



THE HARDWARE ACE

a
**PHINEAS
PINKHAM**
howl

by **JOE ARCHIBALD**

The C.O. should have known better. It was a friendly relations dinner for the new Frog squadron in that sector—and the Skipper let Phineas Carbuncle Pinkham come to the party!

AS IF IN AN EFFORT TO IMPRESS more firmly in the minds of the long-suffering, swearing A.E.F. the fact that the expression “Sunny France” was a fallacy, old Jupe Fluvius was emptying

another load of clouds on Frogland and churning it into a gooey geological mess. Perhaps to save time, the vendor of rain was cascading most of his wares down on one particular spot—that occupied by the Ninth Yankee Pursuit Squadron outside of Bar-Le-Duc. Not

that the riders of the Spads failed to welcome a respite from taking a poke at Jerry; but too much of anything, even ice cream, is more than enough. The pilots, holed up in their little cubicles, snapped at each other like feline stepbrothers in a cage. Any attempt at conversation led to an argument. Arguments resolved into fights. And Major Rufus Garrity, C.O., prayed that the deluge would soon abate, lest these fights lead to funerals.

The wet blanket, however, was finding one individual impervious to its attack. There was nothing in the world wet enough to dampen the innate spirits of Lieutenant Phineas "Carbuncle" Pinkham, Boonetown, Iowa's gift to the Air Service. Phineas was now standing in the doorway of his Nissen hut, surveying with twinkling orbs the swamp that had once been a tarmac. Standing beside him was Bump Gillis, radiating the sunny personality of a professional pallbearer with a toothache.

"Say," commented Phineas, "If we put in cranberries now, we'd have 'em in time fer Thanksgiving. Giss I'll put it up to the Ol' Man."

"There's only one thing funnier than you, ya ape," growled Bump, "an' that's an attack of cramps." And the pilot swore and went back to his tumbled cot.

"Which is better than havin' no sense of humor," flung Phineas after him, his mouth splitting into a wide grin and exposing to view a collection of ivories that would furnish keyboards for two grand pianos. He, too, turned and walked toward his cot. Reaching under his pillow, he withdrew a book and squatted down on his trunk to begin reading.

Bump Gillis opened one eye and let it focus on the black letters on the cover of the book, to wit: "How to Fool Your Friends." He grunted scornfully and turned over, his face to the wall. His snores soon vied with the tattoo of the fain on the iron roof. Phineas Pinkham, oblivious to everything, continued to absorb the contents of his treasured tome, memorizing its chicaneries, chuckling at its revelations. The sodden, bedraggled day groped toward dusk. Bump Gillis' soporific solo ended with a souging wheeze. Phineas yawned and dosed the covers of his book. The glances of the two men met.

"Time for grub," growled Bump and rolled out of his bed.

"Gripes!" snorted Carbuncle as he yanked on his coat "Ya even seem sore about that."

"Nuts!" observed Bump and steeled himself for the walk over to the old farmhouse.

THE grumbling Ninth dribbled in to mess. Each of the long faces seemed to shrink to normal at the sight of the Old Man, who was already seated in his chair. Eyes shone with an anticipatory light. This was an event. Generally the Old Man blew in when they were already finished eating. Something was in the wind.

"Going to wait mess for a few minutes, men," the Old Man announced. "Going to entertain."

"What's that?" asked Captain Howell, leader of A flight, with astonishment.

"Yes, Howell," the C.O. elucidated. "I've invited the French squadron over that moved in near Soirry Wood three days ago. Must establish friendly relations. Necessary for cooperation and all that. Understand? It's about time another combat unit moved into this sector. Nothing but bombers and clumsy observation crates around here. We'll have a fighting chance against Manheim's ships now. Understand?" And as the last word dropped crisply from his lips, the Old Man's gaze happened to wander to the homely countenance of Lieutenant Pinkham. "You, Pinkham!" he snapped. "None of your dizzy tricks, do you hear? Let me catch you pulling one and I'll burn your pants. Understand?"

"Yessir," grinned Carbuncle.

"I can see," mumbled Bump Gillis, eyeing Phineas, "that somebody's goin' to git their pants burned."

"Maybe," answered Carbuncle, edging toward his chair. "Frogs! Hell, it'll take us all night to say 'hello' to 'em! An' if one of 'em tries to kiss me. I'll bump 'im in the snoot."

"Huh!" sniffed Bump. "Even the Frogs have got some self-respect."

"Yeah? Well—"

"Shut up, youwtwo buzzards!" bellowed the C.O., emphasizing the order with a whack on the table top with a big fist "I want you to keep in mind that everything depends on the way you treat the French. We need their support. Can't start out on the wrong foot like we did with the British. We—"

"Well, them beef-eaters did cheat us outa that Gotha," interrupted Wilson. "They wa'n't within a mile—"

"That's enough," growled the major. "Gilkes," turning to a mess attendant, "if you're trying to say something, hurry up and say it."

"I don't believe there are glasses enough here, sir," ventured Gilkes. "We only—"

"Ransack every hut for some, then," ordered the C.O., "an' bring every bottle that has something in it, too."

"There's two glasses in my hut," offered Phineas Pinkham as the mess attendant hastened to obey.

Ten seconds later they all heard a sound like a big tramp steamer plowing through a heavy sea. It stopped just outside with a screeching of brakes. The Old Man hurried to the door and flung it wide open.

BATHED in the thin light that streamed out stood a big, mud-caked Renault. Six men, muffled in big cloaks, their kepis protected from the downpour by rubber coverings, emerged from the big car's confines and sank ankle deep in the mud. With difficulty they pulled their boots out of the ooze and walked toward the Old Man. Reluctantly the Ninth Pursuit rose from their chairs.

"Majair Garratee, may I ask?"

"Yes, *oui*," answered the C.O. "Colonel Boncouer, I believe? Come in. Come in. A terrible night, eh, colonel?"

"*Oui! Oui! Certainement!*" exclaimed the French officer, after the usual military courtesies. "The rain, she is terrible. I have bring with me *beaucoup* brave gentlemen, majair. It is so good that you ask us here, mais oui." And Colonel Jules Massoin Boncouer threw off his cape with a dramatic gesture, revealing a militaristic sartorial grandeur that dazzled Yankee eyes. Blue tunic plentifully studded with ribboned bars, scarlet trousers and highly polished black boots.

"Cripes!" exclaimed Phineas Pinkham with a grin. "Look at the fireworks. I bet if ya rang a bell, that Frog'd run fer a pitcher of ice water."

"Shut up, you damn fool!" cautioned Captain Howell.

"Gentlemen," barked the Old Man, whirling on his heels. "Attention! Colonel Boncouer, commanding French Squadron at Soirry Wood!" Twelve heads nodded in acknowledgment. Followed then introductions all around. Captain Lecroix, victor in forty-seven air battles with the Boche, at length was given the great honor of knowing Lieutenant Phineas Carbuncle Pinkham.

"Pleased to meetcha," said Carbuncle. "Ya won't find it a bad *guerre*. Them krauts ain't so tough. It's the firs' hundred years that's the hardest. After that ya won't mind nothin'. Now here's how I fight them Heinies. I let 'em git close an'—" A hand reached out and mercifully dragged the Yank away from the astounded Frenchman.

"He got creased by a slug, captain," apologized Wilson, tapping his head significantly. "He's been that way ever since—"

Lecroix shrugged. "*J'ai compris, m'sieu*," he smiled,

albeit glancing at Phineas dubiously. "*C'est la guerre, oui?*"

"Wee! Wee!" breathed Wilson with vast relief. "But let's sit down, captain; everything is ready."

Conscious that the Old Man's gaze was burning him up, Phineas Pinkham settled down to the serious business of eating and drinking, his eyes flitting from one French guest to the other. Colonel Boncouer was sitting directly across from him, and for some reason or other, Carbuncle did not like his moustache. Nor his nose. In fact, so far as Carbuncle was concerned, the Ninth Pursuit could carry on just as well without the Frog.

Gilkes, the mess attendant, placed a glass before the French officer's plate. Phineas regarded it with conflicting emotions. It came from his hut and it was a tall glass with fancy filagree around the rim. Bump Gillis choked on a piece of bread. The Old Man frowned. Phineas watched the glasses being filled, one by one. This done, the Old Man picked his up and rose from his chair. A shudder shook Phineas' frame.

"We are honored," began the major, "to fight shoulder to shoulder with Colonel Boncouer's brave flyers. I wager we will give Manheim's staffel more than they have bargained for. A toast to France!"

GLASSES were tipped. A sudden exclamation from Boncouer brought everyone up with a jerk. Phineas Pinkham felt a lump of mirth well up in his throat and fought it down with desperation. The Frenchmen was dabbing first at his chin, then at his tunic with a handkerchief.

"*Pardonnez moi*," he smiled, slightly embarrassed. "I am *tres gauche*—clumsee, you say, *messieurs*. The wine, she spill." And with that, Boncouer tipped his glass for better results. Bump Gillis almost strangled as he saw a little stream of wine irrigate the officer's chin. A ludicrous expression passed over Boncouer's face as he removed the glass from his mouth quickly and examined it with suspicion.

The Old Man watched the proceedings with a royal purple hue suffusing his irate face, one eye on the glass and the other on Phineas Pinkham, who was maintaining an innocent mein with Spartanlike effort. Abruptly Boncouer tipped the glass slightly over his plate. Wine oozed out of a little hole near the top of the receptacle and made a small puddle in the dish. Bristling, the Frenchman slammed down the glass and swept the Yankee faces with questioning eyes. Finally they centered their attack on the C.O. Little gurgles,

unmistakably the backfire of muffled mirth, touched off the spark.

“So!” exploded the French officer with indignation. “Ze Yankee joke, *n’est ce pas?* I do not theenk it funny, *non!* You insult Jules Massoin Boncouer—you laugh! Pouf!” And the visiting colonel snapped his fingers in a gesture of contempt. “We do not remain, *non.* We go. It is as they say. *Les Americains,* they are not gentlemen. *Messieurs, nous ailons—*”

“An’ a cup of corfee!” sang Phineas Pinkham.

“Shut your face, Pinkham!” roared the Old Man, as he got to his feet. In two strides he reached the angry Frenchman, who was making for the door, indulging in indignant pantomime.

“Let me assure you, colonel,” wheedled the C.O., augmenting his words with explanatory gestures, “that there has been a misunderstanding. Mistakes will occur, of course. It has been an unfortunate—”

“*Oui?*” sputtered Boncouer. “Zey laugh. Zey play what you call ze joke! *Non.* We go—”

“But, colonel,” insisted the Old Man.. “I—”

“Pardon,” came a voice behind the C.O. “I will speak to the colonel.” Major Garrity stepped out of the batter’s box in favor of Captain Lecroix, who immediately began a barrage of rapid-fire French, punctuating it with gestures. Finally Colonel Boncouer shrugged and turned to the Old Man.

“Pardon, m’sieu,” he apologized. “I am of ze fiery temper. I will stay.”

“Thank you, colonel, that is fine.” And with a silent prayer, the C.O. returned to his chair.

THE business of eating continued. Desultory conversation rippled around the festive board among those who could make themselves understood. The smoke-filled air, however, seemed pregnant with uncertainty. Veiled thrusts anent the inferiority of the Yanks lanced out of the mouths of those wearing the blue tunic. The eyes of several bibulous Yanks were giving birth to mean looks. The C.O., his fingers crossed, hastily strove to secure a promise of cooperation from Colonel Boncouer before hostilities broke out anew. As a precautionary measure, he invited the French officer to withdraw for a private powwow near the warmth of the open fire.

Phineas Carbuncle Pinkham’s face was as innocent as that of a new-born babe as he watched Colonel Boncouer assume an important posture. His back to the roaring fire, the Frenchman gesticulated busily as he talked. Phineas dropped a spoon, leaned sidewise

from his chair and reached under the table. Abruptly a great sheet of flame leaped out of the fireplace and hit Colonel Boncouer in the seat of the pants. With a yelp he jumped high into the air, came down firmly and began to run in a dizzy circle, smoke streaming out behind him. Pandemonium broke loose. Peace and tranquillity gathered up their white garments and fled the mess hall.

The Old Man stood like a statue, mouth hanging open, and watching the human merry-go-round. Something seemed to happen in the space of a minute and a half. Phineas was on the floor, one arm wrapped around the neck of a threshing Frog pilot. Gilkes, the mess attendant, came running out of the kitchen with a pail of water. Taking careful aim, he discharged the contents on the fiery seat of French authority. And then one of that gentleman’s wildly flailing arms caught Major Garrity on the bridge of the nose.

“Oh, it’s a fight you want, is it, colonel?” blazed the Old Man, his Celtic blood stewing, and he waded in. “Well, here’s what I think of your squadron!” *Boff! Biff!* Two great fists hit almost simultaneously on the Frenchman’s ample proboscis.

Colonel Boncouer found a resting place under the table and lost all interest in the proceedings. Outnumbered red pants beat a retreat into the wet world.

“Hey,” yelled Phineas Pinkham. “Ya’ve fergot Bonsewer!” Reaching down, he assisted the dazed Frenchman to his feet anything but gently. Captain Henri Lecroix took charge and led his superior to the door.

“Ah, ze Gothas, comrade,” the Frenchman was blubbing. “How many zey killed? *C’est terrible—*”

Major Rufus Garrity staggered to his chair and surveyed his group of grinning pilots with baleful orbs. The lion’s share of their accusing gleam fell on Phineas Pinkham.

“Well, ya can’t blame me,” the flyer defended himself. “I didn’t bring that glass in.”

“When I want you to talk, Pinkham,” snapped the C.O., “I’ll ask you. Maybe you didn’t have anything to do with the colonel’s pants! Shut up! Don’t tell me it was a log shifting. I smelled gasoline. Stand up, Pinkham!”

Carbuncle stood up. Something clattered to the floor. Complying with the Old Man’s orders, Bump Gillis reached down and picked it up. With a grin he tossed it toward the C.O. It was a squirt gun as large as a service revolver.

“So!” The word shot out of the Old Man’s mouth like a piece of metal. “Quite a shot, aren’t you, Pinkham?”

“Well,” stammered Phineas Pinkham. “Them Frogs got insultin’, I got sore an’—”

“Yeah,” chimed in Captain Howell before the Old Man could reply. “I didn’t like them cracks they made, either. They said we were green flyers an’ would learn somethin’ if we watched them. One of the little shrimps said we didn’t know—”

“Huh?” bellowed the Old Man. “Those lousy Frogs said that? Well, we’ll show ’em we don’t need any help. I wish I’d taken another poke at that rooster!” And slamming down the butt of a cigar, Major Garrity strode out of the room. Shaking with glee, the Ninth Pursuit followed his lead.

LATE the next day there was little evidence of this levity on the faces of the surviving pilots of the midday patrol. They were nosing their Spads toward the muddy drome after a losing battle with Manheim’s Fokkers. Ten machines had taken off. Seven were returning, two of them just staggering in. The Jerry leader had convinced the Yanks that the supremacy of the German Air Force was not an idle rumor.

Since replacing von Kohl, who was eating scant fare in a Yankee prison camp, thanks to the ingenuity of Phineas Carbuncle Pinkham himself, Manheim had lashed his command to hellish fury. For weeks the Ninth had been unable to cope with it. Shortage of men and ships was the excuse to G.H.Q., but that Round Table of brass hats had long since regarded this as a stock message, a bromide to be scoffed at. The Old Man had staked everything on the arrival of the French outfit on the fringe of the sector, had anticipated establishing friendly relationship which would lead to a ganging against the Jerries.

Now, as the major stood watching Howell’s wheels kiss the soupy field, the thought of last night’s brawl was as salt rubbed on an open sore. An uncomplimentary word slipped out from beneath his moustache as his eyes sought out Pinkham’s garishly painted Spad, for within its pit sat the cause of it all. And he hoped to witness said bus digging a well in the center of the field. Phineas, however, had no desire to become but a memory to Boonetown, Iowa, there was some unfinished business to attend to back there. He settled down to a passable landing, then climbed out of his bus. The Old Man swore and walked to where Howell leaned wearily against his ship, dragging streams of smoke into grateful lungs.

The report was as usual. Too many Fokkers, covering Jerry observation crates. No sign of other Allied ships.

“Hell!” growled the Old Man, and turned toward Wings. Waiting for him there was another dish of gall and wormwood—a message. Swearing, he ripped it open.

“Reports received from French headquarters regarding disgraceful treatment at hands of your squadron, mentioning insults to Colonel Boncouer, fist fights among the personnel, and other conduct unbecoming officers and gentlemen. As a result of communication with French headquarters, we have been acquainted with the fact that cooperation between the Ninth Pursuit and the French group will be hampered by this ill-feeling, a disastrous situation in view of the success of the German air offensive. An explanation of the facts in this disgraceful occurrence is expected immediately, and an apology to colonel Boncouer and his command is compulsory.

(Signed) Hakwood, Wing Headquarters.”

His face a vivid violet, Major Rufus Garrity balled the communication in his fist and slammed it to the floor.

“Apology my eye!” he roared. “I’ll see myself in hell before I crawl on my hands to that fish-faced Frog. I’ll give ’em facts, the fatheads! The Fifth Marines couldn’t insult this outfit an’ get away with it. No, by cripes!”

“Beg yer pardon, sir?”

The Old Man whirled and beheld Lieutenant Pinkham. “What in hell do you want?” he thundered.

“I got a scheme, sir,” beamed Phineas. “We’ll paint the squadron up like Indians. We’ll git the propaganda guys to circulate reports that a kraut aviator was found scalped. That’ll smash the Boche morale and—” Phineas suddenly stopped and went into reverse. Uttering inarticulate cries, the Old Man groped for anything that was liable to perpetrate a murder. His fingers closed around a book approximately six inches thick. Phineas beat it to the tarmac by a gnat’s whisker.

“All right, all right,” growled the flyer indignantly. “If ya don’t want no suggestions.” Cautiously he picked up the book, weighed the advisability of returning it to the owner, but contemplating that life was good, he shrugged and wended his way to buzzards’ row.

A FLIGHT, having licked their wounds, went over again at dawn. Far off to the left of the Yankee V, away above the khaki-choked trenches, circled another flight. Captain Howell, Phineas Pinkham and Company hoped that it was the Frogs. The ships,

however, seemed in no hurry to get anywhere. Howell cursed and drilled on. Evidently it was a rendezvous for an escort awaiting the appearance of observation or reconnaissance crates.

The Ninth went on alone. Manheim and sixteen black-crossed Tripes came down out of the sun. Phineas Pinkham swore that he smelled lilies as he followed Howell up. Under his wheels a different kind of flower bloomed. Its pollen—little bits of iron—whistled through his Spad's upper wing. *Blam! Blam!* Archie bursts seemed to prod the Yankee flight toward Manheim's horde. Out of formation now, every man for himself. Phineas wondered if they bred Fokkers like mice as he tripped his guns at a flashing Boche fuselage. The sky was choked with them, their Spandaus smoking everything alien out of the melee. The Old Man's brood was against the ropes, fighting desperately to get clear. One by one they shot through the Boche guard. Then another avalanche of Spads came thundering down the sky slope. The Frogs!

Howell turned in his pit, skidded around and turned his nose back toward the fight Outnumbered, Manheim carried on the battle for several minutes, lost four Tripes, then signaled frantically, for retreat. The Ninth limped back to the Old Man, and for the first time in weeks reported a victory over the Boche. Major Garrity even made a playful pass at Phineas as he gulped down the news of triumph. He lost no time in acquainting the Wing with the latest developments. Now let the fatheads get nasty!

The aftermath, however, hit the squadron between the eyes and knocked them back on their heels. Congratulations poured forth from the brass hats—but not into Bar-Le-Duc. The Frogs were hailed as the victors. The Ninth Pursuit, caught in a trap, had been saved from annihilation by Captain Henri Lecroix and his brave gentlemen, who were officially credited with seven *descendus*. This was the situation in a nutshell. It was just too bad that the witnesses to the air battle became confused as to the insignias of the Spads.

The C.O. locked himself in his quarters and converted it into a swearing room. The breach between the French and the Yanks during the ensuing days widened. If Manheim could but have known it, he had scored a moral victory. Phineas Carbuncle Pinkham still grinned, and occupied his leisure moments with perusing the book that had been, in a way, a gift from his C.O. It was "Immortals of France."

"What's that junk?" asked Bump Gillis, late one night. "Some more smart tricks?"

"Nope," answered Phineas. "Very instructive. I should think a nitwit like you would try an' build up a weak brain with readin'."

"Yeah? Maybe you're gonna win the war, huh? All alone."

"Maybe," grinned Carbuncle and poked his face into the book once more.

THE harbinger of a German offensive, Manheim came back over the lines with his squadron augmented by another score of Tripes. And then came a crushing blow to Allied morale. Colonel Boncouer's group of Spads, led by the ace, Lecroix, clashed with the Jerry leader's swarm half an hour after the Yanks had come back from a balloon-straffing jaunt. In seven minutes Lecroix and six of his comrades were down. Two other French pilots failed to make the drome in crippled ships. Decimated by half, their leader gone, Boncouer's Spads crawled back to their nest, bleeding and burnt.

"Trying to win the war all by himself, eh?" snapped the Old Man to Howell, as he handed a despatch rider a message conveying sympathy to the French commander. "The damned old buzzard! Well, this'll teach him a lesson. Maybe he'll be willing to gang against the Jerries now an' forget his blasted so-called honor. An' what ails those brass hats? Those Frog generals ought to make Boncouer listen to reason. If we could get the D.H.s over'at Moucourt, these Frogs with replacements an'—"

"Yes, I know," said Howell with a bleak grin. "But the Frog brass hats are mad, too. Y'know, you haven't apologized yet."

"Huh? What's that?" barked the C.O. "Well, I'm not goin' to! But I am goin' over to Boncouer an' knock some brains into his head." Major Rufus Garrity, to make good his threat, climbed into the squadron car that night and ploughed through muddy France to the native outfit near Soirry Wood. The visit, however, was a rank failure. Ten minutes in Boncouer's realm was enough for the Yank. One comprehensive glance at the pilots there convinced the Old Man that, despite replacements, the Frog squadron would be about as much help to the Allied cause as a squadron of girl scouts. With the passing of Lecroix went the nerve and fire, the morale of Boncouer and his men. The French leader had greeted the American officer icily from the depths of the doldrums. He was stubborn, bitter, and rebellious. The Old Man came back to Bar-Le-Duc, swearing and filled with disgust.

The Ninth Pursuit bore the burden of sky fighting against Manheim's horde, a pitiful defensive. The air was out of the hands of the Allies. The men in the

trenches sensed it and their spirits ebbed. The great wings of Manheim cast a huge shadow over the Front. Something had to be done. Wings could send up new men, but ships—that was the problem. And the brass hats were convinced that Manheim was but an over-exaggerated bogey man. They saw no necessity, even if it was possible, to move in a squadron from another sector. Replacements would be up to fill the gaps in the Ninth Pursuit. They would have to carry on.

“If we could get all the damn ships in a bunch an’ go after the krauts, we’d lick ’em,” repeated the Old Man for the hundredth time to Howell. “Twenty Frog ships, those DeHavilands an’ this outfit would wreck Manheim or I’d eat my shirt. An’ the brass hats have always got some other dizzy orders that sure are a great help to the Boche. We’ve got to get together an’ gang ’em—”

“Yeah! Yeah! I know,” grunted the flight leader impatiently, and sipped desultorily at his coffee. “Try an’ do it. Them Frogs are washed out. By the time they snap out of it the war will be over. Unless they see a vision of Napoleon or somethin’. Then I bet they wouldn’t cooperate, as you say. Hell!”

“Make it two hells!” snapped the Old Man, rising from his chair.

DAWN brought another bunch of gray to the thatch of Major Garrity. Phineas Carbuncle Pinkham, announced an excited flight sergeant, had disappeared. And Phineas was due to go over the lines in just two minutes.

“Gone, you say?” thundered the major. “How? Where? Why? Cripes, maybe he can make himself disappear. Where’s Gillis?”

“Here, sir,” and the paged flyer tugged at his helmet.

“Where’s Pinkham?”

“Don’t know, sir,” answered Bump. “I thought he went over to town for a drink when I turned in. When I woke up, I saw his bed hadn’t been slept in.”

“He’s too damn lazy to walk to Bar-Le-Duc!” roared the C.O. “My guess is he hopped that truck that brought those new men up last night. The fish-faced whoozle! I’ll get his pants for this. Deserting it is. Maybe I’ll even have him shot.”

What’re you clucks starin’ at? You too, Howell. Git into those ships. An’ mind you, Howell, no glorious sacrifices for the profiteers. If you see too many Fokkers, dust it back. Understand?”

“Yessir,” grinned Howell, and motioned his men toward the line of Spads.

There was no thought of the Boche in the flyers’ minds for the moment. The question of the whereabouts of Phineas Pinkham left no room for anything else under their helmets. As they gunned their ships away, Bump Gillis wondered if the big-eared fool had blown himself to bits with one of his trick toys or something. Maybe he had gone nuts entirely, and was going out to get the krauts with his bare hands.

At this particular moment, however, Phineas Pinkham was right under the wheels of his hutmate’s Spad as it soared over the roofs of Bar-Le-Duc—a thousand feet under. Having spent the night in the town, gleaning certain information from the natives, Phineas was now evacuating it by means of an antiquated bicycle which he had purchased for the staggering sum of fifty francs. Money in the mind of the Boonetown flyer was no object at the moment. As he forced his senile purchase westward through the mud, he whistled a lilting tune. The roar of a flight climbing toward the lines brought his head up. He waved a hand, then bore down on the pedals of his means of locomotion and was soon disappearing over the top of a hill.

For hours Phineas rode on, pausing at brief intervals to rest and examine a piece of paper he took from his pocket. It was high noon when he coasted down a rutted road and then swung into a divergent one that led to a great chateau standing on the top of a green, tree-studded hill—one of those many chateaux of France without the existence of which this story and many others would never have been written.

Lieutenant Pinkham let the bicycle roll to a clump of bushes and jumped clear of it. One hand pawing at his damp brow, he proceeded to take inventory of the chateau and its grounds in a most mysterious manner. Evidently satisfied with his appraisal, he began to make his way furtively up the roadway, the condition of which convinced him that it had seen no one for some time. In all probability, the chateau had been abandoned when the first great Boche offensive had reached its environs with Krupp shells.

Phineas walked up the great stone steps and pushed against a massive door. Nothing happened. He retraced his steps, standing back to study the situation, legs spread wide apart. At length he skirted one corner of the chateau and discovered a great hole in the masonry. Chuckling, Phineas crawled through. An hour had passed before he emerged again. There was an expression of achievement on his face. Gazing down at the panorama visible from the chateau’s high

elevation, the adventurer espied signs of animation near a distant French farmhouse. Without further ado he started down the bill.

THE afternoon was overtaken by dusk. Dusk's reign was usurped by night. A moon as big and round as the bottom of a dish pan looked down on the Ninth Pursuit hangars and huts, and bathed the French outfit near Soirry Wood in a flood of light. Colonel Boncouer and three of his gentlemen, lured out of doors by the lunar spell, stood before a canvas hangar and idly watched groundmen tinker with a Hisso engine. Sporadically their eyes would peer into the heavens anxiously. It was a night for Gotha prowling. Big guns kept up a perpetual nagging rumble.

Colonel Boncouer tugged at one pointed end of his moustache nervously and was about to turn away. Suddenly his face paled. His eyes bulged out and his tight mouth opened wide. An awesome grasp jerked from his throat as he pointed to the crest of a distant hill with a finger that shook like a guitar string. His pilots looked and nearly collapsed.

Bathed in light stood a great white horse, and astride its back sat a figure clad in ghostly armor. Slowly a metallic arm raised a glistening long spear skyward, shook it vigorously for several seconds; then horse and rider seemed to crumple and disappear before their very eyes. Colonel Boncouer fell to his knees, his breath coming in gasps, and offered up a prayer. Then he jumped to his feet, stood on quaking legs and stared at his stunned flyers.

"*Mon Dieu!*" he gasped. "*C'est elle! C'est elle! Jeanne D'Arc, she shows us the way. You hear, comrades!*" he shouted hysterically, jumping up and down like a marionette. "From the grave she came, *messieurs*. You saw? You saw? *Oui! Oui!* The Maid of Orleans bids us strike. *Voila! Voila!* The vision! We must strike at Manheim. At the dawn. Ah, *bon Dieu!* Jeanne D'Arc. *Voila!*" With eyes blazing, every fibre of his being inspired. Colonel Boncouer strode swiftly to his quarters. Groundmen still knelt by their Spads, with white faces glued to the spot where the vision had appeared. Pilots stood rooted to their tracks, transfixed. A car rumbled off the drome, turned into the road leading to Bar-Le Duc.

Major Rufus Ganrity nearly fell out of his chair when the French officer pushed his way into Wings like a gust of wind. At first he thought Boncouer was drunk, but shortly realized that it had taken something stronger than liquor to bring him over to the Yanks.

"Ah, majair!" the Frenchman exclaimed, clasping his hands in front of him. "*Pardonnez moi*. But a miracle she has happen. I, myself, my brave comrades, they see it too. *M'sieu, Jeanne d'Arc* we see her. The Maid of Orleans. On a hill she rides on a great white steed. Ah, *c'est magnifique!* She carries a great spear, *m'sieu*, and she points it to Germany. A miracle she happened! France, my glorious France, she is save. Tomorrow we strike, *mon ami*, strike for Jeanne d'Arc, *oui? Oui?* You mus' believe, *m'sieu*—"

"Huh?" That was all the Old Man could say for the moment. He looked into the Frenchman's eyes for signs of derangement, his hand cautiously straying toward the gun that lay near his elbow. A tingling sensation coursed the length of his spine as he sat propped like a ramrod in his chair. "You saw—wh—what? Wh—who? What in h—"

"Ah, *m'sieu*," beseeched Boncouer, "You mus' believe. My gentlemen zey tell you. We mus' strike tomorrow, majair. Jeanne d'Arc, she sends us! Every Spad, majair. Manheim, he is doomed. We crush him, *m'sieu*. Nothing she can stop us. We fight. At our side zos brave Americans! We forget ze feeling, majair. Look! Here, she is my hand."

Major Rufus Garrity mechanically reached for the Frenchman's shaking hand and mumbled something regarding his readinees to take off at dawn with every man and every ship. And then, before he could make a move, he was kissed soundly on both cheeks. With a roar he came back to earth and jumped out of his chair. Boncouer, however, was already out of the door and the C.O.'s lashing fist hit at empty air. The Renault had no sooner purred away than Howell and four pilots came running into Wings. They found the Old Man grinning and pawing at either cheek.

"The Frogs have seen a vision," announced the C.O. "They have seen the Maid of Orleans. They're goin' to gang the Jerries with us tomorrow, men. Turn in early an' get plenty of sleep. Tell the flight sergeant to have every bus in condition if he drives the groundhogs all night. That's all!"

"Cripes!" exclaimed Howell. "That cognac they been drinkin' must be powerful stuff. Where'd they see her an' why? How?"

"Get outa here!" bellowed the Old Man.

"Maybe he's gone nuts, too," breathed Bump Gillis fearfully as he pushed his way out past Wilson.

MIDNIGHT found the drome still in a fever of activity. Mechanics swore and sweated as they

worked with pots of dope, strips of edged fabric and a heterogeneous assortment of tools. They were so busy and made so much noise that the sound of the clippity-clop-clop of something with four legs did not reach their ears until the thing was almost upon them. A mechanic working at the nose of a Spad saw it first. Dropping his wrench on the head of a grease monkey who was bending over to examine the landing gear, he clutched at a wire for support and forced out a weak yell. A knight on horseback, such as he was wont to read about—and right here in France! And it kept on coming. The flight sergeant noticing that several pilots were running across the tarmac, summoned a brave front and stepped out in front of the drooping head of the apology for a white charger.

“Who the hell are ya?” he challenged.

“Who-o-o-o-ooa!” came the muffled command from the tin onus atop the steed. “Knave,” came a startlingly familiar voice, “I am John of Ark! Lift up the portcullis! I seek Sir Rufus!” And, lifting off the helmet, the rider dropped it into the mud, drawing a deep breath. Phineas Carbuncle Pinkham, his homely grinning face caked with mud, surveyed the staring pilots who had just reached the scene. Then he prodded the tired horse with his heels and was on the way across the tarmac once more.

“Haw-w-w-w-w-w-w! Haw-w-w-w-w-w-w-w!” exploded Bump Gillis and fell into the mud.

The door of the big house across the field suddenly opened and a figure was silhouetted on the threshold. Phineas Pinkham grinned as he saw it sway, then dutch at the jamb for support. Clippity-clop! Clippity-clop! With a clanking of metal Phineas finally drew rein in front of the bewildered Old Man.

“Greetings!” announced Phineas. “I am a weary and hungry knight in sore need of succor!” And there was a noise like a tin peddler’s cart going over a bump in a road as he dismounted.

“Wh-a-s-a-a?” blurted the C.O. “Y-you’re a wha-a-a? Why, you fish-faced, fiap-eared whoozle, Pinkham! Where you been? Wh-where did you git that nag, huh? Come in here an’ damn quick! Just went off on your own account? I’ll—” The Old Man’s verbal barrage broke off abruptly. In a flash everything came to light. Scratching his head, the major stared at Carbuncle’s grimy, grinning physiognomy for nearly a minute; then turning, he burst into laughter. Phineas sighed and eased his armored frame to the floor.

“Cripes,” he remarked. “I can’t hold this hardware up no longer.”

“So you were the vision,” managed the C.O., still weak with laughter. “You were the Maid of Orleans! Hell, what a joke on those Frogs! They said you vanished, Pinkham. How? Spill it!”

“Remember what Howell said about them Frogs needin’ a vision to git ’em started? Remember that book ya tossed at me playful-like, sir?” began Phineas with effort.

“Well, I got to readin’ it. It was about hist’ry. An’ I got an idea. I beat it over to Bar-Le-Duc an’ got a steer where there was one of them chateaux that had stuffed knights in it. I went over an’ pinched the tin union suit. It was the horse that was hard to git. When that Frog apple-knocker finds that fourlegged wreck gone, he’ll raise hell!”

AGAIN the place rocked with mirth. Finally the C.O. held up a hand for silence. “That disappearin’ act, Pinkham,” he reminded. “How—”

“That wasn’t my doin’s,” grinned the heap of Junk on the floor. “That damn nag looked around at me when I was on that hill an’ got scared. The next thing I knew, me an’ the horse was in a heap-rollin’ down the hill. We ended up in an old shell hole filled with water. I nearly got drowned an’ lost my spear. Well, it took me nearly an hour to git organized again, but here I am.” And Phineas’ face beamed with utter self-satisfaction. “Maybe I didn’t fool them Frogs, huh?”

“You did, Pinkham, by cripes!” forced out the Old Man between laughs. “You did! Boncouer was over here hours ago, begging us to gang the Jerries in the morning. And that is what we intend to do, in spite of hell and any orders that come in from the brass hats. Here, you men, help get Pinkham out of that tin suit!” he roared at Howell and his mirth-racked companions. “Every man an’ every ship is to be ready at dawn. That’s all.”

Sixteen ships thundered on the line when dawn traced its first pink line over the eastern horizon. Chanting a hellish chorus, they left the field, picked up twenty French ships two minutes later, and roared toward the sky corner where twelve D.H.4s were to be waiting. Manheim came out of Germany with forty Fokkers and smashed into the snarling Allied wedge over the Meuse. If he had brought a hundred Tripes, the result would have been the same—a crushing defeat. Fifteen Boche ships were burned out of the ether. Blood trickling from two wounds, Manheim wriggled out and fought a riddled ship back to the Jerry drome. The air belonged to the Allies once more.

The Ninth Pursuit was arranging for a binge. In an hour Colonel Boncouer and his gentlemen would arrive. Major Garrity had his men lined up in front of the farmhouse.

“You hear me, you buzzards!” he bellowed. “If any man of you so much as breathes a word about that tin suit of Phineas Pinkham’s, I’ll have him hamstrung. Understand? The Frogs saw the Maid of Orleans, didn’t they? What?” The Old Man’s lower jaw jutted out as he swept the line with belligerent eyes.

“Yessir, they did!” grinned the flyers in unison.

“I’m sorry,” went on the C.O., looking at Carbuncle, “that this won’t get you a medal, but we can’t let those Frogs know—”

“Sure, that’s all right with me, sir,” Phineas reassured the major. “I know how they’d feel. I never forget how I felt when my ol’ man told me there wa’n’t no Santy Claus!”