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**PHINEAS
PINKHAM**
howl

PLEASE OMIT FLOWERS

written and illustrated by **JOE ARCHIBALD**

There was one thing von Holke, famous German ace, wanted more than anything else—to see Phineas “Carbuncle” Pinkham lowered into the ground in a long, black box. And Phineas would do—well, almost anything to oblige an enemy!

THE NINTH PURSUIT SQUADRON was holding the binge of binges. And in whose honor, should you ask, but Phineas Carbuncle Pinkham’s! Furthermore, it was not a private celebration. Outside the big stone house were parked three khaki-hued, mud-bespattered cars which had brought nearly a dozen brass hats, as well as a war correspondent, from four points of the compass to drink a toast to the man who had brought down *Hauptmann* Mannheim.

It might as well be admitted that the invitations sent out to the commanders of the French and British squadrons had been courteously but firmly declined. However, Major Rufus Garrity, still retaining memories of past friendly-relations banquets with his neighbors, received the messages without affront. Rather, he

regarded them in the light of necessary gestures in a “Safety First” campaign. For on this night Phineas Pinkham, like Caesar’s wife, could do no wrong. An extravagant statement, to be sure, and one to be taken with a whole shaker fall of salt.

The Old Man had poignantly realized the chances he would take and had announced the binge only after hours—yes, days—of meditation. He had known that the binge would offer a wider scope for the inimitable Pinkham talents than they had heretofore enjoyed and would result in nothing but a strain on the family relations in Chaumont. But Phineas was a hero, and so Major Rufus had forgotten his better judgment and plunged into the orgy with all the enthusiasm and joy of a man who is sawing off the limb he is sitting on.

His homely conglomeration of features split into a grin that might even have been called unholy, Lieutenant Phineas Pinkham sat on Sir Rufus’ right, the place of honor, and found plenty of things wanting in the countenance of Brigadier-General Chauncey Wrightstone, who was placed directly opposite. The brass hat, Phineas mused, certainly should be able to make a good living souring pickles when the war was over. He sat like a museum piece, the only signs of life being the movement of his right arm transferring soup from plate to oral cavity. He seemed to be enjoying the proceedings with all the zest of a Zulu at a grand opera.

CAPTAIN HOWELL, Bump Gillis and the other buzzards sat on the edges of their chairs and wondered why nothing had happened. Major Garrity sipped his soup, tried to be the perfect host to the brigadier and to watch Phineas at the same time. It was the calm before a storm.

Something happened just as Major Garrity was in the middle of a deep breath. *Splo-o-o-osh!* A shower of bouillon sprayed the tunics of Phineas and the C.O. The human fountain was Chauncey Wrightstone, and as he stared at something bobbing around in his soup plate, an expression of anger tainted with nausea spread over his august countenance. With a growl he dropped the spoon and shoved back his plate, then glowered at the Old Man.

“Gad, sir!” he erupted indignantly. “Does your cook always serve bugs in the soup?” He paused and sponged his tongue with a napkin. “A beetle, ugh! Gad, it does not speak well for the conditions here, major. That is enough. I’ve lost my appetite! Send for the mess attendant!”

“Haw-w-w-w!” said Phineas abruptly, reaching into the Brigadier’s soup gingerly with thumb and forefinger. “Ya shouldn’t mind bugs, sir. They’re swell eatin’. Better’n them snails the Frogs eat” The Ninth Pursuit and its guests sat aghast as the amazing flyer plucked out the bug and tossed it into his cavernous mouth. Jaws bulging and eyeballs shoved out like those of a blowfish, the brigadier stared at Phineas as the grinning flyer chewed the bug with great gusto.

“The crazy nut!” muttered Bump Gillis.

“Disgusting, by gad!” exploded the brass hat, slamming down his napkin. “Gentlemen in the Air Force, bah! I—” He gulped and turned a little pale as Phineas bolted his morsel.

“It’s okay!” exclaimed Carbuncle triumphantly. “Oney licorish, ffaw-w! Giss I fooled ya that time, hey?”

The Old Man made a strange gurgling sound and reached for a water pitcher. In the next moment he mumbled an apology to the brigadier.

Cognac saved the situation for the moment. Its resultant warm glow in the region of the brigadier’s diaphragm made him act almost human. More cognac was consumed. A bucolic levity reigned and the house buzzed with sociability. The Old Man slapped Phineas on the back as the brigadier suddenly got up from his chair, albeit a little shakily.

“Well, we’ll see what G.H.Q. thinks of you over at Chaumont, Pinkham,” said Garrity. “Guess they think this is soriie outfit now, eh?”

“Gentlemen,” began Chauncey Wrightstone in an oratorical voice, “we are here to do honor to a man who has accomplished much for the Allied cause. First, let us drink a toast to Lieutenant Phineas Pinkham, conqueror of von Korpff, Mannheim, and—”

Phineaa reached into his pocket for a handkerchief and placed it over his nose. *Ho-o-o-o-o-o-onk!* *Ho-o-o-o-o-o-nk!* *Honk!* The brigadier shut his eyes and hunched up his shoulders. Phineas removed the handkerchief from his face.

“Huh!” he grinned. “Scuse me. I giss I got a cold comin’”

“Hell!” growled the C.O. “I thought it was an air raid.”

“As I was saying,” proceeded the man from Chaumont testily, every word seeming to taste bad before he got rid of it, “it is only fitting that the United States should show some apprec—”

Ho-o-o-o-o-o-onk! *Honk!*

The brigadier clenched his fist, swore softly, then

let himself fall into his chair. "If you care to say something, major," he snapped, looking at the C.O., "you're welcome. I've had enough. Pinkham might be a hero, but—"

"Kin I help it if I haveta blow my nose?" demanded Phineas indignantly, after a swallow of cognac. "I giss if you guys had a cold and—"

"Rats!" bellowed the brigadier. "Shut up, Pinkham!" barked the Old Man and got to his feet "There was a purpose to this binge, gentlemen. Lieutenant Pink—"

Ho-o-o-o-o-onk! The Old Man swore. Chauncey Wrightstone reached savagely for his coffee. As he brought the cup up to his face, something flew through the air and splashed into it so that the hot liquid splashed into his eyes and seeped into his nostrils. With a howl he pawed at his face as Major Garrity reached out and plucked a tin object from the cup.

"Got a cold, have you, you crack-brained ape?" roared the C.O. at the complacent Phineas. "Well—"

"Aw, can't ya take a joke?" complained the flyer. "An' it's my party, ain't it? An' who wants to hear a lot of boloney? Them guys at Chaumont ain't kiddin' nobody. They tell a guy what a great termater he is at night, then bust 'im in the mornin'. That was foolin' you guys—that tin nose-blower, huh? I got it with a lot of other stuff from Chicago. I got another one here that I kin imitate birds an' animals with an'—"

"Good God!" moaned the brigadier and held his head in his hands.

MAJOR GARRITY called the mess attendant in a hurry and ordered him to bring more cognac and the cigars. Chauncey Wrightstone's face brightened a bit as a plate on which reposed two cigars was placed before him. He sipped at the cognac just as Phineas reached over the table.

"Excuse me, sir, but I don't smoke much. Ya kin have mine, too," and he added two cigars to those already on the plate. Bump Gillis trembled violently and looked at the Old Man, who seemed to be wrestling with a dozen sudden cramps.

"Thanks, Pinkham," snapped the brass hat, and picked up a cigar. "Like to chew 'em a while before I smoke," he said, refusing the C.O.'s proffered bricquet.

Bump Gillis' pent-up breath burst forth in a noisy gush.

"Well," said Phineas suddenly, rising from his chair and grinning at the Old Man, "we oughta entertain our guests, sir. I'll do a coupla tricks. Hey, Wilkes," he

shouted to the mess attendant, "got a raw egg?" The answer was in the affirmative and before the Old Man could find speech, the day's work of an industrious hen was placed in Phineas' hand.

"Now, I'll take this hat," began the joker, picking it up from a nearby table, "an'—"

"Damme, man!" shouted the brigadier. "That's my hat, and if—"

"Aw, I ain't gonna hurt it," grinned Phineas, placing it, crown down, on the table in front of him. "I've done this trick a thou—er—a dozen times. Ya see, I break the egg like this, an—"

The eyes around the table widened astonishingly, and a chorus of astonished sounds filled the air as the gooey contents of the shell dropped with a plop into the officer's headpiece. The brigadier swore and held onto the edge of the table. Some of the buzzards shifted side-wise in their seats. Phineas then placed a handkerchief over the hat and made some strange passes above it with his hand.

"Hocus pocus," he said and snatched the cloth away. The magician gulped as he looked into the hat. He turned green, then a violent red. The spectators raised themselves and craned their necks. Brigadier-General Chauncey Wrightstone stared into the outraged hat just once, then went beserk.

"H-huh!" alibied Phineas. "I giss I fergot somethin'. I giss I gotta practice some more on that one. I—er—ha! Well, no hard feelin's, I hope? I—"

"You fish-faced whoozle!" stormed the Old Man, as he danced up and down with rage. "A hero, are you? Well, you used to be. I'll—"

"Let me get at him!" yelled the brigadier as he skirted the corner of the table. "I'll knock his fool head off. I'll—"

Phineas knew joking when he saw it. There was no such thing around at the moment and he sought an exit. The brass hats swarmed around the brigadier, begging him to control himself and yanking him back just as he threw a handful of knuckles at Lieutenant Pinkham. They missed their mark by a whisker.

"Hell!" snapped Bump Gillis disappointedly.

Shaking himself like a bear, the brass hat straightened out, threw off those who held him and summoned all his dignity.

"Good night, major!" he rasped caustically to the harassed C.O. "I've had a most enjoyable evening and will not spare words in praise of the Ninth Pursuit Squadron—and Lieutenant Pinkham! If he's a hero now. I'm an eskimo, and I'll see that he gets what is

coming to him!” He snatched up a cigar, bit off the end savagely and rammed it into his mouth. Phineas edged away as the officer touched a match to its end.

Whir-r-r-r-r-r—bang! The brass hat howled, reeled backward and batted at the swarm of sparks with both hands. Phineas vaulted the table and dashed out into the night. A short time later the cars rumbled off the drome and Major Garrity stumbled back into the house, muttering like a man deranged, feeling at his ears and wondering why they weren’t as long as those of a jackass. He groped for the table, gulped down a glass of liquor, then picked up a full bottle and carried it to his sanctum.

THE OLD MAN was still snoring when C flight took off on the early patrol on the new day. With Mannheim gone, the morale of the Fokkers had waned a bit and, for the past few days, the Spads had been enjoying the upper hand in the sky. But today something hit the tarmac with greater force than a Gotha egg. C flight came back tattered and bruised. A scared-visaged flight commander staggered toward the Old Man’s quarters as fast as one good leg could carry him.

“What’s up?” asked Howell of one of the returning buzzards. “Are the Jerries flyin’ tanks?”

“Worse,” came the response through tight lips. “Von Holke has moved in. The Death’s-Head Squadron!”

“Cr-r-r-ripes!” gasped Captain Howell. “The Baron. Well, I guess we’re in for it now.”

“I hope the armistice comes quick,” said Bump Gillis, puffing at his cigarette nervously. “Well, my insurance will come in handy. My ol’ man ain’t worked since—”

“Huh!” sniffed Phineas Pinkham. “Are you bums afraid of that kraut? He ain’t no different from the other Heinies. An’ a skull ain’t nothin’ but a guy’s dome with the meat off it!”

“Yeah, fathead!” growled Gillis. “It’s your fault, an’ maybe the Baron don’t know what he’s after, oh no! The scalp of the bum that got Mannheim and von Korpf! Well, when we git upstairs today, none of us know ya. An’ when you git smacked down, the Heinies’ll lay off us. Git it?”

“Haw-w-w-w-w-w!” guffawed Phineas. “Ya flatten me. Bump. Ya don’t mean that the Baron come in to the sector jus’ to git me?”

“No,” was his hutmate’s scathing response, “to pick lilacs, ya halfwit.” And he ankled away with Howell, leaving a Carbundle with knitted brow to figure out the sudden change in the aspect of the *guerre*.

A qualm passed over Phineas momentarily as it occurred to him that it is not so good to be too famous, and that the head that wears a crown indeed is uneasy. However, he finally shrugged and walked toward his hut with his brain moving faster than his feet. Self-preservation is the first thought of man, and Phineas was giving a lot of attention to the thought.

Within the hour A flight, with a grim-jawed flight commander in the van, flew over to where France had been turned into an *abattoir* and scanned the heavens for some ships with skulls and crossbones ornamenting them. G.H.Q. had let it be known through a mouthpiece known as Chauncey Wrightstone that a certain bridge over the Meuse was in the Ninth’s keeping and that it would be just too bad if the Jerries blew it up. Von Holke and his grim flock swept down toward the bridge with three Albatross ships under their trucks. And they proved themselves expert nursemaids.

After their first brush with von Holke, Howell and his brood were sadder but wiser men. The bridge was smashed into a million pieces. Likewise two Spads. Another brace of Yankee birds came back with pinions nearly *hors de combat*, and one of them was Lieutenant Phineas Pinkham, who had been through the worst half-hour of his jovial life. Von Holke had taken a liking to him. In fact, all during the flight the Baron and the Boonetown flyer had been inseparable, the latter being lucky to get downstairs with some of his pin feathers still left

“Well, that settles it!” snapped the intrepid Phineas as he stepped out of his bus. “Somethin’s gotta be done.” He rubbed a nicked flipper, swore and looked at the survivors around him. “An’ where were you bums?” he wanted to know. “Helpin’ them Heinies bust up that bridge? I gisa you guys got farsighted all at oncet. All I saw was skulls, until I thought I was in the Catacombs.”

“Yeah?” retorted Bump. “Von Holke chased ya ragged an’ it’s jus’ your dumb luck you ain’t nothin’ but a mem’ry. Huh!”

“I’ll git that squarehead,” promised Phineas wrathfully. “No guy kin pick on me!”-

“Sure ya will,” agreed Howell. “He isn’t much. Just a little better than Richthofen was, that’s all.”

“Go feather your nest!” proposed Phineas scathingly, and he retired to the privacy of his hut.

THAT night the Old Man picked up a bunch of hatchets and went on the warpath. G.H.Q. had

thanked him in no gentle tones for the services rendered the Kaiser and had promised him that one Lieutenant Pinkham would answer charges in due time for the disgraceful treatment of one of their favorite brigadiers. The Old Man had considered this last thrust as a silver lining to the cloud that had suddenly dropped down over the Ninth Pursuit. He gave it hot and heavy to his buzzards after the last patrol, reserving the lion's share of grief, of course, for our hero, Carbuncle.

"And now you realize what you're up against, you birds," he said in part, "and you can thank your beloved comrade here for everything —Lieutenant Phineas Pinkham! The Kaiser has ordered that the Pinkham hide be delivered to Potsdam in the shortest period of time, and there is an iron cross with sauerkraut for the man who does it. And the Heinies like iron crosses like cats like liver. That means you're all going to catch hell until Pinkham is *finis*, understand? Von Holke has already dusted off that part of his chest where the iron cross will be stuck!"

"Oh, yeah?" snapped Pinkham. "This is the thanks I git for knockin' them krauts down. Well, git ya-selves all transferred an' I'll run the Ninth all alone if you're scairt. Huh!"

"That reminds me, Pinkham," cut in the C.O. "Wing thinks the best thing to do is to give you a transfer, as you're too well known in this part of the *guerre*. They think it's a tough deal for the rest of the buzzards. They're thinking it over now and I guess they'll spirit you away and we'll have a good cry. An', of course, they're giving you a break."

"Wha-a-a-a-a?" gasped Phineas, phased for the first time in the knowledge of those around him. "Git transferred after I've done all I've done? The dirty bums! The mush-faced brass hats! I'll desert first. Them bums can't—"

"Think of it, Pinkham!" taunted the Old Man. "The fun you will have fooling the new outfit you're going to! They won't be wise to your tricks and—"

"Like hell!" roared the Boonetown flyer. "I jus' got me a dame in Barley Duck. They'll have to drag me out with mules, by cripes, if they want to—"

"Come, come," soothed Bump Gillis sweetly. "Don't git hysterical. You kin fool that brigadier an' the Wing by goin' out an' lettin' von Holke lay ya among the sweet peas. An' ya'll be doin' us a favor, as the kraut maybe will go back to play in another yard just as soon's he gets the iron cross."

"You big stiff!" yelled Phineas and swung. Bump

Gillis grunted, picked up his undercarriage and landed without it. Canaries were still singing to him when the Old Man finally ordered somebody to pick him up and see if there was still sign of a pulse.

"That's another charge against you, you homely baboon!" shouted Sir Rufus. "Damme, I hope they transfer you to Siberia in the morning."

"L-lemme at him!" gurgled Bump, his eyes and legs crossed. "I'll k-kill—"

BUT Phineas, smoldering like a swamp fire, was already out on the tarmac and heading in a hurry for open country and free thinking. The *guerre*, he soliloquized, had suddenly become a serious matter, and something would have to be done about it or else the Boonetown brass band across the pond would be startin' to practice, "In the Sweet Bye and Bye" instead of "Hail, the Conquering Hero Comes!"

A shiver rattled Phineas' ivories as he slumped down on a rock and diagnosed his precarious status in the war.

To the accompaniment of a serenade by nocturnal insects and such, Phineas strove to get his cerebrum and cerebellum into harmony, thereby to concoct a way out of this mess. In a nutshell, the Kaiser wanted the life of Lieutenant Phineas Pinkham. Brigadier-General Chauncey Wrightstone wanted his skin. The squadron regarded him as something which would have to be erased if they were to have a minute's rest from the Death's-Head Staffel.

The first fruity Pinkham thought pertained to headlong flight to Switzerland, but this was almost instantaneously voted down. How could a guy land a Spad on the top of an Alp? And then an idea sneaked out from, the darkness and belted him between the ears. All they wanted was the life of Lieutenant Pinkham, that was all. And strangely enough. Carbuncle laughed aloud. Well, the fatheads, he would see what he could do about accommodating them.

It was close to midnight when Phineas routed out Casey, the flight sergeant, and inquired whether the non-com would care to be shown how to manipulate cards in such a way as to positively insure against loss in the stiffest poker game. Of course, Phineas made it plain that he expected a favor in return, but Casey jumped at the chance to clean up a sizable fortune in the A.E.F.

"Sure," yawned Casey. "Sure, but that Spad ya brought in today is out. Ya couldn' git off the ground with a block an' falls. It's—"

"It's goin' to fly, see?" Phineas was determined. "I

got my trademark painted on it, ain't I? Well, how's the Von goin' to spot me right away in another crate? An' where's there another crate? If ya wanta learn them palmin' tricks an'—"

"Awright, awright!" replied Casey. "But ya've gotta promise to take all the blame if the bus folds up on ya."

"I always take the blame, Casey," declared Phineas with a grin. "Now let's git started. Ya said ya had some asbestos I could have. Drag it out,"

"I'll git busted if the Old Man finds out I've took it. Pink—er—sir," complained Casey, "but I giss it'll be worth it to git back at them pasteboard sharks over in Barley Duck." And the sergeant yawned again prodigiously, shook himself, barked at a pair of grumbling grease monkeys and went to work.

Stripped to his undershirt, Phineas plunged in himself. Forgetting about the expense, he and his subordinates used up the majority of the supply of edged fabric and dope in taking out the great hunks of daylight that had been punched therein by von Holke and his buz zards. Casey spent over an hour inside the fuselage of the Spad and, while working, came to the conclusion that Phineas Pinkham's head must be a roost for squirrels and bats. Grease monkeys collected all the oily waste and rags hanging around loose and carried same to the Spad, where Phineas gave instructions as to their disposal.

Into the wee small hours the work continued, and finally Phineas voiced his confidence in the Spad's ability to fly. He took his departure. Before seeking his bunk the inimitable Carbuncle plunged into his trunk of tricks and drew forth a hideous grinning skull. For an hour or more he worked on it with shellac and bits of asbestos until the death's head soon began to take on the appearance of being flesh-covered and of saffron hue. The grisly task completed, Phineas called it a day.

"Crazy as a loon!" opined Casey, back at the hangar, as he wiped his face with the back of his hand and stared at the Spad through heavy-lidded eyes. "What in hell has he rammed that junk into that crate for? Cripes!" And he followed the swearing grease monkeys out of the place.

"*ACH!*" grunted the Baron von Holke at dawn over on the German side. "Today, my brave gentlemen, I shoot down that upstart, *Leutnant* Pinkham, *ja!*" And he threw out his chest, patted himself on the back and looked toward France. "Yesterday I almost have him, but he runs away. No fighter he iss, *Dumkopf!* Bah! A

trickster yet iss he, but nobody plays the tricks on von Holke, *nein!*" And he glared at the Fokker riders about him as if daring a contradiction. Of course, the Baron did not meet one and his chest expanded so far that a button popped off and hit a Heinie pilot in the eye.

On the drome of the Ninth, Lieutenant Pinkham, the pawn of fate, was practicing little or no chest expansion. Neither was he asking for spiritual advice as the zero hour for A flight's takeoff approached. The Pinkham grin and cocksureness was still in evidence as he gulped hot coffee in the big stone house.

Bump Gillis slammed down his cup and grinned. "Greater love hath no guy, not even a nitwit," quoth he, "who lays down his life for his brothers."

"Maybe you would like another kick in the teeth, ya homely fish?" proposed Phineas with a growl. "Got me all wrapped up an' addressed, ain't ya? Well, von Hokum better say a prayer an'—"

"Pinkham!" The Old Man roared as he stepped out of his sanctum, wrapped up in a great coat. "That Spad doesn't go off this ground unless you rub off that crazy stuff you've got painted on it, understand? Von Holke will dust you off soon enough, and I'm damned if I'll have anything on my conscience. Cripes, man, do you want to get killed?"

"What do you think, major?" answered Phineas with a grin.

The Old Man choked on a mouthful of coffee, swore and turned on the pain in his neck. He shoved out a hand as if it were a sword and spat out some words. "Well, goodbye, then, Pinkham, you crackpot!"

Phineas shook. "S'long!" he said airily. "An' tell that brigadier I hope he gits kissed by a pair of tanks when he ain't lookin'!"

The Old Man swore and looked at the buzzards around him. "You hear this, don't you, you birds?" He whirled on Phineas. "You're grounded, you fathead! Those are my orders. That Spad isn't fit to fly, anyway. If you go up today, it'll be against orders. That's all. What do you think of that?"

"Wh-why, major," stammered Phineas with a grin, "I didn't think ya liked me so much. Haw-w-w-w! Well, off widersine, as the krauts say." And as he walked out of the house, Howell whirled on his war-birds.

"Get this, you bums!" he shot out. "Watch Pinkham's ship today. Watch it every second. I'm not going to see all the fun in this *guerre* go kerplunk, see?"

"They better watch, skipper," growled Bump Gillis, wrapping a muffler around him, "or I'll start shootin' at Spads!"

“C’mon,” yelled Howell, and the flight commander grinned at the rimose countenance of the C.O. as he ran to the tarmac.

“Hell’s bells!” groaned Major Rufus as he walked toward the line of ships. On the side of the Boonetown flyer’s chariot were the words, “Pinkham’s Spad! First You See It, Then You Don’t!” And Phineas was climbing into his pit Bump Gillis stared across at him and gasped. His hutmate was pulling on his helmet over a football headgear, and under the miracle worker’s arm was a bundle that might contain almost anything.

Contact! *Br-r-r-r-r-r! Br-r-r-r-r-r!* Props Stuttered, then reached a crazy pitch. Howell shoved off and his brood, one by one, rolled after him. The Old Man watched them streak for the Front, and he stood like Atlas under his heavy load.

THE Death’s-Head Squadron, skulls and cross-bones gleaming from the grim flanks, skimmed high above a sea of scud that completely hid the throbbing terrain below, save for occasional patches that became visible as the ceiling melted away. Von Holke licked his chops and watched those rifts intently. This day he felt like a dish of cold cuts, and once he spotted concentric circles, he would have them.

However, the Baron had lost sight of the fact that Phineas Pinkham and his mates might like as much altitude as Junkers. And so, imagine his chagrin when he looked ahead and saw the Yankee flock growling in front of his nose.

“*Ach!*” guttural von Holke disappointedly. “*Ach!* Vell, it no difference makes.” And he put on his fiercest battle face and waved an arm to his gallant companions. Sky space was eaten up by Mercedes and Hissos ravenously, and then skulls and cross-bones fused with Major Garrity’s stable and the fight was on.

Lieutenant Phineas Pinkham looked wildly about for Baron von Holke. The dread Heinie leader spotted Carbuncle, and twisting his way through the crowded sky, began to unload Spandau drums as the Spad hovered in front of him. Captain Howell ruddered out of the way of a Fokker and sent a long burst at von Holke, but it was Bump Gillis’ ship which convinced the Baron that Phineas’ erasure would have to wait. Vickers lead ventilated the fuselage behind him and, with a round Teutonic oath, von Holke wrenched around and made Bump Gillis wish that he had been born color blind and with flat feet.

Common sense should have prodded Phineas as far

away from the German Baron as his Hissos would take him, but no. The Boonetown flyer gunned to Bump Gillis’ aid. And then things began to happen too fast. A pair of Tripes bottled up Bump. Another streaked across Phineas’ line of flight, and Carbuncle was forced to lift his nose. As he did so, Baron von Holke appeared before him as if genii had placed him there.

Phineas wished for some smelling salts, gulped down his heart, which had collided with his Adam’s apple, and tried to get away from the Spandau blasts. He threw his ship into a slip, straightened out and then bent forward suddenly in his pit, the stick held fast between his knees. He yanked out a bricquet hurriedly, fired it and touched the flame to a strip of celluloid protruding from under the seat just as von Holke jumped on his tail and warmed up his Spandaus for the execution.

Phineas’ Spad wobbled as lead smashed through the fabric behind him. Then he dropped his nose, and smoke began to roll out of the bitten ship. The Ninth Pursuit whispered *adieu* to the Boonetown flyer, then raged and swore and bore down to get von Holke, who was glued to Phineas’ tail as if he were being towed.

A minute or two later great black smoke clouds rolled out of the falling Spad and enveloped Phineas in the pit. Von Holke sent in another burst as he saw his victim rise up and unloosen his belt. Hah! The great *Lentnant* Pinkham was getting singed! *Ach!* What a fighter the German thought himself to be! *Ein! Zweil Drei!* Three more bursts for *Gott und Vaterland. Ach—Dunner und Blitzen, vas ist?* And Baron von Holke looked around to see a brace of Spads nibbling at his tail assembly. He went up fast.

PHINEAS CARBUNCLE PINKHAM hurriedly fastened a gas mask to his head as the ground came up to meet him. He knew that there was little time in which to pick out a landing place, and the first open space he caught a glimpse of was good enough. But black smoke swirled about him and shut off the scenery below. When his vision had cleared, lo and behold, a set of buildings were getting ready to gather him to their embrace, and it was going to be a hard one.

The flyer quickly cut his motor, slipped in and fish-tailed as much as he could before he smashed down through the roof of a barn. Bump Gillis saw the Spad, wrapped in a pall of smoke, form a merger with the Frog structure, and a few moments later, as he twisted out of the way of a Fokker, he saw the roof of the barn spew up flame and debris. Von Holke had also seen and

shook hands with himself. “Exit Lieutenant Pinkham!” shrieked Bump Gillis, and he slammed into the battle to get three of von Holke’s Heinies to square accounts.

Baron von Holke was almost sorry he had brought down his man in the next few furious moments. The Ninth Pursuit took the gloating grins from the skulls and sent them high-tailing hack to Germany with the losing end of the purse. It was a heavy-hearted flight of survivors, however, which flew back toward Bar-le-Duc to confirm the fears of Major Rufus Garrity.

ALL that day and far into the night silent buzzards paced the tarmac of the Ninth Pursuit Squadron and stared hopefully at every vehicle that lumbered onto the field. Finally, however, they resigned themselves to Carbuncle’s fate and walked heavily to the old stone house, where sat Major Garrity, cold pipe rammed between his teeth, eyes staring at nothing “It looks like he did what I said,” growled Bump Gillis, as he threw himself down at the table. “He knew we was goin’ to git lots of hell if he didn’t git shot down. Well?*

“Gad, Gillis!” ejaculated the C.O. “I think you’re right. What a man! The most amazing man I’ve ever met. Hope the damn brass hats are satisfied. Say, was he shot down behind the lines? Are you sure?”

“Of course,” mumbled Bump. “I watched him, an’ he didn’t fall far from the Jerry support trenches. Well, I giss—” He became silent. There was nothing more to be said.

“That kraut, von Holke!” spat Captain Howell. “He better get transferred to the Navy. What we’ll do to that mug won’t be worth—listen!” The flight leader stiffened as he shouted the last word. Warbirds sat as still as mice. Then something came from overhead—the faint sound of a motor.

Led by the C.O., they rushed out. Howell stopped in his tracks and swore. It was a Mercedes engine which sang up there. Something fell out of the sky and hit the ground near the far edge of the field, and a groundman brought it to the house. Feverishly yet tremulously the Old Man took a wad of paper from a metal container and read it aloud.

“Leutnant Pinkham shot down by Baron von Holke. His remains found in barn near our lines. Have you yet another joker, ja? Your comrade is being buried with military honors at dawn and we will respect a truce until the ceremonies are over. Please omit flowers!”

“The dirty squareheads!” raged the major. “The

l—” His voice failed him and he walked into his sanctum with heavy tread. A Last frail thread of hope snapped in Bump Gillis’ chest, and he walked out to the tarmac.

A flight flew over the ruins of the barn that was the cross to mark the spot where the tragedy had taken place, and dropped a wreath in token of respect to the departed one. A group of Jerries fired some volleys over the grave and then it was finished. Von Holke shoved out his chest some more.

THREE days passed and the Ninth Pursuit fought von Holke’s staffel to a standstill. Every night, when the grim work was done, they gathered at headquarters and wished that they had a rubber cigar or a loaded biscuit. And on the fourth night Major Garrity went to Bar-le-Duc to drown his secret sorrow in the cups. He picked out the Rouge Vache Cafe and settled himself in a corner. He was sipping his third jigger of brandy when a hoarse guffaw behind him sounded above the rest of the din and gave him a start such as he might have gotten from sitting on a live wire. His brandy spilled down over his chin and stained his tunic as he swung around.

A man clad in the uniform of a French officer sat at a table with a fair damsel. He had a large pink nose and a little mustache. Major Garrity shrugged, wondered if he had taken one too many, and immediately ordered another drink. He was lifting it to his lips when another laugh jiggled his elbow. And then glass and contents fell into his lap as to his ears came familiar words.

“Haw-w-w-w-w-w! Giss that fooled ya, kid! Looks jus’ like choklit, don’t it? But it’s rubber. Haw-w-w-w-w-w!”

“Oh-h-h! You aire ze clevailr ba-a-bee! Show Babette some more, *m’sieu*. Show ze one you call ze sleight of han’, *n’est ce pas?*”

“Wee, wee! Sure—”

The Old Man was on his feet. He swung around and towered above the merry-making couple. A pallor spread over the face of the French officer—that is, with the exception of his nose. And as his mouth snapped open, the glue on the little mustache became insufficient to hold it in place. It hung over one lip. And despite the unfamiliar nose. Major Rufus Garrity could not fail to recognize Lieutenant Phineas Pinkham.

He choked back a cry of joy and assumed a wrathful mien. “Pinkham!” he bellowed. “Outside!

And make it fast or I'll ride you out on my boot, you fish-faced whoozle! A deserter, eh? And impersonating a French officer! Well, you've stepped into some mess now."

Phineas mumbled apologies to the surprised *mam'selle* and lifted himself to his feet. He limped out, his face split in a wide grin.

"Didja miss me, major?" he ventured as the C.O. shoved him toward the squadron car.

"You fathead!" roared Sir Rufus. "Where—"

"Ya wanted me dead, didn'tcha?" retorted Phineas. "The krauts are satisfied, ain't they? Well, listen, if ya kin stop talkin' that long—"

And strangely enough, the C.O. listened, and when Phineas had finished, his grizzled countenance was softened up by a chuckle.

Two hours later Bump Gillis and his mates stared critically at the tall, trench-coated figure that breezed into the Frog farmhouse with Major Rufus Garrity. They did not like the man's nose or the little mustache or the way his hair grew.

"Gentlemen!" announced Garrity. "Lieutenant Smith to take Pinkham's place. Picked him up in the Red Cow. Smith, meet Captain Howell!" And he shoved the newcomer toward the leader of A flight. Howell grasped the hand, gulped with horror, and let it drop. It had come away from the newcomer's sleeve and the wrist was thick with gore. Bump Gillis' jaw dropped almost to his breastbone as he leaped to his feet. Smith ripped away his nose, his mustache and wig.

"Haw-w-w-w-w!" came a familiar eruption. "Giss I fooled you guys. That was a wax flipper!" And then he was mobbed by the crowd of laughing, shouting buzzards.

"IT WAS like this," elucidated the Boonetown flyer later. "I figgered that I was worth more dead'n alive to the C.O. and you ungrateful bums, so I rammed the fuselage fulla old rags an' waste soaked with oil an' put asbestos all 'round it, an' maybe that crate wasn't like a dump cart to handle. When the Von got after me, I set the stuff on fire an' then put on a gas mask so's I wouldn't pass out. My idea was to land some place where there wasn't no Heinies around, but that asbestos fell apart an' all them old rags started burnin'

plenty. My boots was catchin' fire so I had to land quick, an'—well—it was an accident, landin' in that Frog barn, an' the ship blew all to hell."

"You're tellin' me?" growled Bump Gillis. "Didn't I see it? But how—I—*er*—we all saw 'em bury ya, too, an'—"

"Haw!" laughed Phineas. "Sure. I fell outa the bus when it went through the roof an' landed in a haymow, an' some burnin' rags fell in the hay an' set it on fire. It got the gas tank of the Spad. I crawled out of a door an' hid in a ol' covered pig pen. Some sheep got burnt up with the barn an' they thought some of the roast was me, the fatheads! That was a break. All I needed was a corpus delecty, which is a guy's remains! I giss I have led a good honest life or else would I have got such a break? I slept with the pigs all night an' watched the krauts bury my ashes in the mornin' an' it was nice of you guys to drop me a wreath like you did. I bet you was all cryin'."

"Yeah," growled Howell, "with joy an'—"

"I giss that skull I planted in the Spad didn't fool them guys, huh?" continued Phineas. "Later in the afternoon some Frogs breezed in fast an' took the town away from the Heinies an' a Frog officer got bumped off, so when I got a chance I stole his uniform an' got a ride into Barley Duck. Well, I didn't come back quick because I figgered it might spoil everythin', an' now I'm a dead man, see? Von Hokum has shot me down in flames, haw-w-w-w! Well, you guys are satisfied, hey? An' I bet they move von Hokum out pretty soon."

"By the way, Pinkham," put in the Old Man, "in view of your—*er*—great sacrifice, G.H.Q. has recommended you for a posthumous medal, but now, of course—"

"Haw!" scoffed Phineas. "I should worry. I kin buy one any time in Barley Duck for a box of rubber matches."

Over on the Jerry side, von Holke and his gentlemen were knee-deep in Rhine wine. The Baron was puffed up with each toast to his great prowess.

"*Ach!*" he gloated. "We finish with *Lentnant* Pinkham sooner as expected. Now back we move and finish up with the Englander *Schwein, ja?* And more wine was poured and a lot more *Hocks* emanated from the Heinie mess. All of which proves the calibre of the well-known aphorism, "Ignorance is bliss!"—and how!