



a HUMPY & TEX adventure

WASHED OUT

by ALLAN R. BOSWORTH

One of them chewed tobacco and the other sang, but it wasn't until they were pulled over the side of that mystery ship that Humpy and Tex sang "Hallelujah, I'm a bum."

IT WAS ONE OF THOSE DAYS when almost anything could happen. The sea shifted uneasily under low-hanging, sullen clouds, and there was a heaviness in the air that got on men's nerves. Far out over the Atlantic, thunder rumbled with the regularity of distant artillery.

Not a day for flying, but the navy cloud crackers at the Ile Tudy sea-plane base had only one motto—you couldn't keep a good man down. So the I-39 roared out over the black waters, spurned them in a whip of spray and climbed to the low ceiling as she vanished in the ocean haze. Back at the runway a little group

of aviation machinist's mates watched the take-off in silence and then shook their heads. It was more than a fifty-fifty chance that the plane would never come back.

"Humpy" Campbell, quartermaster first class and senior member of the station's famous enlisted flying team, was in the I-39's cockpit, his mouth set in a grim line that was drawn down to starboard by the huge chew of tobacco in that jaw. "Tex" Malone crouched aft as observer, and the manner of both was unusual. Ordinarily they took off with easy going banter and the shooting of much bull; this time their goggled faces were tense masks. Humpy leaned far over his stick and scanned the storm-threatened horizon; Tex watched the dark waters with unwavering gaze.

"One lousy freighter ain't worth a good crate and a couple of sky-busters!" Tex complained to the wind that howled through the I-39's struts. "Why didn't she make the convoy this morning? I reckon the skipper will believe me next time, if this crate turns up missin'. I told him it was no day to fly, and he said maybe it wasn't any day to shoot torpedoes either, but the U-boats was skulkin' off Point Penmarch!"

The convoy was probably in Nantes by now; it had steamed down through the straits of Belle Isle that morning with a couple of closely guarded troopships. Then, of all days, the British cargo ship had chosen this one of poor visibility and brewing storms to show up late and wireless for a special escort into St. Nazaire.

"Probably she's such a rusty old tramp even the Boche won't waste a torpedo on her!" Tex muttered. He saw Humpy shift his tobacco to port, and the pilot's lips formed a few seagoing swear words. The British freighter was not going to rate very much with Humpy.

Clouds milled angrily ahead and above them. A sudden blinding flash came from uncomfortably close quarters; the thunder clap resounded loud above the engine's roar and Humpy jerked around in alarm, momentarily mistaking the noise for a shell burst. He grinned sheepishly at Tex when he saw his error.

Forked lightning streaked across the brooding sky just ahead and Tex watched, fascinated. The sturdy seaplane suddenly lurched, and the air was filled with bumps that made it rough as a shell-pitted road.

Then the shower struck with the fierceness of a tropic squall, beating into the faces of the two sailors. Over-sized rain drops bounced off the wing fabric to be whipped into a wet mist by the throbbing prop. Humpy rubbed his sleeve across his goggles to clear away the water that shut out his vision, but it formed

quickly again and for minutes that seemed an eternity the I-39 flew blind. On the outer edge of the rain squall they were buffeted and dried by a fury of winds, and the heavy-set pilot scanned the seascape below for something that would enable him to get his bearings.

They were all right, so far. That jutting reach of rocky land far over their starboard was Point Penmarch itself, a grim tombstone marking the graves of many an Allied ship. It was in these waters that "Penmarch Pete," most notorious of all German undersea raiders, operated.

Tex Malone caught the pilot's eye and yelled something made unintelligible by the wind's howling, but Humpy saw him wave a gloved hand seaward and looked. Low down on the murky horizon was the freighter wallowing south.

Humpy kicked her over and the I-39 swung to port, creaking in the wind like the vessel to whose aid she was winging. Farther to sea, deeper into the peril that every navy airman faced over the heaving sea lanes.

A FEW minutes later and they dipped down above the rolling stack, then shot skyward again while men waved from the wet deck below. Tex Malone breathed a sigh of relief and cursed the rusty old hooker in the same breath. For some inexplicable reason, he hated that tub. If it hadn't been for her, now, he and Humpy would have been caulking off back at the station, and they needed after having helped convoy the troopships down over the northern sector early that morning.

He had only a brief glimpse of the vessel as they roared over her, but he could see she was salty and old, with her topside cluttered with enough gear and superstructure to drive a navy man crazy. Then he straightened in his cockpit and began a vigilant watch over the tossing waters for the cigar shaped bulk of a U-boat or the jab of its periscope on the surface.

Humpy swung the plane in a series of long ovals, straining his eyes to the south for the sub chasers that were to help take the freighter down through the straits of Belle Isle. Mine-laying submarines had operated in that perilous channel; Tex Malone looked to his bomb sights and saw that all was ready to drop the two eggs the I-39 carried suspended under her fuselage.

Crash! Streaking fire etched itself against the dark heavens again, like the path of some celestial tracer bullet. Tex and Humpy ducked involuntarily; in the next instant a sheet of water enveloped the laboring ark and it plunged sickeningly toward the restless waves.

Rain poured upon them with the copiousness of a cloudburst, beating them down, hissing into the hot motor until it choked and died and sent futile clouds of steam from its hood. Humpy battled with the desperation of a man fighting death, righting the ship for one breath-giving moment only to lose control again the next. He ripped the blinding goggles from his face and fought the falling crate silently while Tex yelled encouragement and maledictions from the rear.

Even the menacing surface below was shut out by the gray rain until it loomed in their fear-sharpened vision, perilously near, shooting upward with the speed of the wind that shrieked in the twisting wires and howled about the dead prop. Humpy turned a distorted face aft and shouted something at his observer and Tex nodded. The pilot was telling him to loosen his safety straps; there was danger of hanging head downward in the water if the ship capsized on landing.

She struck with a splash and a boltstraining lurch that crumpled the starboard float, skidded off the crest of a wave and slithered into the trough. She missed going over on her nose by an inch when the next wave struck forward and buoyed up her bow; then she lost headway and slanted to starboard, pitching dizzily and sinking deeper with every passing swell.

"Well, I told the skipper, damn his eyes!" Tex swore through the rain. He stood in the cockpit, removing his heavy flying jacket for all the world like a man who was determined to swim back to Ile Tudy for the express purpose of saying "I told you so!" to the Old Man.

"Maybe he'll believe me next time!" continued the Texan triumphantly. "Ain't no plane can live in this kind of weather!"

"Yeah! He'll believe you next time, you poor rubber sock!" Humpy retorted sarcastically. "If there is a next time! Don't you see we're washed out? We'll be doin' well to stay afloat long enough for that freighter to put about—if she even tries to put about. Too damn busy savin' herself!"

"Look!" Tex exclaimed. "It's stopped!"

It was the rain squall, over as suddenly as it had struck. Visibility increased; the horizon widened, and there was the freighter, a vague bulk half a mile way, lumbering along as though nothing had ever happened.

"Hey! Hey! Help!" yelled the excowboy. In moments of stress he forgot to be nautical.

"Ship ahoy!" shouted the more seagoing quarter-

master. He grabbed the Very pistol and fired. A red light flamed in the gray heavens. From the freighter came a hoarse blast.

"She's goin' to pick us up!" said Humpy. "Keep your shirt on—likewise your coat, sailor! They oughta make these magnetos so they'll run under water. If that ain't what happened to this engine, I'll kiss a marine!"

"Save your love and kisses for the skipper of that Limey tub!" advised Tex. "I thought he was going to pass us up."

"Hell, if it wasn't for him we wouldn't be here, would we?"

THE merchantman was deep-laden and slow. She approached cautiously, feeling her way like a crippled old lady avoiding mud puddles in the street, finally drawing near enough for the two shipwrecked flyers to make out the name on her rusty bow-plates.

"*Suffolk Lass*, my eye!" snorted Tex. "She was a lass when Columbus sailed, maybe. Still, she looks pretty good to me. The starboard wing tip is under."

"Stand by for a line!" bellowed a man from the deck of the steamer.

"Aye, aye!" Humpy yelled back.

The line came, uncoiling its wet length with a hiss to fall across the fuselage. Tex grabbed it and hauled away until a heavier rope was passed. The freighter eased around until the seaplane was upwind, and Humpy grunted in admiration. Not every merchant skipper would know that was the proper way to tow a plane.

"Have you got a sling, Yanks?" shouted the skipper, a burly, whiskered salt who stood at the freighter's rail. "Can you rig one if we pass you the line? We'll hoist your plane aboard."

"Let's have it. I'll rig the sling all right!" Humpy answered. "Only you'll have to make it snappy!"

There was no time wasted. Humpy and the lanky sailor from the Texas Panhandle rove off lines around the fuselage, with spreaders to prevent crushing the crate when it was lifted.

They made fast the rope around engine bearers and secured lines to the wings, working half of the time in the water.

"Haul away!"

The ship was towed up wind, dragging deep in the treacherous swells. Humpy and Tex fended off as best they could while a straining donkey engine hoisted the I-39 gingerly and deposited her near the taffrail, her wings athwartships and resting on cargo boxes that

were lashed to the deck. Sturdy seamen made her fast and the *Suffolk Lass* resumed her journey.

"That was a bit of damned good seamanship, captain!" Humpy exclaimed as he swung himself to the deck. "We hadn't expected to save the plane, and we thank—"

He stopped short, biting off his words with an abruptness that caused Tex Malone to whirl about as he stepped to the planking. The observer's jaw dropped in amazement and his hands went up slowly.

There was a businesslike Luger in the captain's grip, and it pointed toward the two Americans!

"What the hell?" Humpy stuttered. "What's the meaning of this?"

The captain chuckled deep in his throat and stroked his bearded chin, "Yankee swine!" he sneered. "*Verdammt* Yankees! Do you think for a minute I put about to save you? No! But, my friends, we can use: you! Schwartz! Search them!"

"Why—why, you damned lousy Krauts!" gasped Tex. "Flyin' the British flag! Sailin' an English ship!"

"All's fair in love and war, you know!" the captain laughed. A sallow-faced man wearing the first mate's cap stepped forward and ran his hands over the two bluejackets. They had no weapons.

"Well, what's your game?" demanded Humpy. "If we're prisoners of war, then we want the rights accorded prisoners of war. Where are you going to put us ashore?"

"That remains to be seen!" said the captain. "It might make you feel better to know that none of us may ever set foot on shore again. But surely if the despised Germans can attempt the most daring feat in the war, two brave American airmen can face the same danger!"

There was mockery in his tone, mingled with a forced bravado. Humpy noticed his eyes; they were tired and gleamed with a strange light. He looked around the circle of faces. All Germans, all well disguised as British merchant seamen. All pale and wearing the look of men who were facing doom. There was a mysterious tenseness about the ship that sent a chill along his spine.

HUMPY squared his shoulders. "You worked it pretty slick, radioing for an escort into St. Nazaire!" he said to the German. "More efficient German spy system, eh? Well, where are we headed?"

"St. Nazaire!"

Humpy laughed derisively. "Okay with us, Jerry!" he declared. "Only you won't ever make it. They'll find

out—there'll be an inspection party boarding your ship outside the harbor. And if you do get inside, what the hell good will it do?"

"We are to spend the rest of the war in a prison camp or in hell!" the German said. "You'll help us, or be shot. When the submarine chasers pick us up, which will be very soon now, you'll hail them and instruct them to report that we picked up your plane. I think it'll be far easier to enter the harbor at St. Nazaire with an American seaplane on deck, don't you?"

"You'll get no help—"

"We shall see, we shall see!" smiled the German. "There will be some one near, behind these boxes, when we contact the chasers. It would be an easy matter to take you below and shoot you."

He turned on his heel with true Prussian precision, then halted.

"By the way, *Schweinhund*, let me caution you against smoking. Our cargo, you may be interested to know, is enough explosive to blow every ship in St. Nazaire off the map. And, by the way, that is just what we intend to do!"

He went forward, leaving Schwartz and a pair of wooden-faced sailors, all armed, to watch the Americans. Humpy looked at Tex and the other flyer frowned and scratched his head. Schwartz motioned for them to sit down on a box that was on the deck near their plane.

"Looks like a cruise West, shipmate!" remarked Humpy. "Washed out ain't no name for it!"

"Silence!" growled Schwartz, waving the Luger.

Now Humpy could see the German's game. He visualized it with a sort of horrible helplessness that grew while the *Suffolk Lass* wallowed along on her mission of death and destruction. They intended sailing the explosive-filled tramp into St. Nazaire, where the fuse would be set and the crew would leap overboard, leaving the *Suffolk Lass* headed straight for a pier or another vessel. Perhaps she would blow an undocked troopship sky high.

"God!" Humpy shuddered. "They talk about what effect the loss of a transport at sea would have on the folks back home! And if one was blown up in a French harbor—"

He wiped a chill of perspiration from his brow and tried desperately to think of a way out. If they so much as tried to signal one of the chasers it would mean death. If there was only some way of setting off that cargo of explosives—

Another rain squall came and passed; then the sun

shone out and the sky began to clear. A villainous-looking German came and grunted something to Schwartz, who went forward to eat his dinner while the new Boche stood guard. The villainous-appearing Hun grinned evilly at the two Americans until Tex glowered at him.

“Quit skinnin’ your face; I ain’t buyin’ hides!” the ex-cowboy advised,

The guard did not answer; the other two Boche sailors were stolid as ever. They were all picked men, Humpy reasoned, and he had to admire the daring of their plot and the success with which they appeared to be carrying it out.

A hoarse blast from the whistle of the *Suffolk Lass* startled his overwrought nerves and he jumped. That would be a couple of chasers, bearing down from the south, their knife-like bows cutting the waves. He couldn’t see forward because of the gear that cluttered the freighter’s deck, but the chasers would soon be off their beams circling and keeping a wary watch for periscopes and mines.

He heard a heavy footstep and looked up. It was *Herr Hauptmann*, trim and military-looking despite his unshaven features and the ill-fitting merchant marine officer’s garb.

“Ha, my Yankee friends!” the captain greeted. “You will please to do as I say, now. Climb up there and appear to be repairing your motor!”

“You can shoot and be damned before I—” Tex began.

“Take it easy, Tex. It’ll do no good!” Humpy interrupted. He wanted the wider range of vision that would be afforded from the plane; he wanted action of some kind. Two Boche sailors had already, mounted to the observer’s cockpit and were removing the drum from the Lewis gun. They were taking no chances.

“Up you go!” the captain urged, waving the Luger in his hand.

THE two Americans climbed to the plane. The captain stood below, where the crates stacked on the deck hid him from the trim gray chasers that were passing on each side of the *Suffolk Lass*. His pistol hand was steady.

“Sing—whistle—appear happy!” ordered the German skipper. “Here, Schwartz, shoot the first one that makes a treacherous move. I must be on the bridge. Take the canvas off that hatch—show the *Schweinhuhds* what is below!”

He went forward again and the sallow-faced Schwartz took his place. Signals ran up from the bridge

and streamed gay in the wind. They were answered from the little submarine chasers. Humpy saw men on the decks of the American boats training glasses on the *Suffolk Lass*; he knew the radio was flashing out messages to the Ile Tudy seaplane base that the I-39 had crashed and had been picked up by the freighter. His jaw clenched until the muscles hurt.

Seamen removed the canvas from a hatch directly under the plane. In the dim light that penetrated the cargo space below, the two Americans could see box on box of explosive stacked in orderly rows, lashed here and there to prevent them from shifting when the freighter rolled.

“Sing!” Schwartz ordered. “They’re watching you through their glasses. Tinker with the motor and sing!”

Tex looked at Humpy. The pilot nodded. He saw something in the observer’s eyes, a pleading for him to understand something that Tex dared not to speak. The ex-cowboy had a plan of escape, perhaps.

Humpy began to whistle, tunelessly, while he hammered here and thereabout the engine with a wrench. A lot of good it would do, to tighten the nuts on the I-39’s motor, when she, would never fly again, when neither of them would ever fly again—

Tex Malone was singing an old hobo song as they rolled along, as the trim gray chasers swung by and headed down into the straits of Belle Isle. Humpy admired the nerve of his shipmate as he listened.

“Hallelujah, I’m a bum! Hallelujah, bum again!”

“Hallelujah, give us a handout, To revive us again!”

He looked over at the observer, who was leaning into the pilot’s cockpit. Once more Tex tried to tell him something, but the men below were close enough to hear; they were watching.

“Hallelujah, I’m a bum! Hallelujah, bomb again—”

Bomb again! Bomb! Ah, that was it—the damned old Texan was trying to tell him about the bombs; they still had two of them suspended beneath their plane. A lot of good they would do, hanging under there, though.

Great guns! He saw it now! That open hatch just below, the explosive stored there. It was a cinch to let one of the 216-pound eggs fall; getting clear would be a different matter. Still, they could run down the top of the upper wing and dive into the sea; it was worth a try!

He straightened and climbed nonchalantly to the wing. Tex was on his knees on the wing surface, leaning over the cowlings, peering into the cockpit.

He looked at Humpy and the pilot nodded almost imperceptibly.

“No signals there, or I’ll shoot you!” Schwartz was saying from the deck, where he sat on the box Humpy and Tex had lately occupied.

“No, no signals!” Humpy answered. He took a long breath, “But look, what ship is that?”

He pointed off to starboard. Schwartz fell for the ruse and looked in that direction.

“Now!”

Tex released the bomb support, it tipped forward and the heavy projectile fell.

Humpy Campbell made the wing’s end in less than nothing, flat. He launched himself far out in a dive.

Boom! Water dulled the sound of the blast, but the noise was terrific, nevertheless. Humpy fought to stay under; there would be falling wreckage hissing into the sea all around them. Them? He wondered—Tex hadn’t had the same chance that he had. Tex had to straighten and get set to run.

His lungs were bursting. Couldn’t stand it any longer—couldn’t stand it! He shot upward and broke surface in a hail of debris.

A gasp of pure air and his head cleared. There was the ship almost broken in two, burning fiercely, no sign of life on her decks. The plane was gone, Tex was gone! He swam frantically over to where a man bobbed in the water, face upward. It wasn’t Tex, and the man was dead.

Humpy treaded water and peeled off the cumbersome flying jacket. That made it easier. He swam around the stern of the sinking *Suffolk Lass*. Couldn’t stay up much longer. Sub chasers were coming up as close as they dared.

His hand struck something—an arm! He grabbed it, pulled the man toward him. It was Tex, limp and white, with a crimson gash on his forehead. Humpy choked a prayer of thankfulness and began swimming wearily out from the wreck. She was going down, he had to get out of that suction.

A life preserver from one of the sub chasers struck the water near by; he slipped an arm through it and clung on grimly. Everything went black, everything faded away into a queer oblivion. The two limp bodies were hauled on board the American boat.

Then men were crowded onto his chest, shoving and pushing and making him spit up enough water to float a battleship. Hell, couldn’t they leave a guy alone after all he’d been through? Tex—where was Tex? He sat up, choking and sputtering, and there was Tex with a bandage around his head, lying on the deck alongside and smiling at him.

“Howdy, old-timer!” said the excowboy. “Fooled ’em, didn’t we? Only I figgered I didn’t want anybody in my way when I started off that ship. So I jumped from the other side. Didn’t mean to get separated from you, Humpy!”

