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**PHINEAS
PINKHAM**
howl

BARGAINS FOR BLOIS

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It was a dastardly trick! On account of it, Colonel Guilfoyle, G.H.Q.'s weightiest chair-warmer, threatened to bust the Old Man. Somehow connected with it was the Old Man's promise to make a spark plug-cleaner out of Phineas "Carbuncle" Pinkham. And we don't blame either of them—do you?

WELL, IT CERTAINLY HAD BEEN a day! We mean for Major Rufus Garrity's gang of buzzards who called themselves the Ninth Pursuit Squadron, operating from a field outside of Bar-le-Duc. Captains Howell and Fitch had led A and B flights over the lines at noon and had met their particular pestiferous aversion, Manheim, the German Junker who just could not see the Allied slant on the war and advertised the fact with a flock of Spandau-heeled Fokkers. The argument had waxed torrid for possibly ten minutes when the Von threw in the towel and staggered back to Germany, content with the loser's end.

On the way home, drunk with success, the Spads had sighted a Drachen bobbing on its cable. Without ado, Howell had sent his two sausage experts down through a snapping sea of anti-aircraft to knock it off. Said experts had been Bump Gillis and the one and only Lieutenant Phineas "Carbuncle" Pinkham, that irrepressible jokesmith who seemed to enjoy the *guerre* even more than did the profiteers.

The observers of the Drachen had not waited to see if the Yanks were fooling. Even before the flames had licked out from the bag, they were overside and floating down to tell the Jerry who commanded the battery below that, so far as they were concerned, he

could direct fire at the American lines from memory.

After this concluding act, the Ninth Pursuit, for a change, had gone home to enjoy something from the Old Man other than insults. In answer to Howell's report, the C.O. had mumbled, "Well, it's about time!" and had condescended to let A and B flights take it easy for the rest of the day— providing that further hell should not be dished out by G.H.Q.

The announcement had inflated the exuberance of Phineas Pinkham until it was on the point of bursting, for it had meant that he was free to take a little walk down the road to a Frog farm where, in an old stable, lay an aged, indisposed white horse. For the last three days, Phineas had been anxious as to its condition. On arriving at the place, the flyer had been told by the farmer that the equine had breathed its last.

"Huh!" Phineas had grinned. "Guess it's a tough job to bury one of them nags."

The Frenchman had agreed and scratched his head. He, too, was old, and certainly was not equal to digging a grave for, the departed beast of the fields. In consequence he had given a willing ear to the suggestions of Phineas. The dead horse had been attached to a rope leading from a pair of mules and was soon being dragged across the countryside.

A few hours later, Phineas, the Frog farmer and the mules had paused on the top of a knoll overlooking the drome where Colonel Boncouer and his Nieuport outfit carried on for Joffre and Foche. The grinning Phineas had tarried but long enough to wipe a moist brow before cutting the mules loose from the dead weight. After which, he had motioned to the perplexed old Frenchman and departed, hoping that the succeeding few days would be very warm.

"Ya couldn't very well have that dead horse hangin' around your place," had been Phineas' only explanation to the Frog. "Ya'd have to have a gas mask on the days the wind was just right. So this was the only thing t'do, ol' timer. Don't thank me. I alius like to help. Guess I'll take a short cut home, Frenchy. O revoy!"

"Mais, je ne sais pas!"

"So do I!" the hurrying Phineas had flung back. "O revoy!"

THE five miles back to the Ninth Pursuit had seemed but yards to the chuckling Boonetown flyer. He had had his joke. Those Frog aviators had been getting too cocky of late. A few days of good sun and they would have to go upstairs for fresh air. Arriving

back at the old stone farmhouse that was the heart of social activity on the drome of the Ninth, Phineas had found Bump Gillis, very white of face, being treated by a medico.

"Wha-a-a-a-a?" the flyer had asked with perfect innocence.

"Pinkham!" the Old Man had roared. "Let me hear you say you didn't know that those licorice sticks in your hut were loaded with soft rubber! Left them just where anyone could reach them, didn't you? You fish-faced whoozle! You—"

"I didn't offer them to Gillis," and Phineas had edged toward the door. "The bum is always stealin' my stuff, so if he got burnt, why ride me, sir? I—"

"Y-you nitwit!" Bump Gillis had forced out with effort. "I'll—ow-w-w! I'm dyin'! Ow-wow-w-w-w-w!"

Thereupon Phineas had backed out of the house. Yes, it had been a day!

However, it is written that wherever joy rules without a checkrein Old Man Trouble is always circling overhead, peering through bomb-sights to drop a load of eggs filled with grief. Just after mess one of them fell. In the ensuing cloud of dust a big automobile was visible. It lurched out of the rough road and trundled over to the big house where it stopped smack dab in front of the door.

Major Rufus Garrity peered out.

His pipe shook between his teeth as a robust oath skidded down the stem. The overstuffed individual getting out of the car was vaguely familiar. The Old Man tried to believe otherwise, but it was no use. In a vertical position the visitor's identity was unmistakable.

The perfectly tailored tunic strove vainly to hide the fact that the man's chest and lower gastronomic regions had allied to wipe out all semblance of a waist line. A pair of legs, shoved into boots which had never trod the mud of the Front, were nowhere in proportion to the load they were forced to carry and perforce were rickety at the knees. Above the barrel-like torso rode a head with ears plastered close together. A bushy growth beetled above each piercing eye and a well-groomed one based a large snub nose. Surrounding these features was an abundance of superflous flesh. The ensemble was Colonel Gifford Woolsey Guilfoyle, the pussyfoot of Chaumont.

"Major Garrity, I believe?" was the colonel's opening salvo as he strutted toward the C.O. with a pudgy hand outstretched. "Remember me, no doubt! Colonel Gif—"

"I do, sir," hastily put in the Old Man, not caring to listen to the lengthy baptismal announcement. "Yessir. Glad to see you, sir! I—"

"Come to make a little tour of inspection, major," smiled Colonel Guilfoyle. The Old Man had seen the same amiable expression one time on a hyena's face. He tried to respond but simply grunted and stepped aside to let the man pass through the door.

ONCE inside, the brass hat gazed loftily about. Pilots who had been lounging about jumped to attention—that is, all except Phineas Pinkham. His intentions were good but Bump Gillis had not forgotten the pangs of his hutmate's licorice sticks. Phineas was thrust violently forward to fall over a chair with a crash and pancake. From this undignified position he looked up at Colonel Guilfoyle.

Major Garrity swallowed a curse, groaned and waited. The brass hat glowered down at the prone pilot with utter disgust and tapped his boot impatiently with his cane. Lieutenant Pinkham got to his feet and emulated a ramrod. The Old Man cleared his throat nervously.

"Ah-er-ahem!" he began. "Gentlemen, this is Colonel Guilfoyle from headquarters. Ah—er—come to look us over. Be here for a day or so. Want you to show him every courtesy. Aft—er—"

"Carry on!" barked the colonel irritably, his eyes focussed on Phineas. Abruptly he turned to the C.O. "Sloppy appearance, I should say, major," he erupted. "Not a soldierly-looking one in the bunch. Men in the air force always like that. Get lax. No excuse for it!" He rapped his boot with his stick by way of emphasis and motioned toward the door that led to Garrity's sanctum.

"You must not forget, colonel," said the Old Man testily, "that these men have been under a terrific strain. No rest. No—"

"Oh, I know all that, major," replied the brass hat, waving a belittling paw. "I know all that. Old stuff. Every time I—" His words were abruptly cut off by the closing door.

"The fat-headed sea lion," growled Lieutenant Pinkham. "Start the phonograph, somebody, so's the bum can't hear us. An' you, ya bum!" he yelped at Bump Gillis. "I'll git even fer that shove. I'll—"

"Go shrivel up, ya homely baboon," growled Gillis. "Ya've got more'm than cornin' to ya. I'll—"

"Shut up, you birds!" interrupted Howell. "Know who that sea lion is?"

"Tinfoil—Colonel Tinfoil," answered Phineas. "An' I wish a Gotha would fly over an' do some business.

I bet the grapefruit would roll back to Chaumont faster'n we could run. An'—"

"Yeah, he's no bargain," agreed Howell. "I pity the Old Man. He came up here once before; a lot of you guys weren't up then. That brass hat is a friend of the Secretary of War. That's the reason he wears a colonel's suit. Goes around making tours of inspection. They're glad to get rid of him at headquarters. He wouldn't be on this side of the water if the desks hadn't given out back in Washington. He's a pain, a flock of cramps, and an earache. But he's a necessary evil. Got a hell of a lot of pull and can bust anybody. Worth millions. Just a big overnight brass hat.

"And that cane of his! Wait until you see him goin' around the drome, pokin' into everything with it. He'll see something in back of the kitchen, garbage or anything, and poke into it. Every bit of rubbish or empty ammo crate and petrol drum he pokes at with his cane. Maybe he thinks a Jerry spy is hidin' in 'em. Almost drove the Old Man nuts when he was here last. I pity him now. An' he's writing a story of his war career. Carries it with him all the time. So lay off him if ya don't want to get busted. I mean you, Pinkham!"

"That porpoise!" sneered Carbuncle. "I hope I git a chance to feed him some of that licorice! Goes around pokin' things, huh? Well, he better stop pokin'."

"You heard me, Pinkham!" snapped Howell. "We don't care what happens to you, but if you get the Old Man in bad, we're sunk."

"He said we was sloppy," complained Phineas. "He—"

"—was lookin' at you, ya big ape," finished Bump Gillis. "You wasn't exactly a snappy lookin' aviator when ya saluted him from the floor. Haw-w-w-w!"

"Yeah," growled the ruffled Phineas, "but jus' wait, Bump. He who lasts—er—ah—last laughs, laughs—er—hell! I mean ya'll laugh on the wrong side of your mug!" finished Phineas and walked out of the room, pausing in front of the door to Wings to salute the colonel behind it with thumb to nose, the familiar old American custom. Satisfied with himself, he walked out into the night.

BACK in his cubicle, Phineas began to rummage into every nook and corner. On his homely freckled face was a cryptic smile, the appearance of which always meant but one thing—an unsuspecting victim had walked in. A human guinea pig for the professor

of trickery and jest to experiment on. Grist for the mill.

Phineas chuckled as he picked up a heavy paper bag and found it intact. This he folded up and rammed under his tunic. Picking up his flying gloves, helmet and goggles, he slipped out of his hut and sneaked along in the shadows of buzzards' row. Once in the rear of the hangars he quickened his pace. Reaching a little brook, he knelt down to scoop up a handful of mud. This he plastered over the lower part of his physiognomy and continued on his way up a little hill whose crest was studded with young trees. He stopped, donned his helmet and goggles and pulled on his flying gloves.

The bag next drew his attention and he yanked it from under his tunic, spreading it open. Then Phineas cautiously walked toward the foliage with the bag held at arm's length until it was directly under an object that was suspended from a limb. His next movements were swift. He reached out with his left hand and yanked downward. Something fell into the bag with a dry rustle and the loose ends were immediately twisted together. The prowler then turned and half ran down the hill.

Colonel Guilfoyle, as if by way of showing the flying upstarts of the Ninth Pursuit that brass hats did not sleep out most of the war, was in the mess hall early the next morning to sample the steaming coffee with the pilots who were to go out on the dawn patrol.

"Hmph!" he commented after a sip. "Excellent coffee. Better than we get at Chaumont. Lucky beggars, you flying officers. Nothing like good food and drink and—"

"Lousy dishwater!" grumbled Phineas Pinkham, slamming down his cup. "I bet Gilkes washed out his gloves in it. It's gittin' worse all the—"

"Ar-r-rumph!" snorted the colonel indignantly, turning his eyes in the flyer's direction. "Are you insinuating, lieutenant, that I'm no judge of coffee? Well, you young upstart, I want you to know that I grow coffee. Ah—er—damme, man, this is my coffee. I want you to know that I sell this expensive brand at little or no profit and you ungrateful—"

"Nobody gives it to us, sir," reminded Phineas very politely. "We have to pay for it, sir. We—"

"Shut up!" barked Howell hoarsely. Phineas did. He thought it was a good idea, after a glance at the colonel who was slamming his cane angrily against his boots. The brass hat was about to yip something, but the Spads outside began to growl. Phineas laughed and pulled down his goggles.

Falling into step with Bump Gillis, he walked out on the field. His glance strayed toward a heap of old cases near the ammo shed as he climbed into his Spad and his heart was light though his lips curled ruefully. If he could only be there to see the fun! But Manheim, the Ninth Pursuit's ancient enemy, was waiting upstairs.

COLONEL GUILFOYLE showed his contempt for the air monsters by taking a position precariously near to the outrider of the flight. Major Garrity came hurrying across the tarmac and shouted in the brass hat's ear. The colonel turned his head slightly but stirred not an inch. The Old Man shrugged and tamped down his pipe. Howell signaled. A deafening roar made the colonel blink. The flight leader shot across the field. One by one his pilots gunned from the line. The Spad closest to the brass hat jolted forward.

Major Garrity stepped back. He had seen the puddle under the ship's starboard wheel. There was a swish, a spray of muddy water. Colonel Guilfoyle took it all on his new whipcord trousers and shiny boots. He looked down, mouth open wide. Suddenly he howled angrily and shook his fist at the trundling ship. He sputtered and swore and whirled upon the Old Man.

"He did that on purpose, the upstart!" he roared. "I want to prefer charges against him. I'll show—"

"I warned you, colonel," the Old Man reminded him impatiently, his gaze fixed on the departing ships.

The brass hat stopped sputtering. Begrudgingly he admitted that he had spoken hastily and went off to get another pair of trousers out of his musette bag and to round up the hapless driver of his car to clean and polish his boots. The major stared after him, praying that he would get nothing less than hardening of the arteries before he reached the house.

"The big, fat-headed blimp!" he mumbled and walked toward the hangars to give the office to the flight sergeants. The colonel, he told them, would be making the rounds after mess, and they were to get all set.

Inspecting was Colonel Guilfoyle's only lame excuse for being on the palpitating continent. So after his expansive inner man had been sated with food, he duly sallied arrogantly forth, cane a-swinging, to ascertain the degree of efficiency in the Ninth Pursuit's layout. Beside him, heart harboring homicide, walked Major Garrity.

They reached A flight's hangar. The colonel beetled his brows and looked into every nook and corner for

something to argue about, his cane ever knocking against struts and wires of Spads as if he knew what it was all about. Having found plenty of grounds for argument, he snapped a few uncomplimentary words to the groundmen and walked to the next hangar. Here the same testy ritual took place. At last, leaving the hangars, he walked to the ammo shed and immediately voiced his disapproval of the empty cases, et cetera, that reposed against one side of the iron-roofed makeshift structure.

“Hmph!” he grunted, poking his cane into the unsightly heap, “don’t these men ever police this drome, major? Always in a mess. Nothing in any sort of military order. Hmph! What’s in that paper bag?” He punctured it violently with his stick. Something told the Old Man to turn and run. Intuition perhaps—or was it a message through the ether from a pilot who at the moment was sitting a Spad high over the Front?

In answer to the brass hat’s onslaught with the stick, there came a sudden angry humming commotion. Out of the hole in the bag poured a stream of angry striped hornets bent on getting hunk with somebody or other for keeping them imprisoned for hours. Seven of them landed simultaneously on the surprised features of Colonel Guilfoyle and sat down hard! Others circled his ponderous frame and landed on the seat of his pants to hold a field day.

Major Rufus Garrity howled as his nose suddenly appeared to take fire, and he started in a series of mighty leaps for the stone house, beating desperately at the air around his head as he ran. The diminutive striped Fokkers piqued at his blind spots again and again and brought forth intermittent painful yelps. Colonel Guilfoyle, his dignity in a state of utter ruin, danced and howled in one spot like a whirling dervish until it occurred to him that he should beat a retreat.

Across the tarmac he spun and side stepped like a shadow boxer, his puffy hands flailing like the arms of a Dutch windmill. Groundmen grew weak in their hysteria and were grateful to see him half, fall into the door of the squadron headquarters.

PHINEAS PINKHAM returned with A flight a few moments later, his heart pounding against his ribs, his eyes lighted with expectation. As he slanted down, he saw a groundman jump spasmodically and slm a hand to the back of his neck. Another suddenly rocked back on his heels and sparred with something which Phineas could not see. The Boonetown flyer grinned knowingly and eased his Spad to the field. Colonel

Tinfoil, he noticed, was not in evidence. As he switched off and rolled to a stop, he saw a group of groundmen, huddled close, advancing toward the ammo sheds. They were armed with pyrene extinguishers.

“Haw-w-w-w-w!” guffawed Phineas Pinkham as he got out of his ship. He had no sooner felt his boots touch the ground than a non-com touched him on the shoulder.

“Thee Ol’ Man wants t’see ya the minit ya git in, loutenant,” said the man. “There’s been hell t’pay, sir. The brass hat an’ the C.O. stepped into a nest of bees. They—”

“The Old Man?” gasped Phineas. “Cripes, I fergot that he would—” He bit off the rest of his speech and walked toward Wings. Well, they couldn’t prove a thing.

However, Phineas should have known better than to have mused thus. As he stepped inside the door, he heard a painful groan, then a curse, then another groan. Lieutenant Pinkham almost choked with suppressed mirth as he got his first glimpse of Colonel Guilfoyle. So he would poke around with his cane, would he? First aid, in the shape of gobs of soft mud and generous applications of witch hazel, was being administered to the obese brass hat who lay back in a chair, puffing, swearing and groaning alternately. His fat face was covered with sizable igloos which were swelling with each passing second.

Phineas averted his gaze and walked into the Old Man’s presence. Major Rufus Garrity’s face, with the exception of one eye, was completely swathed in a turkish towel. The odor of more witch hazel seeped into Phineas Pinkham’s nostrils. That eye of the C.O.’s, however, blazed like a torch, and the Boonetown jokesmith got in the first oral punch.

“Believe me, sir,” argued Phineas desperately, “I didn’t know nothin’ about it, sir. T—”

The Old’Man ripped away the towel from his mouth. “Oh, you didn’t, eh? Well, listen to me, Pinkham. I sent the orderly out to see if that hornets’ nest was still on that little limb up on the knoll—and it wasn’t! I suppose the bees moved themselves into the hag and tied the neck of it up? Well, what’ve you got to say to that, you fish-faced—”

“Well—er,” replied Phineas, “aw-right. I did git the bees, but did I tell the big turtle to poke his cane into ’em, sir? Did I know you was goin’ to be with him when he done it? Well, I’m sure sorry, sir, I—”

“Well, you’ll be sorrier, Pinkham!” blazed the C.O. “Guilfoyle’s going to put us in a sling. He’s getting out

to-night—going to Fuiry. Threatens to break me. He can do it, too. All your fault, Pinkham! You and your smart tricks. You—you—er—get to hell out of here!”

“Yessir!” said Phineas with alacrity, backing out “B-but we licked Manheim again! They’ll have a fine time bustin’ this outfit, sir. We—”

“Get out!”

Phineas got. He shot a quick look at the miserable brass hat and hurried to his cubicle to think over the situation. In five minutes he had an idea, the first of a series. He was weighing it carefully when Bump Gillis and Captain Howell intruded upon him.

“Well, ya got us in for it now, you half-wit!” declared the flight leader. “And if ya don’t get us out of it, ya’d better desert, see?”

“Huh!” grinned Phineas caustically. “That ol’ sea lion has got you all scairt, huh? Well, to me he don’t mean that!” Phineas snapped his fingers in a gesture of contempt.

“He’s a friend of the Secretary of War,” Howell reminded him. “He can break the Old Man, see? If he does, it’s going to be too bad for you.”

“Aw, git out!” snapped Phineas. “I wanna think. Next time let me know you’re comin’ an’ I’ll make a lemon meringue pie.”

The pilots left in disgust.

THE day wore on. So did Phineas Pinkham’s brain. After the last patrol the Boonetown flyer walked to one of the hangars. Bump Gillis watched from the window of the stone house. A motorcycle chugged out, Phineas straddling it. Bump could see that there was something in the side-car.

If he could have followed his hut-mate, he would have seen Phineas stop at a bend in the road about a quarter of a mile distant from the drome. The Boonetown wag reached into the side-car and lifted up a blanket. From under it he picked up half a dozen cognac bottles and broke them one by one over a big stone. The jagged fragments he tossed into the road. Then Lieutenant Pinkham rode the mechanical bug toward Bar-le-Duc.

Now, to follow this brainstorm right, you should be in two places at the same time, but as that is impossible, let us shift from one to the other. At mess the Ninth Pursuit was intrigued by Phineas Pinkham’s empty chair. Colonel Guilfoyle, his florid countenance an unlovely mass of humps, wanted to know where the lieutenant was, and why and if he had had permission to be absent. The Old Man, his nose swollen and one

side of his face on the bias, was in a bad temper. He told Colonel Guilfoyle that he cared not a tinker’s damn where Pinkham was. He hoped sincerely that he had fallen into a ditch and broken his neck.

“Well, major,” growled the brass hat through puffed lips, “you cannot expect me to report to headquarters favorably. This squadron is a disgrace to the air service. No discipline, no respect for superior officers, no military efficiency. I shall take steps to remedy this, major. My word has weight in Washington, understand? I want my car ready in an hour, major. Going up to the artillery unit near Fuiry. Got my stomach full of the air service! Bah!”

“You’ll have it!” snapped Major Garrity.

“What, sir?” Guilfoyle bristled. “The car, colonel,” hastily replied the C.O., his fist clenched and itching to caress the brass hat’s nose.

An hour later. Colonel Guilfoyle got into his car, ignored the Old Man’s parting courtesy and barked to his driver. The Ninth Pursuit, hearts heavy and seething with indignation, watched it until it was out of sight in the gloom.

“Well, we’re in for it, men,” growled Garrity. “I see my finish. I—er—if I can just get my hands on Pinkham once more! I’ll blow his head open and find out how a man lives without a brain. I’ll—”

“That goes double for us, sir,” promised Howell. “Looks like he took Gillis’ and my word for it. We told him he’d better desert. Well, if I never see him again, it will seem like yesterday. The crazy—”

Bang! Bang!

“What the hell?” wheezed the Old Man.

“Came from down the road,” offered Bump Gillis with narrowing eyes. “Maybe Pinkham’s shot the blimp. No, he wouldn’t—”

“Let’s go,” barked the major. He started running. Pounding on behind, Bump Gillis had a hunch that the hand of Pinkham had stirred up another batch of woe.

Halfway to the bend in the road the buzzards could hear a burst of angry utterances. They stopped to listen a moment before hurrying on again. Abruptly two big blobs loomed up in the darkness ahead. Two beams of light stretched out from one and stabbed at the scenery beyond.

“Cripes!” yipped the C.O. between gasps. “The colonel!”

“Yes, it is!” boomed an angry voice. “Look at this road, major; full of broken bottles. Two blowouts, damme! Look at them, man! Oh, when I get back to

Chaumont! So this is where you dump your bottles, is it, major? Well, I want the squadron car!”

“Sorry, sir,” apologized the Old Man, “but it’s not in order, sir. A spring is broken. We—”

“So!” bellowed Guilfoyle, jumping up and down, the tip of his cane splashing up mud. “That’s out of commission, too? Is there anything on this damn drome that is in order? I’ll find out why—”

IT WOULD have torn your heartstrings to have tarried and studied the face of the harassed Major Garrity. So we will take you over to a serious-drinking establishment in Bar-le-Duc. Here sat Phineas Pinkham at a corner table and around him, their bibulous orbs shining like stars and their ears cocked at attention, was a trio of the worst examples in the A.E.F.

“Ya say ya’ve got forty-eight hours’ leave, huh?” Phineas asked them. “An’ ya want to earn bowkoo francs, seein’ that you’re all broke? Well, then, this is a soft snap, an’ ya might git a chancet to smack a colonel in the eye. This car has to go over the road that leads through that little burg of Moisy-le-sec. Ya got time to git over there long before it arrives, see? An’ you’re sure them Boche helmets an’ coats are in that cellar? Well, then, you’re all set. All ya have to do is tie ’em up an’ wait until we come in. There’ll be three Spads come down, see? We’ll rescue the colonel an’ make believe we’ve plugged ya. Okay?”

“Sure, lootenant,” grinned one of the Yanks, reaching for another bottle. “We’ll be over there in three hours. If he comes up tonight or termorrer, we’ll be waitin’ fer him. An’ do. I hope he gits tough? I alius wanted to bop a brass hat in the snoot. The war’ll be a success fer me if I git the chance. How ’bout some of them francs now?”

“Nothin’ doin’,” said Phineas with finality. “Ya gotta git goin’ right away. Ya’ve all got skinfuls now. That oughta last.”

“A wright,” grinned another one of the Yanks. “Guess we’ll git fun enough outa this without gittin’ paid fer it, anyways. Well, oh reever! See ya in Moisy-le-Sec. But don’t you orfisers fergit to come down with them air wagons, see?”

On uncertain pins the trio of doughs on the loose weaved out of the caffe. Phineas grinned with great relief and evacuated the cafe. He did not, however, hear a chuckle from a little man who had been sitting at a table on the other side of a very thin wall, so in ignorance he was blissful. The little man was clad in

the uniform of the French Flying Corps. He had a small mustache and a pair of snapping dark eyes. He had been sitting there for over an hour, sipping at Martinis. Convinced that the American had had time to get a good start, the little man rose from his table and hastily wormed his way through the crowd of revelers to the door.

Lieutenant Phineas Carbuncle Pinkham slipped into the drome of the Ninth Pursuit in the wee small hours. He roused an angry Bump Gillis from a sound sleep. Captain Howell was already awake in his own hut. He had sat up to await the sound of a motorcycle purring in. Without stopping to put anything on over his undershirt, he made a bee-line for the Pinkham cubicle.

“Sh-sh-sh!” cautioned Carbuncle as the flight leader burst in. “I wanna talk to ya. What’re you doin’ with that club, huh? Put it down an’ I’ll tell ya how we kin git in right with ol’ Tinfoil!”

“I’ll bet it’s a hell of a scheme,” grumbled Bump Gillis, half awake.

“So it was you that put them bottles in the road?” menaced Howell. “Well, the Old Man is sunk now, sure. The brass hat is wilder than hell First thing in the morning he’s leaving for Fuiry. Ya can’t stop him now, you ape! For two cents—”

“Listen, ya dumb clucks!” urged Phineas. “Let me tell ya!”

FOR nearly half an hour the hut buzzed with subdued conversation. Captain Howell finally departed, scratching his head dubiously but reluctantly admitting that it was the only chance to save Major Garrity’s scalp. Bump Gillis sank back on his cot to wonder how Phineas Pinkham had escaped from an insane asylum to enlist in the Air Force. The gentleman in question did not close his eyes all night. Sporadic chuckles fell from his cot. Everything was perfect.

Gillis had informed him that during his absence the Old Man had received orders to have the Ninth patrol the back area incessantly on the morrow. Troops and supplies were going up. Jerry should be shoved back in the air—Manheim in particular. And old Tinfoil was going up to Fuiry.

Well, a little before noon, A flight would fly over to Moisy-le-Sec and save the brass hat and his memoirs from the clutches of the enemy. And what an enemy! He would show Howell and Bump what brains will do if you only use them. And a few miles away, over in Colonel Boncouer’s squadron, a little Frenchman

was also, chuckling. Yes, indeed, the Scotch sage who chirped that the best laid plans of mice and men oft go astray said a hangarful.

The eventful day! Colonel Gifford Woolsey Guilfoyle lost no time in shaking the dirt of the Ninth Pursuit's tarmac from his shiny boots. After breakfast he stamped out to his car, the indisposed tires of which had bees freshly inner-tubed during the night by a pair of swearing ground-men. The colonel again ignored the Old Man's parting courtesy and simply informed him that so far as he was concerned, the major was nothing but a captain and perhaps even a lieutenant. He would show this shiftless squadron what was what when he got to Chaumont. Bee stings and all, he climbed into the car. The musette bag carrying his cherished memoirs was tossed in after him. There was a roar, and the car shot away.

"I'm prayin' for the first time in months," growled the Old Man to Howell. "If a Jerry can only get over him and unload a lot of iron! Well, you'll have a new C.O. damn soon. Not that I care a damn. I won't have to look at Pinkham any more. Where—where is he, Howell? Get him. Tell him I want to see him."

Phineas duly walked into Wings. Pilots huddled together in the big room and waited. Only one voice seeped through the crevices of the door. It was apparent that Phineas was getting little chance to say a word. The angry rumble of the Old Man's voice was punctuated with heavy thuds. When the C.O. slammed his fist down on wood, you could hear it in Dunkirk. After a while Phineas came out. He closed the door behind him and leaned against it.

"Phew-w-w-w-w-w-w!" he exhaled, wiping a moist brow. He grinned at the interrogating faces. "He said so far as he's concerned," enlightened Carbuncle, "I'm only a sergeant an' maybe even a corporal! Well, I guess I'll be cleanin' spark plugs tonight." He walked out, but he was still grinning. It was said in the Ninth that Phineas must have been born with a grin.

Two patrols went out and came back. A flight gassed up and was ready to take another whirl. Howell drew Bump Gillis and Phineas aside for last minute instructions.

"Yeah," said Phineas almost in a whisper. "Moisy-le-Sec. We'll leave the flight an' drop down. The old sea lion is there by now. An' them three frouzy doughs need francs an' want to punch a colonel in the nose. They'll be there all dressed up. The blimp won't have sense enough to figger it out. He'll think the Boche made a drive an'—"

"I got it!" snapped Howell. "C'mon, we've got to hop." He yanked down his goggles and ran to his ship.

"Hot dog!" exclaimed Phineas and followed him.

"It's a rum go!" growled Bump Gillis. "An' boy, if anythin' goes wrong with this trick of yours, we'll git shot."

"Well, they kin only do that oncet!" laughed Carbuncle.

THE worthy von Manheim had been acquainted with the fact that fresh Yankee troops were taking a step forward on the ground. Would he and all of his gentlemen take the air and see that the Boche bombers got a chance to spill the Americans, asked the High Command. Manheim would, of course. With twenty-four of his merry gentlemen he hopped a lot of Fokkers and went upstairs, anticipating the sport of some ground-strafting after some eggs were laid.

Captain Howell and his flight got in their way just as they were skimming over the Yankee trenches. Phineas rapidly counted the mess of Boche as they swept in. After getting to one hundred and six, he quit in despair. Just their luck on a day like this! If one Spad got back, he mused, it would be a miracle. Manheim must have collected everything in Germany that could fly.

His musings stopped with a shiver. Guns were clattering. A Fokker snarled at him, whipped up and bored in to smack him down. Phineas wished, as he dove, twisted, rolled and zoomed, that he had paid more attention to things pertaining to combat flying at Issoudun. As he leveled out, a big ship loomed up ahead between his struts. In the rear pit a Spandau was crackling at him. Phineas squeezed the trips and a dark figure behind the gun threw up its hands.

"Kamerad, huh?" grinned Carbuncle, whistling over the Boche. "Well, yuh spoke too late." Marveling that he had hit something, Phineas gunned up to a higher strata of battle where Howell's streamered ship fought like a living demon. Around it a cordon of Spads beat off the overwhelming numbers.

As Phineas hammered his way through a gap made for him by two Jerry pilots who had no idea of committing suicide, it occurred to him that old Tinfoil would have a long wait for rescue at Moisy-le-Sec. Manheim's brood seemed to breed Fokkers in the air as the fight went on. Well, he wished that he could have lived long enough to have seen Aunt Hannah back in Boonetown throw away that rusty black hat.

Then he saw Manheim hammering on Howell's

tail. Without hesitation, Phineas gunned across the Boche leader's line of flight. With inches to spare, the Boonetown flyer whistled by Manheim's shimmering prop and took a burst through the tail that was meant for Howell's broad back. Now he had done it! What a damned fool! Manheim would be mad.

The Von was just that. He piqued at the retreating Spad with blazing Spandaus. Phineas took time out to hope that the three doughs would each take a smack at old Tinfoil, before he desperately flung his ship into an Immelmann. Manheim mocked the same wide, climbing turn, heating his guns on the Spad's tail. Suddenly Manheim knifed out and climbed for the ceiling, wagging his wings.

Phineas looked back hurriedly as he leveled out. There were a lot more ships in the sky—Spads and Camels.

Well, that had been a break! He ruddered around and looked for Howell as Manheim's flock high-tailed for Germany with white puffs flowering out all around them.

The Ninth Pursuit, minus three ships, weeded themselves out of the flock of Allied birds and went skimming homeward. Phineas hoped that the flight leader had not forgotten about old Tinfoil. As if he had read Carbuncle's mind, Howell veered slightly to the left and headed for Moisy-le-Sec. It had been a little town of several old stone structures and had been abandoned early in 1916 when Boche projectiles began to pick it out as a landing field.

Phineas flew on, looking overside to spot the landmark which could not be very far away. Suddenly he looked up. Howell's wings were signaling. Pilots watched him wave to Pinkham and Gillis and stab downward with a long gloved finger. Three Spads slanted down to the little town. The rest of the flight, befuddled, turned a little and headed for Bar-le-Duc.

CAPTAIN HOWELL picked out a likely-looking spot and ruffled down to land. As Phineas aped his superior's movements, his stomach turned over and over. There was no sign of a car down there. From this height it would easily have been picked out. He looked over at Howell, but that gentleman was absorbed in studying conditions of the terrain. That which appears to be flat ground from a high altitude often turns out to be a precarious stretch of bumpy sod.

Misgivings had Phineas by the throat as he let his wheels hit a stretch of terra firma on the outskirts of the village. A few yards away on either side of his

Spad, Howell and Bump Gillis were trundling to a stop. Carbuncle lost no time in getting out of his ship. Leaving the prop idling, he made a dash for the cluster of houses. At the corner of one he stopped to stare wildly about. Howell and Gillis caught up with him just then.

"Looks like a dud," commented the pessimistic Gillis. "I don't see no car."

"Hell!" swore Howell. He whirled on Carbuncle. "Some little scheme, ya bum! You sure are a corporal now. You won't even be that. Of all the—"

"But somethin' mus' be wrong. Maybe they—listen!" Phineas trembled in his shoes and his mouth snapped open. He held up a warning hand. Distinctly, from the house beside them, came muffled yelps. They seemed to come from the ground.

"The cellar!" yipped Phineas and dove into the open door of the house. The door leading below ground was not hard to find. Bump Gillis lifted a big hook from its staple and dung the door wide.

"Hey-ey-ey!" called Phineas.

"Ya-a-a-ah!" rasped a voice. "It's us!" Heavy boots shuffled up the stone steps that led from a dark musty cellar. Phineas peered down and made out the wrathful countenance of a Yank.

"Wh-what happened?" demanded Phineas.

The frouzy-looking doughboy blinked as he stepped into the daylight. A frayed greatcoat which had once belonged to a Boche covered his little frame like a tent. He held an old coal-scuttle helmet in his hand.

"Huh?" he snapped, glowering at the officers. "What happened? Well, we jumped the brass hat an' dragged him an' his driver into the cellar an' locked 'em up, just like ya told us to an'—"

"An' I bopped a colonel!" boasted another Yank, also garbed in the wreck of a Boche coat. "He got tough an'—"

"Shut up, Flannelmouth!" barked the first dough, cocking his fist. "I'm doin' the talkin'!" He turned to the flyers again.

"Well, we waited," he continued, "until we heard some airplanes buzzin' overhead. Three of 'em, You said three. Well, they landed an' come over an' shoved guns under pur noses an'—they was Frogs!"

"Wha-a-a-a-at?" gasped Phineas. "Fr—?"

"Yeah," affirmed the doughboy. "They tied us up an' went down an' took out the colonel an' his showfair. Then they pushed us into the cellar. An' one little bum with a hare lip tol' me to tell Lootenant Pinkham—that's you, ain't it?—that maybe ya won't bring no

more dead nags around his flyin' field. He didn't let the brass hat hear him, though. He—"

"My Gawd!" groaned Bump Gillis and held his head in his hands.

"Them lousy Frogs!" yelled Phineas. "Boncouer's Frogs. I'll git hunk. I'll—"

"Well, if you didn't pull a trick this time, Pinkham!" exploded Howell. "C'mon, let's git out of here. We might's well go and get what's coming back at the drome. C'mon."

"Don't we git them francs?" yipped the dough at Phineas who had slumped down on an old chair and was trying to figure it all out.

"Yeah, sure," he said mechanically. "I got 'em. Ya'll git 'em."

"C'mon, nitwit," repeated Howell.

"I'm stayin' a while," groaned Phineas miserably.

HE WAS still sitting there like Rodin's "Thinker" when Howell and Bump roared overhead. The doughs shifted from one foot to the other and stared down at him.

"Oh, say, lootenant," said one without warning, "the big cluck left something behind. A bunch of writin'. Flannelmouth tossed it into that ol' woodbox over by the stove."

"Yeah?" Phineas' eyes brightened a little. "Let me look at 'em."

"Here they are, sir," ventured the dough, Flannelmouth, a few seconds later. "They fell outa his bag."

"Huh?" muttered Phineas. "I bet they did. You bums was lookin' fer cognac, I bet, an' ya pulled 'em out!" One of the trio coughed nervously.

Phineas idly flipped pages of Colonel Guilfoyle's literary effort. Suddenly he stopped at one page and opened his eyes wide. He read it hurriedly, flipped over the next page and perused another. A howl leaped from Phineas Pinkham's throat and he jumped to his feet.

"Awright, you guys!" he grinned, reaching inside his leather flying coat. "Here's a bunch of francs. All I own. Go drink yourselves to death." With that Phineas rammed the memoirs of old Tinfoil under his coat and ran out of the house.

"Nuts, awright!" commented one of the Yanks. "Them flyin' buzzards is all goofy. But lookit these here francs, will ya! C'mon, ya lousy sojers, let's git!"

The tarmac of the Ninth Pursuit was pregnant with a strange tension when Phineas rolled his Spad up

to the line. Groundmen looked at him but briefly as he stepped out of his bullet-strafed Spad. Their eyes seemed to be drawn toward the big car that stood in front of the big stone house. Phineas looked over. The car was very familiar.

"So that's it, huh?" growled Carbuncle as he walked wearily toward the squadron headquarters, over which hung a nimbus of grim, forbidding uncertainty. "The ol' sea lion come back to gloat, did he? Well, well!"

As Lieutenant Pinkham opened the door and walked into the big room, the breaths of a dozen pilots hissed inward like the souging of a receding surf.

"Well," said Phineas through tight lips, "what's happened?"

"Plenty!" growled Howell. "Guilfoyle is in there telling the Old Man about the great rescue the French squadron made. Going to recommend them for a medal. Before he went in, he told us what a lot of clucks we were. Always asleep. Jerries only five miles away and we don't know anything about it, get that? On top of everything else, this ain't going to do Garrity a bit of good. We're sunk, see? An' it's all your fault, ya freckled-faced baboon. Maybe we'll get a skipper that'll look at you once and pull out a gun. We're hoping, Pinkham."

"Yeah?" sneered the Boonetown worker of miracles, his omnipresent grin splitting wide open. "Wait an' see. I—"

THE door of the sanctum flew open. Colonel Guilfoyle stalked out, his mouth set with grim purpose, the hornet bumps on his face gleaming white against a florid, fleshy background. Behind came Major Garrity, shaking with helpless rage. Despair clouded his eyes.

"I trust," was Guilfoyle's farewell shot to the pilots, "that when I visit you again, I'll see some improvement. I know I will. My report—"

"I want to speak to you a minute, colonel," put in Phineas Pinkham. "Alone!"

Major Garrity's legs buckled. The Ninth Pursuit stiffened. If a bomb had fallen at their feet, they would not have been less perturbed.

"Why—you—ah—er," sputtered the brass hat. "Confound you, you young whippersnapper! Talk to me like that? I'll break you. I'll—"

"Perhaps Colonel Guilfoyle will be broken, too, if General Pershing reads his memoirs," came the startling reply, "and Marshal Foch and Joffre. I believe it is in writing that you criticize their efficiency in

no gentle terms. It would seem that St. Peter will eventually be found very lax once you get to the pearly gates, sir."

"Wha-a-a-a?" That was all Colonel Guilfoyle could force out. His face paled to the tint of a gravestone as he stared at Lieutenant Pinkham. It changed to red, then to purple. His fat torso shook with indignation.

"W-well, Pinkham, this is a dastardly affront. You have my memoirs, have you? Been reading them and exaggerating, what? Give me those papers, lieutenant! You hear me?" He stepped toward Phineas and raised his cane.

"You're forgetting yourself, colonel," said Phineas sweetly. "And I don't hand over the memoirs until you have gone to Chaumont and have turned in a report such as the squadron merits. We caught hell today, but we licked the Boche. You may be a friend of the Secretary of War, but you're just a big false alarm to me." Lieutenant Phineas Carbuncle Pinkham turned and walked up to Major Garrity. He drew a bulky roll of papers from his coat and handed them to his C.O.

"I think these should be in your possession, sir," he said, saluting smartly. "They should come in handy lest you become a captain, sir, and I get busted to a corporal."

Major Garrity snatched the memoirs avidly but grinned as his eyes bored into those of Lieutenant Pinkham. They hardened and strayed to the miserable Colonel Guilfoyle.

"These papers are yours, sir," he said, Using Carbuncle's own words, "after your report goes to Chaumont. I would not mention your heroic rescue if I were you, either, colonel. A general might die laughing. There were no Boche in Moisy-le-Sec, understand? You can figure the rest out for yourself, but you won't live that long. Shall I show you to your car, colonel?"

"Damme!" exploded Colonel Guilfoyle, stamping out. "I've enough of this silly war! I shall resign immediately upon reaching Chaumont!"

"Then we'll git another medal!" grinned Phineas. "But wait until I git even with them lousy Frogs!"