

"Fools?" Abe cut him off. "And blamink me? Me, what from de bottom of de heart makes fine records for de squadron? Me? How could I do sometink what vas already done? I wouldn't be old enough to make fools from you guys. You got it a head startink years ago."

Captain Montgomery Parsons Smith sizzled. He struggled to find words, but Abe was chattering on, mercilessly.

"I vas on to you guys from de commencement," he snapped. "A bunch of damn, dumb, social ladder-climbers, vot you are. And five years ago you didn't have a pot for eating purposes. Now comes it de var, so what? De old folks makink lots of money and dressink up de kids like Astor's pet barmaid, only more, and making fools from demselves."

Captain Montgomery Parsons Smith was smoking.

"Stop! Stop that, I say!" he bellowed.

"Stop it, hey?" Abe jerked. "Stop, hell! I got it dis much to say yet. You asked it for volunteers, ain't it? So, didn't I said it before anybody else—before de white-livered sissies of your phoney outfit? Dot's enough. So take anybody else, it's all de same to me. But me, I'm goink on de bombink." He snapped his fingers in Smith's face. "Catch on?" The door slammed behind him and he was gone.

The conference between Captain Montgomery Parsons Smith and Major E. Stuyvesant Jones following Abe Ginsberg's declaration was long and earnest. At length Smith rose.

"I'm done talking with the vulgar person," he concluded. "I think our plan will work, major. I'll leave the matter in your hands, sir. I'm through with him."

But in spite of what the hellions of the Twenty-third had called him and his buzzards, Captain Montgomery Parsons Smith was not a seventh son of a seventh son, and so he could not look into the future and know how untrue his last words in regard to Abe Ginsberg would be.

It was another half-hour before the orderly, dispatched with haste and anxiety to seek out one Lieutenant Abraham Ginsberg, found his quarry in a one-sided crap game with a bunch of grease-balls and brought him to the office of Major E. Stuyvesant Jones.

Abe glared in utter disgust. Jones forced a pained smile.

"Ginsberg," he said, uttering the name in hushed tones, "I believe you've been under a terrific strain of late. The incident of the past two hours with Captain Montgomery Parsons Smith proves that you have about reached the breaking point. You need a rest. I'm sending you to Paris for a two weeks' leave. Here's a pass."

Abe's eyes narrowed as he took the slip of paper.

"So dot's de vay de vind lays, hey?" he said thoughtfully, glaring at the two weeks' pass in his hand. "So at last you guys found it a vay to get rid of me. Listen. In de first place, I ain't goink. In da second place I don't vant to spend de money, and in de tird place—veil, I ain't interested."

"You—you mean you won't take a two weeks' leave to Paris?"

Abe shrugged. "Take it dot vay or leave it. I ain't interested."

"By thunder," Jones chirped, "you will go, Ginsberg! You will go to Paris. Listen. I'm giving you orders now. There's a D.H. on the line warmed and ready to start. You'll take that plane and go to Le Bourget. After that I don't give a damn what you do. Get vulgarly intoxicated—or anything."

LESS than an hour later, Abe Ginsberg watched the D.H. storm out of Le Bourget field near Paris and thumbed his nose at the vanishing rudder as it slipped into the darkness. He moved slowly down the tarmac where ships of every description were lined. Suddenly, he stopped and stared. He blinked and stared again. Five D.H. planes were there in front of him, lined up a little haphazardly, as though they'd been left in a hurry. He came closer, and as he stared at the insignia

on the nearest crate, his heart pounded for joy. Five D.H. planes from the Twenty-third bombardment squadron, only ten miles from the field of the Seventy-sixth! Lady Luck had sure put the Bee on him for once.

"Listen," he begged of a hangar sergeant. "Dose five crates. Yeah, de D.Hs. Tell me sometink. How long before dey go back?"

The sergeant grinned. "Be pulling out about midnight. Some of the wildcats from the Twenty-third come down to see Paris and die."

"Dank you."

Abe Ginsberg's heart was throbbing wildly under the big safety pin that held his leather coat together, as he made a roundabout journey into the semi-darkness and behind the great D.Hs. Stealthily, he clambered into the rear cockpit of the middle machine and crouched there. Once, he glanced at his watch. The luminous dial told him it was nearly midnight.

From far down the line of ships, Abe heard harsh voices, struggling, each in his own way, to carry his idea of the proper key. And was Mademoiselle From Armentieres catching hell? Five lurching, shouting figures swayed toward the line of D.Hs. like dizzy apes plowing through heavy surf.

"Oi-oi," breathed Abe. "Drunk like pickled Gefilte fish."

He was beginning to have misgivings when three minutes later the five D.H. planes, with Liberties coughing and wheezing, staggered down the dark runways before the motors were properly warmed, and roared into the air. Fearfully, a little sorry he had stowed away in that back cockpit, Abe Ginsberg rose from his crouched position and glanced over the rim of the Scarff mountings, straining to see through the darkness. Suddenly, his heart all but stopped beating. They were turning to the right. Paris was there, ahead. They weren't going back to the field. Not yet, anyway.

"Yi-yi!"

He jerked up straight in the cockpit, with the prop wash blowing him half out, and stared about him. He was in the point plane, and the other four were following in the closest formation he had ever seen.

Midnight and almost pitch dark. Five drunken peelots of the Twenty-third, flying in that darkness so close you could toss a bottle from one cockpit to another and heading wide open, with cold motors, straight for the Eiffel Tower.

"Yi-yi," wailed Abe. "And not a cab in sight!"

Abe, half-crouching in the rear cockpit, felt the stick of the dual controls slam him in the safety pin,

heaved a groan and stared wildly over the edge again. Before him, the gigantic shadow of the Eiffel Tower loomed as the lead D.H., cocked on one ear, was taking the tower in a tight vertical at the hand of a drunken maniac.

Tip to tip with it snarled the other four D.H. lumber trucks, with men of equal degrees of plasterfication at the sticks. All took the tower on one ear, holding their tight formation and climbing as they spun round it, like a great ascending corkscrew.

In that instant, Abe Ginsberg's self-assurance fled from him like the innards of a busted feather bed in a tornado and left him shaken and trembling and moaning.

"Yi-yi! Oi, *gewaltdt!*" he moaned. "From de fryink pan into de fire is nottink. So I thought it was bad to be mixed up from a bunch of dummies in a deaf and dumb school? Now, lookink. From deaf and dumb schools into de middle of de front of a lunatic asylum. Yi-yi! Yi-yi!"

They spun round and round.

"Was it Shakespeare said it, 'Heaven protects de drunken guy'? So vhat I'm? I ain't drunk. Yi-yi! De only sober guy in de whole distillery, ain't it?"

Was Ginsberg scared? Bowlegged!

Suddenly the ships leveled and droned north. Now and then, the crazy yowl of some drunken hellion split the air above the racing motors. Minutes passed. Abe wished they'd land. Then they were tearing down. He could tell by the sound of the engines. They cut. He gasped and instinctively grasped the stick; then, an instant too late, he remembered and released his hold again as the stick thrashed about wildly. There was a grinding crash, and Abe Ginsberg had only time for a quick, "yi," before his body shot forward and half out of the cockpit. His head struck something that didn't move, and with the abruptness of a bolt of lightning crashing into the cave of the sirens at the hour of the bath, Abe Ginsberg was plunged far beyond the twitter of canaries and the prickly lumination of twinkling stars.

BEHIND that crashed D.H. came the others, too close to swerve. Wing against wing, prop against tail group, they piled and cavorted in a great mass of wreckage, mid grinding and mashing of spare parts. Too late, gasoline flares burst into brilliance, and five pilots, unscathed and cursing, staggered from their weird positions under dangling wing coverings; they wriggled out from necklaces of center sections, garnished with instrument boards, to hiccough

demands as to where the others had been when the tornado struck.

"Wild Bill" Martin, flight leader, suddenly blinked hard, and stared at a small, still figure, hung half out of the rear cockpit of what had been his lead plane, held by the safety pin caught in the Scarff ring. He shuddered and came closer with much uncertainty; then, with the gentle fragrance of a blasted wine cellar, came his mumbled words.

"For goo'nesh shaksh! We go' a cashualty!"

"Yesh," blinked another. "Who ish it?"

With exceeding tenderness, they lifted Abe Ginsberg from the cockpit, staggered away from the wreck and laid him face upward on the ground.

"Can't be General Pershing," ventured Bill Martin. "Shtoo shmall."

He made fumbling examinations, tore open the leather coat and stared with the others at the medals and the wings.

"He'sh a hero, men, and—and we killed him!" he gurgled, thickly. "We got to gi' him a burial bef'ing hish rank as offisher and gentleman."

A dump was close by and Bill Martin had staggered away toward it. He lurched back now, carrying a box, long and narrow. A Liberty prop crate.

"Look, you guys," he chirped. "Thish'll have to do for a coffin for our frien'. Military honorsh, for him. Thash right. Sure."

Very tenderly, Abe Ginsberg was laid to rest in the box that was more than twice too long and not quite wide enough. But he went in nicely with a bit of crowding about the shoulders. With mumbled words of magic, certainly not akin to religion, the lid was placed on the box, and it was lifted to the shoulders of the four others.

"Ashes to ashes, dush to dush," he chanted." If the mam'selles don't get you, then the sherries—"

A booming voice cut off his words of intended benediction.

"What in hell's going on here?"

Major "Hell's Bells" Harvey was glaring at them.

"You damn, drunken bums!" he boomed. "I've got something to say to you guys. What in hell do you think you're—"

There was a slow movement inside the box. With a cry of alarm, the four leaped out from under it and let it crash to the ground. The lid bounced off, and Abe Ginsberg sat up. "Yi-yi," wailed Abe.

Hell's Bells Harvey whirled at the unpardonable interruption.

“Well, what do you want?”

“Oi, *gewaldt*, an aspirin maybe—or better a whole box. Yi-yi! My head. Splittink’s no void.”

Hell’s Bells Harvey glared down at Abe Ginsberg; then snatched him from the box by his coat collar.

“You—what are you doing here and who the hell are you?”

“I—I’m from de Seventy-sixth,” Abe stammered. “I—”

Major Harvey took another look and shook his head.

“Gee,” groaned Bill Martin. “A heliotrope.”

Harvey swung on him and let go Abe’s collar.

“I’ve decided one thing,” he snapped in sudden decision. “Five ships have been crashed by you crazy loons. Five D.Hs. All right. You’ll pay for them. Replace them, dollar for dollar, for what they’re worth. I’m going to make an example of you birds.”

Then he whirled and strode off across the tarmac.

That was the instant that Abe Ginsberg found himself in what looked to be the greatest peril of his career. Four of the five crowded about him unsteadily and threateningly. Wild Bill Martin towered before him in the darkness, considerably more sober.

“Listen, you!” he rasped. “It was all your fault. I remember now. You shook the stick when I was landing. You’re to blame—for this—thish mess we’re in. Alright, then. You even spoiled a perfectly solemn funeral. And what’s more, you’re going to dig up the dough to pay for these five ships. Understand?”

The last was punctuated when Bill Martin’s big bony fist shook with frightful clarity in Abe Ginsberg’s twitching face. And as they left him standing there and rolled away, Abe Ginsberg held his head, swayed back and forth and moaned.

“Yi-yi! Better I should stayed dead. Now, vot trouble I got. Payink for five ships and vid what? Oi-oi!”

ABE GINSBERG’S nimble mind was not taking a vacation that night when the others were plunged in deep sleep. He was working frantically with a plan. It might help him out, and at the same time accomplish the success of his feverish desires in regard to the lovely gentlemen of the Seventy-sixth.

Abe went straight to the room of Wild Bill Martin an hour after dawn. His hand trembled with eagerness as he knocked on the door. There was no answer. He knocked again. Only heavy breathing and the odor of second-hand alcohol greeted him.

Gingerly, he pushed the door open a crack and peered in. Bill Martin hadn’t made the bed at all. He was lying curled up on the floor, with his leather flying suit neatly tucked under the blanket. Abe reached his side in a quick leap and shook him anxiously.

“I got it! I got it! Listen.”

“Huh,” groaned Bill, rolling over. “Huh? Oh, yeah. I’ll have bromo seltzer this time.”

He rolled back. Abe shook him frantically now. There wouldn’t be much time to waste.

“Hey, wake up, vill you? I got it a swell idea. I—”

Bill rolled over, blinked, stuck his tongue out nearly a foot and shuddered. Then he sat up and opened his eyes.

“Huh? What the hell?” He glared at Abe. “Who the hell are you?”

Abe explained hurriedly. Bill nodded a slight remembrance. The ships. Sure. There was something about paying for five D.H. ships. With that thought, Wild Bill Martin was rapidly coming out of his fog.

“I got a way out,” Abe raced on. “Listen. I know some think about de seventy-sixth, catch on?”

“Huh,” grunted Martin, “who don’t?”

“No, honest. Vait. Listen. Tomorrow morning at four o’clock dey’re goink to bomb de supply depot near Ramou, see? Secret stuff. Just at four o’clock, catch on? Veil, here’s how ve vork it. Ve get all de money ve can at dis field. It’s easy, when I tell you. I got it two hundred francs myself, just to show you I ain’t foolink. You and de rest of de gang go over and get in a argument vid de Seventy-sixth, see? Make ‘em mad dey ain’t done no bombink vhat amounts to nottink for a long time. Make ‘em bet vid you dot dey don’t make a bombink raid in de next twenty-four hours dot vill mean much, see? Dey’ll figure ve don’t know nottink about the secret orders to dem. So what vill happen? I’ll tellink you sometink. Ten to one odds you’ll gettink, if you hold out. A good clean-up and enough for payink for de ships, maybe. Catch on? Dey’ll fall easy if dere major holds da money.”

“Huh?” blinked Bill. “Listen, guy. How are you so sure that they won’t get there?”

A wise look came into the eyes of Abe Ginsberg.

“I’m tellink you. I’ll fix it, see? Guarantee it. I’m villink to bet effery knickle I got it myself. I can fix de ships, maybe, or sometink. I’ll take care of dot. You make it de betting.”

It took some time for the thing to percolate through the brain of Bill Martin, but at length he agreed, since it was the only way out. Five D.H. ships

to pay for. No leave of any kind until the last dollar should be paid. That would mean an eternity. Gray beards and canes and all that. And war without a trip to Paris now and then was—well, it just didn't fit into the scheme of things of the Twenty-third.

Every nickel that could be mustered about the field of the Twenty-third went with Bill Martin and the rest of his flight, when he flew to the field of the Seventy-sixth, to return late that afternoon with the good news that the money had been covered.

That night Abe Ginsberg slipped out of the post of the Twenty-third and made his way to the Seventy-sixth. It took him two hours to accomplish his work there. Then he returned.

"It's okay," he grinned happily. "Now, for our job, ain't it? We got it to blow up de depot ourselves at four in de mornink." He turned to Bill Martin. "You got de permission of de major?"

Wild Bill Martin nodded.

At exactly half past three in the morning, while it was the darkest part of the twenty-four, five bomb-laden DeHavilands lumbered and wobbled their way out of the field and wavered over the boundary trees like a flock of cows full of milk staggering over a hedge.

Abe Ginsberg, from his cockpit behind Bill Martin, grinned wisely as he stared now ahead into the blackness and again rose half out of the cockpit and stared at the instrument board of the cockpit ahead. Flying by compass. The only way to get there in the dark. Compass and time, then the flare.

That first flare was the signal for every Jerry searchlight to burst into glory, piercing the sky with their sharp beams of prying light.

In and out of those rays dove and whirled the five bombers, flying like the hellions they were. Ground guns boomed and rattled and grunted up at them, but somehow, the lights couldn't hold the ships long enough to make shots effective.

ABE worked the toggle handles rapidly as his ship roared over the east end of the supply depot. The rest had strung out in a line. The din became terrible. Bursting bombs below tangled with the rattle of machine guns and the grunting of archie fire as the Kaiser's star-gazing crews fired, missed, cursing, only to fire again.

One turn at the other side of the dump, then the five roared back and the bombs hurtled down again to finish the job they had started. Wild Bill Martin was flying like a master, and Abe was hopping up and

down with joy as he worked the toggles, emptying the whole of the bombs.

Then he was leaning far over the cowl between the two seats, and his fist was drumming frantically to get Martin's attention. Martin turned and pulled back the gun with a drop of the nose so he could hear.

"Now go land at de field of de Seventy-sixth," Abe yelled at him. "For collections, ain't it time?"

Major E. Stuyvesant Jones stared at the five planes, unbelieving, when they landed in the dim light of dawn at the field of the good old Seventy-sixth. The misgivings he felt showed on his pinkish face as he walked toward them. Some of his swagger was gone.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded of all and sundry.

Bill Martin saluted and grinned.

"Just came over to collect that little bet with your boys," he grinned. "If I figure correctly, you ought to have somewhere in the region of a quarter million francs waiting for us here. These men of yours certainly roll in it, major."

Major E. Stuyvesant Jones turned four shades whiter and two tinges of a pastel gray.

"Why—why, I say now, there must be some mistake here. I thought when I saw these planes of yours landing, you were the flight of ours that went after—well, out on a secret mission."

"Mistakes," chuckled Abe Ginsberg, coming in sight now for the first time. "Certainly, mistakes. Ve got it de dump ourselves. Catch on?"

Major E. Stuyvesant Jones seemed to stagger. He blinked and glared.

"You, Ginsberg?" he tried to snarl. "You here? By George, I'll put an end to this. I'll have you transferred or something. I'll—"

Then Major E. Stuyvesant Jones was exceedingly rudely interrupted by the booming laugh of one Wild Bill Martin.

"Transferred!" bellowed Martin. "I'll say he's going to be transferred, and to the twenty-third, just as soon as possible. And now, major, we'll take the payment of that bet. Right now."

Jones blustered and turned another shade whiter.

"By George," he fretted, "you'll do no such thing. That bet, as I recall it, was that our men, the five picked men, I believe, could not make a successful, noteworthy bombing raid within the next twenty-four hours. That time has not expired as yet, gentlemen—" as though in blasphemy—"so I must ask you to wait until the proper time is—"

A breathless orderly came running down the tarmac, trotted before his commanding officer and saluted.

“An urgent call on the telephone for you, sir,” he announced.

They followed Major E. Stuyvesant Jones to his office. They hung about the door and listened to his voice grow more and more excited as he talked and saw his face get redder and redder as he listened. He seemed to slump weakly in his chair then, as he hung the receiver on the hook. His face was white, and his hands trembled.

“That was my flight,” he gasped, “the flight which was led by Captain Montgomery Parsons Smith, I’m exceedingly sorry to say. They’—they’re down and crashed near the town of Bellegarde. I can’t say that I ever heard of the place. Perhaps one of you—”

Then Bill Martin’s voice boomed in a roar of laughter that he could not control.

“Bellegarde?” he boomed. “Haw-haw-haw. That’s at least a hundred kilometers south of Paris. How in the name of—”

The office filled with the roar of laughter from the palpitating throats of the hellions of the Twenty-third. And all the faces there assembled still had puzzled expressions—all, that is, save Abe Ginsberg’s. He had a wise look.

“Well,” boomed Martin, when a lull had come, “I dare you, major, to figure out any reason for holding up that bet any longer.”

THERE was menace in Wild Bill Martin’s face, and Major Jones understood. He knew when to take his cue.

“Certainly,” he managed to say as he walked toward the safe.

With bulging pockets, the men turned to go. Bill Martin hesitated and turned back.

“I’d like to use your phone for a moment, major, if you don’t mind,” he ventured. “Like to call Major Harvey and tell him—that we’re over here and we’re coming back to the field as soon as possible.”

Then he was ringing, talking to the major. And his face grew wrinkled with joy and mirth he could hardly control until he had finished. Then with a wild whoop, he left the office and dashed out to the others, waiting there on the tarmac.

“Ba-a-b-y!” boomed Martin. “Has lady luck made a three-point on us? Listen. That was the biggest job of the war, so far, the blowing up of that supply depot just

at this minute. And the Major? Is Hell’s Bells Harvey tickled? Geez, pink like a strawberry sundae. He says he was only kiddin’ about paying for those crates. We’re goin’ on leave, guys.”

He turned and faced Abe Ginsberg, still grinning.

“Now, Ginsberg,” he chirped, “it’s your turn. You go into your dance and tell us how come all this. How in hell did that gang get strayed way down south of Paris, when they should have flown in the other direction?”

“You ever hear it dat de shortest distance between two points is de straight line? Veil dot’s all wrong. Maybe it vas Franklin vot said it. It’s still wrong. I got it an old uncle vat is smart. He tollink me when I vas a boy.

“Make it a leetle noise and go de longest way. Peepels don’t tink you going where you are and dey don’t watch you so close. It’s maybe not de shortest but it’s de safest.

“I’m just remembering vat de uncle tell me. You got to be smart in dis business. I vas making a leetle noise for de boys.”

Abe’s reasoning was lost on Bill Martin.

“What the hell has noise got to do with it. We fly by compass in this outfit.”

Martin advanced threateningly on Abe.

“If I thought you were kidding me—”

“Yi! Yi! Don’t do it.! I’m tellink you.

“Vas it simple? Like rollink off a flagpole.

Remember dot horseshoe vot Smith always took it along for luck? So I give it to him more luck vid de horseshoe. Vid electricity. I magnetized dot horseshoe.”

“Huh?” burst from many throats.

“Certainly. Magnetized de horseshoe, so de compass would be crazy in de ship. Catch on?”

Bill Martin stared at him. “You mean,” he demanded, “that we bet all this jack on that one trick? Hell, the rest of his crew would have noticed they were going wrong and raised a stink about it and—why, holy mackerel, they might have bombed Paris for Berlin!”

Abe’s grin broadened.

“Oh, de bombs?” he chuckled. “Veil, I always did tink does dopes would hurt somebody some day, maybe. So de bombs, I fixed vid wire so dey couldn’t be released. And vidout releasing, dey couldn’t go off much for hurting somebody. And de horseshoe,” he chuckled softly, “I’ll tell you. I tought was one horseshoe lucky for somebody, more horseshoes would be more lucky. So vat did I do? Just gave it each ship a horseshoe apiece, to make sure.”

“Huh?” gasped Wild Bill Martin, just before he exploded with laughter. “You mean you put a real horseshoe in each ship for luck?”

“Veil,” Abe shrugged. “Maybe not really horseshoes, but dey vas shaped like it. Like de magnetize in Smith’s horseshoe vot draws de needle of de compass and makes it crazy, so vas da rest, only not really from horses’ feet. Dese I got it from some old magnetos. Dey vas horseshoe magnets, de odder four.” He broke off in a laugh. “Just for luck. Catch on?”