

a
**PHINEAS
PINKHAM**
howl



TROUBLE OR NOTHING

written and illustrated by **JOE ARCHIBALD**

FLYING MODELS (v55n1) JANUARY 1948

With the CAA after his hide, the CAB out for his blood, and the FBI gunning for his practical joke business, Phineas Pinkham, the Bagdad, Ohio, wonder-man, could think of nothing better to do than violate every flight rule in the books by hunting rubber cows in the skies while dodging a flock of USAAF .50 caliber slugs!

FLYING OUT OF NOWHERE, a plane of a kind made an emergency landing on the air strip of the Flying Carpet Airline, Inc., (Phineas Pinkham, President and General Manager) and wheezed and staggered to a stop almost on the front step of the old two-car garage that served as the administration building. A scared-looking little citizen climbed out, got down on his hands and knees and kissed terra firma, then looked up at Phineas and the head mech, Terence Patrick Casey.

"I'll sell that coffee grinder dirt cheap, my friend," the no-longer-air-minded taxpayer sniffed. "Four hundred bucks as it stands. I'll even throw in a hundred gallons of gas. An' the heck with it."

"What is it, Casey?" the Boonetown miracle man asked, and scratched the bald strip on his dome.

"I don't know," Terence admitted. "Elmer an' Boom Boom will know when they get back from Buffalo."

"I bought it from army surplus," the fat little visitor divulged. "It is what they call an LS, an' it was used for liaison work an' artillery spottin', they said."

"Casey," Phineas said, "tow that crate out an' look it over good 'fore I buy it. I got to go in an' call a flyin' instructor I know."

"I hope a strait-jacket comes with it," Casey snorted. "It don't weigh as much as a 1917 Spad, I bet. I am glad a model of Columbus's Santa Maria is not available an' you are not a sea captain as you would start out right away to the Northwest Passage."

"You got your, Orders, Sarge!" Phineas snapped. "At your age who else but me would hire you?"

"AS THOUGH we ain't got trouble enough," Casey complained to Greasy Gilbey while he probed at the vitals of the 165 horsepower engine. "The C.A.A., the C.A.B., the F.C.C., an' all other flyin' bureaus are gettin' ready to roll up this flyin' carpet an' notify second-hand dealers, but you'd think they were goin' to send him a nobble prize instead. Well, I've seen that crackpot shinin' up Captain's bars while waitin' to be called in for a courts martial."

Phineas made an appointment with the flying instructor, jotted down a reminder to get himself a pilot's license, then answered a query put to him by the unexpected interloper.

"That strip of fabric nailed up there with thirty-two crosses?" the ex-war flyer grinned. "My *descendus* in the first *guerre*, Mr. Gamper. The little sausages are for Heinie balloons. Nineteen. I knocked down twenty, but the U.S. brass hats robbed me of the last one."

"Well, what do you know?" Mr. Gamper said and puffed at his cold cigar stub. He reached for a lighter and snapped it on and a stream of water came out of the side of it and hit him in the right eye. Shock number two was a kind of cat-like scream that came out from the rubber cushion he was sitting on. Mr. Gamper catapulted out of the chair, was half-way to the door when Phineas caught him. "Forgot to tell you, Mr. Gamper," he grinned. "My card."

"There are tricks in all trades," the addled visitor read aloud. "'Our trade is all tricks!'"

"Haw-w-w-w-w!" Phineas laughed. "My factory is in—"

"Just let me out of here if you don't mind," Gamper gulped out, and tossed a battered card case to the desk. "Address is on there, if you decide to buy the plane. Yes, can I tone for a phaxi? Never mind, I'll walk to a bus, it is such a dice nay."

A few minutes later Phineas went out to see about the shape the LS was in.

"A couple of new parts an' this powerplant'll be aw-right," the mech said. "The struts on this heap are wobbly. But don't never ask me t' fly it nowheres or I quit."

"Who do you think you are, Casey? It is my own private plane. Any more suggestions?"

"Silver handles on the sides would be nice," Casey sniffed, and walked away. "Le's finish that crap game, Greasy."

Representatives from the Civil Aeronautics Board and other alphabetical agencies of the government that had been formed to protect life and limb and properties of flying citizenry in the U.S. had already been to see Phineas Pinkham and to inspect his airline. They had left behind them over a dozen recommendations for immediate improvement and had made it quite plain that the neglect of even one of the suggestions would bring dire consequences. Phineas had been called to Washington to explain away certain infractions of air rules on the part of his pilots, Boom Boom Brink, and his son, Elmer.

Boom Boom had been severely censured for flying at an altitude of not more than five hundred feet over Kankakee, and for dropping a weighted package containing a letter to a favorite mouse. The missile had hit, a block from the doll's house, and had nearly fractured the skull of the police commissioner.

Elmer had come into the airport at Iowa City with balky flaps and had caused the merger of an oil truck and a sedan carrying two detectives and two uncouth citizens who had waived extradition. The crooks had been re-captured after quite a rhubarb.

Both pilots still had to answer for alleged rank discourtesy to control tower personnel, and for faking dire emergencies in order to get priority over other pilots waiting to land. Boom Boom, on one occasion, had screamed that he had been seized with an appendix attack, but had forgotten to go along with the gag when he'd stepped out of the DC3.

"I wonder what they did this time," Phineas sighed as he heard the drone of a transport overhead. He went out and watched Number Eleven come in and make a bumpy landing.

BOOM BOOM came down the ladder first and he looked too nonchalant to suit Phineas. He told Boom Boom to come clean, as no cat, even after a raid on a canary cage, could look so innocent.

"Don't blame me every time," Boom Boom sniffed. "It was Elmer's fault this time. Ask him! The Detroiters were playin' in Cleveland an' he wanted t' see what the score was at the end of the sixth. I bet he was only a hundred feet up as I could almos' reckernize Hal Newhouser on the mound. He feathered the props to fake trouble—oh, my achin' back!"

Phineas unbuckled his belt and ripped it loose from his pants. "That was all we needed, clamhead!" he yelled at Elmer when his pride and joy put his feet on the strip. "I am goin' t' whale the daylights out of you!"

"Wait, pa, how about the time you stole a plane at Issousdon, France, an' went to Paree an' buzzed the Place of the Concords?" Elmer howled. "Can I help it if I took after you—?"

"Correction, Elmer," Phineas yipped. "It is you I'm takin' after!" He chased his offspring half-way to Boonetown, but found out that youth was being served as usual. He gave up, staggered into a roadside inn and ordered beer and aspirin, gasping, "It wa'n't—the Place de la Concord—it was the Rue—Madelaine. Garrity, that lousy brass hat, lyin' to my boy. If I ever meet up with the—"

Phineas paid for his beer, told the blonde waitress to keep the change for the dollar note, then wended his way back to the airport.

Elmer cautiously entered the Pinkham home in Boonetown after dark. He went up the stairs to his room and locked himself in. "Well, I better write t' Washin'ton an' see if they need an aviator over in the ETO or Japan," he sighed, and rummaged around for writing paper. Downstairs the volume of sound coming out of the Pinkham Wilco radio stepped up suddenly, and Elmer Pinkham heard the last part of a significant sentence.

"—frightened the spectators until officials feared a panic. The transport just skimmed over the flags flying from the stadium, and Lou Boudreau, Indian manager, missed a third strike as a result of the pandemonium that ensued. He says he will protest the game. Such flagrant violations of the rules of the airlines, J. K. Cogglesprecker, president of the C.A.B. said, will not be tolerated and the pilots responsible will be severely dealt with. It is believed that the plane was owned by the Fly—"

Elmer Pinkham clamped his hands over his ears. "I s'pose a wolf that had a sheep-eater for a pa is expected t' be a vegetarian. *Nuts!*"

During the next thirty-six hours, Phineas Pinkham got a taste of more trouble than he'd ever caused C.O.s in his World War One career. Mrs. Pinkham woke up in the small hours of the night to see Phineas pacing the floor in his old-fashioned nightshirt, and mumbling like a hermit. "—Number Seven is grounded—has to have a new P&W—Elmer's license is suspended indefinitely until after an invest—Boom Boom is still li'ble for the benzine board—got t' cancel contracts—need a new pilot—they'll most likely wash out the whole outfit—which is quicker an' less painful, I wonder—carbolic or prussic—investigations—safety violations—inadequate lightin' for the air strip—I should of stood in bed—"

"You better jump back in or you'll get grounded yourself," Mrs. Pinkham snapped. "I told you never t' go back in aviation!"

At ten a.m. the next morning, Number Eleven, piloted by Boom Boom, and carrying Elmer as a passenger as far as anyone knew, took off from the air strip with a cargo of fresh tomatoes and egg plant, furniture, and twenty crates of chicks, bound for Baltimore. Phineas stood with his abbreviated ground crew and watched the DC3 until it was out of sight. "Huh, my own son—grounded!" he groaned.

"Wanna bet?" Casey sniffed.

"You mean you think Elmer would disregard orders from—?" Phineas was indignant, and seemed unable to find more words.

"What do you think?" Casey tossed at his boss, then walked away.

"I wisht I had an answer for that bum!" the proprietor of the Flying Carpet Airline snorted, and then turned and saw a strange character approaching. "Who let you on this air strip?" he yelled.

The citizen answered by handing Phineas his card. It introduced Waldo Bruff, Flying Instructor.

"Bomb jour," the old Spad operator grinned. "When do we start?"

"Where's the pupil?" Waldo asked.

"Who you think I am, huh?"

"Oh, my," Bruff gulped. "I was afraid you was. Well—by the way, there is someone waiting for you over at the—*er*—office, Pinkham. Interesting looking individual, yeah,"

"Wait here," Phineas said, and trotted toward operations. A citizen nearly as tall as the St. Louis Cardinal shortstop, and twice as broad, was standing by the water-cooler and holding a drinking glass up to the light. The front of his shirt was quite damp. "Dribble glass, hah?" the visitor snarled at Phineas. "Ver-r-r-r-y funny!"

"Er—what can I do for you?"

"You run this—airline?"

"Its all accordin' to who you are. Haw-w-w-w-w!"

"I'm Sam Bullard, F.B.I."

"Awright," Phineas yipped. "Never mind the details. They tried to land on the lawn of the White House where they roll eggs. They nearly took both legs off Harry T—I'll go quietly. I—"

"You seem t'be mixed up, Pinkham," the F.B.I. man sniffed, and took things from an inside pocket, a dollar note presumably, and a sheet of paper carrying the photos of a very rough looking gee, full-face and profile. "Anybody lookin' like this mugg grab a ride on any of your crates lately? He's Eddie the Etcher, alias Frankie the Ferret. Somebody like him passed off a phony bill on a babe at a roadside stand couple days ago. Picture of Lincoln on the bill—without his beard. Look at the letters printed there. They'd sure look okay to a guy in a hurry or who had stig-matism. 'Ununited Skates of Acirema.'"

PHINEAS FELT a trifle atomized. There was aspic in his legs instead of knees. "Lincoln? That is just a picture of Little Dabner of the comics. I ought t' know as—why, this is an outrage, huh? Passin' off such

stuff as real lettuce. I sure hope that crook tries t' buy passage to anywheres from me!"

"Well, keep the pictures of the punk, Pinkham," Bullard growled. "I better get goin'."

When the F.B.I. man had driven away, Phineas frantically called his factory in Des Moines. "L-Lis-ten, George," he yelled when a familiar voice answered. "Scrap all that stage dough! Call in all shipments if you made any. We're doin' too good a job on that item, yeah. Huh? Better burn it up! Oh, cripes!" He took a roll of bills from his pocket and hurriedly examined it lest he had more of the same spurious moola on his person.

"Look, Pinkham," Waldo Bruff threw at him from the doorway, "I'm a busy man. If you want to know how to take an airplane off the ground—"

"Listen, Waldo," Phineas snapped back. "I was fly in' planes when you was gettin' wrapped up in three-cornered doilies. Just tell me where is each instrument and you can go."

"Look, Pinkham," Bruff bridled, "The days when you flew—"

"Oh, yeah? Onct a guy learns to skate he never forgets," Phineas insisted. "Leave us waste no more time, Bruff."

"Sure, I put on skates for the first time last winter in twenty years and I landed smack dab on my empennage, Bub!" Waldo snapped. "Well, anyway, let's get started doin' somethin' with that flea trap. No wonder somebody sold it to you cheap."

The mechs, Casey and Greasy Gilbey, watched with avid interest as Waldo Bruff drilled Phineas Pinkham in fundamentals. He explained the instruments on the L5 dashboard, then got into the light job and taxied along the runway. He took it up to 500 feet, then brought it down again. Worry-dew glistened on his physiognomy when he stepped out. "I'm raisin' my price, Pinkham. It is now twenty bucks a lesson."

"Here is five, you chiseler," Phineas sniffed. "Now beat it. I got a six-year-old niece could fly that without her scarin' herself. Haw-w-w-w!"

"Yeah? You don't git no license without me okayin' you, Pinkham," Waldo said.

"Stick around," Phineas grinned. "Casey, run over to the office and git me my old helmet!"

Waldo Bruff's mouth snapped open. "You can't solo without me givin' you the go sign, Pinkham!"

"Here's twenty bucks, an' shut up!" the Boonetown war veteran sniffed.

"An' get him a parachute," Bruff yelled after Casey.

"Wha-a-a-a? Listen, Waldo, I never used one and never will," Phineas asserted. "It is like a champ

swimmer goin' into a tank with water wings. I never did take nothin' upstairs I couldn't come down with!"

"I should go far away from here," Waldo sighed. "If this ever gets out—"

"A nice radio set," Phineas said as he settled into the L5's office. "Gamper didn't forget a thing, huh?"

"He forgot t' keep away from this airport," Greasy Gilbey gulped. "Well, there must be other bosses somewheres."

Wearing the helmet he had used over never-to-be forgotten topographical features of faraway France such as Mont Sec, the Meuse, the Vosges, and Metz, Phineas Pinkham let 165 horses loose and took off in the L5. He cleared the pole holding the windsock by the width of a pencil, clipped needles off a clump of pines on the northeast perimeter of the airport, and threw the L5 into an Immel-mann when he reached eight hundred feet. Coming out of the turn, he looped the L5, and ex-Sergeant Casey, U.S. Air Corps, 1917-1919, covered his face with his hands. Waldo Bruff took a little box of aspirin from his pocket and indulged in an overdose.

Phineas circled overhead, then came in for a landing. Bruff and Casey and Greasy Gilbey scattered like frightened grouse. At seventy miles per hour, the owner of Flying Carpet Airlines hit terra firma, got just a piece of the runway and headed for the woods on the south border of the field. The L5 bounced, came down again, hopped a ditch, and then rolled to a stop.

Casey's mind went taxiing back along memory lane. "An' here I was worryin' about the crackpot. Greasy," he said when Phineas brought the L5 around and onto the strip. "Every guy has his own system, huh? He-e-ey, Bruff!"

The flying instructor crawled out from under Phineas Pinkham's apology for an administration building, got up and staggered onto the field, his face as pale as a penguin's bib. "M-My apologies, P-Pinkham," he gulped. "I'll graduate you immediately, recommend you for a pilot's license. The rest is up to the C.A.A., or F.B.I. Just let me out of here. Er—what do I owe you for the lessons? What am I say—?"

"I know how you feel, Buster," Casey sighed. "Air safety experts have been set back fifty years."

"Haw-w-w-w," Phineas laughed. "Happy day are here ag'in. Nothin' to it, boys."

"If you git a license to fly," Casey snorted, "I will put in an application for Secretary to the Interior."

"And I will join the Vassars," Greasy Gilbey said.

THERE WAS little joy in Bagdad later that night. An electric storm came up and a bolt of lightning

knocked the Pinkham portable gas-driven generator for a loop, and there were no lights to guide the DC3 in that was already winging its way over the commonwealth of Illinois. Phineas got into his jalopy and drove full tilt to Boonetown. He rushed into his house and upstairs and rummaged frantically through the contents of an old trunk. An hour later he, Casey and Greasy Gilbey were pounding certain powders together in a bowl. Saltpeter, sublimated sulphur, and sulphuret of antimony.

"So now we run a prescription counter," Greasy sniffed. "What in *h—!*?"

"An ol' trick I used over acrosst when I needed a flare to light me in," Phineas yipped. "You pound that stuff into them three tin cans an' add some camphor to it. Then we'll put 'em out on the strip and light 'em."

Just half an hour later, the sounds of Elmer's and Boom Boom's return shook the skies overhead. Luminous blue lights guided the DC3 in without mishap, and Phineas elbowed Casey in the ribs. "Am I still on the ball, huh?"

"Yeah," Casey admitted, awed by the touch of the old master.

"Don't tell me they stole the generator!" Elmer Pinkham yelled, striding up. "Where did you git the canned heat, pa? Well for once we had a trip without no trouble, but we got bad news in Washin'ton. They're goin' t' throw the book at us awright, a feller close to some big shots in the C.A.A. said. A guy named Hubert Wick of Goliath Airways offered to buy our crate for twenty grand. I almost took a thousand in advance. Now tell me what bad news you got since I left, pa."

"Le's go to the office, Elmer, an' havosa directors' meetin'," Phineas Pinkham choked out. "Do you think you will make a good trick novelty salesman?"

Phineas Pinkham and son went into a huddle and could not come up with a play that seemed to have a chance against the threatened attack by flying brass hats. The radio was on, but the Pinkhams hardly heard the warning to pilots that was being broadcast far and wide. An army barrage balloon had broken loose from a Colorado airdrome where it had been put to use advertising a sale of surplus light training planes, Jeeps, etcetera. All aircraft pilots were asked to be on the alert for the rubber cow. It was floating willy nilly and was trailing cables and ropes. Army planes were on the hunt for the gas bag.

"What was that the announcer said, Elmer?" Phineas suddenly asked.

"Nothin' much, pa. Pilots landin' on emergency

fields have to look out for cows and sheeps, etcetera. Army surplus sale of cables an' ropes. Called some senators gas bags—about time. Well, how long would it take us to get back into business if we got the book threw at us, huh?"

"At least twenty years," Phineas sniffed. "Then we would have to buy jet planes an' deep space soupsonic crates. All the other airlines would beat us to the contracts with guys on Venus or Mars, Elmer. It looks bad."

One of the mysteries of the first world war, as far as Terrence Patrick Casey was concerned, was how Phineas Pinkham ever became a lieutenant in the flying corps. The veteran ackemma, twenty-four hours or so before the president of the Flying Carpet Airline was to know for sure if he was to be rubbed off the Iowa landscape, DC3's and all, nearly suffered a stroke when he learned that Phineas had received a civilian pilot's license. "They've committed homicide just like they'd stuck a knife through his juggler vein. Greasy," he wailed. "A D.A. should have passed on that, too. Well, le's go an' look for jobs tomorrer. I hear they want fruit pickers in Oregon."

Phineas proudly displayed the certificate to his son, Elmer. "I'm a hasbeen, am I, you squirt?" he mocked.

"You use that thing and you will be," Elmer yelled. "You ain't got it no more. No vasamotor stability. And your aerobolism is—you ought to have some regard for ma! I'll sue the C.A.A. I'll prefer charges against Waldo Bruff! Look, throw it away, pa, huh?"

"Right now I am goin' to go on patrol," Phineas grinned. "Oh, if that L5 only had Vickers guns an* there was some Heinies to shoot at. Well, I'll show you if I haven't got gasamotive stability and that embolism. You just come an' watch."

"No thanks. I will call ma an' ask her which undertaker she wants to take from in town," Elmer snapped.

PHINEAS WALKED out to the air strip and hailed Casey. "Git the L5 fixed up with gas an' oil, Sarge. I am goin' to look over the balloon line near Mont Sec. Haw-w-w-w!"

"Don't be silly," Casey yelled. "The sky is cloudin' up, an' besides you have took the cracked pitcher to the well onct too often, an' I need a job."

"I'll have discipline here, Sarge. You heard my orders!"

Phineas Pinkham climbed into the light plane and yelled. "Contact! Hurry up an' spin the prop, you grease monk—ha, I forgot. It is automatic today. Well, adoo!" The L5 roared along the strip, leaped clear of the ground like a flushed partridge and went aloop-ing into

the troubled blue yonder. Phineas forgot his worries and the brass knuckles the C.A.A. were putting on. He was airborne and as free as a bird. He passed over what looked to be a sizeable flying field twenty minutes after the takeoff and thought he'd have fun. He put on his ear-phones and picked up the mike. "NC niyun-fower-tha-ree-sevvun-niyun—callin' Ivory Tower. Over—"

"Tower—NC nine four three seven nine, go ahead."

"I sure will. What is my position, huh? Over."

"Three seven nine. Fifteen south-west at fifteen hundred. Runway fourteen, call on downwind leg, over."

"Put that in U.S language," Phineas tossed into the mike. "I am no runaway and the wind isn't running down my leg, haw-w-w-w-w!"

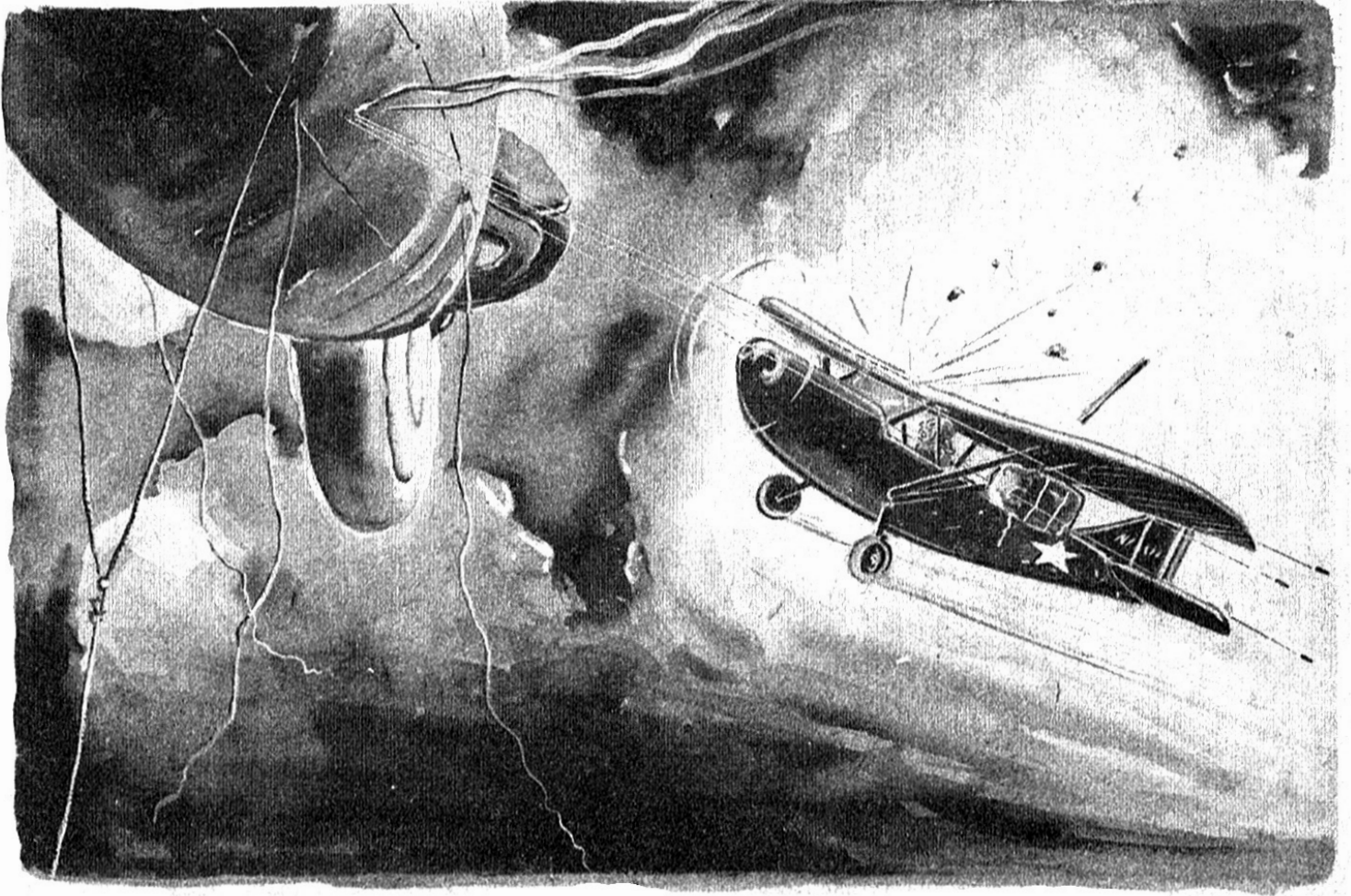
"Listen, you lemonhead! What gives—?"

Phineas silenced the radio and laughed himself into a near spin. "What fun I would've had with Major Garrity back in Barley Duck if we'd had radios. Brother! Huh, it is gittin' cloudy an' I should turn back. But I wonder what the ceilin' of this grasshopper is. Well, there is just one way t' find out. I could get fourteen thousan' with my last Spad an' that was almos' thirty years ago."

Phineas Pinkham pointed the snout of the L5 at a big cloud and poured on the coal to the 165 horses. He kept looking at the altimeter. Two thousand—twenty-five hundred—three thousand. The tail started dragging, and then—Phineas Pinkham saw the great rubber cow seep through a great gob of mist and sweep in to meet him. His powerplant seemed to scream like a thousand banshees as if it, too, had nerves, and was scared out of its magnetos.

"It—it roars like a Mustang," Phineas gulped and swung toward the left, passing along the length of the big barrage balloon, not more than fifty yards from its bulging sides. Then there came a sound that took Phineas back over the years. *Br-r-r-r-r-r-t br-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-t!* Tracers howled past his cowling. A strut disappeared, and the L5 went into a conniption fit as heavy stuff tagged it. Phineas, trying to remember most of the things he'd forgotten, fought the grasshopper out of a wicked slump, and was on even keel when the grim shape thundered directly overhead. As if that was not enough, a great ball of fire lighted up the heavens and the old Spad expert felt the heat of it.

The rubber cow, cables and ropes thrashing like serpents in agony, fell toward the earth, a tremendous fiery torch, and Phineas frantically goosed the engine of the L5 to make sure he would not get sauteed like a veal chop. The effort put more strain on the wounded grasshopper, and Phineas knew it wanted down but



fast. "Well, here is where I left in 1918." Phineas choked out. "I have come in again. That bum shootin' through that balloon—you take care of ma, Elmer, and be a good boy like always."

The army plane came sweeping back to get a look at the moth that seemed to have come out of the barrage balloon. It passed within a hundred yards of the L5, and Phineas quickly memorized the row of numbers on its tail. 222794. All at once the old Pinkham acumen came to life, and for the moment he forgot his precarious position in the scheme of things. A runaway barrage balloon, property of the U.S. Army. A Mustang throwing punches at a civilian pilot. Haw-w-w-w-w! At an altitude of fifteen hundred, holding his wing on by a prayer, Phineas tried to contact the army pilot by radio, but found all communication had been shot away.

The L5's engine coughed and Phineas looked at a gas gauge that was no longer there. Oil spattered his face and now he was over the Meuse again in a Spad and he kept talking to himself: *No Spad ever licked you yet, Phineas. This is a Spad. This is a Spad. It is 1917 and Barley Duck is just ahead, and Bump Gillis owes you twenty bucks. Babette expects you tonight!*

Terra firma was coming up to embrace the Boonetown miracle man. Phineas could see the mole on the cheek of a housewife hanging out her wash. The woman tossed a suit of long underwear away and legged it for cover. He threw the rapidly disintegrating L5 over the roof of her house with little to spare and cut down all the horses left in the powerplant. The grasshopper was wingless when it slid past a little structure shaped like a telephone booth and dove into a creek.

PHINEAS instinctively extricated himself from the L5's office, made a pass at a big catfish that nibbled at his nose, and pushed himself to the surface. The tail of the grasshopper was above water, and he splashed over to it and hung on. High in the sky was the army plane and it was high-tailing it from the scene of the crime. "Wait'll I put you in a sling, you bum!" Phineas gulped, and wondered how many bones he had cracked up. A freckled-faced kid rowed toward him in a flat-bottomed boat.

"Bum jour," Phineas greeted hazily. "*Vive la France!*"

"A Frenchy, huh?" the sprout observed. "No wonder you folded up against the Natsies, flyin' like that. Huh!"

"I just was in dreamland for a second, sonny,"

Phineas explained, then had another relapse. "Quick, git me to the nearest C.P. I have t' call the Ninth Pursuit as I found the secret Gotha drome. Garrity'll bust me after that, hah! Chaumont might give me his job, haw-w-w-w-w! So that was the great von Schmutzig was after me, was it? Awright, git me to a phone, veet!"

"Nuttier than a pecan bar," the country lad mumbled. "Must of cracked his noggin an' has got to be got to a horsepital."

Phineas became rational again once more when he found himself on the horsehair couch in the farmhouse. Voices seeped in from the kitchen. "You think mebbe that ball of fire was a meatyer bustin' up, paw? A piece hit the poor feller's plane an'—"

"Reckon, maw."

"Maybe an atomic bomb busted up in the plane was carryin' it," the farmer boy offered. "Well, I hope Zeb gits back soon with that light truck. The ol' guy looks like he's washed up, ma."

Phineas kept repeating the numbers 222794. He wondered if he would sue for five hundred thousand or a million. He would hire three Philadelphia lawyers and take it all the way to the Supreme Court. The old doll trotted in to see how he was and he shut his eyes and groaned. "I can't stand it—give me a hypo! Tell Bump Gillis an' the rest t'carry on for the Democrats. If the Republicans git in the way—er—le's hock the Kaiser!"

"He's fightin' the first world war," the kid said. "They'll most likely put him in a squirrel roost, ma."

An hour later, in a healing hacienda in southern Nebraska, Phineas Pinkham asked an M.D. had he seen a missing clavicle around anywhere. "I am glad I am not a herrin'. Doc, as all the-bones I got ache like parted lovers' hearts. Look, I want some newspaper reporters, and I want t' telegraph my fam'ly, also my lawyers. Will I live, Doc?"

"What you have done, Pinkham," the corn belt croaker sniffed, "should be sent to Ripley. At your age, and not even a pinky fractured."

The bigger journals of the U.S. carried the story the next morning that pushed Gromyko and the U.N. right off the front page. The Des Moines Star-Trib's headlines screamed as follows:

CIVILIAN PILOT SHOT DOWN BY ARMY PLANE!
 Nearly Cremated by Exploding Barrage Balloon.
 Phineas Pinkham, First World War Pilot, Claims
 Sky Hit-and-Run!

The Minneapolis Herald's big black type yelled:

MUSTANG PILOT SHOTS DOWN CIVILIAN PLANE!

Son of Senator Scraghorne Was Hunting Drifting
Barrage Balloon!

"It was criminal negligence on the army's part," Phineas Pinkham was quoted as having said. "First, they let the rubber cow get loose, an' then they give that pilot real fifty calibre slugs to shoot, not just tracers which are bad enough. Then when I was goin' down, the Mustang buzzed me an' added to my panic. Instead of leadin' me toward an airport which was only half a mile from where I cracked up in the creek, the pilot took it on the lam!"

On the drome of the Flying Carpet Airline, Elmer Pinkham and Boom Boom and the ackemmas avidly devoured the printed pages.

"I knew it," Casey snorted. "You git him upstairs an' he could even cause an eclipse of the moon or sun. Of all the pilots in the U.S., it had to be the son of Senator Herkimer Scraghorne. One barrage balloon loose in the U.S. and he fums into it. I wonder has he got a case?"

"Somebody's li'ble," Elmer said. "If I know pa, he will convince the Supreme Court somebody really is! What publicity for our airline, huh?"

"The criminal negligence," Casey observed, "is on the part of whoever give him a flyin' license. A lot of citizens will want all this hushed up. Who can prove the Mustang pilot didn't see Phineas before he started the shootin' at the sausage?"

Twenty-four hours after Phineas had been deposited on the hospital bed, word was relayed to him that certain representatives of the army and otherwise were coming to quiz him. He was munching an omelet at the time, and a bottle of catsup reposed on the tray beside it.

"Awright, I'll see 'em," Phineas said. "But I don't want nobody around like doctors an' nurses when I talk it over with 'em. To-morrer afternoon, huh?"

THE CATSUP was nowhere in sight when the tray was taken out of the sick room. Phineas examined a sheet and found that it had been to the laundry more than somewhat, and indulged in a big grin. He might have lost a little of his flying savvy, but when it came to legerdemain and prestidigitation and skulduggery, he was right on the ball. "Haw-w-w-w, they won't want too much of an investigation," he told himself. "I'll make it even worst than I told the reporters. I wonder if a brass hat named Garrity is readin' about me? Of course the

U.S. Air Corpse is not to blame but they have t'prove it, haw-w-w-w; I remember they tried to in France more than once, but I still never went to Blois."

An hour before the delegation was to arrive, Phineas tore a bed-sheet into many strips and smeared some of them with catsup. He wound them around certain portions of his anatomy, and left an eye and part of his mouth bare. On a table beside him was a legal document his lawyer had brought him from Boonetown, his last will and testament. He had given strict orders that he would not be disturbed an hour preceding the grilling so that he could shed some of the shock sustained by his gruelling experience. It had seemed reasonable to the doctor.

At length four men came into the room, and one of them was Lieutenant Craghorne.

"Awright," Phineas began. "It was my word against the looie's here. Did he see me or didn't he? I say he got trigger happy an' thought I was a plane beatin' him to the rubber cow. It was awright if he did knock me for a loop, but he didn't have t'run off, huh? There was an airport nearby an' he should've piloted me towards it as my radio was all smashed up an'—"

"Yes, yes, now listen to me, P—"

"Here I am a licensed aviator an' I git treated like a Nip or a Nazzy. Even if I wa'n't shot down, it is a miracle I didn't git snarled up in that balloon cable. An' they want t' put me outa business, imagine? Imagine the army usin' hydrogen when they should've used helium in a rubber cow they figure should git loose? There could have been a fire that would've swept the prairies from here t' Chillicothe, Ohio. A farmer's house could of burnt up with all his children. Wa'n't there no other way t' snag that balloon, hah?"

A Colonel mopped his pate and raised both hands. "If you'd let us git a word in edgew—"

"Figure it out for yourself," Phineas went on. "I lose a two thousan' buck airplane. The crackpot aviator shortened my life I figure about fifteen years which means my good wife will be a widow that much sooner an' fifteen times twelve thousan' a year she won't git is—and there's my own health while I live which won't never be the same and so I should sue for fifty grand for incapacitation as my son, Elmer, is not the executive type. Then there is my trick novelty business which I'll have to neglect while I'm bedridden. That's another hundred thousand an'—"

A civilian investigator excused himself, feigning sudden illness. An army Colonel had about pulled all the overseas stripes off his arm before he could jump in and yell Phineas down. Lieutenant Craghorne

said the hell with it and went out to brief a nurse. "Pinkham? Trick novelty business?" the graying brass hat gulped. "Was you ever with an outfit called the Ninth Pursuit Squadron, near Bar-Le-Duc, France, in the first war?"

"Guilty," Phineas snickered. "And one time you slugged a Captain's eyewash with belladonna? He tried to drive back to Chaumont—remember? An' he saw two lights where there was really only one and turned to the right an' hit a truck?"

"You do look familiar," Phineas admitted.

The Colonel tugged at the sleeve of a major. "Let's get out of here, Bert. The attorney general of the U.S. wouldn't take this case. They can settle it in Washin'ton the best they can. They should know what I know."

When they had gone, Phineas peeled off his bandages, tucked them under his mattress, and was as innocent looking as a choir boy holding a baby lamb when the M.D. and the nurse came in. "Well, you don't look the worse for it," the doctor grinned.

"I don't think I will be," Phineas grinned. "That is—I mean—"

"Your wife is outside," the nurse said. "Shall I let her in?"

"You think you could stop her, huh?"

"Babette is a cute name, Mr. Pinkham," the invalid tender said. "It just fits Mrs. P—"

"Wha-a-a-a? Ug—look, nurse, if I was in delirium when I got here, you got no right to tell secrets as you took a hypocritical oath, don't forget. Babette was a Frog doll I knew back in 1918, is all."

The whole incident was soon hushed up and Gromyko was allowed to come back to the front pages. It was apparent to most citizens interested in aviation that certain moguls of the trade, in mufti or otherwise, had reached agreements and compromises, which proved to the UN that men could really get together and settle a problem, even one named Phineas Pinkham.

"Phineas," ex-Sergeant Casey said the day Elmer's license was restored. "I don't know what happened in Washin'ton, but there is one thing they should do. Send you to Greece instead of the loan, in a Piper Cub. Joe Stalin, to get rid of you, would lift the iron curtain, scam out of Manchuria, and even vote the Republican ticket."

"He should know better," Elmer sighed, and picked up a stack of papers. "Contracts, pa. We're lousy with 'em. We'd need two more crates to handle 'em."

"Go get 'em, son," Phineas grinned.