

THE PHANTOM FOKKER

by FRED DENTON MOON

A weird, strange story of a baffling encounter with a ghost of the air.

BOMBING WASN'T EXACTLY IN the Red Dot Squadron's line. But in those days the boys used to get orders to do all kinds of crazy stunts. They didn't have a single plane equipped to handle bombs, and not a single flyer who'd been trained for a bomber. But the job was shoved off on them occasionally, anyway.

Most of the Red Dot crew bucked at riding with a couple of cylinders of T.N.T. strapped loosely under the wings of their wobbly little crates. They bucked even more at the idea of leaning over the side to cut the fireworks loose when the ship was making a hundred flat through the enemy's territory.

Bombing, of course, isn't a difficult feat, nor is it especially dangerous. But to the man who's never been trained for it, there's something creepy about riding in the same crate with a half-ton of high explosives.

But Jeff Potts didn't mind bombs. Jeff didn't mind anything. He was one of those flyers who could hold a crate in a loop and shave himself at the same time. Kiting along through the enemy's treetops, or chasing a Heinie a mile above the clouds—it was all the same to Jeff Potts.

That's why he usually went up solo when the Red Dot bunch got orders to do a little pineapple throwing.

"Get those doleful grins off your mugs!" Jeff growled when the whole field gathered around to watch him take off with bombs one night. "I know every man of you is tickled pink because I didn't ask for company to come along!"

"Gosh! It must be a great feeling to be a hero, Jeff!" grinned Tommy Reddy, who was fastening the bombs in the little Nieuport. "I don't believe you're scared of the devil himself!"

"At least I'm not scared of a couple of little grenades," snapped Jeff, getting into his coat. "What difference do you guys think a bomb would make if your particular tracer was scheduled to come along?"

It wouldn't matter whether you were carrying a bomb or a feather! When a man's time comes, it comes—and the decorations he's lugging around won't make a particle of divvy!"

Jeff Potts was the best-natured man in the Red Dot. Also, the most fearless. He'd won a string of medals before most of the other boys started realizing that a little scrap was going on in France. But he never bragged.

In fact, Jeff Potts was so reckless in his fearlessness, some few of the men had an idea that he was just a little bit off. But even those who thought he was queer liked him a heap. The Red Dot actually seemed to centre around Jeff Potts. He was the life of the field.

"WELL, since you're coming back, we'll be ready for you, Jeff," said Captain Pratt, grinning. "I caught a Frog with a whole cartful of white wine this afternoon. We'll pull the cork when you come home. And remember, boy, an extra quart for every bullet hole you capture!"

Jeff Potts always came back. The boys had a regular little ceremony they put on in his honor. One of them counted the new bullet holes in his wings, another checked up on the fresh scars on the fuselage, and somebody else set down the instrument readings to be toasted at mess.

Foolishness, of course. But it helped to relieve the tedious strain the whole squadron was under most of the time. They didn't dare plan any kind of horseplay for any of the other flyers.

A few experiences had taught them that nine times out of ten, the man they were counting on for the fun wouldn't come back. Then everybody felt mighty glum.

But Jeff Potts—well, Jeff Potts always came home whole and grinning.

THE sun had just gone down when Jeff went up that night. Bombs and all, he took off the runway as

smooth as a bird. One time he circled the field, then zoomed up on a steep slant and went out of sight over the eastern horizon.

When the roar of his engine died out, the boys who were left behind glanced at their watches and grinned. It was exactly six-thirty. They knew that Jeff would be back before nine.

For about thirty miles after he took off, Jeff tripped along up the sector as smoothly as a cat on its way to a dairy. He had his orders and plenty of cigarets, and he knew about where he would find the big guns that were his objective. The night was as clear as a bell; no moon, few clouds, very little breeze and not another plane in the sky.

When he wheeled left to cross the lines, Jeff was flying at about three thousand. Far below, in the trenches, he could see faint blurs of candlelight. The sector was unusually quiet, with only a scattered flash of rifle fire and a lone calcium flare burning here and there.

When the German trenches had been left behind, an occasional lighted farm window or wrecked village slipped past. It was a dreary, monotonous landscape, scarred with deep pits and black craters.

An unearthly gray fog shrouded the river and most of the flat country, but the low hills with their white ruins and wrecked forests stood out clear and ghostly in the pale starlight.

Ten miles from German territory and forty miles from home, a big ridge of black hills jutted up in the south. Jeff swung his plane and headed straight into them. He knew the country well enough to realize that he was approaching the vicinity of the big guns.

His first task would be to find those guns before the guns found him. After he had them spotted, the rest would be simple. All he'd have to do would be to zoom down within range of the gunners' pistols, cut loose his firecrackers, and get home—if he could.

Throttling the jenny down a little when the first of the hills slipped under him, Jeff switched on his light and studied the map. A ruined chapel was indicated on the drawing. But he was too high to pick it up.

After scanning the sky on all sides to make sure that he was momentarily safe, Jeff tilted earthward and dropped a thousand feet. Then, in two wide circles that lost another thousand from the altitude glass, he saw the chapel—a ghostly, whitewashed ruin that sprawled like a stark skull among a clump of black shadows on the crest of a little hill.

Beyond the church, south, the map showed another

hill. And in the woods between the two hills, a red cross indicated the supposed location of the hidden battery.

Jeff switched off his light and made another broad circle to find the second hill. When he had picked it up, he knew that somewhere within a radius of five miles he would find the guns.

The moon had not yet risen, and the pale light from the stars made the objects on the ground look blurry and unnatural. After a wide, cautious circle that failed to start an alarm among the stark, broken trees, Jeff felt himself getting a little shaky. Even to a man who has no fear of death, it's no fun riding over a couple of bombs. Especially when every tree under you is liable to come to life and start shooting.

BUT worse than the bombs and the danger of getting too close to the masked battery was the threat of a swooping enemy plane. Jeff knew that the roar of his engine might rouse some telephone operator in the hills. If that happened, a fleet of Fokkers or Pfalzs would instantly be routed out to cut him off. And a lone little Nieuport, weighted down with a quarter-ton of dynamite, would have absolutely no show of escaping more than one of the faster, sturdier enemy ships.

There were no planes in sight, however, and no stir in the forest below to indicate that his own ship had been seen or heard. After one more careful scrutiny of the bleak, shadowy hilltops, Jeff dropped down.

Using the steeple of the ruined chapel for the center of his circle, he swung wide over the wooded valley where the guns were supposed to be. For ten dragging minutes, he spun and peered hawk-like down upon the motionless, twisted trees. Steadily, but cautiously, he lost altitude at each spiral. His flesh was cold. Little prickly chills of anticipation chased one another up his spine in rapid succession as the silent treetops and bare rocks rose to meet him. Momentarily he expected to see a flash, hear the screech of a shell as it rushed to bring him down in smithierines.

But no gun barked. Not a light flickered among the trees. If so much as a twig moved, Jeff could not make it out.

And yet, he was almost positive that the big battery of guns lay crouching less than a hundred feet below his trucks. He instinctively knew that his low-flying ship was the target for many watchful, enemy eyes. The innocent shadows and piles of branches in the forests did not deceive him, for Jeff Potts was well aware

of the art of camouflage. But even when he almost touched the tops of the trees, and the gust from his blade caused a shivery lane to rush through the dead leaves—not a shadow stirred!

Ordinarily, Jeff Potts claimed that he had no such things as nerves. But it was anything but natural for the men he knew were somewhere below to remain quiet while he swooped close above them. There was something uncanny in the silence that hung over those ghostly-white, twisted trees and their black, impenetrable shadows. The pale shadow of his plane, floating over the broken branches and scorched trunks, might have been the shadow of the Wings of Death.

The moon was rising behind a heavy clump of gray cloud. Moving rapidly down in a stiff gale that had sprung up, these clouds flung a ghostly, moving shadow on the southeast slope of the ridge. And clouds, of course, meant wind and darkness. But worse, they meant that a fleet of enemy planes might come sneaking upon the lone Nieuport without warning. Meeting a skyful of Heinie ships while he was flying solo at less than a hundred feet was the one thing that Jeff Potts craved not to do.

Determined, however, to locate the hidden guns and do his worst, Jeff dipped back and forth over the dark woods until he had worked himself into a nervous sweat. Finally, when the wind had risen to a little gusty gale that wrenched the ship dangerously close to the reaching treetops, he decided to duck for home.

Very probably the rangefinders had mistaken the location of the battery. Or, the Germans might have moved since the day before. Anyway, he'd made every effort to locate them, and having failed, could do nothing else except go back and report failure.

JUST as he turned back east, however, a big light sprang up and cut the clouds above the ridge about five miles away. It looked like a powerful searchlight. But while Jeff was still busy with the turn, the beam flickered and went out.

Thinking that he had found the guns after all, Jeff roared up in a steep slant, turned, and headed further into the enemy's country. Here, too, he found the hills as silent as death. With his engine roaring, he crossed and recrossed the exact spot where the light had bobbed up. And not a sign of the enemy could he find.

Maybe they were trying to bait him into some kind of trap, Jeff thought. He shyed off and climbed

a hundred feet to look about for an approaching plane. But the sky was empty, unless the Boches were advancing under cover of the clouds. After waiting ten long minutes and seeing nothing move except his ownship's shadow, he spiraled slowly down again.

When he had circled and dipped until his head was swimming, Jeff got angry. Throwing caution to the wind, he tried diving straight for the little hollows between the bare hills.

Anyone who wished might have brought him down with a pistol, so close did he swoop above the broken tops of the trees. But on the hills and in the valleys, not a leaf stirred. Save where his propellor's gust raked the underbrush, the woods were lifeless.

Jeff Potts told himself that he was one kind of fool, and that the Germans below were a stronger brand of the same kind. He wished that he had a long pole to poke down among the shadows and stir them up.

Just to prove to the enemy gunners that they were crazy for letting him swoop around over their heads, he heaved one of his bombs overboard and scooted.

The woods and hills roared, and dirt and trees and stones flew everywhere. But after the echoes of the explosion died out, the country was as dark and silent as before.

Mad then sure enough, Jeff heaved the other bomb at a spot where he thought the German gunners might be hiding. Again there was a terrific detonation. But again he had missed his unseen target.

After hovering around for a moment to see if he had done any damage worth reporting, Jeff wheeled back east. When he leaned over the side to get his bearings from the ruined church, he happened to glance upward. Just above his right wing, and streaking so close that he could see the two men in her, was the biggest Fokker Jeff Potts had ever encountered.

IT WASN'T diving, but just hanging there. Hovering above his right wing like a big gray wasp.

Jeff had been caught in a dozen traps almost as bad before, but never before had the sudden appearance of a lone enemy ship rattled him. There was something spooky about the way this big twin-motored Boche had sneaked up. It loomed weird and terrible up there in the pale starlight, the long ribbons of thin cloud gliding in its wake.

Rattled though he was, Jeff could still think. To rise was impossible, and his wheels were almost skimming the tops of the trees even then. Nevertheless, Jeff threw the stick downward, and opened his gas to the

last notch. Fortunately, the plane was at that moment crossing the very crest of the hill. With a rush and a roar, it responded to the gas and stick, skipped through the leaves themselves, cracked a few branches and bounced off the ridge on the south.

By a miracle he righted the scout when she struck the clear sky on the other side of the rocks. It was a desperate chance, and he had taken it so quickly his mind failed to register details. Fighting, twisting, he somehow managed to right the plane. Then, giving her the gas to the limit and imagining a bullet in his back at every turn of the propellor, he roared through the clouds and headed east for home in the teeth of the wind.

For about five miles, he pushed the machine straight forward for all she was worth. Then, when no rush of lead came from the Boch, Jeff turned in his seat and looked back. The Fokker was no where in the sky. The black ridge he had just left was being completely shrouded by the rolling clouds. The big gray Fokker, Jeff decided, must be still thrashing around looking for him in those fleecy clouds.

For about five miles further, Jeff's heart thundered with the sweet song of success. By some quick thinking and quicker work, he had outwitted an enemy who had had every possible advantage. His scare of a few minutes before was gone like a smoked-out pipe. He laughed aloud at the thought of the surprise he must have thrown into the two Germans when he ducked and went tearing through the treetops to get from under them.

THEN, like a flash out of the void above him, came that same big gray Fokker. Almost two hundred feet above, and a little behind, Jeff saw it. Not a sound did its double-engine make. How it had penetrated the distant cloud bank and came up to him so rapidly, he couldn't understand.

But it was there, nevertheless. And it still held every odd for a scrap.

With a sharp zoom of protest from his racing motor, Jeff swung his crate around on her left wing and dived straight down. As if the devil himself was following the Nieuport into that dive, he held the scout's nose to the ground. At the bottom of a two thousand foot plunge, he wrenched her around, straightened out and held his breath for the wings to drop off.

There was an awful jolt, a whine somewhere back in the tail, but the Nieuport held together. Without

waiting to see where his pursuer was, Jeff threw her over to the right, rocked a time or two to test his controls, and then headed east.

Ordinarily Jeff Potts wouldn't have given a cigaret to keep out of a fight with a lone ship. But that big, gray, silent, two-manned Fokker had thrown a chill into him from the moment it first appeared. Old sixth sense had been on the job. Jeff had a hunch, and a mighty strong hunch, that there was something unearthly about that plane. He couldn't explain why, but he'd rather have gone out alone to meet the whole German air fleet in combat than to tarry around and exchange a single bullet with that big sneaking ship.

Jerking the Nieuport to the right and left to take advantage of every thin wisp of cloud, Jeff held her nose for home. How his plane stood the awful strain of his darting turns, he didn't know. He didn't especially care whether she did stand them or not. All that mattered was to avoid that big, swooping, silent Fokker.

The German, however, wasn't to be shaken off. It didn't take Jeff Potts more than about ten seconds to realize that the other pilot was pushing his big crate as crazily as he was pushing the little scout.

The big Fokker traced every twist and turn the Red Dot Nieuport made. And with amazing smoothness and ease. Better still, the German put his ship through some tricks Jeff Potts had never seen before.

At times, when it dove through a heavy bank of cloud, the giant Fokker was almost hidden. But like ever-pursuing Death, it would dart back into the open and glide nearer. Jeff, glancing back, would see it in one spot. And the next time he stole a glance, it would be somewhere else. It seemed to travel in long, gliding bounds. Sometimes in front of the Nieuport, sometimes behind; always above.

WHEN it seemed that the German was going to chase him all the way home, Jeff decided that he'd try a few bullets. He was under the Fokker, and about a dozen lengths ahead. Swinging into a sharp loop that carried him dangerously close to the ground, he banked suddenly, turned over and got right side up just in time to pass under the German's right wing. It was close work. But it brought back some of Jeff's old self-confidence. He knew that he had the Fokker at his mercy for the space of one fleeting second.

Before the German could slow his downward rush or twist out of range, Jeff cut loose a strip of tracer bullets almost against the bottom of the skull and crossbones that were painted beneath the cockpit.

The bullets went ripping out of the twin Lewis like a shower of red-hot hornets. Jeff was an expert shot, and he was so close to his target that there was no danger of missing.

He distinctly saw a dozen of his tracers dart through the German's right wing, pass through the fuselage where the gas tank was stored, and go hissing off into thin air above the stone-faced pilot's hand. His fire, however, had no more effect on the Fokker or its men than if he'd been shooting chinaberries into a sheet of asbestos.

When the drum on the gun was exhausted, Jeff cleared the Fokker and came out of his loop automatically. He was ice-cold all over. He couldn't do anything except stare around at the big gray ship that had wheeled and was following him without a sound or shot.

Jeff Potts had heard tales of pilots who'd been smashed to their death by a strange, phantom enemy plane. He'd never been credulous of these tales, however, because he did not believe in ghosts or spooks of any kind.

But there was no denying the fact that the ship into which he'd just emptied a ninety-seven red-hot tracers was not a man-made plane. Those zipping, inflammable bullets had passed completely through the German's most vulnerable spots—had passed completely through her crew as well—and their effect had been the same as if the Fokker were made of shadow!

AS THE unearthly craft dived straight for his rudder, Jeff turned his controls loose and closed his eyes. The cold rush of the air in his face when the Nieuport started kiting woke him up. He had an impending crash, as well as a pursuing ghost, to think about.

Less than three hundred feet above the ground, and rushing to meet it like a flash of light, he thought for a moment that the ship was out of control. In a last desperate effort to live, he snatched the stick and swung her out of her earthward plunge.

Every wire in her groaned, every stay and joint creaked. But she held together. Weak, sickeningly weak, she jolted out of the dive just above a big black shell crater. Fighting, struggling, almost on the ground, she wheezed and coughed and then zoomed clear again.

Glancing upward as his ship steadied, Jeff saw that the Phantom Fokker had disappeared. And two miles to his right the two green lights marked the landing field of the Red Dot Squadron. Without tarrying around that part of the sky waiting for the ghost to

come back, Jeff Potts jerked his scout wide open again and headed for home as if the fields of all hell were riding his tail.

WHEN Jeff Potts almost crashed that night, the majority of the Red Dot gang were convinced that he was more than a little "off balance." When he told his tale of the Phantom Fokker, after having been lifted pale and trembling out of his cockpit, the men smiled pityingly and pointed to their heads.

"He's as mad as a March Hare," Captain Jeffers declared sadly when he had helped Jeff over to the dinty and put him to bed. "He swears that he was chased home by a ghost!"

A pall fell over the messhall where the squadron was gathered. The white wine that Captain Pratt furnished was barely tasted. The men were disappointed, for they had counted on Jeff Potts' rollicking, sarcastic good-humor. They always counted on Jeff Potts for the fun when he returned from one of his night solo bombing trips.

THE next morning, Jeff reported to mess as usual. But he was changed. Deep seams on his haggard face told his story of a sleepless night. He greeted the others with a nod and a few low words, and kept his eyes riveted on his plate when he spoke.

The men treated him kindly. Too kindly, perhaps, for him not to notice and understand that they were sympathizing with him. No one spoke of the incident of the night before. Jeff himself ignored the silence that his presence caused. As soon as he had finished eating, he excused himself and went out. One or two of the men glanced after him and shook their heads.

Automatically relieved from patrol by his flight of the previous night, Jeff Potts spent the entire day alone in his dinty. He did not turn up at lunch, but his absence failed to dispell the pall that seemed to hang over the others. Again the squadron ate in silence, and no one dared mention Jeff's name.

When dusk came, however, and supper was laid without Jeff showing up, Tommy Reddy spoke:

"It's a darn shame about Jeff Potts! Maybe you fellows think he's crazy, but that man's got more gray matter than all the rest of us put together! Jeff's my friend, and what he says goes, get that? If Jeff Potts says he saw a ghost, I say he saw a ghost too! And if any of you blankety-blanks think different—say it to me!"

It was the strain cracking. The men knew and kept their eyes lowered. Nobody spoke.

"Why don't you talk—somebody talk!" yelled Tommy, glaring around the board at their bent heads. "Agree with me, or disagree with me—it don't make any difference what you say, but say it!"

Somebody at the head of the table fumbled a knife and it fell to the floor with a clatter. Captain Pratt laughed—a shrill, mirthless laugh. Instantly the whole table was laughing—all except Tommy Reddy. The men weren't laughing at Tommy. They were laughing because it was a relief to laugh—because the strain was broken.

"Stop it, I say!" yelled Reddy, snatching up a chair and drawing back his arm as if to send it crashing upon the table. "I'll fight any man of you who says that Jeff Potts didn't see a ghost!"

Captain Pratt, who had started the laughter, was the first to catch the flash in Tommy Reddy's eyes. Instantly he was silent.

One by one the others noticed that the mirth had suddenly grown still around them. A moment of gasps. Then silence. Silence so tense it could almost be seen, and every eye riveted upon Tommy Reddy's face and the raised chair he held above their heads.

For a moment Reddy glared, holding the chair as if he was undecided which man to throw it at. Then, suddenly, he whirled from the table and started for the door. Before he reached it, Jeff Potts, in leather jacket and goggles, came in.

"The colonel's just ordered a plane out for a bombing trip, fellows," Jeff said quietly. "I'm going. Ta ta!"

"And I'm going too," snapped Tommy, catching his arm. "The rest of you mugs"—he faced the silent table—"can go to hell!"

WITH scarcely a dozen words, and those concerning the new plane or the bombs, Tommy and Jeff Potts went over to the two-seater Nieuport and climbed aboard. For the first time since his connection with the Red Dot, Jeff Potts took off before an empty field. But he tried not to show that he noticed. And Tommy, settling himself in the rear seat, said nothing. He had not even asked where their flight would carry them.

As on the night before, Jeff went up in the face of the setting sun, circled the field one time, zoomed up on a steep slant toward the east.

For about thirty miles he tripped straight up the sector. He had his orders, and his ship carried two bombs. The range-finders had rechecked their calculations and located the big guns at a spot about

ten miles from the ruined church. Jeff could have saved time by continuing east for a few more miles, but instead, he chose to retrace the territory he'd flown over the night before.

Tommy Reddy, leaning over the cockpit, saw the dreary, ghastly landscape drifting past. Ten miles into German territory, a plane passed far to the right of them. But it was either one of their own ships, or a German who did not wish to engage them. For a few moments it hovered above a cloud bank; then turned sharply and disappeared in the dusk.

When the ruined church came into sight below, Jeff dropped altitude and slowly crossed the spot where he had dropped the bombs the night before. Tommy, not understanding why they were tarrying around, wondered what there was about the gnarled, shell-torn trees that attracted attention. When he turned in his seat and pointed east, Jeff grinned. By gestures, he indicated the ridge above which he had first encountered the phantom ship of the night before.

Tommy, following Jeff's finger, saw the long, shadowy ridge looming up in the starlight. Above it a brisk wind was huddling silver-edged clouds. An eerie, spooky scene.

And even as he looked, Tommy saw a big searchlight flash up. For an instant its beam flickered across the sky.

Then the light went out.

INSTANTLY a huge, gray, twin-engined Fokker appeared on the horizon, swooping downward to cut them off in the hills, its wires and braces gleaming in the starlight, the muzzles of the gunner's twin rifles pointing straight for their own whirling prop.

Tommy, in the front seat, cut loose the two bombs instantly. There was a flash far below and behind them, a dull roar, and the hiss of flying trees and stones. Then Jeff turned the Nieuport's nose upward.

The engine roared throatily, its deep, reverberating zoom punctured by the staccato rattle of Tommy's rapid-fire guns that sent a streak of hissing tracers up to meet the swooping Boche.

For a moment, Jeff Potts himself could not believe that the craft that was rushing to meet them was the same shadowy ship of the previous night. Then, as the Fokker straightened out of its plunge, he saw that Tommy's flaming bullets were passing completely through the German and zipping out into the clear sky beyond!

What could it mean?

Tommy, too, realized that the Fokker was not earthly. For one long crackling blast, he held his double-Lewis open. The golden bullets zipped out like wasps until the belt was exhausted. Then, with a gesture of his hands, Tommy indicated that his rifle was a hopeless weapon to train upon the Phantom.

Jeff Potts, however, was determined to bring the ghost down or die in the attempt. Without slackening his up-rushing speed, he held the Nieuport straight in the path of the descending Fokker. When the twin propellers were spinning silently almost against his own flashing blade, he dipped slightly and closed his eyes.

INSTEAD of a crash, a faint shadow chased itself across his locked lids. Opening his eyes, Jeff glanced down into a glaring light that almost blinded him. Then, too late, he saw the top of the ridge looming just ahead. Before he could turn the plane or rise, there was a jolt, a splintering explosion and sudden blackness.

When Jeff opened his eyes, Tommy was bending over him, pleading with him to live.

"It wasn't the ghost, Jeff! We smashed a cliff. Quick! get a grip on yourself, old man. We're inside the German lines. We've got to get out of here before they find us!" Half stunned, his right arm limp, and blood streaming down his face, Jeff allowed Tommy to carry him down the scarred hillside.

As they reached the valley, the searchlight on the ridge sprang up again. Following the long white beam skyward, both Jeff and Tommy saw it pick up the phantom Fokker, trace the ghost ship's gliding course across the heavens, and die out as the plane reached the distant horizon.

LATE the next afternoon, after almost twenty hours spent ducking into shell craters and dodging German patrol parties, Tommy Reddy succeeded in getting himself and Jeff Potts safely across to their own lines. Jeff was almost exhausted. Weakened from his wounds, and hoarse from a day spent in the cold, drizzling rain; he was delirious when an American doctor set his broken arm. Over and over again he muttered the story of the Phantom Fokker.

"The boy's nuts," declared the doctor sadly, shaking his head. "He'll always be as crazy as a bat!"

"He will not!" snapped Tommy Reddy, glaring from the other side of the ambulance. "That fellow's Jeff Potts, the greatest flyer on this front. He's no more crazy than you are, you pill-roller!"

"This man has suffered some kind of brain shock, son," answered the doctor patiently. "He's been telling me for an hour that he met a ghost."

"He did meet a ghost," retorted Tommy tersely. "So did I! Do you think I look crazy?"

The physician shook his head sadly and left the ambulance. He had seen many boys robbed of their senses by the war.

FOR the next two weeks, the Red Dot bunch called at the hospital to visit Jeff and Tommy. To each man who came, Tommy told the story of their encounter with the Phantom Fokker. The men listened patiently, but they went away sad. Thereafter, Tommy's name was dropped also from the Red Dot mess conversations.

"They think we're buggy, but we're going to show 'em," Tommy said doggedly, after he had recovered enough to hobble across the ward and perch on the side of Jeff's cot. "They think we didn't meet that ghost! But when we get out of this hospital, you and I are going to prove a thing or two!"

Jeff smiled. During the three months they had been in the hospital, a warmer, understanding had grown between him and hot-headed little Tommy Reddy. At times, when he recalled his two encounters with the ghost plane, Jeff had wondered if he could be crazy. But if he had lost his mind, Tommy Reddy was a madman too. And Tommy talked, looked and acted sane!

Determined to solve the mystery of the phantom ship, the two boys left the hospital at the end of the fourth month. During their convalescence, however, the Red Dot squadron had become a thing of the past. Disbanded and scattered, the old bunch was engaged on various fronts in the heavy aerial action that was marking the beginning of the end of the great struggle.

When Jeff and Tommy got their hospital discharges, it was their intention to rejoin the old crowd. And when they learned that the Red Dot had been disbanded, they could find no other outfit that appealed to them. While they were resting in Paris, the Armistice was signed.

THE war's over and I'm glad of it, but it means that our chances of ever solving the mystery of that darn ghost are also over," said Tommy Reddy. "We agreed long ago that the Phantom Fokker was in cahoots with the German army. And now there's no German army! We'll never have a chance to prove to the Red Dot

crowd that we were telling the truth about meeting that spook!”

“Maybe we will, Tommy,” answered Jeff quietly. “Now that there’s no fighting, we can explore all that country back of the German lines. I’ve got a hunch that our ghost is still hanging around that ruined chapel.”

In Paris, the boys met dozens of men who’d recently been flyers. Despite Tommy’s protests, Jeff insisted upon spending nearly all of their money buying wine for these French, British and American aviators. He asked each man about the Phantom Fokker and learned that nearly every man who drank their wine had heard tales of the spook plane.

None of the men had actually seen the ghost, but most of them gave it credit for numerous deaths. Dozens of allied planes had crashed from no apparent cause. Jeff and Tommy soon learned that the French particularly gave the Phantom Fokker credit for the deaths of many flyers.

After they had collected a whole notebook full of wild ghost tales, Jeff Potts did some hard thinking. Most of the crashes attributed to the phantom German ship had occurred within a radius of twenty miles of the spot where he himself had met the ghost. Therefore, if the phantom was to be explained, Jeff was positive that he and Tommy would find the explanation in the hill country about twenty miles back of the old German lines.

TEN years after the war was ended, Captain Pratt found himself faced with a problem that stumped him for several days. The surviving members of the old Red Dot Squadron had decided to hold their first reunion. The men had scattered widely during ten years, and it was finally agreed that they would all assemble again and have a couple of days of fun and recollections. Captain Pratt was in charge of the reunion plans, and his problem was Jeff Potts and Tommy Reddy.

Of course, Captain Pratt and all the others wanted Jeff and Tommy to attend the banquet and blowout. But when they remembered the pall under which the two flyers had left the old outfit, no one could think of a tactful way by which the chums could be invited.

None of the old bunch doubted the sanity of Jeff and Tommy any more. The widely known aerial advertising firm of Potts & Reddy could not have been built up by men who were the least bit deranged.

Their story of the Phantom Fokker had been forgotten by the Red Dot men. Or, if not forgotten,

the ghost tale, like so many other incidents of the great war, had been put aside in their minds as inexplicable. Captain Pratt himself had forgotten Jeff’s and Tommy’s ghost plane until he was about to invite the two flyers to attend the reunion of the old bunch.

“If they’ll come, we will be more than glad to have them,” he said. “I’m going to write them both a note and tell them about our plans. But boys, if Jeff Potts and Tommy Reddy cut us cold, or tell us to go to hell, I can’t blame them a darn bit! We said they were both crazy, and if they’ve forgotten the way we cut them ten years ago, they’re bigger men than I could have been!”

Two days after the invitations had been mailed, Captain Pratt received a telegram from Jeff and Tommy. Not only did the chums accept the invitation to the reunion, but they invited the Red Dot to hold the get-together and banquet at the great flying field of the Potts & Reddy Aerial Advertising Company.

Captain Pratt, a little stunned by their unexpected cordiality, immediately wired all the Red Dot men that the reunion would be held at the Potts & Reddy field.

Jeff and Tommy met their old comrades at the train, and upon their arrival at the field, a regular air battle was staged in their honor by the Potts & Reddy planes. One of the warehouses had been fitted up with little rooms, and the celebration, which had originally been planned for a two-day affair, lengthened into a solid week of fun.

On the last night of the reunion, when the banquet was finished, Jeff Potts rose at the head of the table and told the men to follow him to the roof.

THE night was cold and as clear as a bell. There was no moon, few clouds, and very little breeze.

“Boys, watch that range of hills over there in the east,” Jeff said, pointing to a long ribbon of low peaks on the horizon.

The Red Dot men followed his pointing finger. For a moment they could distinguish nothing in the sky except the scattered, blazing stars. Then, suddenly, an illuminated airplane glided into view.

Not a sound heralded its approach, but as it sped rapidly toward the field, the men recognized it as one of the huge, twin-motored Fokker ships that had given them so much trouble during the war.

“Gosh! Where’d you get that spooky looking Boche, Jeff?” demanded Captain Pratt, gazing at the approaching plane with amazement.

From the shadows behind them, Tommy Reddy chuckled. Every man suddenly understood that the

big, silent, two-bladed Fokker that was hovering above their heads was the same ghost that had chased Jeff Potts and Tommy Reddy home that night ten years before.

Back and forth, diving and climbing in broad, swift spirals, the ghost ship moved. Then, suddenly, it came to a dead halt in midair. While the fascinated group stared at it wonderingly, a burst of flame flashed up between the two spinning, silent propellers. Quickly, almost instantly, the whole ship was ablaze. Then there was a burst of white light, and where the ghost ship had hovered in the sky, huge letters of red, white and blue fire spelled the words "Potts & Reddy, Aerial Advertizers!"

"THERE'S not much to tell, fellows," Jeff protested, laughing. "You've guessed it right, that was mine and Tommy's Phantom Fokker you just saw from the roof!"

"But explain the thing!" cried Captain Pratt eagerly. "You two men swore one time that you were going to capture that ghost. I want to know how you managed to trap him, bring him all the way over here to America and teach him to do advertizing stunts at your bidding!"

"Well, after you fellows sailed for home, Tommy and I went north," Jeff began, after the excitement had somewhat died down. "Some of the natives in that part of France claimed to have seen our Phantom Fokker gliding across the sky, but no one had seen it since the close of the war.

"But Tommy and I were determined to prove to you fellows that we were in our right minds. We stayed up in northern France for nearly a year, hunting and asking questions about the mysterious German plane. But needless to say, we didn't find anything.

"Then, one night when Tommy and I were about ready to give up the search, we saw an automobile turning around on a distant hill. The way its headlights flashed up in the sky made us remember the searchlight we saw that night near the ruined church. The next day we moved over to the ridge where we crashed, and late that afternoon we stumbled on the Phantom Fokker!"

JEFF paused and smiled. He had noticed that one or two of the men were exchanging glances that expressed their doubts about his sanity.

"What did it look like, that—ghost?" demanded Captain Pratt curiously.

"Well, it was simple—almost too simple," answered

Jeff, grinning. "At first we couldn't even understand why it had fooled us. The trick consisted of a very powerful, double-lensed searchlight. It was equipped with adjustments to throw long or short beam, just as the latest model pocket flashlights. Inside the case, and between the two lenses, was a tiny, colored-glass model of a Fokker type ship. This model was complete in every detail, even to two little propellers that revolved, and the dummy figures of the pilot and the gunner.

"As I said, the principle of the ghost was simple enough. On a dark night, when the light was turned on, its powerful beam shot high into the sky carrying with it the greatly magnified shadow of the little glass airship. You've just seen the ghostly shadow-plane the apparatus throws against the sky."

"But I don't understand about the searchlight part of it," interrupted Captain Pratt. "Goodness knows, the airplane looked realistic enough, but why couldn't we see the beam from the light?"

"The effectiveness of the ghost depends entirely upon the circumstances under which it is encountered," explained Jeff. "The reason that you couldn't see the searchlight just now was because you were on the roof, almost a hundred feet above the light. On the ground, level with the beam, you could see the light with that plane at the end of it.

The night Tommy and I crashed, we were above the light and level with the shadow. We were a bunch of nerves when we first saw the thing, and of course we didn't dream of looking around for the beam of the searchlight."

"Those Germans were slick," put in Tommy, grinning. "They knew that not one flyer out of a hundred would stop to look for the explanation after he'd emptied about a hundred bullets into the ghost without effect!"

"When we found the ghost," went on Jeff, "I immediately realized that it could be used for a cracker-jack advertizing scheme. We brought it home with us, and have been working on it and improving it ever since. Although our names haven't been mentioned, we are the founders of a new system of aerial advertizing. All over the country we are throwing colored, moving advertizements against the sky."

"Well, I'll never doubt anybody's ghost again," declared Captain Pratt, raising his glass. "Even if a man tells me there's an angel advertizing Pink Pills against the sunset, I'll take his word for it!"