

SAY IT WITH BOMBS

by FRANKLIN M. RITCHIE

When the swarm of German Fokkers swept out of the clouds and met an American bombing party they struck a lot of red-hot action they hadn't counted on. Jim Barker believed in using whatever tools are at hand—and, "They Learned about bombs from him."

A GREEN-TAILED FOKKER dived past Jim Barker's clumsy bombing ship, spitting fire. It whirled in the golden sunshine like a darting dragon-fly. Bullets ripped through Barker's fuselage. But he paid the Jerry no attention.

The American had recognized that bus. He knew it contained Baron Von Hüllesheim himself, the Jerry ace who'd been cracking crates all up and down the front. He knew, too, that the master pilot had sworn to get him because Barker had washed out the Baron's kid brother.

But Jim Barker was a bombing pilot on a mission. He had bombs to drop—and he couldn't bother with anything else until that was done. A bullet chipped the longeron at his elbow, but he stared grimly ahead.

Bill Gerard, now, would probably have gone after the Baron. Dapper Bill had been Barker's rival all his life—and Bill generally won out. Back at the training field Gerard had been picked for pursuit work while Barker had been dubbed "the Jerry ace"—because he'd cracked up five Yankee crates.

They had made a bomber of him. And, with all the dour obstinacy of his Scottish blood, he had decided to show that bombers' eggs would win the war. He paid no attention to the Baron or to his whistling bullets.

The ship rocked under a new burst. Barker glanced around. His observer was sagging forward—dead!

Little ridges of hard muscle stood out on Barker's lean jaw as he clenched his teeth. He squinted grimly over his triangular bomb sight, one hand on the release cord. He'd show 'em what a bomber could do! As the Baron poured a new burst of lead through the center section just over Barker's head the bomber merely shook himself as though to rid his body of a buzzing fly.

Vignettes showed ahead of him far below. There

were red roofs here and there where shells had spared a tiny bit of the town. The rest was shattered masonry, once white but now blackened by explosions. The fields were brown and bare.

That was his objective. There was a Jerry battery in the town which the artillery had failed to silence. So the bombers had been sent over. And Jim Barker's mind was on his target. His nerves tingled with the grim thrill which always gripped him just before he loosed his cordite thunderbolts.

There'd be time enough to take a crack at that pesky Fokker after this job was done. The pursuit ships weren't the only ones who could make records in the air. But, just now, he had to keep his mind on his immediate job, even though the Jerry's bullets were singing uncomfortably close.

Off to one side a wing of Tom Lowden's ship whipped crazily over in a sharp sideslip as the smoke of a German shrapnel burst mushroomed wide beneath his landing gear. At the same moment Hank Barlow's crate went up in a stall to avoid a red-nosed Fokker which flashed across his path, streaming lead at the De Haviland.

The German missed with his raking fire, but a chance bullet, flying wide, severed a bomb strap under Lowden's wing.

FOR a moment the lean, dun-colored egg teetered precariously. Then it dropped, long vanes whirling as it fell. A dull blast boomed over the roaring of the motors. A brilliant orange flash gleamed for an instant against the azure sky as the bomb—set for contact explosion—struck the center section over Barlow's head. White smoke billowed like a cotton ball. Bits of wreckage rained downward. And Barlow was gone.

Jim Barker saw it all from the corner of his eye. But just at that moment the red-roofed barn which was his

particular objective crawled slowly toward the forward cross-bar of his bomb sight. His lips moved, cursing silently at the Jerry who had done Hank Barlow in. But his eye was on the sight and his hand on the release cord. He had to do his job!

A new cloud of Fokkers hit the bombing squadron. Barker noted from the corner of his eye that the green-tailed Jerry was coming closer. And he saw, too, that the fresh attack had thrown his mates into confusion. They dived and sideslipped clumsily, trying vainly to evade the nimble German scouts.

The bombers scattered and broke formation, a cardinal sin. In mad haste to turn their guns on their assailants, some of the observers forgot their bombs altogether. Others pulled nervously at the release cords, dropping their eggs at random, eager to be rid of their dangerous cargo before joining battle with the Jerry hornets. The squadron formation was dissipated in a jumbled dogfight.

Jim Barker gripped his stick a bit tighter and paid no attention to the threatening Germans. The greentailed Fokker, diving past, raked his wings and fuselage with leaden pellets. But the big bomber's gaze never wandered from his target. A bullet rattled the longeron on which his free arm rested. But he never moved, never even glanced up.

A thin smoke column was already mounting skyward from the wreck of Hank Barlow's crate. Hank Barlow had been his best friend. But Jim Barker could not spare it a glance. Instead, he had to wait for a red roof to come in line with a wire. Then he had to pull a string. But his face was seamed and haggard. He'd take it out on the Jerries when this job was done.

A puff of black smoke blossomed in a widening circle as a queuing Archie got his range. Too low! But the concussion rocked the D.H. like a tiny fishing smack in a heavy sea. Still he gave no sign. Whistling shrapnel screamed past him from the ground. Tracer bullets from the Fokkers wove a wispy web about him. Yet his glance never wavered from the target.

The Baron dived again in his green-tailed Fokker, his guns spitting redly. Tex Connors, in the ship ahead of Barker, threw up his arms and collapsed limply over the side of the 'plane. The crate nosed up and stalled, standing on its tail. Then it toppled sidewise into a dizzy spin.

Barker's face went white. His stomach tide itself in a knot. He'd had a date to go to Bar le Duc with Connors! But just now he had to take care of his bombs. Revenge was for the pursuit ships.

A STACCATO hammering to the rear told him a German was on his tail. And since his observer was dead he had no protection. But his job was to hit the target down below. He jerked the release cord and leaned over the side of the ship, reckless of the bullets which tore through the fuselage. As the missiles exploded redly on the ground he threw the D.H. over in a sideslip to avoid the air currents set up by the blast. A red roof rose into the air, disintegrating before his eyes. It collapsed like a doll's house. A direct hit! He smiled grimly. His job was done. Now he could go after the Baron.

But the squadron had reformed. Dobson, at point, was wagging his wings as a signal to get into place. Breathless dogfights were not for clumsy bombers. His lips tight, his shoulders sagging, Barker climbed back into position.

For the first time now he could attend to the attacking Fokkers. He nosed around and fired a burst at a Jerry which had ventured too close. But even now he was handicapped. He had to stay in formation. He couldn't chase the Germans. He had to wait until they crossed the line of his fixed guns. Pursuit birds like Gerard had all the luck.

A black cross showed under a Fokker's wing as it maneuvered about him. But his own role was purely passive. Their eggs once laid, the sole objective of the bombers was to get back home—so they turned and fled ignominiously from the agile Jerry scouts. Barker flushed with the shame of it. But that was his job. He had to take his crate back to the 'drome so he could load up with more bombs and come out again.

The green-tailed Fokker played at will around the clumsy, fleeing bombers. Barker was protected now by the ship in back. But the Baron dived on another bus and poured in a burst. Red flames spurted from the tank. And the ship went down streaming fire behind it like a comet. Barker was helpless to aid.

After they crossed their own lines a flight of S.E.'s showed up and whirled down upon the Germans. Barker recognized it as Gerard's squadron by the insignia painted on the ships, and he made out the purple stripes which marked Bill's bus. He saw the latter tangle with the green-tailed Fokker and put a burst through its tail. Some birds had all the luck!

But the Jerries called it a day and pulled out, leaving the S.E.'s behind them with apparent ease. The Baron was safe.

The bombers climbed quietly from their ships when they landed. Jim Barker's face was grim. He

wasn't hardened yet to seeing comrades crashing earthward. Barlow and Connors and the other men were still in his mind as he pulled off his goggles and his helmet and strode toward the hangars.

"Machines!" he muttered. "Sit there helpless and watch those boys go down! And never turn a finger to help them!"

"Makes a man wanta join the pursuit birds!" agreed Bates.

But Barker turned slowly to the speaker, his face still grim. "No, Bob", he argued. "They get the glory—but after all it's the exploding bombs, the red eggs, that really count. The chase pilots are only there to clear the way."

Bates grunted. And Barker couldn't rid himself of the sense of humiliation which oppressed him. His face flushed. He'd get that Baron! Even a bomber would get his chance!

And the Baron had sworn to get Barker, had even dropped a note on the drome expressing his determination. It looked as if the odds were on the Jerry.

Bates wanted Barker to go along on a party in Bar le Duc. But the big bomber's thoughts were all on his work. The cognac and the mademoiselles of the town held no appeal.

"I'm going to work on the new bomb sight I've been doping out," he answered. And he stalked grimly off.

BILL GERARD came over to the bombers' drome that night with some of the other pilots from the 47th Pursuit, eager for a binge. Barker noticed that the other man was excited. His cheeks were flushed. His eyes sparkled. And it was too early for him to have been drinking. But he explained.

"I put a burst into the Baron's crate!" he effervesced.

Barker smiled quietly. "Good!" he congratulated. "I'd like to get a crack at him myself. I owe him one."

Gerard stared at the bomber. Then he threw back his head and laughed uproariously as he sprawled in a big easy chair in the squadron mess hall, near the bar. "That's one for the book!" he chortled. "A bomber gettin' the Baron!" He shook with silent laughter, convulsed with mirth at the mere idea. "You're cuckoo!" he gasped. "Plumb crazy!"

Barker flushed hotly and his big fists clenched. But he controlled himself. After all, he had a bigger job ahead of him than quarrelling with an egotistical pursuit pilot.

"Reckon I've as much chance as you have!" he answered slowly, his eyes grim as he thought of Barlow and Connors.

But how? He was only a bomber. The chances were all in favor of the Baron. He could fly rings around Jim Barker even if the American got a chance to meet him.

Gerard laughed again. He told the story over and over, with all the embellishments he could devise. Jim Barker, a bomber, was out to get the German ace of aces, the man with whom the best of the pursuit pilots were glad to battle on even terms, considering a draw a virtual victory.

Big Barker, whose tongue was as slow as his huge limbs, protested in vain that Gerard could claim no credit, since he, too, had failed to bring the Baron down, even though he had had a chance to dogfight. But Gerard pointed out that the bombers had done nothing but run while the S.E.'s had at least sent the Baron and his circus speeding back into Jerry territory.

Barker pursed his lips, flushing to the tips of his ears. He left the verbal argument to Gerard and walked off to resume work on his new bomb sight. After all, it was action that counted, not words. He'd show 'em! He'd make his eggs count! Let 'em laugh now! They'd see soon enough!

And when he started off on another bombing raid next morning it was with "a grim determination to keep a careful lookout for the Baron. He was the first man on the field, pattering cheerfully around his bus while the other pilots gathered sleepily in the gray dawn. While they curbed the mud which dragged at their feet, lazily donning helmets and goggles and tightening their flying gear, Jim Barker was adjusting his new bomb sight and looking over his bombs.

He noticed that more than one man was shivering—though it was not particularly cold. Thinking about Barlow and Connors, he supposed. Barker's lips tightened. He had a score to settle on their account—if he got a chance, after he had laid his eggs. After all, that was his real job.

THE motors roared with deep-throated resonance. Exhausts flashed redly in the semi-darkness, scattering sparks like jewels as the first ship took swiftly off. Each in turn, the others followed the leader into the air. They were on the job—their job. They were setting out to drop their bombs.

Gathering over an appointed spot in the lightness of the upper air, they took their places in the formation. Jim Barker frowned as he fell in behind

another bus. This was no way to get the Baron. What chance had a man in a formation like this? But he smothered his anger as he thought of his job. After all, it was dropping the bombs that counted!

The air was smooth and clear—as it is only in the early morning, just at dawn—and the clumsy bombing ships sailed quietly toward the lines. This time there was no interference. Not even an Archie bothered them as they pushed swiftly across the trenches toward the railhead which was their objective.

AS CASUALLY as though there were no boche avions within a hundred miles they dropped their bombs. They watched smoke and flames spring upward. Buildings toppled and fell as the bombs exploded. Their job had been completed. But Jim Barker was suddenly disgusted. It had been too easy. What was the use of a job like this. The pursuit pilots had the luck.

They had been warned in advance that if the air were clear and they had plenty of petrol left they might be used for reconnaissance work. So when the flight leader waggled his wings they scattered, each to his appointed sector. And they made radio connection with batteries to which they had been assigned.

Dropping down to a ceiling of about two thousand feet, Jim Barker cruised idly about, hunting a target.

At a cross roads near a little gray village where some of the red roofs still gleamed intact, he spotted a first class traffic jam. The Jerries had snarled up a couple of battalions of infantry, a long motor truck train, and a battery of artillery.

He pointed this out eagerly to his observer. Then he climbed a couple of thousand feet higher while the other man worked out his map co-ordinates and wirelessly them back to their battery in the rear. Barker circled the spot, leaning overside and watching the gray-green blur of men. Mentally he smacked his lips, until suddenly the place was bracketed by bursting shells. This was the answer to their message! His job! He thrilled.

Smoke puffs indicated that the artillery caissons had been hit and had exploded. The wagon train seemed to melt apart. And the gray-green dots, the troops, scattered in mad panic. That is, some did. Others, slumped down silently in their tracks.

A tiny figure—probably one of the guns from the Jerry battery—appeared to have escaped the shells.

Barker saw that it was being dragged toward the shelter of a little wood. And thither, too, fled those of

the gray-green atoms which had not slumped down under the American artillery fire.

Like a hound spotting the elusive quarry, Barker dropped on the wood. The blood sang in his veins. He waited grim-lipped for the new target to show on his cross-bar. As it appeared, he pulled the release cords. Then he watched carefully until he saw the smoke puffs which indicated that his bombs were bursting among the trees. He grinned as the foliage rocked and swayed under the concussion of the eggs.

But his triumphant grin was suddenly dispelled by a staccato rattle on his tail like a riveting hammer in action. A boche! He glimpsed the green tail of a Fokker flashing past. *The Baron!* Barker sideslipped swiftly. But the Jerry clung to his tail like a bulldog, refusing to be shaken off.

WONDERING why his own observer's Lewis gun was silent, Barker glanced around. The man was hanging limply in his safety belt. His head bobbed up and down with the ship's motion. There was a red smudge across his forehead. Dead!

The pilot's mouth went dry. The palms of his hands tingled. His head felt light. Another burst from the Fokker's guns just missed him. The Baron was going to get him!

But Barker's eyes gleamed suddenly and he straightened up. His breath came in short, hard gasps. He had dropped his eggs. He was alone, had no formation to bother with. He could dogfight this Jerry! He would fight it out in revenge for Connors and Barlow. He had no eggs to bother with.

Swiftly he nosed over and dived. He came close to breaking the back of his clumsy bus as he took it over in a speedy loop. The fuselage strained and shivered. But it held!

He came out on top of the Jerry, but the latter turned gracefully in a lightning Immelmann and slid easily out of the stream of lead which Barker turned upon him. It was like child's play for the Baron, with his nimble scout. The clumsy bombing crate had no chance to keep up with him.

A dark shadow clouded the D.H. for a moment. Barker caught a glimpse of a black Maltese cross as the Fokker dived past him, spitting fire. Its tracer bullet trails were like threads which were entangling the huge bombing ship. Barker thought he had the Jerry now. But the Baron zoomed lightly upward and was back on the tail of the D.H. as if the bomber were standing still.

Centering his downthrust wingtip on a shattered

house on the ground below, Barker pivoted swiftly in an eighty-degree bank. But the Fokker clung grimly to his tail. The swift circling kept the German from centering an effective fire upon him, but the Jerry ship was so fast that Barker had no chance at all to get within firing range.

Barker sideslipped straight down, and the Baron followed. He nose dived, and the Fokker was on his tail. He pulled out swiftly, jerkily, in the hope that the frailer pursuit bus might tear apart under the strain. But the German clung like a limpet, following every maneuver and going him one better. Try as he would, Barker could neither shake him off nor get him on the sights of his own machine gun.

The strain began to tell. Perspiration stood out on Barker's forehead despite the cooling rush of air. He was near exhaustion from the physical labor of handling the controls.

The Baron's bullets came closer and closer. The net woven by the white trails of the tracer bullets drew tighter about the heavy D.H. The Jerry seemed utterly confident. He waved insouciantly as he whirled past Barker, raking the fuselage with a withering fire which missed the pilot only by inches. Then he slipped easily out of range of the American's fixed gun and swung back onto his tail.

Why didn't he stay there? He put—the Baron's daredevil stunts down to his well known flair for the theatrical. The Jerry was like a cat playing with a mouse.

Barker sideslipped out of the Fokker's path. He turned in an Immelmann as fast as he could get from the clumsy bombing bus. He zoomed and looped. He smiled grimly when he saw that he was in the Baron's blind spot. At last he could use his gun!

But the German had only been playing with him. The Fokker dropped out of range before Barker could press the trigger. The American could feel that his enemy was laughing at him. He—a mere bomber—had had the temerity to dogfight with the Baron! Only a pursuit ship could do that.

STALLING his ship, Barker fell backward as though he had been hit. He threw up his arms and slumped forward against the cowl, limp and apparently lifeless. He let the controls alone. The bus dropped into a spin and headed downward, its nose whirling dizzily. Barker sat motionless, listening to the sickening whiz of the tail as it swept around in narrowing circles. The wind screamed as the downward plunge increased

in speed. He gazed straight downward, waiting. The ground rose swiftly.

The brown earth seemed to be spinning in a circle and he had to remind himself that it was the nose of his own ship which was revolving. Above him he stilt heard the irregular swish of the tail plane. Motor full on, he was dropping earthward at two hundred miles an hour. He held his breath.

Cautiously, at last, he shoved his stick forward, worked out of his spin, and went into a straight nose dive. But still he was dropping so fast that to pull out might snap the back of the crate. He pulled gently back on the stick against the terrific rush of air. Slowly, with all his strength, yet gently enough to avoid the disaster of a sudden jerk, he eased backward on the controls.

A hundred feet from the ground he leveled off—just in time. With an unconscious sigh of relief he streaked away over the treetops, hoping he had fooled the Baron into thinking he was about to crash. If he had, the Jerry might have relaxed his grim pursuit. But a new burst of machine gun fire told him that his enemy had followed him remorselessly down.

The Fokker was on his tail. And he had lost his altitude!

BARKER tried to climb. But the Jerry drove across his path and forced him to sideslip out of the way to avoid a collision. He was losing altitude at that game, altitude which he could ill afford so close to the ground. And the little Fokker was far speedier than his own big bus. There was no chance to escape by running away. The Baron was going to get him!

He made another break. Surprisingly the Jerry let him pass—and then stuck his own nose up and went past him like a shot. The German waved mockingly and poured in another burst. There was no chance at that game.

Barker levelled off—and the Fokker was right behind him. He made a desperate effort to loop, but without success. And a moment later he heard bullets rattle against the metal of his petrol tank. This was the end.

There was no explosion, but the precious fluid leaked swiftly out. The motor coughed and sputtered. Then it died. The stick ceased its mad whirling. It slowed to a mild revolution in which the blades were clearly visible. The lack of noise in his wires warned him that he was stalling. He nosed downward. He was only a hundred feet from the ground—with a dead stick!

He frowned and clenched his teeth. The Baron had got him after all. The Jerry's fire had ceased. He was following the American down, to make him a prisoner.

Suddenly Barker heard a new rattle of machine gun fire. But there were no bullets weaving about his own craft. He glanced around in wonder and saw that the Baron, interested in his victim, had neglected to take his usual precaution. An S.E. was on the Jerry's tail. It was in the Baron's blind spot. The pilot had the Jerry ace of aces at his mercy.

WITH a start, Jim Barker recognized the S.E. The purple stripes on the fuselage marked it as Bill Gerard's. Jim Barker cursed silently. His rival would witness his discomfiture. And, from all appearances, Gerard would win the most coveted of victories at the same time. He'd donk the Baron. The pursuit bus would win out where the clumsy bomber had been useless.

But the ground was close. Barker had to give all his attention to landing the ship. The ground was bad. Wheels and tail skid touched the ground together. But the earth was pitted with shell holes. A wheel caught in one of them and capsized the ship. There was a rending crash as it washed out one wing. The nose pointed skyward.

Barker leaped to the ground. There was a fierce hammering in the air above him. He supposed Gerard was delivering the *coup de grace*. He glanced upward.

He started suddenly. Bill Gerard, even with his S.E. scout, hadn't been a match for the Jerry ace. Though he had the Baron in what should have been a death trap, the German had swung his Fokker out of range. He was a cleverer pilot than Gerard. He got away. He looped. And he caught Gerard napping. He came out on the S.E.'s tail, pressing his trigger.

ONE burst was enough. It snapped a strut and the crate dropped, its wing collapsing. They were close to the ground, so the S.E. came down flatly. It was reduced to kindling wood in an instant. Barker held his breath, wondering what had happened to its pilot, who made no move to climb out.

But the Baron, theatrical as ever, swooped groundward. He had spotted Barker standing there and his guns crackled. The American was bowled over by a sudden blow. Searing pain shot through his left shoulder. The Baron had shot him!

With infinite agony Barker dragged himself into a shell hole, hoping it would shield him from the bullets which poured down from above. The Baron's ship was

circling above him, not thirty feet from the ground. The Jerry was trying to finish off his victims, to make sure that nobody escaped.

Barker saw that his only chance was to crawl to the American lines. He had come down in No-Man's-Land. Perhaps there was a chance. He thought bitterly of Hank Barlow and Tex Connors, his friends, whom the Baron had killed. But there seemed no way to help them now. Gerard might still be alive. But there was no way to get him out. He'd better start.

He glanced over the rim of his shell hole. The Baron was circling the clearing again. He dove close to the wrecked S.E. As Barker's head popped up he swung about and sent a new shower of bullets at the American, but the latter never flinched. He stared at Gerard's ship. And suddenly he saw the pilot leap out, dash toward a shell hole near the big D.H. and burro win. The Baron came after him.

But he couldn't reach him with his bullets. The Jerry circled low, his wheels almost touching the ground. Unable to get Gerard; he turned on Barker. The latter dived, and then the Baron resumed the attack on Gerard. Barker stuck his head above the shell hole, watching grimly.

The Fokker hurtled over the wreck of the D.H. so close that its wheels seemed to drag on the cabane on the upper wing. Barker decided to make a break. There was no chance to harm the Baron. The best he could do was to save himself. Slowly, his wounded arm throbbing at every move, he dragged himself out of his crater, ready to make a dash to the American lines.

Then he halted, staring at his own bus as it rested there in the shell torn waste. His eyes were drawn to the space under the lower wing. He leaned forward.

There was a spot of brilliant red. It was the painted nose of one of his bombs. It had become stuck, somehow, and had failed to drop off when he pulled the release cord. He hadn't done his job properly after all. He still had an egg to dispose of. And he halted his dash. He couldn't leave now.

The Baron had spotted him. Mud and dirt splattered up around his feet where the Jerries bullets were landing. It was only a matter of minutes now until one of them would strike. But he couldn't quit until he had delivered his eggs.

Suddenly he grinned, patting the revolver at his hip. He struggled closer to his own ship.

THE Fokker was circling. It had to keep moving, of course, and the Baron had no intention of landing

in such terrain as this. But he was low down, almost grazing the mud of No-Man's-Land as he whirled about, firing all the while.

Jim Barker dropped into another shell hole, close to the wreck of the D.H., so close that he gritted his teeth and his face was white and haggard.

"Keep down!" he shouted at Gerard. "Keep down if you want to live!" The other made no answer.

Barker leaned on the edge of the shell hole, resting on his wounded arm though it throbbed and ached. The Baron's bullets were spattering around him like hail. But his face set grimly and he paid them no attention. They threw dirt in his face. They played around him. But his eyes were fixed tensely on the splotch of red under the wing of the D.H. Slowly he drew his revolver. He took careful aim.

The green-tailed Fokker dived. Its landing gear almost brushed the upper wing of Barker's abandoned ship. Watching the bit of red, the American smiled grimly.

A machine gun bullet from the Jerry crate toppled him backward. But just before it struck him he had pressed the trigger of his revolver.

And the revolver had been aimed at the red fuse of the bomb under his wing. He had drawn so close that a miss was impossible. He was almost on top of the red egg.

There was a terrific blast. Barker was whirled around in his shell hole as though a cyclone had clutched him. But the bullet which had stricken him down had saved him from the destruction he had expected to bring upon himself. The shell crater protected him from the flying debris.

When it was over he dragged himself weakly erect, so he could look around. The D.H. was gone. A great hole marked the spot where it had been. But a charred and blackened Fokker wreck lay a few yards away. It had been just over the bomber when the egg exploded.

Barker smiled grimly. He had made good with his eggs.

He and Gerard were taken out together by the stretcher bearers. At the first aid station, the little pursuit pilot held out his hand and grinned sheepishly.

"You sure got the Baron!" he said. "How'd you do it!" "Red eggs!" Jim Barker smiled.