



MAYSHARK

THE SINISTER SENTENEL

by ARCH WHITEHOUSE

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A young model builder stumbled on an idea the U.S. Government had been seeking for years. An Air Service official was murdered. A giant Curtiss Condor crashed to its doom on the desolate sand dunes of Chesapeake Bay. Those three things happened far apart—yet they led Buzz Benson into the mystery of the sinister sentinel known as Devils Trap Light.

IF YOUNG BRUCE CARLETON hadn't stumbled on an idea the government had been seeking for years, Billy "Buzz" Benson would not have had to escort a Curtiss Condor from Newark down to Washington.

Bruce had invented a seaplane with a safety device on it that left the real designers gasping. He made a model of his ship and, by some freak of fortune, an Air Service officer spotted it just as young Bruce was about to display it at a model airplane contest.

"Put that thing back in that box, kid," sputtered the Air Service man. "Don't let anyone see that until you have placed it before somebody in Washington!"

So Carleton was whisked off home in an Army Cadillac and told to sit tight until he was sent for. Under no consideration was his ship to be shown to anyone.

Two nights later, the Air Service officer who had seen the ship was mysteriously murdered. Some one tried to burn the Carleton bungalow and a boy who resembled Bruce Carleton was kidnapped off the streets of New York—and unexpectedly returned when it was discovered that he was not the right person.

No wonder Buzz Benson was escorting the Condor to Washington! Bruce Carleton was aboard, with his model tightly wrapped in heavy cardboard, and everyone on the big transport felt the tense strain of the trip. Carleton had to get to Washington safely.

Benson was pondering on it all as he plowed along after the big Curtiss transport. He was flying a two-seater Falcon himself, rushed out for him from New York to the Newark Airport. His position as an under-cover operator for the Secret Service brought him many such trips as this, but somehow this seemed unreal.

"Wonder what the kid has that has them all in a stew," he mused, staring out over the gun sight toward the roaring Condor. "Sounds goofy to me—*hello!* What the devil?"

A lot of things began to happen. Buzz took a quick look down and saw that they had passed Wilmington and were heading for the opening of Chesapeake Bay.

The Condor began to stagger and wobble as though writhing with some gigantic internal distress. Then

one of the motors cut cold, and he could see the flashing steel prop jerking back and forth, as though trying to get going again.

IT WAS the flashing that bothered him. There was a certain amount of light off the steel blades, and reflections from the late afternoon sun on the sleek surfaces of the wings, but through it all he could see a queer stabbing flash that seemed to come up from the ground.

"What the devil is that?" he snarled, dashing up toward the floundering Condor. "There are no tracer bullets."

Again that splintery shaft of light came up and seemed to dance on the cowl of the other motor. Suddenly that power egg ceased to function. The Condor was helpless. The pilot put the nose down, and Buzz saw that he was heading for a long strip of open beach that lay between Taylor's Island and Golden Hill.

"Now don't tell me they're working a ray on him," snorted Buzz, watching the Condor go down in easy spirals. "That gag is so old and so impossible that I'm not even going to consider it . . . Hello! This is more like it!"

Out of the east came a giant seaplane. It was nothing like any ship Buzz had seen or heard of before. A wide-winged monoplane, it was powered with two well streamlined motors set in tandem at the extremities of the wing roots. Beyond the motors flashed out a beautiful tapered wing of great size and thickness. A portion of it had been fitted with cabins, and a row of low narrow windows could be seen in the leading edges of the wings. Beneath each set of two engines were hung long, tapering pontoons that looked large enough to offer space for more cabins. The front of the fuselage, which protruded out from the center-section of the wing, was efficiently streamlined and had some of the lines of a liner's hull.

"What the deuce is this?" Benson gulped, turning back and letting the Condor go down on her own. That move was a mistake, but his interest in this ship and his suspicion that it was responsible for the downing of the Condor seemed to justify his closer inspection.

The great seaplane came on toward him like a winged monster. Buzz hurled the Falcon to one side, and just missed a terrific burst of fire from the leading-edge cabins.

“Wow!” Buzz roared. “This is something to fight!”

Over went the Falcon, and into action came Benson’s Brownings. Two streams of fire bit into the wings of the giant, but she continued on and Buzz was instantly in a storm of wailing lead.

“This is no place for me,” he growled, clearing with some smart flying. “That baby has too much under her roof. Might as well set an outboard motor boat to sink the Indianapolis! I know when I’m licked.”

He curled away to get out of the range of the guns, and darted into a cloud. The seaplane came after him, but Buzz lost it in the haze and then curved back toward the spot he had last seen the Condor.

But in the fight with the giant seaplane, Buzz had lost all idea of his original position. He was all turned around, and before he realized what was up, he discovered that he was flying north along the Atlantic Ocean side of lower Maryland, rather than south along the Chesapeake Bay side.

At last he orientated himself and shot back across from Dover to Easton. Then, turning due south again, he finally picked up the spot between Taylor’s Island and Golden Hill and discovered the big transport down safely along the lower stretch of a wide sand dune.

“Too much time wasted,” he growled. “Anything could have happened in all this time.”

And plenty had.

BENSON put the Falcon down lightly and got out. To his amazement, he could see no one anywhere. He left his motor idling and ran across to the silent transport.

“Plenty of footprints,” he noted, spotting the ruffled surface of the otherwise hard-packed sand of the dune. “And they look as though they trail down to the water. Queer!”

He leaped for the cabin door and jumped inside. There was no one there. A few light pieces of baggage and a coat or two lay around and the remains of a light meal was scattered in the aisle.

“Hey!” he yelled. “Where are you birds?”

The only answer he received was a low, harsh cackle that made Benson’s blood chill. He turned around and stared about, seeking the source of the mirthless laugh.

“Who’s that?” Benson growled, feeling beneath his

left arm-pit for his automatic. The only answer was another cackle, like the rattling of pebbles in a tin cup.

Benson rushed into the control pit and stared about. No one was there. He moved forward and looked out of the window. There, lying along the wing-root, peering intently at the damage that had been done to the engine and the motor cowling, huddled a little deformed man.

“Who’s that?” Buzz growled. “Where the devil did he come from?”

Slipping back into the main cabin again, he moved to a window and jerked it open. The strange little man out on the wing turned and grinned at him.

Buzz took the man in from the top of his head down to his broad-toed shoes. He was terribly deformed across the shoulders, and his long shapeless hands hung inches below his tattered sleeves. A finger still poked at the holes in the dural sheeting around the engine.

“It worked!” he squealed, as he caught sight of Benson. “Now they’ll believe me.”

“What are you doing out there?” Buzz demanded. “Who are you, anyway?”

“Who are you?” retorted the man. “You had to come down, didn’t you? I told them I could do it, but they wouldn’t listen to me. Now they’ll listen!”

“How long have you been here?” Buzz asked.

“Just came across the dunes, just to make sure it had worked,” the man answered. “Where did you come from?”

“Where’s everybody who was aboard this ship? See any of them?”

“No! They must have run away. Scared! They’ve never seen anything like this before. See! It got the engines—nothing else. Wonderful, eh?”

“What are you talking about?” Buzz turned away from the window and came out of the cabin again.

“Never mind. When they call for me now, they’ll find out. It’s my turn this time,” the man replied, crawling down off the wing.

Buzz gave it up and stared down at the tracks in the sand. He followed them down to the water’s edge, where they disappeared.

“Looks as though they took a boat, or were put into a boat. What sort of a mess is this, anyhow?”

He stood peering out across the strange gray waters of Chesapeake Bay. The whole thing seemed incredible. He tried to figure the time it had taken to do all this, and cursed himself for not following the Condor down at once.

“This is what comes of not taking a job seriously. That darned kid and his model! I wonder what could have happened.”

He stood puzzling it all out—the downing of the Condor, the complete disappearance of the crew and passengers—and this strange figure he had found huddled up alongside of the battered motor. He turned to look back at the man and decided to question him further.

But he, too, had disappeared!

BUZZ ran around the Condor and scrambled up the sand to the top of the nearest dune, peering in all directions. There was no trace of the little man. He could have gone in a dozen directions and disappeared over any of the high swirling dunes. Buzz went back to the Condor with the idea of giving it a closer inspection.

He felt helpless and alone now. The grim-snouted transport stood like a dead thing out there on the white sand. The motors, with the damage pointed out by the mysterious man, drew his attention. At first glance it appeared that they had been put out of action by gunfire, but suddenly a strange fact struck the flying reporter.

“That old guy might know something,” he muttered. “These slugs all came from the ground, not from above!”

He crawled under the wing and peered up. The shots had come up through the bottom of the motor egg and had broken up the various important bits of equipment the magnetos, carburetors and timing devices. The astonishing item was the fact that the bursts had, in both cases, been directed so well. They had not scattered at all. A man’s hat would have covered the lot.

“That’s some shooting,” agreed Buzz, perplexed. “The same in both engines, too. I wonder if that old guy had anything to do with it.” He fingered through the battered metal and found two of the bullets. His eyes opened wide as he inspected them.

They were similar in general shape to the American .30-calibre bullet except that they appeared to be encased in some light, soft metal. At the lower end were two circular rings of another soft metal, and it was easy to see that they had been fired through a barrel of unusual rifling. In passing through the barrel, these rings had been forced into vanelike fins.

“That’s the queerest bit of death I’ve ever seen,” mused Buzz, inspecting them closely. “What the deuce were they fired from?”

He slipped them in his pocket and prepared to plunge into the mystery.

A last glance around the ship assured Buzz that there was no evidence of foul play or tell-tale streaks of blood anywhere. He took off again, flew up the beach and landed at Taylor’s Island. Leaving his ship in charge of a patrolling Coast Guardsman, he went on up the beach to find a telephone and called Major Morton in Washington.

“We’ve been looking for that Condor everywhere,” snapped the major. “What happened?”

Buzz outlined the whole affair quickly and Norton whistled.

“Those bullets sound queer—and yet familiar. Seems that I’ve heard of some one trying out a new bullet that has a tremendous muzzle velocity and trying to sell it to the government. Another nut, I suppose.”

“Whoever got up this idea,” growled Buzz, “is no nut. What I want to know is how he aims and controls it so well. The damned thing put two bursts into those motor eggs that hardly covered a space a foot square. That’s shooting, major!”

“Well, what we need to worry about first is that kid and his model. Got to find him, somehow. No trace of any sort, eh?”

“Only the tracks of the lot of them running down to the edge of the water. They must have gone away in a boat somehow. Did the kid have his model with him?”

“I guess so. He was supposed to be bringing it down here.”

“Then you don’t know for sure, eh?”

“No. Look here, Benson. You had better make a thorough search of the shore along there, and give that Coast Guard guy the wire to look out for the Condor until some one can get down there and take it out.”

“I get you.”

“Patrol the whole coastline on each side of the bay and look up anything that seems queer. We’ve got to find that kid. The whole country will be up in arms, otherwise.”

“How about that bird who cleared off from the dunes? Want me to look him up?”

“No. Leave him to me. I’ll call the Bureau of Inventions and check on everyone who has been trying to sell a new gun. That should cover him.”

“I don’t like that guy, major. I was a sap for letting him get away, but I figured he was daffy.”

“Well, make a good effort to locate that boat. Have

everyone working on it, and then get down here late tonight. I'll see you then."

BENSON put the Coast Guard stations wise and had them throw out a dragnet for an unknown boat. It should have been easy, for you can't very well hide a boat large enough to accommodate at least ten people. Unfortunately, they had no idea what they were looking for.

The Coast Guard at Taylor's Island managed to get some aviation gasoline for Buzz and he filled his tanks again and made a few minor repairs on the bullet-slashed Falcon. It was getting dark when he was ready to take off, but he decided that any movement the men in charge of the mysterious boat might make now would be attempted under cover of darkness.

For more than an hour the roaring Falcon haunted the rugged shore of Chesapeake Bay, darting in and out, crossing back and forth, while Benson sought a boat—what type he had no idea. Up and down in the darkness the grim fighter plunged, shooting over the oyster fleets and through the dingy craft that sputtered up and down the bay. Off Crisfield, where the small, marshy islands lay offshore like lurking demons, he turned south again and caught the flashing beam of the Devil's Trap Light, a tall, hewn-stone lighthouse that towered nearly 200 feet in the air above the water. Miles out from the shore its tip glowed red with a warning glow to protect night-flying airmen.

Suddenly, the beam which had been flashing intermittent long and short blades of light began to stutter and flicker strangely. Then, as Buzz watched it, puzzled, he saw that the beam was jerking out a series of dots and dashes, and he finally made out a distress signal, an S.O.S. He instantly made plans for an investigation. He climbed higher, then shut off the throttle and set the Falcon into an easy glide in which only the low moan of the flying wires gave any indication of his approach.

The water below gleamed evilly as he sought a stretch of smooth sand on which to land. The light from Devil's Trap continued to splash out jerky signals. Buzz watched it out of the corner of his eye as he S-turned down and finally came to a smooth running landing on the beach. He stared out over the water, figured the tide and ran the ship well up out of the way, so that it was hidden in the shadows of a rock. Then, without bothering to remove any of his flying kit, he trotted down to the shore and looked for a boat.

A few hundred yards up the beach he came upon

a rude dock, dank and rickety. From one end floated a small rowboat. He leaped in, cut the painter and inserted the oars in the locks. Then silently he drew away toward Devil's Trap Light, which stood up like a grim sentinel, about three hundred yards off shore.

As he rowed steadily, Buzz took in the general outline of the tower. It was the ordinary light, built on a small rock. The light chamber was mounted high and had a small channel-iron balcony running around the outside, from where the glassed-in light room could be cleaned. Out from the west side was suspended a signal boom, fully 150 feet above the water. A small white house snuggled close up to the base of the tower, indicating that the keeper had quarters other than those inside the tower.

It took Buzz fully a quarter of an hour to reach the weed-covered rocks and clamber up behind the white building.

"No lights," he observed. "Something queer here, for certain."

Then, remembering that the light, which now had swung back to normal signals, must have been tampered with from somewhere inside the tower, Buzz made his way across a narrow, shingle-covered path and made for the door. It was not locked, and he pushed it open carefully and crept inside.

THE doorway led into a clean, whitewashed corridor. He crawled along the wall and came into the square opening that looked directly up into the tower. Four long steel guides ran up into the darkness above, and Buzz sensed that the great weight, suspended on a steel cable which was used to turn the great lamp and the lens frame, was hanging high. It was still early evening, and it would not run down until morning.

Listening carefully, Buzz heard voices coming from a room off to one side. He crept along and hid behind a Navy locker. No sooner had he darted into this shadow than out of the doorway came two men.

"The little devil!" one snarled. "Jake should have watched him closer. He got all the way up into the tower and was fooling with the light. Don't know what he was up to."

"Too damned smart for Jake," agreed the other. "They'll never get it out of him. Let's go over and see that the others are all quiet."

"They have some one in there," Buzz muttered to himself. "Only way to find out is to go in and have a look." He crept out of his hiding place and opened the door carefully. Another passageway, dim and

indistinct, lay ahead, then another door, under which gleamed a thin bar of light. He listened.

"If you don't come clean, kid," bawled a heavy-throated voice, "we'll get rid of you so fast you won't know what happened to you."

"And then where will you be?" a youngster's voice answered.

There was a dull smack. "You're too damned smart," the heavy voice replied. Benson's fist instinctively doubled. "You'd tell us what that model idea was or—"

"You keep your hands off me!" the youthful voice replied. "You've got the model." Benson's throat constricted and he had to control himself to keep from rushing headlong into this torture chamber. The youngster's voice went on. "If you're so smart, you can figure it out for yourself."

"You know, and we know," the husky voice went on, "that this is not the model you are supposed to be taking to Washington. This is only an ordinary model of an autogiro. Any kid can make that from kits."

"I'm not arguing with you," the boy went on. "I don't know what you are talking about, anyway."

"You know what we want, and the quicker you come clean, the quicker you'll get away from here. Now how about it? What was the idea that Army officer saw that made him tell you to put it back in the box and take it home until you were advised to bring it on to Washington?"

"I won't tell you!" the youngster flamed. "The government sent for it and the government's going to get first look at it. After that, I'll make you a dozen at three dollars apiece." *Smack!* Another blow caught the youngster across the mouth and he went reeling across the floor. At that instant, Benson yanked the door open, drawing his gun. The move was timed perfectly, but Buzz didn't know it. As he stepped into the doorway and saw the half-circle of ruffians who were baiting the lad, the boy himself tripped sideways against a heavy Navy coco-matting rug and fell smack into Benson's hands.

"Who the—" one of them growled. "Good work, Bruce!" cheered Buzz, catching the boy around the shoulders and dragging him clear. "Quick, out this way!"

Bang! A pistol shot screeched between them. Benson turned and let fly, and a gun went skating across the stone floor of the tower room.

"Shut the door and make for the outside," roared Buzz at the boy. "I'll hold 'em a minute or two."

But just at that instant, two figures loomed in the

gloaming of the corridor, and cut off their escape. A gun flashed and spat. A chunk of lead dug a great wound out of the plaster wall and threw a spray of powdered cement all over them.

Bang! Bang! Bang! The gunfire came from all directions now. Buzz had shoved the lad to the floor.

"Crawl to those iron steps and go up there," he ordered.

"I was up there, an' they pulled me back. No way out," replied young Carleton.

"We'll find a way. Get going!" Voices were raised, and the scuffling of feet echoed through the long dim corridors.

Bang! Bang! Pistols flamed again, and chunks of lead spattered in and out of the iron work of the tower stairs. Buzz replied, huddling back out of sight as the lad plunged on up the ringing steps.

"Get that bird!" a voice below screeched. "That's Benson. How the hell did he get here?"

"Must have a seaplane outside some where. I'll go and nail it. Take no chances on him," another voice answered.

"Quick!" pleaded Buzz, backing up the stairs after the lad. "Make for the side of the tower rail nearest that signal boom."

"Okay. But there's no way of getting down from there."

"We'll have to. These guys are mad. Here they come now!"

DOWN through the gloom they could hear the feet of men scrambling up after them. Shots came up through the trellis-work of the circular stairway, ricocheting off metal and screaming through the framework.

"Get up there and open the window nearest that boom," bellowed Buzz to the youngster. "I'll be up in a minute. I'll stop these babies!"

He watched the lad clamber up higher into the dizzy whirl of steel and steps, and then reloaded his automatic. With two more shots down into the harsh darkness below, he turned and grabbed the steel cable of the heavy weight that hung down from the lamp mechanism. Tugging with all his might, he drew it clear of the four guide girders and let it dangle over the inside curve of the stairway.

"If this sinker hits the way I think it will," he panted, struggling with all his might to get the great weight clear, "no one will come up these stairs for weeks."

He tugged and pulled, straining in the heavy flying equipment he still wore. Then, looking up to make sure that the boy had reached the top, he got the long weight over the inside edge of the hand-rail, and with a quick movement raised his automatic and fired two shots.

The explosions muffled the rasping twang of a severed steel cable. There was a swish as the great weight started down—then a thunderous clang and a tumultuous battering of metal.

“How do you like that for a bullet?” challenged Buzz.

A scream threaded through, the boiler-factory bellow of wrenched metal. The great weight tore its way through one set of stairs, caromed off to take a square corner platform with it and then continued on to the next curve. Its steel tail lashed through the wrenched steel work like the flailing of a monstrous quirt. It cut one man down as though a sword had been swished at his legs.

Bang! The final clatter came. A twisted skeleton of steel tottered down howling with the great pain of being wrenched so cruelly from its moorings, and dropped with a terrific clangor.

Buzz listened, snatched up for a twisted rail and drew himself up hand over hand until his feet came upon the few remaining steps at the top platform of the light tower. Young Carleton stood there, chalk-faced and trembling but relieved to see his liberator.

“What now?” the boy asked, rushing to pull Buzz up.

“Out on that boom. *Quick!*”

“There are no ropes down. I looked when I was up here before.”

“Never mind. We still have a parachute,” grinned Buzz.

“Parachute? Off that boom?”

“It’s only about 150 feet. I know its not much,” agreed Buzz, fumbling with his pack behind his back, “but we’ve got to try it now.”

“What about me?” the boy asked puzzled.

“You go with me, sonny.”

“Okay, you’re the boss. Let’s go.” Buzz led the way out along the boom, straddling it for a way, and then stood up so that he could grip the supporting guy that came down from the tip of the tower. Young Carleton followed.

Out near the edge, they huddled quietly and whispered.

“You go down with me, understand?” Buzz explained.

“Slip your legs inside my thigh straps, face me and hold on around my waist. Then leave it to me I’ll make this baby open in time.”

“What then?”

“The minute we hit, I’ll slip out of the harness. Then you stay with me. Can you swim?”

“Sure! A couple of hundred yards at least. Easy in the sea.”

“That’s right. I have a boat hidden on the other side of the light base. We swim around to drag it clear and then swim out with it so as not to make any noise. After that we’ll get in and make for my ship over there on the beach.”

“Let’s go,” said the boy.

BUZZ stood up and let the lad slip his legs into his hip straps. Young Carleton, tight-lipped, then put his hands around Benson’s waist and took one look down toward the inky blackness below. He shut his eyes and clutched like grim death.

“Here we go. Here’s hoping,” Buzz announced, pulling the ring.

There was a dull rasp as the pins came out of the pilot-chute flap. The little white blossom caught the wind that swept in from the sea and fluttered out. Buzz took one look and dived away from it with a low prayer on his lips.

They went down in a shapeless mass. Over they rolled, and a wailing swish went through their ears. Then came a monstrous jerk, a low dull flap, and with a wrench they were right side up, panting and quaking.

Before they could get their breaths, a new shock enveloped them. The cold sea water engulfed them and they struggled together within the confining straps like two crabs locked in a death grip. Buzz slammed his hand over Carleton’s nose and mouth as they went down into the inky blackness. Over their heads hung a mystifying tangle of cords that seemed to be clutching down at them. He kicked to get clear as they came toward the surface. A low throb of thunder pounded into their ears as they continued the long upward sweep toward air and life.

“What was that?” gulped Buzz, fumbling with the quick-release snaffles of his harness.

“The bo-bo-boat!” Carleton gagged back at him.

Buzz kicked the harness clear and let the boy float to the surface. The folds of the great parachute billowed out on the water like a bloated sea monster. They circled it in easy strokes and then turned toward the rocky base of the tower.

“That’s the boat they brought us in. You ought to see it. Never saw one like it before,” the boy explained as they swam on quietly.

“Where’s the rest of the crowd who were aboard the Condor?” asked Buzz.

“They have them all locked up in the light-keeper’s house.”

“Think we can release them?”

“We can if those guys have beat it,” young Carleton answered.

In a few more strokes, they were back at the base of the light. Buzz drew his automatic out of his dripping pocket, slipped out of his heavy coverall, and together they crept around the tower. There was no one on deck to bother them.

“Where’s this model they were all worrying you about?” asked Buzz.

“It’s back on the Condor.”

“On the Condor? Where?”

“I hid it in the lavatory, inside the towel box hanging on the wall.”

“Then we’ve got to go back there and get it quickly.”

“I’ll say.”

Buzz darted across the open space between the tower and the keeper’s house. There was no interference and he hurled himself at the door which gave, after considerable battering. The two entered a small room.

“There’s a switch on this side,” Carleton explained.

Something clicked, and the small room was flooded in light. In every corner and every chair sat men and women, trussed up. A low rumbling of gagged grunts greeted them.

“Get them untied, Bruce,” Buzz ordered, splashing across the clean floor in his dripping clothes.

Bruce released two young women first. They sat back, relieved but speechless. The pilot and his co-pilot were unbound. Then Buzz found Miss Sellers, the stewardess and released her carefully. In a few minutes Buzz had them all freed, including the two light-keepers.

“Whew!” gasped Pat Logan, the pilot. “Where did you come from?”

“Out of the sky,” grinned Buzz, “and we’re going back at once. I’ll leave you to clear up this mess. No time to explain any further.”

“Go ahead. We’ll get along somehow. Send some help as soon as you can. We’re all worn out.”

“Come on, young feller,” grinned Buzz.

“Coming, Mr. Benson.”

STILL wondering what had really happened, Buzz

led the way down to the little boat and helped Bruce in. Then they rowed off for the opposite shore.

“What happened, anyway?” Buzz asked, when they were clear of the tower base. “How did those birds get you?”

“Well, you see, Mr. Benson,” the youngster explained, “the engines stopped, or something, and the pilot put the ship down on the sandy beach. We were okay, and some of us got out and walked around while the co-pilot tried to get some power up to make the radio set work, so that we could get in touch with one of the airports. About half an hour or so after, I guess, a queer motorboat came up the beach. Four men got out and started running up toward the Condor, and I saw they had guns.”

“And you had brains enough to slip your model away in the towel box, eh?” smiled Buzz.

“Right! Well, then they made us all get into the boat. It was a queer boat, nothing like most motorboats I had seen. They tied the men and blindfolded all of us and away we went. In about an hour they stopped and let us out at the lighthouse.”

“How did you get into the tower?”

“They were tying everybody up in the little house, but they left me free, and led me across to the tower. When they were looking through a lot of bags and mail sacks, I sneaked up in the tower and unhooked the cogs that make it go around. It was easy, for there was a lever there. I figured that if anything went wrong with the light, some one would come out and get us. Then I found that by opening and shutting the big black curtain that they have over the lenses during the daytime to keep them clean, I could signal an S.O.S. I tried that, and then they caught me and dragged me downstairs into that room.”

“After this model of yours, eh?”

“I guess so. Everybody seems to be after it—why I can’t say.”

“What is it?” asked Buzz.

“I don’t suppose I should tell you, but you seem all right,” the lad answered slowly. “Anyway, there doesn’t seem much to it to me. All I did was to make a model of a monoplane with ordinary pontoons. Then I got thinking about safety devices and transatlantic ships, so I made the main cabin like a long motorboat which, in case of a forced landing on the water, could be lowered from the wing down into the water and released so that it could be driven with all the passengers, to safety, leaving the wings and pontoons to float away. See?”

"See?" gasped Buzz. "No wonder these guys were after you! I saw an actual ship of that type in the air when your Condor was shot down today!"

Young Carleton was stupefied. "That's right, Bruce," Buzz explained as he tugged at the oars with even more vim. "A ship made exactly like that fired on me a few minutes after you went down. Didn't you see it?"

"No. Some one must have seen my model when I made the first drawing of it about six months ago. I had it in our school paper.

"You had a picture of it in a school paper six months ago?" Buzz snapped. "Sure of that?"

"Positively! We have them on file still in school."

"That's all I want to know. We'll fool these guys yet. Come on, get moving, there's my ship over there. Here's where we work fast."

THE boat scraped its keel on the sand, and they both leaped out and dragged the boat clear.

"Know anything about machine guns?" asked Buzz.

"Not much. All you have to do is pull the trigger and hold it—Is that right?"

"Well, that will do for now. Look, here's a new drum. When one is empty you press these two prongs on the handle and lift it clear, but hang onto it so that the slipstream does not rip it out of your hands. To put one back on, you press the prongs again, ram it down on this peg until it fits and then pull back this cocking handle twice. Then you're all set again."

"Think we will use it?"

"Can't tell. Get in and put this coat around you. It's an old one, but it will keep you warm."

Buzz looked the Falcon over while Bruce got into the back seat. Benson set the brakes, whirled the starter and climbed in. Depressing the Eclipse starter button, he got the big engine turning over, and in a minute was warming up for a take-off. Down the rolling beach they roared, and swept into the night sky, heading north again for the Condor that had been downed near Taylor's Island. After about fifteen minutes, they got there, and before young Carleton could settle himself to the full joy of open cockpit flight, they were down again and rumbling across the damp sand toward the Condor.

"Come on, youngster," encouraged Buzz. "Let's hurry. We can't waste too much time here. I'm due in Washington by midnight."

Then, as their own engine eased down to idling speed, Buzz heard other motors roaring out across the water. There were several of them, tuned and synchronized beautifully.

"What's that?" asked Carleton.

"I don't know," replied Buzz, "but I have a sneaking idea."

They lurched across the uneven sand and plunged on toward the indistinct outline of the big transport. Buzz sensed at once that something was wrong. As he plunged on, he stumbled over an inert form that lay outstretched before the cabin door.

It was the Coast Guardsman who had been left in charge.

Buzz snatched at the man, who tried to sit up, rubbing the top of his head.

"Get in there, Bruce, and see if your model is still there," bawled Buzz. "What happened?" he then bellowed at the dizzy Coast Guardsman.

"They—they came from big seaplane, out there. Hit me, I—I guess. Wanted to search the—the ship. I guess they did, too. Don't—don't remember much."

"It's gone!" young Carlton bellowed from the open cabin door. "They ripped everything out, and the towel box is down—empty!"

"You all right?" snapped Buzz, shaking the Coast Guardsman. "Look in that front compartment. You'll find some first-aid equipment. Fix yourself up. We've got to beat it. Come on, Bruce!"

Lugging the youngster along to the Falcon, he put him again into the rear cockpit.

"Give that baby all we've got," he roared, snapping his belt. "There they go, heading out for the sea!"

BUZZ sent the Falcon charging down the sand again and whipped it up into the air with a snort of fury.

The outlines of the big boat were clear against the night sky, for the flares of the great exhausts brought out the knifelike lines of the trailing edges. The grim beauty of the whole ship struck Benson. He tried to piece it all together, and the best he could make of it was that somehow they had seen the original drawing of young Carleton's idea that had appeared in his school paper, and had built such a ship to sell to the government or to have patented and sell to the big air lines of the world.

It was evident, also, that they had learned that Carleton had built a working model of the ship and, realizing that they stood to lose plenty if it got before the patent officials in Washington, they had taken this method of getting rid of it. Now they had not only the model but an actual ship. Things looked pretty black for young Carleton's chances of ever being rewarded for his effort as a model builder.

The big black monster shot away into the night and Benson plunged after it. Over Deal Island, it turned east and headed across Pocomoke City, clawing for the wide stretches of the Atlantic.

"All this is beginning to straighten out," muttered Buzz, "but what about that thing—whatever it was—that brought the Condor down in the first place?"

He rammed the throttle forward for the last two notches and tore on after the big four-engined giant. The silver-streaked water of the Atlantic came up and the race was on.

Buzz was gaining fast on the big air monster, but he knew he would have to work fast to get it before he ran out of fuel. He fired his front guns to attract attention, hoping to lure them into an early battle.

"You all right?" he yelled back to the youngster behind.

"Sure!" Carleton replied, beaming.

"Want to go through with it?"

"Bet your life! They stole my model and now they want to get away. Let's give 'em plenty."

"It means losing your model," Benson warned.

"What of it? I can make another. Besides I still have the original drawing we used in the school paper. That will cover me, won't it?"

"You bet! Well, here we go. Good luck and good shooting!"

The Falcon roared up into a steep climb, and then, when the lights of the four-engined seaplane blinked up at them through the windows in front of the main wing, Buzz looked back.

"That's exactly like the one I made," Carleton roared at him. "The cabins in the wings and everything." Down went the Falcon, smack into a tornado of gunfire. Benson's Brownings answered the threat, and the sky was illuminated with streaky tracers.

The navigation lights on the big seaplane went out, and the great ship dodged madly. Buzz threw the Falcon over on her wing tip and yelled, "Let 'em have it. It's yours to get, Bruce!" Bruce twirled the gun around, hung to the spade grip and fumbled for the trigger. In a second the barrel was dancing wildly as the gun spurted her venom.

"Hold her tight, boy!" Buzz bellowed.

The kid steadied on the next burst and Buzz cheered as the spray of lead and fire bit into the tail assembly of the great ship. The monster struggled and jerked madly. One engine conked and threw off strange lights from the prop.

Buzz pulled out and climbed again, avoiding a wild tornado of lead that came up from the wing cabins. He snarled, rammed the stick over, kicked a rudder pedal and went down again. This time his wheels almost ripped out a motor nacelle as he directed his terrible torrent of hail full into the motorboat cabin of the liner. A spluttering streak of flame licked up from the top of the center section.

"There goes their wing-tank," he bellowed. "Go ahead, Bruce. Finish her off. She's your meat!"

Then, pulling the Falcon up into a circling curve, he watched young Carleton calmly blast the great seaplane—the replica of his aeronautical hobby—into a blazing mass of dural, steel, fabric and polished wood. The great ship staggered once, fought like a quirted mustang and then spat her fury with gigantic belches of flame that seemed to come out of the wing windows.

The roaring Falcon continued to circle around the great mass of death. Carleton aimed the gun again and drew a cruel bead on the cabin, blasting wicked lead into it. A roar of thunderous explosion greeted the deadly prodding, and the forepart blew away, hurling twisted bodies, banks of instruments and a section of cabin well out ahead of it.

A last effort came up from one of the wings of the buckled monster and flailed through the struts and fabric of the Falcon. Buzz eased out of the curling circle and let the boy finish her off.

Berr-r-r-r-oom! The ship, splashing the sky with a yellow-scarlet design, fantastic and terrible in its blinding glare, cracked clean in the middle. The two wing tips came up, and the wreckage fell away, swirling, screeching and hissing into the sea. That was the end.

THEY hit Washington about an hour later—worn, and trembling—planted down at Bolling Field and took a taxi to Major Norton's office. Two Navy guards were posted on the running board.

Buzz led Carleton in and up the stairs. Norton heard them coming up the stairs, and rushed to open the door.

"What in God's name happened?" he asked.

"Everything!" snapped Buzz. "Get this kid to bed. He's licked."

"Where's his model?"

"Down in the Atlantic somewhere. Who's this? Why, it's the guy who was huddled on that Condor wing. Where'd you get him?"

“Up there on the dunes, this afternoon, soon after you told us about that Condor’s going down. Wait a minute.” Major Norton called an orderly and ordered him to see that young Carleton was put to bed at once.

“See you in the morning, Bruce,” smiled Buzz. “Nice work, boy. Don’t worry, the major will look after you.” Young Bruce was almost asleep on his feet, but happy. He had flown in an open cockpit Army ship and fired a machine gun. What more could anyone ask?

“Now then, let’s have it,” Norton demanded when they had seen Carleton off.

Buzz told the story while the major and the strange little man sat hunched over a table.

“Then these guys—evidently the old International Aero Company gang—saw Carleton’s early drawing and went to work making it,” the major said. “It sounds like a real proposition. The Department of Commerce is interested in it, anyway, so it must be hot.”

“It’s hot, major. You see, they saw the Condor shot down, went back down the bay and landed somewhere in those crazy island dunes. Then they unhitched the boat, came back and got the gang.”

“Yes. They’re all off now, though. The light will be working in a few days. What then?”

“They tried to get young Carleton’s model, so as to remove all traces of a prior invention, but they forgot the original drawing which Carleton says is on file in his school paper—the drawing that gave them their start. When we got away, they cleared off in the boat, evidently hitched it back on the seaplane, went up and tried once more to find the model, realizing at last that the kid had hidden it. They got it, but they got more. The kid blasted them out of the sky himself.”

“You’d better keep that dark or you’ll get us all hung for letting him aboard the ship. Firing guns, a kid like that!”

“And how he fired those guns, major! But what’s the angle on our friend here?”

“He’s the answer to a government’s prayer. Meet Mr. Abner Hirkimer. He’s the gentleman who shot the Condor down, to make the government take notice of him. The fact of the matter is that we had been looking for him all over the country, but, like all inventors, he had neglected to put his address on any of his letters. And living out in a shack on those dunes, he actually had no postal address.”

“He shot it down—how?”

“Mr. Hirkimer is the inventor of a new gun—just what the anti-aircraft people have been looking for.” “Oh, those strange bullets. Here’s one.”

The man called Hirkimer reached out a bony-fingered hand and clutched at them.

“That’s it!” he cackled. “Now, do you get the idea?”

“No. What is it?” Buzz asked.

“You see those rings on the end? Well, that’s my winged bullet. The shape gives less barrel friction but more muzzle velocity. It does 5,800 feet per second.”

“Good Lord!” Benson replied. “The average bullet is not more than 2,800 feet in muzzle velocity. How do you do it?”

“First the barrel is tapered toward the muzzle, and all friction is lowered by the shape of the bullet. Then I use a nitro-cellulose explosive which is stronger than any other used in small arms. No gas can escape past this type of bullet, and the vanes increase the accuracy.”

“Is that how you directed the two bursts into those engines?” Buzz demanded.

“No, not on the rifling alone. The real secret of the gun is the aiming device. There I use an ultra-infra-red ray, directed through a tube mounted on the rifle. It looks like the old Aldis sight. All I have to do is to turn the ray on, direct the ray-beam on the target and pull the trigger. The ray assures accuracy in aim and the speed of the bullet does the rest.”

“Just like putting the glare of a mirror on a spot and putting a burst of bullets in at the same time, eh?” prodded Buzz. “That’s a swell idea—for us!”

“Yes,” growled Norton, “and if it hadn’t been for our sending for that kid and his model, we’d have lost two amazing inventions in one night. This bird was going to sell it to Japan tomorrow.”

“Do you blame me?” asked Hirkimer. “I’d been trying to get them to buy it, here in Washington, for months, but they wouldn’t answer my letters.”

“Well, don’t worry, old man. We’ll know where you are after this. You’ll have enough to buy the Mayflower Hotel and sleep in a different room every night. And you can use the ballroom for target practice, if you like!”

“I’ll settle for just one little cot in a corner,” groaned Buzz. “I’m beating it for bed right now!”