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**PHINEAS  
PINKHAM**  
*howl*

# A FLYER IN TIN

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*The Limeys weren't sending Phineas "Carbuncle" Pinkham any birthday cards, but he didn't think they were mean enough to shoot at him—even in fun. And that wasn't the only mistake Phineas made! Just consult Major Garrity!*

**A** BRACE OF FLEDGLING WAR BIRDS, as green as the felt covering of a pool table, walked into Wings, Ninth, American Pursuit Squadron, saluted snappily according to the book and announced in dramatic tones that they had arrived to bring about a snappy conclusion to a long and gory world struggle.

"Ha-a-a-rumph!" was the reply from the trench-coated figure standing behind the paper-strewn table, surveying the newcomers critically. "I'm glad you've come at last. Ha-a-ar-rumph!" The man paused to

fiddle with the end of a gray mustache, "meanwhile summoning all the dignity he could find.

"Of course, Smithers, and you too, Hackley, know that there is always a chance that you might get killed upstairs. Sometimes the Germans get sore and start shooting at you, but of course—" and he punctuated the words with an appropriate gesture—"what are bullets to the brave American soldier, eh? How would you like to get started in right now, huh? Just a short hop—"

The new men leaned forward eagerly. "Yes, sir," they said in unison, "yes, sir, we would. We'd—"

“That’s the stuff!” came the gruff response. “But this is just a small detail. All the new men get them when they first come up—will get you in solid with the buzzards here—like a guy when he first gets to college, understand? You—you see, men, we all do a little drinking here. Not much but—well—the—er—bottles pile up. Have to be thrown out, and we can’t trust the job to the groundmen—they squawk too much. The brass hats come in here and poke around and we—we—er—have to be prepared for their visits. Now, if you men will go over to Lieutenant Pinkham’s hut—any buzzard will tell you where it is—you will find two sacks of bottles. I want them taken over to—” He paused and pointed to a map on the wall. “Now, on that you will see Bar-le-Duc. You go dead east until you see a big open field with an old mill and a stream on one side. Dump the bottles when you get over it, but bring back the bags, understand? It’s a tame mission but it’ll get you in strong with the guys here. They’ll know you want to pitch in and help from the start. That’s all. The brass hats are coming in tomorrow and we’ve got to clean house. See?”

“Yes, sir,” answered the fledglings and saluted.

Captain Howell, leader of A flight, and one Bump Gillis watched two Spads, which had come in not more than half an hour before, take off from the field and thunder into the dusk toward the east.

“What the hell!” exclaimed Howell. “Those new guys! What’re they carrying?”

“Search me,” replied Bump. “They—they—” He paused and looked toward the big stone house. “S-say! I bet I know. I bet—” He said no more but walked toward squadron headquarters with a determined stride. Entering the big stone house, he glanced at several innocent-eyed war birds briefly and strode toward Wings. He pushed open the door and entered. Bump’s eyes narrowed. The place was empty. Major Garrity’s trench coat was draped over the back of his chair. Bump Gillis swore, scratched his head and turned to retrace his steps. Out on the tarmac he paused, looked back at the house, swore again and continued toward his hut.

TWENTY minutes passed and two Spads swooped down to the field. The fledglings got out of their pits while curious groundmen gaped at them. Each carried an empty sack on his way toward the line of huts. Two more hours went into the limbo of scrapped time. A big car rumbled onto the drome and rolled up to squadron headquarters. Major Rufus Garrity, C.O.

of the hectic Ninth, dour of mien, stepped out of the conveyance and stamped into the house. In due time the squadron sergeant-major was called into his presence.

“Those new men,” snapped the Old Man, “why in hell haven’t they reported to me? What?”

“I don’t know, sir,” was the response. Then the telephone buzzed.

“Cripes!” complained the C.O., and savagely grabbed up the instrument. Before he could open his mouth, a verbal tornado broke loose, an indignant, wrathful torrent of abuse, employing the most scathing of figures of speech in two languages. Colonel Jules Massoin Boncouer, C.O. of a French squadron near Soirry Wood, wanted to know why, in the name of all that was sacred and otherwise in his beloved France, two Spads should fly over his part of the war and drop empty bottles down on his tarmac. There would be trouble, he continued sizzingly and it would not be trivial. Foch and Petain would hear of it, and so would Haig and Pershing.

Oh, he knew the *cochon* at the bottom of it—Lieutenant Pinkham! Colonel Jules wanted something done “an’ dam’ queek.” So far as he was concerned, every American aviator in France could pull out and the rest of the war would be a pleashaire, *oui! Sacre bleu!* What an affront “to the shades of Lafayette! *Bang!* That was that! And the seething Old Man of the Ninth had not been able to utter a single word. He slammed down the receiver, ripped his pipe out of his mouth and threw it at the wall. The sergeant-major withdrew discreetly, mumbling something about sending the fledglings in to Wings.

Sir Rufus sat in his chair with his fists doubled up in his lap. His breath came in short pants like a hound at the finish of the chase. Compared to his demoniacal visage at that moment, the worst face in a rogues’ gallery would have looked cherubic. And as his faculties began to work, delivering little messages from his brain cells, his fists opened and closed as if they itched to close around a certain piece of throat. The worst was yet to come. Both fledglings walked into Wings, fell back on their heels for an instant, then sidled nearer and saluted.

“Well?” roared the C.O. “Why didn’t you report sooner? D’you think this is a—”

“Wh-why, we-we did, sir,” stammered Smithers, “b-but it w-was not you. It was another officer. He—he sent us out to dump some b-bottles. He s-said—”

Major Garrity seemed to be blown out of his chair.

The green buzzards gasped with alarm and huddled close together for protection.

“G-get out!” roared the C.O. in a choking voice.

“That’s enough. Get out, both of you!”

“Y-yes, sir,” came the alacritous duet. “Y-yes, sir!”

Lieutenant Phineas Pinkham, God’s gift to the world of jocularly, exponent of the fine art of legerdemain and all its worst relatives, walked toward the big stone house and wondered if they had a sense of humor in Blois. Well, the war of late had been getting dull, anyway. He heard a very uncomplimentary oral salute as he neared the storm center of the Ninth. Phineas did not have to turn his head to know that it came from his hut-mate, Bump Gillis.

“Good evenin’, Private Pinkham,” Bump followed up his greeting sweetly.

“We’re waiting for orders, major,” chirped Captain Howell, bowing low. “Shall we bomb Berlin or just have a little signal practice? Anything you say—”

“How’d you like to go to hell, Mister?” inquired Phineas as he walked toward the awesome portals of Wings.

THE fledglings leaning against the table shot our hero a pair of glances which, made it quite evident that they would do anything but die for him. The Jester of the Allies grinned at them just before he was swallowed up in the lair of Major Rufus Garrity.

Over near B flight’s hangar, two of the crew of the meat wagon looked toward squadron headquarters and nodded their heads as they prepared for action. Minutes piled up. Everyone was stiff as a poker from the tension pervading the big room. Every so often, waiting war birds heard a dull, hollow thud that shook the walls. The fledglings eyed the door, their orbs drunk with unholy glee. And then the door of the Old Man’s sanctum opened and Phineas Pinkham emerged, the Old Man crowding him,

“Well, men,” began the C.O., “I’m sorry to relieve you of your new squadron commander. D’you think you can get along in this war without him?”

“Huh!” grinned Howell. “We could get along without the bum in two wars.”

“Motion seconded,” put in Bump Gillis. “When do they hang him?”

“Yeah?” snorted the irrepressible Phineas. “Ya sure are a lot of grateful bums, ain’tcha? I git myself buried so’s that bad, bad German, von Hokum, wouldn’t pick on ya every time ya went up to look around. Awright, now ya kin all git killed an’ I’ll just laff when I hear

about it. Just because a guy wants to have some fun, huh! That’s the only trouble with this *guerre*. They ain’t—”

“—no sense of humor in it, Pinkham!” finished the Old Man. “Now shut up or I’ll have you put under arrest. Not that you won’t be when the Frogs get through burning up all the wires in France. Attention, all of you! You’ve been getting fatter than groundhogs swinging the lead around here. Well, if I’m not mistaken, hell is going to pop damn soon. I—”

“I giss the brass hats won’t keep me on the ground, then,” interrupted Phineas hopefully. “I giss they know I—”

The Old Man picked up a chair and brought it down so hard that three legs splintered. “One more word out of you, you bat-eared halfwit, and I’ll—”

“Awright, awright!” soothed Phineas and edged toward Hackley and Smithers, the new men.

“Jerry is coming at us,” announced the Old Man, resuming his tirade. “Intelligence thinks they are getting pictures of this whole sector. How’re they getting them? From a Bristol. Two weeks ago Lieutenant Price of the British Squadron got forced down behind the German lines. Those who were in the scrap say he landed okay but had no time to destroy his ship. Now—”

“Good!” exclaimed Phineas. “You bums’ll be run ragged. An’ that Limey Price. I wonder how the sap likes to eat Heinie soup made outa acorns an’ ol’ shoe buttons? Haw-w-w-w-w! Wel—”

*Crash!* A phonograph record smashed to bits against the wall near where Phineas’ head was resting. The Old Man was lining him up for another when he thought of the dignity of the Air Corps. Phineas pressed closer to Smithers.

“That Bristol,” resumed the Old Man after a prolonged growl, “is flying around, maybe, with a Kraut at the stick. He’ll have Price’s clothes on, and no doubt all marks of identification on the ship will have been obliterated. It’ll look like a new Bristol. Watch for it and get in close when you spot it. That’s all!” He glared in Phineas’ direction then turned and walked back into his cubicle.

“No hard feelin’s, huh?” grinned Pinkham to Smithers, as he nudged that “buzzard in the ribs. “It was me who got my pants burned. Here, have a cigar. Haw-w-w-w-w-w! I giss them Frogs ain’t sore, huh?”

“Yeah,” replied the replacement, half-smiling, flattered by the attention from this homely, battle-scarred veteran.

Bump Gillis watched the infant aviator accept the weed, then let his glance stray ceilingward where a spider's web hung. Many flies, very dead indeed, were entangled in its meshes. Mister Spider's larder was well filled. Bump's glance then strayed from the spider to Phineas and he grinned, awaiting the worst. Smithers lighted the cigar and dragged a prodigious supply of smoke into his lungs. He sat back in his chair and puffed luxuriously. Phineas yawned and rose from his seat. Mumbling something about taking a little exercise before turning in, he took his departure, but before going, he handed Lieutenant Hackley a mate to Smithers' smouldering cheroot.

IT WAS close to midnight when Bump Gillis burst into the hut he shared with Phineas. The inimitable Carbuncle looked up, sleepy-eyed, from his cot.

"Hey, you fathead," roared Bump, "what was in them cigars? They can't wake those new guys up. They're snorin' like hell an' won't even blink when ya stick 'em with a pin. You'd—"

"Haw-w-w-w!" guffawed Phineas. "Them cigars was soaked in laudanum an' then dried. They ain't enough of it to hurt 'em. They'll wake up in another twelve hours. I want to git away with the dawn patrol in the mornin' an' the Ol' Man ain't got enough guys as it is."

"He'll court-martial you for that trick, you cock-eyed, wooden-domed cootie!" howled Bump. "He'll—"

"He ain't got nothin' on me," said Carbuncle. "If them babies can't battle a mild cigar, well, they better go git some nursin' bottles. Haw-w-w-w-w!" And Phineas lay back and closed his eyes, quite satisfied with the recent progress of the war.

The fledglings woke up close to dawn, as sick as two human beings can be and still be alive. As Phineas had prophesied, the Old Man could prove nothing. The evil-smelling stubs of cigars lying near the groaning buzzards had been sapped of all evidence of skullduggery. Major Rufus stormed around the tarmac and tore his hair and gnashed his teeth until an expensive piece of bridgework loosened. Phineas passed by with all the nonchalance of a man who has nothing to worry about. The C.O. roared at him.

"Grin, you jackass!" he bellowed. "Get into a ship and get in quick. You're going up with this patrol, and for cripe's sake, do me a favor. Get killed and no fooling. Cigars, eh? Getting big-hearted all of a sudden, eh? Well, I'll hang you up by the heels yet, you dish-faced baboon. Knew we were short-handed. Damn!" Reason vanished. He made a dive for Phineas but the

marvel from Boonetown, Iowa, was already rolling across the tarmac on efficient undercarriage.

A flight went over the lines and found the skies as empty of airships as a coal mine. Phineas, gloating over his latest triumph, was in a playful mood. Captain Howell, after a futile search for Heinies above the clouds, signaled his flight for the return to the drome. A Spad fell out of the formation and went twisting down. Bump Gillis swore and looked toward the flight leader's ship. Howell gestured with a gloved hand and the action conveyed his thoughts more poignantly than would the words, "To hell with him!"

Phineas straightened out and climbed, his prop boss thumbing the Spad's nose toward the Rhineland. He twisted and dodged over a battery of archie, came down and raked Heinie support trenches with a blast of lead. Still no competition came from the Kaiser's air stable. He went up again to see if anything like a Fokker was sunning its wings behind a great gob of ceiling. Still no hunting. Coming down once more, he spotted a flight of Nieuports skimming a strata below. With a whoop Carbuncle dived at them, straightened out not more than two feet above the head of a cursing French squadron commander and zoomed again. From a distance two men in a new Bristol fighter saw the maneuver and likewise indulged in some rare blasphemy. The pilot shouted back at the observer.

"That's that blarsted 'air-brained Pinkham of the Yankee squadron," he yelled. "If 'e comes at us, give 'im a burst in the tail feathers!"

"Righto!" The man in the rear pit adjusted his camera as he watched the lone Spad. It suddenly swerved and piqued at the Bristol. As Phineas shot over ahead, a burst of Vickers' lead slammed into his back porch. That was enough. He wrenched the Spad around and pointed the nose at the Bristol's ribs. Wild exultation shook Phineas as he slammed a pair of vicious bursts into the British ship.

A man stood up in the observer's pit and waved frantically. As the Bristol suddenly lurched, he lost his balance and fell over the camera. The Boonetown wonder overshot and came leaping back. Take pictures, would they, the squareheaded bums? And they were going to ground Lieutenant Pinkham! He sent in another burst, then held his fire. The two-seater was through for the day and was feeling a cautious, albeit shaky, course down the banisters. Phineas followed it down until it settled into a clump of trees. There was no place to land, so he waved to the wreck and streaked for home.



"Well, I giss you're glad I went up, huh?" grinned Phineas to the Old Man as he turned in his report. "Them kraut's won't snap no more pictures for the Kaiser, hull?"

"You're sure that it was the ship?" Major Garrity wanted to know. "How could you tell? You—"

"They fired at me, so—well, what the hell?" snapped Phineas. "The Limeys don't send me no birthday cards, but they wouldn't shoot at me, would they?"

"It would be a good idea, anyway," growled the Old Man. "Well, we'll wait and see. On top of two hundred other things, you've broken formation. It had just better be the captured Bristol—if you get what I mean, you fathead!"

ALAS and alackaday, as the old scribes would have it, the Bristol was not the one which had supposedly been handed to the krauts by Lieutenant Price. It had been carrying two members in good standing of the R.F.C. and the gentlemen were now smarting under the liberal administering of iodine to countless scratches and cuts. Pictures for Brigade and the camera responsible for same were beyond restoration. The Bristol, of course, was written off in red ink on the King's ledger. The Britishers had explained the playful bursts at Phineas and were absolved of all blame in the matter.

In all his turbulent career Lieutenant Pinkham had never been in a worse mess. It seemed as if he had as much chance of crawling out as a fly that has nose-dived into a pail of hot tar. On the carpet, however, the old Pinkham spirit still blazed bright.

"Well," he said after a long tirade from Major Garrity, "it was a Bristol an' was takin' pictures over on our side. It was fresh painted an' the bums in it shot at me. What would you think, huh? Maybe I should've gone over close enough to see what size collars they was wearin'? Well, the Pinkhams never raised a idiot. I got a case, an' no brass hat kin hang the blame on me. Lookit the tail of my Spad. Do you think maybe a porky pine got mad an' shot quills at me, huh?"

"Still funny, aren't you, Pinkham?" retorted the C.O. "Well, when they get you over at Chaumont this time, it's going to be just too bad!" He pointed a determined digit toward the door. "Get!" he ordered.

Nothing is so bad that it might not be worse. B flight proved the point when it returned from a patrol just after noon of the next day. Two ships were missing, but the brood had hardly spotted a Jerry bus. Archie fire had messed them up. The Old Man

looked at B flight's leader and asked him if he was sane.

"I'm telling you," stormed the war bird, "the Boche have got an anti-aircraft gun that is a wow. Every which way we turned and twisted, it followed us up, and I never have been more sick of a lot of shrapnel in my life. It was hanging to us every second. The ships we were lucky enough to bring in are full of holes. Tell that to the brass hats!"

"I will," promised the Old Man dourly, "and what do you think they'll say? If they believe it, and I know they won't, they'll want to know where the guns are hidden, and isn't that going to be a nice sweet job for the observation crates and the escort that takes them over?" And a lot more of his hair turned gray as he reached for the phone.

G.H.Q. refused to get hysterical about the report. If the Spads had pilots so terrible that they couldn't dodge archie fire, then it was time to draw further recruits for the air service from the women's auxiliary back in the States. Furthermore, a certain brass hat voiced, if the report had come in from any source other than the Ninth Pursuit, a couple of winks might have been lost over it.

The C.O. was at the point of telling the brass hat that he was low enough to steal sheep, but checked himself in the nick of time. At Chaumont, Major Garrity was considered anything but the proverbial white-haired boy and at the moment in the aforementioned place a caustic message was being prepared anent the deplorable conduct of the Ninth toward Colonel Boncouer's Nieuport squadron. The Old Man called in his flight commanders, gave them all hell and then forgot about archie guns.

AS DAYS passed, however, it became glaringly apparent that something was rotten many miles south of Denmark. A British Camel limped home and almost fell apart when it hit the tarmac. The pilot reported that the gun had got his range in about two calendar seconds and had stuck to him like a lovesick airedale pup. There was just one gun of the type in the battery, he felt sure, as other bursts behaved as archie had always behaved before. That one was a terror, and it was something new.

Wires began to buzz all over France. A hundred airdromes from the French coast to the Swiss border reported that they had enjoyed not the slightest acquaintance with the latest addition to the archie family. For some reason, the brass hats mused, Jerry

had placed the gun in the St. Mihiel sector. It would have to be destroyed, and they called up Major Garrity and made it quite plain that his squadron would not be slighted in the process of elimination.

The Ninth was in the midst of a miserable mess. Everything tasted as if it had been sprayed with insect exterminator. Jerry had been making things very unpleasant all day. On the table in the operations room was a vitriolic message from G.H.Q. Major Garrity had not opened it. He knew what it contained. If he had read it, he probably would have killed Phineas Pinkham, and he needed every man, brainless or otherwise, in the party to come.

"If we don't get that battery, we'll have to get a Hiss that'll climb to twenty thousand feet," speculated, Howell with a growl, disgustedly shoving his plate away from him. "The—"

"You're telling me?" roared the Old Man. "That's fine. Now tell me just where we'll find it! We've already got three locations for the damn thing. We've dropped Bombs all over hell, but the battery still does business? We've lost a Salmson and two D.H.4s. A ship can't stay up long enough to spot it. Twelve Fokkers drove you home today, didn't they, Howell?"

"Haw-w-w-w-w-w-w-w!" erupted Phineas. "Well, I giss I'll have to look into the job. It's alius been a Pinkham who was called upon in times ol need. Oncet back in the Civil War at Bull Run, Grant said to my ol' gran'dad, he says, 'we gotta capcher a dozen guns. One man has to—'"

The Old Man dropped knife and fork and held his head in his hands. Funny noises came from his mouth. Suddenly the legs of his chair scraped back across the floor. He got out of it, and leaning far across the table, shoved his iron jaw into the face of the bane of his existence.

"Well, you laughing jackass, listen to this!" he yelled. "You aren't on the ground any more. In less than a week you'll be shaking hands with your grandfather. I'll arrange for it, you halfwit." He paused and looked at the other war birds. A thin grin failed to soften his malevolent visage. "Gentlemen," he said, "don't let the Jerry battery worry you; Mister Pinkham is going to attend to everything. If he doesn't get the guns, he'll get bumped off, and if that won't rate a binge, then I'm a general!" And he left his buzzards in a happier frame of mind.

"Well," grinned Carbuncle complacently as he left the table. "I figgered I'd get back up in the air if I only used my brains. Haw-w-w-w-w! Ya gotta know how to handle the ol' turtle! Bon sewer, bums!"

"Oh, Gord!" groaned Bump Gillis and slumped down in his chair like a balloon that has just been punctured.

"Cripest!" was Captain Howell's contribution.

FAR into that night Lieutenant Phineas Pinkham sat awake in his bunk, searching the furthestmost crannies of his astounding brain for an idea with which to get both himself and the Allies out of a hole. It did not occur to him until the afternoon of the following day when he nosed down to the tarmac with the rest of his flight after a rather disappointing trip over to Jerry's backyard. The archie battery had cuffed them around before the Fokkers got them on the rebound, and the Vons had convinced the Spads that it was wise to run away so that they could fight another day.

As Phineas fluttered down, he saw a playful ray from the sun flash upon a petrol tin. The solar gesture jammed in his brain throttle and it began to whirl and hit on all cylinders. Phineas' homely features were split wide open with satisfaction as he left his Spad in the hands of the ackemmas and trekked to his hut. He tarried there for perhaps half an hour. Then, swallowing his pride, he girded his loins and sallied forth in search of none other than Major Rufus Garrity.

"I got an idea, sir," began Phineas by way of greeting, as the Old Man steeled himself in his chair.

"Maybe it's only a cramp," snorted the Old Man, his big fist clutching a certain communication from Chaumont. "The medico will give you some brown medicine. Better ask him for poison, you cluck! You can't crawl out of Blois now. Read this!" His voice rose to an excited pitch.

"Giss I don't need to," answered Phineas. "It's maybe twice as bad as I think it is. Well, this idea of mine is this. Naturally, if ya want to git the Jerry guns, ya've got to git a ship that can't be shot down. Now I figger if ya put armor on a ship—*er*—that is, pretend to, well, ya see—"

"P-put armor on a ship—or—*er*—pretend to?" repeated the C.O. with a gulp. "What in hell kind of a brain spasm is that? You're crocked, ya fish-faced goop! Get out before I kick your pants off!"

"Awright!" Phineas hastened to comply. "Awright. If ya don't want me to help—" He turned and fled, indignation dyeing his face a fiery hue. "That's the trouble with this *guerre*," he said to the world in general as he walked across the field. "They don't reckemize brains when they see 'em. Well—" His voice

broke off. The pile of petrol tins near B flight's hangar fascinated him.

At that very moment, many miles away, G.H.Q. was in a panic. Something had to be done about the Jerry gun. The trouble had been diagnosed, but the hardest part was to operate successfully. The fact that Jerry had but one mystery gun in play led G.H.Q. to believe that money in the Fatherland was very scarce and that no others were to be manufactured until the one in the St. Mihiel sector had proved its worth. Perhaps the cost of the ordnance did not warrant its manufacture on a large scale. This one, then, had to be destroyed. With Jerry territory covered with such a deadly weapon, plans for a drive there could go on with little chance of interference.

Brass hats put their heads together, buzzed for two more hours and then decided, that somewhere in the Air Corps there was a patriot who would be willing to give up his life for the cause of victory. Squadron headquarters in the sector began to get their message. The Ninth received theirs—and how! When volunteers were summoned, Lieutenant Phineas Pinkham stirred his pedal extremities and broke the tape first.

"The man who goes out," said the Old Man gravely, "will have to hedgehop over to Germany with three bombs at his belly. He will have one chance in ten thousand. I—*er*—realize that you have everything to gain, Pinkham, and nothing to lose—harumph—except your life. The mission is yours. Your time is your own until you take off. I—I guess that's all."

Phineas grinned and took a dirty handkerchief from his pocket. "Giss ya better use this to blow your nose. Well, I ain't killed yet, so all you guys better wait before ya start cryin'."

"Wha-a-a-a-a?" gasped Major Rufus. "Cryin'? Why, you cluck, I'm laughing myself sick. And if you get back, I'll resign. I—I—*er*—well, what in hell are you hanging around for? Get out!"

"I got to talk about them charges against me," said Phineas. "They gotta promise to wipe 'em out if I git the gun. I don't trust them brass hats. An' I want it in writin'—or I don't go! Well?"

"All right, dammit!" roared the Old Man. "I'll tell them. Only leave me alone. Cripes!"

LIEUTENANT PINKHAM elected to start early the next morning when the sun was halfway in the sky. All that night he labored in A flight's hangar with a heap of petrol tins, a wire cutter and a hammer and box of small nails. Three swearing grease monkeys hurried

hither and yon at his beck and call. Bump Gillis tried to take a peek and got a huge gob of oily waste in his right eye. Strange things were happening to the Spad. When it passed final inspection, Phineas took two squares of tin, tied them together with wire and then attached a heavy piece of junk to the ensemble. After which he dismissed his helpers, grinned and sought his hut.

Drama! Phineas Pinkham in the heavy role. On the line, subjected to a battery of curious eyes, was a Spad, and tacked to the greater part of the fuselage from tail assembly to cowl were squares of tin.

"He's nuts! Now I'm sure of it," declared Bump Gillis.

"Well, to hell with him!" exclaimed Howell. "I guess a guy who is going to commit suicide can do it even in a tin bathtub if he wants to."

Before leaving the operations office, Phineas was given proof that the slate would be wiped clean if he accomplished the impossible.

"That's nice of the bums," he grinned. "They would bet on a race between a jack rabbit an' a snail any time. They're big sports, huh? Well, if I disappoint 'em, they better not welch, the swell-headed chair warmers! Well, ardo!"

"Good luck!" managed the Old Man.

"The ol' hippercrit," mumbled Phineas as he fared forth. He turned in the doorway. "Well, sir, will ya do me a favor?" His voice was a little strained. "I got some letters in the toe of a new pair of boots under my bunk. I wish ya'd tie 'em up an' keep 'em if I don't git. back. They're from my dame an'—well—I'd like ya to send—"

"Sure, Pinkham," agreed the C.O., his diaphragm acting up. "Sure, but those krauts haven't got you yet. Well—"

"No," said Phineas. "That's right, ain't it? Well, ardo agin—"

As he walked toward his mystery ship, Phineas Pinkham was a platter of cold cuts in the eyes of his long-suffering comrades. They wanted to shake hands and say something in farewell but would have preferred being shot first. Anyway, the big tramp might hand one of them a scorpion or something. They wanted to know what the piece of tin with the weight was hanging down from the pit for, but in reply to the inquiry, Phineas promptly suggested that they go to hell.

"How 'bout them boots?" chirped Bump Gillis. "Kin I have 'em?"

"Oh, yeah," answered Phineas. "Git a little closer an' ya'll git 'em both in the pants. Well, ardo, ya

bums, an' if I see von Hokum, I'll tell him where he kin find ya. Haw-w-w!" After the prolonged guffaw he climbed into the pit and set the Hisso to trumpeting like a quartet of mad elephants. Pilots withdrew to a safe distance, for Pinkham's take-off under ordinary conditions was bad enough, and Carbuncle slipping away with bombs hitched to his ship was something much worse.

"Good luck, you fathead!" shouted Howell as Phineas gunned away. The Boonetown flyer thumbed his nose in return and then forgot all about the Ninth. His business was with krauts—and such a business!

"Cripes!" groaned Bump. "It's murder!"

"I've seen worse guys," faltered another pilot, "even if I can't remember where."

"What a graveyard this is going to be from now on," groaned Howell, his Adam's Apple jumping around in his throat. "Oh, well, let's play some poker."

OVER on the German side, under a big canopy of canvas and tree boughs, a grim shape squatted on a great flat-car, and near it stood several *Ober-Offiziers* of the German army. They were in conference with a thick-set, big-headed, bespectacled individual clad in a long frock coat. Smiles wreathed the faces of all as they reviewed the spectacle they had just witnessed—namely, the slapping down of a British Camel.

"*Ach, Herr Bissinger,*" exclaimed a florid-faced *Herr Oberst*, "the gun, it iss the colossal success, *ja?* Congratulations, *mein Freund! Der Kaiser und Vaterland* will reward you. *Das Englander* swine was surprised, *nein? Ach Gott, we Germans!*"

"*Ja,*" gloated *Herr Bissinger*, squinting through lenses a quarter of an inch thick. "Yet more of these guns *und* we will keep the *verdamm't* Allies out of our sector. But *Himmel!* The Reichstag reports a terrible deficit in the treasury. A little more time perhaps, and we will make more, *ja!* We will drink to Brunnhilde, *ja!*" he laughed, pointing to the big gun.

"Brunnhilde, *Gott!*" was the response. "It iss a gude name for her, *ja! Prosit!*"

"To *Gott, Brunnhilde und Vat—ach!*" *Herr Bissinger's* hair bristled. He pointed up into the sky where a tiny shape hovered. The sun played mischievously on its flanks and set it to sparkling like a diamond.

"A plane!" shouted a German.

Brunnhilde's crew swarmed about her. Came a flash and a great detonation. Almost on top of the silvery ship the shrapnel burst.

"*Ach!*" enthused *Herr Bissinger*. The officer beside

him who was peering through powerful glasses did not enthuse. He turned to the men near him.

"It is an armored ship," he shouted. "Look at it dodge the shells. *Donner und Blitzen!* Where are the Fokkers? *Ach, Himmel!* There, we hit it, *Herr Bissinger*. See, it iss coming down! Cease firing!"

BUT let us climb up and see Phineas. Our hero is coming down, but there is a smile on his face and a lot of holes in his Spad. A trickle of gore finds a course in the collar of his flying coat. A more hellish three minutes had never occurred before in Phineas' diversified career. He thanked the air gods from the bottom of his heart, however, that Fokkers were late for the first act. He had dodged, sideslipped, stalled and zoomed, but the Jerry scrap-iron had gone with him. When the time had come, he had flipped over and gone down with one hand toying with a wire cutter which he had brought with him. He had sighted three guns but they were not the ones he was seeking.

One thousand feet up, Phineas cut a wire, and a large piece of tinware went twisting toward the earth. Back in the sky, three Fokkers took shape. Phineas tendered them a brief glance as he drilled toward his own lines, remembering to make his flying as rotten as possible and still stay aloft. Was Phineas running away? He was not. He glanced at the watch at his wrist, threw the Spad into a wide bank and again pointed his nose toward Germany and always upward. Fifteen, sixteen thousand feet, Lieutenant Phineas Pinkham climbed. At eighteen thousand, blue-nosed and shivering in the pit, he eased the stick forward and slid downstairs.

Through the ceiling a few moments later Phineas' Spad made a target for a Fokker. But the American pilot ignored the Junker and stared at the terrain below. *Blam! Blam!* Great black puffballs reached for his ship. The sky was filled with singing pieces of iron. Phineas said a prayer and stared ever downward. Suddenly something flashed below. He yelled with triumph and shook hands in the direction of the sun. A Fokker slammed at him and Phineas turned to meet it. The shrapnel had stopped, Brunnhilde being fearful, no doubt, of bringing down a couple of Vons.

"Well, I ain't got no time to play," decided Phineas and drove his point at a Junker. He tripped the Vickers and blasted the Fokker out of his path for the moment, then looked down again. Once more the flash came. It disappeared as quickly and never reappeared, but Phineas had seen enough. He went down in a long, precarious swoop, leveled out, swooped again and then



jerked the lever. A drop of ruination in any language spun down and Phineas held his breath. A great concussion, colored red, ripped up a lot of French scenery.

Spandau lead whistling in his ears, he dropped to two thousand and let loose another bomb. *Blam!* Bits of canvas, iron and wood spewed toward his Spad. He ruddered around and unloaded his third onus of grief—but this time he did not wait for results. Two Fokkers were on his neck, seconds away from shoving his big nose into the dirt. Down on the ground, Brunnhilde was a wreck. A lot of her servants were not feeling so well. A big square black hat, a few remnants of black cloth, and a pair of broken spectacles were, all that attested to the former presence of *Herr Bissinger*.

DRUNK with success, Phineas skidded out of the path of the crazed Vons and reached into his coat. He flung an envelope, weighted down with a big lead sinker, into space and turned his apology for a combat ship at his enemies. Pieces of tin dropped off as he fought. More of the pseudo-armor hung drunkenly from the Spad. The engine was missing; so, too, were a few control wires and a lot of fabric. But Phineas gritted his teeth and flew what was left under him toward Allied terrain.

He zoomed and sideslipped, mushed down until he was almost knocking iron hats off Jerry infantrymen squatted in the trenches. They swore and sprayed him with machine-gun fire, but something not of this world was guiding Phineas along his torrid path. He pulled back on the stick and the Spad refused to climb more than three hundred feet. At that altitude it sighed, coughed, and then caring little what would happen to its passenger, picked out a graveyard below and settled down among the tombstones.

Lieutenant Phineas Carbuncle Pinkham opened his eyes cautiously, and gingerly felt of his head. Why, he had two craniums! No, one was a big bump just over his starboard ear. His eyes blinked at something. With each blink his vision cleared, and soon he absorbed words, etched in stone, that made his jaw snap open.

“Gone From This World to a Just Reward—1870.”

“Somebody is a liar,” mumbled Phineas, peering closer. “Why, cripes, I wasn’t even born in 1870, an’ how kin a guy die before he’s born? Huh!” His senses returned slowly and at last it dawned on him that Phineas Pinkham was still in the flesh, also very much in the scheme of things.

“H-hey-y-y!” yelled a strange voice. “Are ya alive?”

Phineas poked his face from behind the stone. Three Yanks were looking at him. “No, ya blockheads!” he yelled. “I’m dead. An’ say ‘sir’ when ya talk to a orfiser! Shut your yaps an’ come an’ git me out.”

A few minutes later, Phineas was enjoying a cigarette. He lay at ease with his shoulders propped against a tree and inquired as to where in hell he was.

“Ya jus’ made it, sir,” said a dough. “That last jump ya made must of took ya half a mile. We saw ya comin’ for a long time an’ was bettin’ ya wouldn’t make it.”

“Yeah?” grinned Phineas. “An’ I bet the brass hats is bettin’, too. Well, I hope they even lose their skivvies. An’ they will, the bums! Take me to a orfiser some place. I want to git me a drink an’ some sleep.”

Twenty-four hours later Major Rufus Garrity walked with solemn, heavy tread into Phineas Pinkham’s hut. Bump Gillis sat there with a face as long as a horse’s.

“It was murder,” declared Bump. “But he got that lousy gun. I said he would, didn’t I?”

“Who asked you, Gillis?” snapped the Old Man as he reached a hand down into the toe of one of the missing flyer’s boots. “What do you want me to do? I—ow-w-w-w-w-w-w-w! Cripes!” The Old Man gritted his teeth, swore and drew out his hand with difficulty. Bump Gillis’ eyes popped. Fastened securely to the C.O.’s fingers was a mouse trap, and one that evidently had been made for a full-grown, rat-sized mouse.

“The crackpot!” howled Garrity. “The double-crossin’—”

“Are ya speakin’ disrespectfully of the dead?” inquired Bump with a frown. “Huh? Ya ought’ve known better, sir, anyways. I even expect Phineas to come to see me in a shroud an’ hand me a loaded cigarette.”

THE Old Man swore some more and ordered the flyer to take the damned thing off his hand. After which he evacuated the hut with a strange expression on his face. Even though Pinkham was gone, his presence was felt. Major Garrity blew on his fingers and walked to squadron headquarters. On the steps of the stone house he staggered back as though hit with a gas pipe. That voice! That laugh! He rubbed his eyes and ears and walked into the big room.

“How’d I do it, huh?” A cadaverous-looking Phineas Pinkham was making the inquiry. The Old Man leaned against the wall for support and was unable to make a sound. “Well, they signaled to me where they was, the poor saps. Haw-w-w-w! They thought I had a armored ship an’ when I dropped a big hunk of tin down, they thought I was hit. Well, I

figgered they would want to see what covered the ship so I flew away an' come back an' what did I see but the sun flashin' on something an' of course it was just what I thought it was. They had sent a squarehead out to git the tin an' was lookin' it over when I come back. Well, I giss you' bums kin figger out the rest. Haw-w! I bet the Frogs'll be sore when they find out they can't do nothin' about the bottles! An'—"

"You fathead!" bellowed Major Garrity. "That trap! I've got something I can do. I—"

"Oh, Hello," greeted Phineas, his smile widening. "Ya can't begrudge a guy some fun just before he gits killed, can ya?"

The Old Man stared at the great Pinkham for several moments, then turned quickly and ran into his cubicle. He weakened just as the door slammed behind him. He hoped that the flyers outside did not hear the chuckle. Let the brass hats laugh this one off. The Ninth had scored again.

Two days later over in Jerry territory, the great von Holke was summoned into the presence of his commander. He clicked his heels and saluted before receiving a Teutonic verbal barrage right between the eyes.

"Read this, *Dumkopf*," shouted the perturbed Junker leader. "You brought down *Leutnant* Pinkham, *ja*? Bah! Poof! I say. Read it, von Holke! He insults our Emperor, twists the beak of' the Imperial Eagle. The upstart! The Yankee swine! The—"

However, von Holke let the angry leader rave on. He read the message written by the hand of Phineas Pinkham and it was addressed to him.

*"Haw! Haw! Phooey for you and the Fotterland. Thanks for the funeral, von Hokum. Hope the Kaiser has lost his hop pipe and is starting in on a seven years' itch. Hoping you are the same, I am disrespectfully,*

*The guy who busted up your gun,*

*Phineas Pinkham, Lt.,*

*Ninth Pursuit Squadron.*

*P.S. Would you like to buy some tin?"*

Von Holke's face puffed up. He crumpled the paper savagely in his big fist and tried, to speak. Failing utterly, he managed a robust Teuton oath and ran blindly out to the tarmac.

It must be remembered that in von Holke's house in Dresden far away a long row of silver cups stood on a mantel and on each of them had been engraved the name of a war bird who had come out second best in an argument with the famous Junker ace. How can you explain the fact that at the very moment that von Holke reached open air, a black cat made a leap from a chair to the aforementioned mantel, missed, but succeeded in knocking down one silver cup, on the face of which was engraved the name of Phineas Pinkham? Ask us. We don't know.