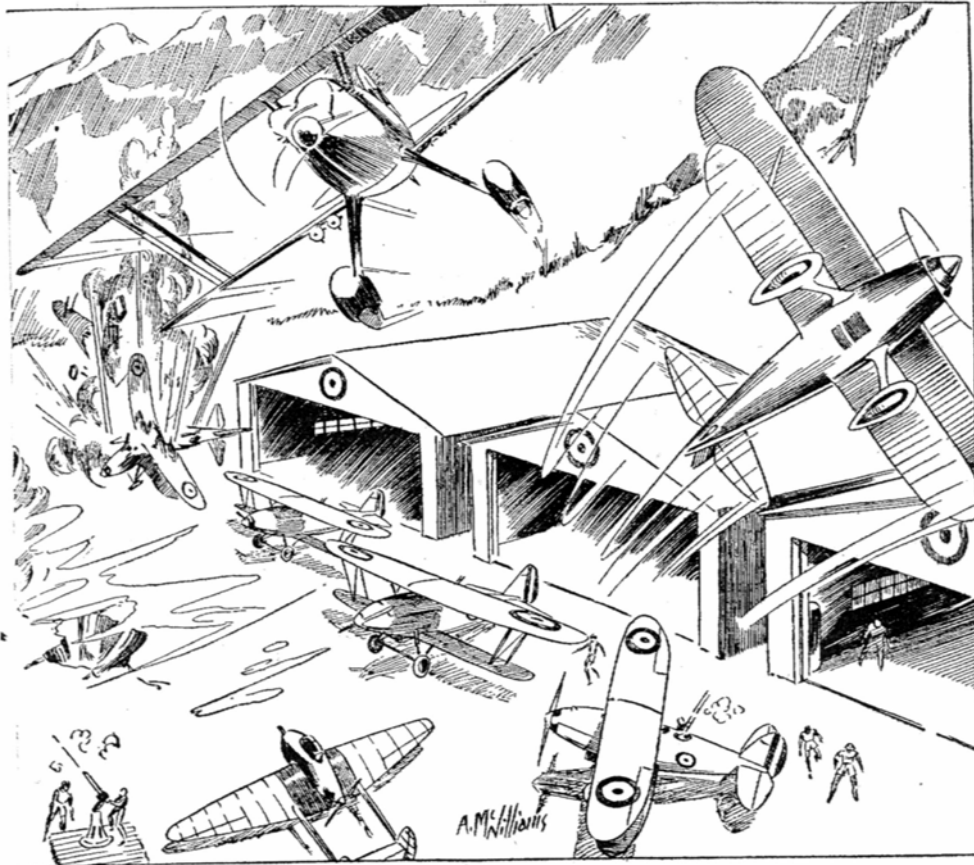


Hellion Hunch

By Arch Whitehouse

Author of "Clipped Wing Clue," "Sky Guns
of Singapore," etc.

Illustrated by Alden McWilliams



"Shut up and get a shovel!" Such was the impudent retort that Crash Carringer flung at old F.S.F. Winters, C.O. of No. 609, Britain's brave little air post in the wilds of India's Afridi-ridden North West Frontier. And that retort tartly expressed the nervy nature of the hard-shooting Yank warplane salesman. For Crash was tough. He needed all his toughness, too. For he was roaring' off to a "date with Death" in the nullahs to prove that blood is thicker than— tobacco!

"I'M NUTS—but this route will save me plenty of miles," Crash Carringer muttered to himself as he roared his sleek Hale Hellion along the winding gorge of the Gilgit Pass that had been cut through centuries of erosion by the Indus River. "I'm stickin' my neck out for it. But if I make it, I save plenty of mileage."

For more than a week now, Crash Carringer, world roaming Hale "Hellion salesman, had been a somewhat happy fugitive from what might be termed justice. He had hurried out of Sinfang when an Ala Shan war lord had decided that Crash had taken too much good Canton gold out of Foochow as the result of a juicy deal he'd put over for three hundred Hellions to strengthen the aerial defenses of General Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist Army.

Carringer had managed to get the gold he'd received down to the American Express office in Hong Kong. He was now carrying his commission—a wad of American dollars—in a belt around his middle that was so stuffed it would have made a swell buffer bag for a coal barge.

From Sinfang he had flown at 260 cruising for Soochow, then he had battled his way through a flight of ancient Junkers bombers outside Khotin and had managed to sneak into Srinagar in northern India and on through to Peshawar. Here he tried to get permission for a flight through the Khyber Pass, his ultimate goal being Baghdad where he figured he could pick up a few more bucks selling Hellions to the Iraq government.

"I wouldn't advise you to cross over the Khyber," the lantern-jawed British District Commissioner had warned. "You haven't a chance through there. But," he had added with a sly grimace, "you can get through by taking the Yengah Nullah, the big gorge which goes through about fifty miles farther down."

"What's it like?"

"Well, the Yengah won't be a picnic. But it's a lot better than the Khyber. There are hostile natives in the Yengah—but no anti-aircraft guns, you know."

"How do you know?" demanded Crash, who was never sparing with his questions.

"Well, it's like this" the D.C. explained, packing a heavy briar and passing his pouch to Carringer. "We do a little

dispatch flight through there twice a week. No. 609, a Hawker Demon outfit, has the show, bringing stuff through from Meshed, over in northeastern Persia."

"Overland grapevine, eh?" grinned Carringer.

"It's necessary, with old Achmed Khan playing hell on the Frontier every so often. You see, we keep track of him through some tribesmen at Turbati-Haidari, and we bring these dispatches through the Yengah twice a week."

"That's a long jump from the Persian-Afghanistan border with a Demon, isn't it?" Carringer went on, staring up at the Commissioner's wall map.

"It is. But that's the chance the R.A.F. has to take."

"And there's only Afridis up there! Nice guys those Afridis, too! Build fires on your belly, if they catch you. Cut off your ears and mail them to your mother-in-law."

"It's not so much the Afridis warriors," explained the B.C. "It's their damned women. They're the blighters who think up all the tortures."

"Yeah. I've heard about them. But we can't live forever, so I'll see how it goes."

"If I were you, I'd go down to Karachi and cut across the Gulf of Oman instead."

"You would. But not me. I've been to Karachi—and there's one or two guys down there lookin' for me. No Karachi for Carringer," laughed Crash.

"I understand," said the D. C., laughing too. He was a good egg.

And that was the situation when Crash Carringer took off and headed for Thai., where he would turn northwest and cut through the Yengah Nullah for a saving of about 1,500 miles.

THE HALE HELLION was a new single-seat pusher monoplane which had its huge 1,000-h.p. Allison engine mounted in the rear of the streamlined nacelle. The tail assembly was carried on two streamlined dural booms, and there were four .50 caliber Brownings mounted in the wings plus a 37 mm. cannon in the nose. With a top speed of well over 300, it was one of the most advanced pieces of aerial fighting equipment in the world. Anyhow, Crash was having a swell time selling Hellions.

He had followed the Indus down from Peshawar. On the Way he spotted the neat layout of a British aerodrome with its row of concrete and elephant iron hangars, the white bungalow that was used for the Recording Office, and the layout of thatched cottages that made up the officers' quarters.

"What a life!" he muttered. "A million miles from nowhere and nothing to do but wait for some Afridi to shoot you down. Ugh!"

But he put all that out of his mind when he swung into the Yengah Nullah and fought the swirling winds that howled down the great canyon. To the south, the Sulaiman Range threw peaks to an altitude of 10,084 feet while to the north there were many well over 4,000 feet. On each side, sheer rock was carved into giant sidings, and here and there hung high ledges on which tiny Afridi villages nestled against the pile of tumbled granite,

He could see the all-important Afridi aqueducts which carried their life-giving water. Small flocks of mangy goats grazed on weird angles of the terrain, and tangled plumes of campfire smoke curled through the great rock gashes to add mystery and terror to the general layout.

Crash had hardly covered a mile of it when he realized that he had taken on more than he cared to go through with.

"But then," he argued, "If those Limeys can go through twice a week with Demons—and with a load— I can go through!"

Twice he sensed the ping-ping of Afridi rifles, and a cold sweat broke across his shoulders. But he carried on, fighting the wild eddies and gusts that threatened to dash his wing-tips into the narrowing walls.

"A swell place to play soldier," he mumbled. "'Wow! And what the devil do you do when you want to turn around?'"

Nevertheless, he decided to press on and see what lay beyond around the next bend. If it got any narrower, the R.A.F. could have it; he'd turn back and risk Karachi—provided he could turn back.

Then, as he approached the steep rock wall ahead, he heard the roar of aircraft motors and the rattle of machine guns. He glanced about quickly, tried to find where the shooting was coming from. The echoes of engines continued

to reverberate back and forth from the sides of the nullah in a mad tattoo beat.

"Hello!" he barked. "There it is. The R.A.F. Demon dispatch plane, I'll bet a buck! And it's coming this way."

He was just beginning to zoom the Hellion up to pass over the onrushing Hawker ship, when he suddenly saw that three more planes were following it. A young war was going on right in the nullah!

Crash Carringer took it all in immediately. Three Heinkel HE.51 fighters, which carried no identifying marks, were chasing the lone Demon. And now he could see the observer chap in the Demon spreading his bursts at the German single-seaters while his pilot was swinging the biplane back and forth from one side of the nullah to the other.

Crash gasped. "They'll get those poor guys—one way or another," he cried. "If they go down, their chances of getting away with a light crash are a thousand to one. And if they do live through it, those Afridi gals will start collecting the kindling." FAST and with vigor, Carringer acted. He nosed down, pressed the triggers of his wing guns, and slammed out .50 caliber stuff in a mad fusillade that pounded smack into the three tight-flying Heinkels.

Then he overshot—and found himself hurtling at 300 directly toward the nullah wall!

Frantically, he kicked rudder pedals, yanked the stick back—and swooshed around, just in time to miss a jagged outcropping of rock.

"Wow!" he ejaculated. "It's a good thing I had my wheels up."

He was coming back fast now, and he saw one of the Heinkels shimmering down in a helpless flutter, a victim of his fire. Again, Crash squeezed triggers, and another climbed, stalled, and fell back on its tail. The third swept over hard, almost side-swiping the Demon with its lower wing-tip. And now the guns of the Heinkel flamed out at the Hellion.

But Crash drew back on his stick and cleared with a mad climb. He let her stall, kicked her over dangerously on one wing-tip, recovered on his throttle, and leveled off. Then he hurled a long drum-fire at the Heinkel, and followed up by nosing down on the one that had gone into a tail-slide.

A short deadly burst from the cannon and the Heinkel exploded, throwing a pennon of flaming gasoline across the narrow nullah.

"That's two of them. Now where did the third go?" Crash argued with himself.

But there was no time to look now! For he had to concentrate his skill in another renversement within the confined space of the gorge. By the time he had completed the maneuver, the Demon flyers were about two miles ahead, hammering/away for safety. And Crash didn't blame them.

He suddenly decided to follow them in order to find out what the fuss he had taken part in was all about. He suddenly remembered what the District Commissioner at Peshawar had said about one Achmed Kahn, a rebel tribe leader. He wondered if there could be any connection between the unmarked Heinkels and the mysterious chieftain.

The Hellion soon caught up with the Demon, and as Crash flew high and throttled back, he saw the observer waving to him. Crash returned the gesture, then settled back and followed the Demon out of the nullah.

But suddenly he saw the British plane swing wide and drop down over a level stretch of desert.

"Hello!" muttered the Yank. "They must have 'stopped one' somewhere in that fight. Their engine's conked out and they're headed for a sit-down. And what a place!"

He waited until they had landed, then decided to go down, too.

But, as he eased back for his glide, he spotted a troop of armed horsemen trotting out of a gulley about a quarter of a mile away. Quickly, he gave his Allison the gun again and zoomed up. The horsemen came on, swinging their long rifles high above their heads as they galloped toward the downed Demon.

Crash watched the plane, saw the R.A.F. observer open fire from his cockpit. One horse went down and the rider rolled clear and crawled behind an undulation in the sand.

Crash knew that it was time to go to work again. Before the body of horsemen could reach the Demon, he was screaming down at them with all four Brownings rattling. Immediately, a few of the horses swerved, and the Demon

observer gave them another burst to keep them moving. Then finally all of the Afridi horsemen swung wide, dismounted, crawled behind sand dunes, and opened fire anew.

"So you won't go home and behave yourselves, eh?" snorted Crash. "Well, take this to give you another idea."

The Hellion dived in again and its four wing guns slapped lead at the crouching Afridis. A few rolled over screaming, a few managed to get to their horses and mount again, and a few tried to get away. But Carringer's bullets mowed them down.

He continued to harass them until he had driven those who were still alive back to the foothills. Then he turned back, skimmed over the dead tribesmen, and landed near the Demon.

AS he opened his cockpit hatch and got his first clear view of the two airmen in the British plane, Crash smiled. The gunner chap was a broad-shouldered lad with a particularly low center of gravity. His head, wearing a helmet that somehow had become twisted so that one ear-flap practically covered one eye, only just emerged over the edge of the Fairey gun mounting. The pilot, a tall, expressionless bird, sat with his arms resting calmly on the coaming of the cockpit.

"I suppose they wonder what the devil I'm doing here," Crash thought as he climbed down and walked across toward the Demon.

Neither man made any effort to get out or to greet him. "Well, what happened?" boomed Crash when he reached the British ship.

"If you have a jack-knife," the pilot said in a well-modulated voice, "will you please open the largest blade and stick into Gourie and me. We want to see if we're still alive."

Carringer laughed and slapped a broad thigh.

"I knew it," the man called Gourie said with a doleful mug, "He's an American. Outside of the R.A.F. flyers, only Americans would ever try the Yengah Nullah."

He spoke with a distinct Highland burr.

"But wait a minute," said Crash. "How about those birds in the Heinkels? Who were they, anyhow?"

"That's what we'd like to know," Gourie said as he started to climb down.

"Don't be an" idiot, Gourie," the pilot said. "You know they were some of old Achmed Khan's blighters. They've gone in for planes now."

"You tell that to old Frosty Winters and see what he says," Gourie argued. "He'd believe in flying elephants before he'd admit there are flying tribesmen."

"Yeah. But he won't have to chase them. He'll sit back there at Lohat blending tobacco."

"Just the proper amount of perique and a dash of Turkish for the binding of the aromas'," Gourie pantomimed with his fat fingers, and Crash gathered from that what Frosty Winters was like.

"What job does this tobacco expert hold down?" he laughed.

"Winters?" said the pilot chap climbing down, "Frosty Winters? You're on the North "West Frontier and you haven't heard of Frosty Winters?"

"Sorry."

"Well, he's the C.O. of No. 609." the Scot explained, "And he's as crafty an old devil as ever came out of what he calls the Great War."

"Very interesting," grinned Crash, "but what are you going to do now? And can your ship be fixed?"

"How do we know? We haven't had time to look it over, what with the Heinkels, the Afridis, and that flying broadsword of yours. What brand of vehicle is that, anyway?" the pilot asked."

"A Hale Hellion. Made in the good old U.S.A. I'm demonstrating 'em before the crowned and uncrowned heads of Asia. Just sold a few hundred to Chiang Kai-shek in China. And my name's Carringer."

"Carringer?" queried Gourie in amazement. "You mean you're the chap who stirred up that mess along the Yangtze the other week? 'Sfunny, too for his Lordship, here, is likewise named Carringer. That is, when he's not in court—in which case he calls himself Smith."

"Oh, shut up, Gourie!" the English pilot growled.

"Yes, Mr. American," went on the Scot. "I want you to meet Clarence Napier Carringer—or, as he's known here, Lord Daredale of Ashbourne."

"Good gosh!" erupted Crash, lighting a cigarette and passing the pack. "So you're a Carringer too!"

FOR fully a minute, each stared at the other. And gradually the realization that here was a family bond drew their features into two masks of astonishment.

"Your father was one of the Carringers?" gasped the amazed Crash.

"And your pater was—Meridith Lovelace Carringer who went to America?" the Englishman managed to splutter.

Crash wagged his head. "Bight! Meridith Lovelace Carringer II was my father. And I am—or rather was—Meridith Lovelace Carringer III."

"Glory be to the Tribe O' Haggis!" cooed Gourie.

"What do you mean 'was' Meridith Lovelace Carringer?" demanded the puzzled Englishman.

"'Was' is right—for I changed my handle to Crash Carringer when the old man 'went west' in France back in '15."

"You changed it?" whispered Flying Officer Lord Daredale, unbelieving.

"Sure! You didn't think I'd go around sporting a moniker like that do you?"

"But you are a Carringer, nevertheless. Why, you must be—yes, you must be my cousin!"

"I'm afraid so," admitted Crash, "but never mind, I'll clear out and save you any embarrassment. I'm on my way to Iraq now. You can forget you ever met me."

The tall blond Englishman tried to find words. "I—I don't blame you, of course, when you get right down to it. You're different—an American, and all that sort of thing. But you really must come and meet old Frosty. I want you to tell him about about the Heinkels. He wouldn't believe me."

"Old Frosty," explained Gourie, "is staging a one-man war on the House of Carringer. But he's forgotten that Nappy's name is Carringer, Just thinks of him as Lord Daredale,"

"Nappy?" gagged Crash.

"Clarence Napier," explained Gourie blandly. "We can't call him His Lordship. He'd get quite squiffy about that, so we call him Nappy."

The Englishman gave Crash one of those appealing glances that mean more than a thousand words of explanation.

"You see," he said, trying to ignore the Scot observer, "old Frosty thinks because—well he thinks because I'm a Lord, I'm a dud. He doesn't believe hardly a word I say, and he keeps the needle in all the time. He wouldn't believe it if I went back and told him we'd been chased through the Nullah by three Heinkels. He'd swear we'd both got blotto before we started back."

"Won't he believe Gourie, here?"

"I doubt it. He argues that he can't understand a word Gourie says. Gourie's Scotch, you see."

"An' he doesn't ken the truest tongue o' Britain," grinned Gourie, patting the brogue on thicker for the effect.

"Okay! Let's go to work on Frosty Winters, The House of Carringer won't put up with that sort of thing," snorted Crash. "Let's get your boiler perking."

They made a hurried inspection of the Demon and soon discovered that the trouble had been caused by a frayed high tension cable which had been clipped by a bullet. They quickly repaired it with some surgical tape taken from the plane's first-aid kit, and in five minutes they had the Rolls-Royce Kestrel ticking over again.

"You get off first," said Crash, "and I'll follow you."

"But you will come back to Lohat and see Frosty, won't you?" the English Carringer pleaded.

"Sure. I do want to see that bird. He might let me have some good tobacco."

The flight back to the R.A.F. aero-drome was uneventful. The two planes landed together, Crash running the Hellion up to the line, waving to Gourie, and climbing out. British mechanics, dressed in tropical kit, stared at the strange fighter.

"Ill have them take care of your plane," the English pilot said. "Come on. Let's tackle Frosty in his igloo."

Squadron Leader F. S. F. Winters stood in the doorway of his cottage, a gigantic curved briar pipe gritted between his massive teeth, A typical British overseas officer, he sported a gigantic red face, blue eyes, and massive legs that bulged beneath his tropical shorts. His pith helmet was cocked over, one eye.

For a second he blinked at Crash. Then emitting a huge cloud of blue smoke, he turned his attention to the pilot and Gourie.

"Where the confounded 'ell 'ave you been?" demanded Frosty Winters. "And who's this man?"

"My name's Carringer—Crash Carringer," the American spoke up, "Just blew in on my way through to Iraq. Any objections?"

"Objections? Objections?" blarsted Winters, almost losing his pipe. "You can't blat all over the Frontier just as you like, you know. This is British territory, and you're s'posed to have permission before—"

"Let me report, Sir," broke in the Englishman. "We were attacked in the Yengah Nullah and were assisted through to safety by Mr. Carringer, here. He's flying a new American fighter—a Hale Hellion."

This statement left Frosty gasping. He had to remove the briar to maintain his control.

"What the devil are you talking about, Daredale?" he snapped. "Hale Hellions! Never heard of 'em! And you say you were attacked?"

"Ay, Sir," broke in Gourie, putting on his brogue again. "We weer attacked by three Heinkels when we weer two, perhaps three, miles in. An' yon gentlemen promptly and wie dispatch shot twa o' 'em doon."

"Stop that blarsted dialect, Gourie. I can't understand a word of it. What's it all about, Daredale?"

"Just as Gourie said. Three Heinkels attacked us in the Nullah, and Carringer blocked them off, shooting two down. He also drove off a lot of

Afridis who tried to get us when we were down outside the Nullah*. Shot the lot up and helped us get back."

Frosty Winters gurgled, then motioned them within. Once inside. Crash immediately reached for a tobacco box that

had been made out of an elephant's hoof. He took off the cover, sniffed the aroma, and half closed his eyes.

"Ah!" he said quietly, "thank the Lord for a man who knows tobacco. Turkish, Sumatran, perique, Virginia, and Latakia! What's chances for a pipe, Frosty?"

At that, Squadron Leader Winters came as near apoplexy as he ever will. But Carringer's admiration for his blend served to carry him over the crisis. He sat down with a beefy thud, weakly waved one hand toward the box, and watched Crash fill a horny pipe.

"Have you ever tried Irish roll, panned shag, and perique, Frosty?" asked Crash, putting a match to his pipe. "Now there's a real blend that'll make you forget all the rest. I remember when I was in Hudson Bay two years ago—"

"Wait a minute," said Winters. "Let me put that down. And you, Daredale, buzz off and make out your report. I'll see if I can make sense out of it later. I want to talk to this man. See you later."

The Englishman and Gourie saluted and backed out, trying to suppress broad grins.

"Did I hear Daredale say your name was Carringer?" Winters asked after the officers had left.

"That's right—Crash Carringer."

"Seems I've heard that name somewhere before."

"Well, I've just come through from China where I got myself into something of a show over the Yangtze," said

Crash, tactfully steering him away from the family connection, between himself and Daredale.

"Oh yes! I read about that in the
Rangoon Express. Bit of a boy, you are,
Carringer!"

"Just a series of events that fitted in with a little scheme of mine to sell Hale

Hellions," grinned Crash. "And you know, the R.A.F. ought to try a squadron or two of these boilers."

Winter waved a depreciating hand, then suddenly recalled what Daredale has said about the Nullah scrap.

"That's right," said Crash. "And you ought to do something about this bird Achmed Khan."

"Achmed Khan? What's he got to do with Heinkels?"

"Well, that's who Lord Daredale said it was. He seemed certain about it."

"Daredale, bosh! That damn fool is always trumping up stories like that,"

"Well, he was in a, beaut of a jam today. No fooling about that!" And

Crash told the whole story in detail.

"Hmm!" breathed Winters when he was through. "I suppose I have to believe it. And that means there'll be the devil to pay. Now let me see what the dispatch case has to offer."

And while Carringer sucked on his pipe, Winters thumbed through the papers in the leather mail pouch. Finally, he selected one letter, opened it, studied the contents for some time, then thumped the top of his desk.

By Gad! There might be something to it," Winters growled, reaching for the tobacco box. "Irish roll, panned shag, and perique, did you say?"

"You mean, about those Heinkels?"

"Ah, that's it," said Squadron Commander. "Ali Chong, our man on the other side, says that Achmed Khan has been seen with some aircraft men, and a number of Heinkels have been observed flying near Sabzewah, over in western Afghanistan."

"There you are! You see Daredale was right this time," smiled Crash, "And now, what are you going to do?"

"Well, I hardly know. We can't do much unless they—"

BUT FROSTY WINTERS never finished that sentence. From some where off to the west came the telltale roar of aircraft engines. Crash pulled his pipe out of his mouth, listened.

"They're not Kestrels," he said, jumping up.

"Rather. Sound like hydraulic rammers. Must see about it."

Together they rushed to the window —and saw three whale-headed Heinkels nosing down toward the Lohat field.

"They're coming here!" Winters burst out in a husky voice.

"Yeah—and you'd better duck"

No sooner had Carringer said that, when two yellow missiles were seen to spin out from below the wings of the lead German biplane.

B R R - 0 - 0 - 0 M! BR-R-R-ONG! CR-RASH!

Gigantic geysers of brown earth shot up from the aerodrome—and one of those geysers carried a mangled Demon to its crest. The concussion shattered every window in Winters' cottage and scattered glass all over the floor.

Crash did a swan dive across the room and finished up under the big packing-case desk. But Winters stood there fascinated, staring out of the shattered windows.

SRR-0-0-OM! BO-O-OM! KER-UMP!

Three more crashes resounded through the flimsy building, and Winters was flung upon his broad back by the force of an uncomfortably-close detonation.

More explosions sounded. Then the three Heinkels swept over the cottage with an ear-splitting roar. Crash huddled under the desk waiting for what he figured would be his finish.

But just then a Lewis gun opened from somewhere on the field and fanned a wild blast of fire across the roofs of the buildings that drove the Heinkels off. There followed three more loud explosions. But these were a few hundred yards away, indicating that the raiders were getting rid of their bombs to make their get-a-way.

Winters crawled across the floor, still gripping his pipe in his mouth, and peered over the sill of the window.

"Blarsted fool!" he bawled. "Look, Carringer. Look at that fool, Daredale —shooting from the cockpit of that Demon!"

"Why not?" said Carringer. "He kept 'em off, didn't he? That guy's got plenty of moxie—even though he is a Lord."

"Got no sense, you mean. But good heavens—look now!"

Crash made his way through the wreckage, peered out.

"See!" cried Winters. "These fools are going to take off after them. Against orders, too—or at least without orders."

"Bright lads," said Carringer. "Got the right idea. And I think I'll go along. Might be some fun in the Yengah—if they go that way."

Winters, puffing like a grampus, stared out as Daredale and Gourie started to warm up their Demon. "But but without orders!" he kept saying over and over again. "Without orders!"

Crash now dashed out of the door.

He noted that men were running in all directions. As for the field, it was so badly cut up that there was hardly room for a take-off.

"Wait a minute!" yelled Carringer as the Demon began to move. But Daredale, not hearing him, thudded off crosswind between two piles of dirt.

"Okay! I'll catch you—somewhere!" concluded Crash. Then he climbed in the Hellion and revved up his Allison.

Frosty came chugging up under forced draft, his pipe blowing off clouds of smoke, "Head them off and send them back!" he bellowed. "I'll have them both cashiered. Send them back!"

"Shut up and get a shovel," blarneyed Crash. "Fill those damned holes in before we get back,"

He kicked the starter, opened up gradually, then snapped his cowling back. Winters stormed about the nose of the ship making faces and blowing smoke. But without heeding him, Crash fanned his tail around and boomed away in pursuit of the Demon.

After all, blood was thicker than tobacco blends.

UNDER Crash's skilled hand, the Hellion slammed into the sky like a rocket. Then leveling her off, the Yank hammered across the desert toward the foothills, keeping the Demon well in sight. The Heinkels were farther north, racing like mad to get to the Yengah before they could be intercepted by the Demon.

"There's a chance they'll make it, too," Crash muttered, studying the situation and opening the Allison wider. "But if

we can beat them to the Nullah, we'll nail them as sure as shootin'."

The race was on now in earnest, the three Heinkels converging toward the great Vee-shaped gash in the hills and the lone Demon, still a mile or so ahead of Crash, gamely trying to beat them to it.

Thrilling to the mad contest, Crash laughed aloud. "Clarence Napier Carringer! His Lordship going after three Heinkels in a Demon. I guess there's something in a name after all—provided you can live it down"

The Hellion was gaining fast, and Crash Carringer now leaned over his stick and peered along his air-cannon sights. The Heinkels were just going to make it, he figured; so he climbed higher above the line of the Demon and took several long-range pot shots at the German-made single-seaters.

The Heinkels now broke up their tight formation and swung into single file. Daredale, following Carringer's example, opened fire, too. Then the third Heinkel staggered and swished around as the first two shot into the Nullah. Crash then nosed over, darted under the tail of the Demon, and poured a wicked four-ply burst into the tardy Heinkel.

And that blow proved too much for the biplane raider. It broke up, vomited smoke, threw away its wing's, and plummeted into a low gully with a tremendous crash.

"One down—two to go," observed Crash, pulling out and swinging over hard to get through the gap of the Yengah gorge.

The Demon was well after the two remaining Heinkels now. And seeing Daredale's tracers skipping after the fleeing single-seaters, Crash opened his Allison hard and roared over the top of the British two-seater, his eye dead on the two ships ahead. Then he ripped open every gun he had and sent a hurricane of lead and steel up the Nullah. The Heinkel swayed back and forth, tried to evade the fire as much as the confining' gorge would allow.

"I'll get you babies before you cut through into the narrower portions, of this overgrown ravine," Crash snarled, giving them another burst.

The mad chase led on through the Nullah for another mad mile. Finally, however, Carringer's efforts were rewarded. The trailing Heinkel took a long burst somewhere near its right wing tip and swung hard. Crash saw the pilot

raise his hands frantically. Then the ship swerved, nosed up—and bashed itself into the dull gray wall! There was a flash of flame and a thud ' that echoed all along the Nullah. And only some twisting fluttering wreckage remained of what had a moment before been a plane.

Crash watched it fascinated, then slammed over it as it rolled down the side of the wall and wound up in the swirling rapids below to be washed along through a rock infested torrent of water.

When Crash looked up, the other Heinkel was already out of sight around the next bend.

Crash decided to make his turn and play safe. As he came around, narrowly clearing the sheer walls of the Nullah, he glanced about to spot the Demon to make certain he would clear it. But the Demon was now nowhere to be seen!

With a low cry, Carringer swerved in his seat and stared back, believing the Demon had passed under him. But though he also watched carefully in his retrospect mirror, no sign could he see of the British two-seater. Whipping around again in a stiff turn, he tore back down the Nullah as far as he dared, peering down on both sides for some sight of the silver Hawker. But still no sight of the Demon!

"What is this?" he growled, "Where did they go to?"

Then he suddenly caught the glint of a silver wing in the light of the noonday sun. The Demon was down—a wreck on a narrow ledge of rock half way up the side of the Nullah.

Crash gasped. "How the devil did Daredale get it onto that ledge?" he asked himself.

He flew past, stared down. Yes, two figures were waving at him and he could see that they had come through unharmed. Then he made a quick survey of the surroundings, attempting to figure how they could get out. The ledge was fully 1,500 feet above the raging torrent of the gorge, and above, for another 2,000 feet, rose sheer wall of gray rock. It was fully three, perhaps four, miles in from the entrance to the Nullah.

Somewhat below the stranded flyers huddled a few Afridi huts. A whitish wall of stone nearby marked the natives' aqueduct, and wisps of smoke indicated their cooking fires.

Crash's trigger mind took in the situation at a glance. Daredale and Gourie were trapped, there was no arguing on

that score. The Afridis would soon be trying to get up the rock wall to them, and there was no way of escape above.

As he turned again, he could see the Englishmen working like mad to build up a barricade of rocks around the machine.

"Smart idea, that," agreed Carringer. "Maybe they can hold out there for a time—if I can get help back for them."

Then he swung around for the last time, fired a white Very light to let them know he understood the situation, and raced down the Nullah again. As he roared away, Gourie waved a brace of Lewis guns he had dismantled from his cockpit. The Scot was going to fight it out to the finish.

"What a fix!" growled Carringer, reflecting on the merciless customs of the tribesmen of the North West Frontier. "They won't last long if many of those blood-thirsty hillbillies get up to that ledge."

He gave the throttle a few more notches as the Nullah widened, and added: "But us Carringers have got to stick together!"

* * *

FROSTY WINTERS was stunned when he heard the news. He sat in his big chair tapping his massive row of front teeth with his pipe stem.

"They are swine, you know, Carringer. They'll do anything."

"Who—Daredale and Gourie?"

"No, I mean the Afridis. And if Achmed Khan has his finger in the pie anywhere, it'll be that much worse."

"Can't you fly some foot troops up here from Karachi?"

"No. You see they're all down at Delhi for some sort of a Viceroy's affair. They'll be away several days."

"Gripes!" exploded Crash. "But say, can't you arm your mechanics, take a party into the hills, and try to set them out?"

"Why, man! You don't know these Afridi devils. Our mechanics are drilled, yes. But we're more interested in their technical training. I wouldn't dare try them against the Afridis. It takes trained hill troops to take care of the tribesmen."

"But "we can't sit here and do nothing," Carringer argued, pleadingly,

"Suppose you tell us what we can do," replied the discouraged commander. "After all, they got themselves into this mess. They took off without orders. I can't take all the responsibility for this, you know."

"Of course not. No one is blaming you. But we've got to do something. We just can't let them die out there!"

Winters sat meditating for some seconds. Then he turned to Crash and asked; "How much of that rolled Irish do you use in that mixture?"

"Look here," stormed the American. "Forget this tobacco gag and let's see what we can do about getting those guys out."

Before the Squadron Leader could answer, a low booming roar came out of the west. Again, for the second time within an hour, both Carringer and Winters charged toward the window.

"Another Heinkel!" rasped Carringer. "Coming in low this time."

"No bombs, though."

"You're right. Wonder what the idea is?"

They huddled against the window, which still offered only a bare frame-work boasting no glass, and watched the German single-seater curl over the aerodrome, then bank and roar away over the desert,

"He dropped something—a message streamer," husked Crash.

"The swine! Telling us what they're going to do, I suppose."

A perspiring Aircraftsman retrieved the streamered missive and brought it to Winters with a salute.

The commander quickly extricated a folded paper from the streamer, spread it out, and studied it, "Achmed Khan!" he spat. "The cheek of the devil!" Then he gave the paper to Crash, "who read:

Compliments of Achmed Khan to Squadron Leader Winters. We are about to capture two of your officers. However, we will consider a fair exchange. Your men will be returned safely — if all the planes of No. 609 Squadron are

flown to the open area, at the eastern end of the Yengah Nullah within an hour and turned over to my flyers. This demand also includes the strange craft now using your aerodrome which attacked my flyers earlier today. I can allow you only one hour in which to fulfill this agreement.

—Achmed Khan.

"Good Lord!" cried Crash. "He doesn't want anything, does he!"

"I'll see him in hell first!" stormed Winters. "Who does that greasy native think he is?"

"But what about Daredale and Gourie? You can't leave them to be tortured to death."

"You can't trust Achmed Khan, anyway."

"Perhaps not. But let's fool him. I've got a hunch—a Hellion-hunch you might call it."

"What do you mean?"

"Let's deliver the planes—with a scheme behind it all."

"You're mad. I'd be drummed out of the R.A.F."

"You're not sitting so pretty as it is."

"But you can't expect me—an Englishman—to kow-tow to that swine. I can't turn British Government property over to that devil!"

"No—but you can kid him into thinking that you are. I tell you, I've got an idea!"

"Well, out with it!"

BUT before Crash could answer, a Radio man came up with a flimsy in his hands.

"It's from Mr. Daredale and Mr. Gourie, Sir," he said, presenting the folded slip. "They must have managed to get an aerial strung somehow and are working their radio set on the battery."

"Good!" barked Frosty Winters. And he unfolded the sheet and read:

Have put up barricade of rocks. Trying to hold out. Natives seen climbing rock wall few hundred yards below us.

Believe they are trying to get above us. We are on Jhang Ledge. Will hold out as long as possible. Position perilous.

—Daredale, and Gourie

Crash glanced at the message. "Well," he said, "we still have an hour."

"You mean, you really think I should turn my planes over to Achmed Khan?" said Winters incredulously.

"Listen," came back Crash. "Here's my idea." And he outlined a daring plan to outwit Achmed Khan.

"But that would be madness!" raged Frosty Winters, after he had heard Crash out. "Surer than blazes that sounds like a million to one chance."

"Nevertheless, it's worth trying," came back Crash. "Besides, what have you to worry about? I'm the guy who's got to do the worrying,"

"If you try to carry this thing through, you'll never do any more worrying," said Winters with a mournful mug.

"Leave that to me. You just get your ships over there and make sure your men know their lines and cues. They can parley the Afridi lingo, can't they?"

"They wouldn't be out here if they couldn't."

"Okay! I'm taking off now. And remember, the planes are to be delivered to the entrance of Yengah Nullah, lined up facing the opening, just as though you were doing some sort of an inspection show. When you get there, you and your pilots get out. But leave the brakes on and the engines ticking over. The rest we have already arranged for. All clear?"

"As clear as a Bermondsey fog," mooned Winters. "But carry on! All Americans are mad anyhow," he continued. "And—"

"—And guys named Carringer are doubly goofy," broke in Crash with a grin.

"Carringer Carringer," muttered the commander. "Seems I've heard that name before—before you showed up here, I mean, and before I read about you in that Rangoon gazette."

"When I come back, I'll give yeu the low-down on all that," Crash said, climbing up into the Hellion.

Frosty Winters waved his big ham-like hand as Carringer's engine opened up with a wholesome bellow. Then he walked over to where his officers were lined up beside their Demons.

"Irish roll, panned shag, and perique," he muttered to himself. "I must remember that."

A minute later, Carringer, his brain clicking like a knitting machine, was pounding the Hellion toward the south, climbing like a fool. He closed his hatch and huddled down for warmth as he planned his mad escapade. He knew he had to work fast, and he realized that every move must be timed perfectly if his scheme was to succeed.

At Manzai, forty miles south of Lohat, he swung west through the great gorge cut through the mountains by the Gomal River. Then giving the Allison all she had, he thundered on over to the Afghanistan side and roared north again to find the western end of the Yengah Nullah.

The Hellion was now climbing hard again, and Carringer checked with his watch which had been synchronized with that on the broad brown wrist of Frosty Winters. He smiled as he pictured the scene at the wide fan-shaped entrance of Yengah Nullah on the North West Frontier side. There would be twelve gleaming Hawker Demons lined up in a semi-circle facing the great gorge. The rear guns would be hanging limp in their new Frazier-Nash mountings, and the pilots would be lined up, like men on parade, forty paces to the rear.

The Kestrel engines would be ticking over, throwing strange glints of silver off their metal tips as they stood there awaiting their new native owners. Crash shuddered at the thought that his scheme might not work—shuddered even more when he thought of the fate of the stranded flyers.

He could only hope he had timed it right.

"Build fires on their bellies, will they?" he snorted. "Crafty as Bedouins, cruel as headhunters, agile as the chamois, and as creepy as adders!"

"Well, here goes!" he said. "Neck or nothing for the house of Carringer!" And with a wild wing-over the Hellion screamed down for the great gorge below that held the fate of Flying Officers Daredale and Gourie.

Crash sang as he leveled out some 5,000 feet below; "We don't know where we're going—but we're on our way!"

At the western terminus, the Nullah was even more wicked than it was at the North West Frontier end. Crash had to fly like a maniac to make it. In and out, skimming through with his wing-tips almost vertical at times, he roared through the giant passages.

FIVE MILES AHEAD, at the eastern opening to the gargantuan ravine, twelve Tirah tribesmen in dirty white jodhpurs, stained scarlet tunics, and tightly wound Chora turbans, came charging out of a narrow defile on the left of the gorge.

As they approached, Squadron Leader Frosty Winters bit his mustache as he stood there at attention before his helpless airmen. His great knees trembled as he watched the tribesmen pilots dismount and dash one by one to the machines. And he closed his eyes and drew in a great breath as they climbed one by one into the forward cockpits and fumbled with the controls,

"If it will only work!" prayed Frosty Winters,

Above, three Heinkel single-seat fighters circled, lazily waiting.

Winters watched. But then, like automatic men, each Tirah pilot jerked suddenly, twisted his head slightly, then brought his arms above the cockpit coaming and let them rest there.

The twelve, steel-bladed props of the Demons continued to tick over and throw off the glints of silver.

Behind Frosty Winters, twelve British officers in shorts, open-throated shirts, and pith helmets, remained at attention like Guardsmen at a trooping of the colors.

"It's working," husked Winters out of the corner of his mouth. "But I still don't believe it!"

Not a Demon moved, and the three native pilots in the Heinkels above now stared down, unable to comprehend the unbelievable scene below.

CARRINGER could only visualize all that. It was he who had planned the amazing tableau. There were still many things to do, however, and the seconds were clicking off fast.

And now, Jhang Ledge was only just around the next bend. He leaned forward as he screwed through the narrow defile and made a new adjustment on the variable-pitch prop. Then he straightened out and wound down the trailing edge flaps. The Hellion seemed to tremble as she slowed down after a slight withdrawal of the throttle.

Then the ledge loomed up ahead, and Crash could see' the downed Demon standing at a wild angle at the far end, banked around with a barricade of rocks.

"How that Limey was able to set it down there, I don't know," he rasped.

"But if one Carringer can do it, surely another can , . . . can take a try at it." Thereupon he lowered his wheels.

The Hellion now fluttered, and Crash eased her over so that her star-board wing-tip was almost scraping the wall. Gusty currents bounced off the wall and made the stalling Hellion dance madly. And as Crash eased her out of it with his left pedal, he felt like closing his eyes and awaiting the crash.

Before he realized what was going on, the narrow edge of the ledge was under his landing gear. Quickly, his heels fumbled for the brakes and he snatched the throttle back. It now seemed as though the Hellion were dangling on the end of a string.

Then she hit, bounced a few feet into the air, then hit again! Crash jabbed at his rudder and she swerved toward the edge of the ledge. Another kick and she shot back in again, this time threatening to carve great chunks out' of the wall with her prop.

Watching from behind their barricade, the two amazed British airmen were sure Crash was doomed to plummet down the gorge on the next swerve. And one wheel of the Hellion almost did drop over the edge on the next swing. But the Yank's skilful control work saved her. And now she rumbled up to the barricade—with but a couple of yards to spare.

"Come on!" screamed Crash. "Which one of you will it be? I can just take one of you."

From across the Nullah there now came a spattering of Afridi gunfire. But the Britishers disregarded it. Both vaulted the stone barricade, ran over to the Hale fighter, grasped its tail, and swung it around for the getaway.

Then Daredale, his face chalk white and murky in spots from cordite and dust, spoke up; "Go on Gourie, you're the man!"

"No! You go!" argued the little Scot.

But Lord Daredale drew his Webley, stuck it into Gourie's stomach. "Climb up there," he ordered, "and get the hell out of here. I'm in charge!"

Crash smiled. He liked this Limey Carringer.

Resignedly, Gourie stuck out his hand, gripped that of Daredale. ""Ye knaw," he said, "fra the furrst time in me life Ah regret the history of Robert Bruce!"

"Than move a bit faster," came his superior's reply. "I have a date with an Afridi sniper across this confounded park."

Gourie climbed up on the curved-top of the Hellion's nacelle and straddled it, taking a grip on the open edge of Crash's cockpit.

"Ride 'em, cowboy!" yelled Crash.

The Allison snorted into power again. Then with a wave of his mitt. Crash gave her the gun with full flaps down. The winged fighter slammed off the edge of the ledge, took a stomach-grip-ping drop, seemed to hang a fraction of a second in mid-air, then finally took hold.

Breathing a sigh of relief. Crash cart-wheeled her around and thundered down the Nullah. From the ledge above, Daredale joyously poured a deadly torrent of Lewis lead into the several Afridi turbans that popped up from the rocks on the other side.

Carringer glanced behind him once, saw that Gourie was reasonably safe, then devoted his attention to the race down the gorge. At intervals, low pops of Afridi rifles—guns pilfered from British patrols—sent British Kynoch .303 ammunition at them. But Carringer held true to his course, and in a few minutes the Hellion came thundering out of the pass dead over the amazing line-up of Demons.

Without much ado, Crash circled down, dropped his flaps, and landed on the sandy earth near the grouped ships from No. 609.

"What the devil is all this?" asked the perplexed Gourie as he slid off the nacelle.

"Don't ask questions," grinned Crash.

"Go over there and line up with the rest. Don't break the spell,"

Without another word, the disheveled Gourie ran up to the line of British flying officers, clicked his heels, saluted, and stood to attention without understanding the drama in which he was taking part. Ahead stood the twelve gleaming Demons, their silver props still ticking' over. In the cockpits sat twelve thoroughly frightened Tirah pilots, their arms still hunched up on the cockpit combings.

THE three cruising Heinkels now came down out of the sky like winged projectiles, and their noses were set on the racing Hellion that was taking off again. But Carringer switch-backed across the open plain, rolled at a dangerous height, and shot hell-for-leather back into the Nullah.

Once more the mad race for life. led through the grim defiles of the Yengah gorge. Crash zoomed, jerked, swayed, and skidded back and forth between the narrow walls and sent short, spasmodic bursts of gunfire into the Afridi snipers who 'attempted to pick him off from the ledges.

After him thundered the three Heinkels, spewing lead that zinged and pinged on the jagged walls about him. Their fire caused spurts of dust and rock that added to the medley of madness.

Crash glanced back at his pursuers, knew that he had to take a chance. The Heinkels were gaining. Their fire was too close for comfort.

With a quick decision, Crash nosed down slightly, then suddenly realized he was opposite the Jhang Ledge. With a low groan, he brought the stick back and sighted along the nose gun. The Hellion whipped up, fought to get her head, and whanged over in a tight loop.

He came out dead on a wavering Heinkel and instinctively pressed the trips of his air-cannon. There came three deep-throated coughs — and the Heinkel folded in the middle like a pathetic paper kite with a broken backbone.

Quickly, Crash loosed a second burst. And a clatter echoed off the side walls as the following raider plane jerked, slithered sidewise, and then bashed itself with a terrible roar into the wall opposite.

Crash drew out carefully and whipped up into an easy zoom. The third Heinkel had not yet come up, so he wheeled around to approach the ledge again.

Once more the Same unseen claws of air currents tried to betray him as he dropped down for the tortuous landing. But his nerves were as steady as steel now. Slowly, ever so slowly, the Hellion eased in, dabbed her wheels at the ledge and bounced.

Crash had to fishtail for fair now, and as he fought to hold her for the last few yards, he saw Daredale run out from the barricade with a Lewis gun under one arm. Crash also saw a blue plume of smoke crawling up from the cockpit of the wrecked Demon, and he knew the Britisher had fired her.

As the Hellion bounced on, Daredale hurled himself at the leading edge and managed to check her. This move did the trick, for the Hellion finally stopped. Her nose was not three feet from the wall.

Crash leaped out and assisted Daredale in swinging her around. With Afridi slugs pinging and chipping chunks of stone off the barricade, it was ticklish work.

"Let's go!" screamed Crash.

The Englishman grinned. Then climbing up, still hanging on to his gun, he straddled the nacelle and fired at the remaining Heinkel as it roared down at them.

Crash swore, then plunged the Hellion over the ledge. Daredale, gasping for breath, gripped the cowling with one hand, hung on for dear life as the Hellion slithered down into space with a sickening dip.

Crash caught her as quickly as he could. And after he brought her around he was amazed to hear Daredale firing short bursts at the Afridi heads that bobbed from the rock-strewn ledges on each side.

The Englishman had managed this striking move by bracing the gun under the arm he was holding on with and firing from the pistol grip with the other hand.

The race out with the lone Heinkel following was a snorter. Again Crash had to hammer the Hellion back and forth to get clear. Finally, both planes swept out of the Nullah together, Daredale gamely trying to fire backward from a twisted position on top of the nacelle.

When Frosty Winters saw that, he almost swallowed the largest briar in his very complete collection.

"Take it easy, and just hang on," Crash was yelling to Daredale, "I'll take care of that Heinkel devil when we get in the clear." Then he quickly looked down and enjoyed a sigh of relief on seeing that the twelve Demons still stood in that perfect semi-circle.

The million-to-one gamble was won —unless that last Heinkel could break the spell.

ONCE they cleared, Carringer swung upon the plane that was barring their way to victory. And as he did so, the twelve British pilots below stood at an even stiffer position of attention, their heads back and chins well up. They'd never seen anything quite like this before.

The Heinkel swerved as the Hellion made a two-gun pass at it. Then it came around, tilted up on one wing, and slammed broadside at the sleek American pusher. But that maneuver was the raider's undoing—for Daredale now-hugged the still-warm gun close to him, gripped the cowling tightly, and pressed the trigger.

Pran-n-n-n-n-n-ng!

A full-throated burst caught the unsuspecting Heinkel full in the nose. It's steel prop splintered into smithereens and she zoomed hard like a wounded tern. Over she came with a low creak, then went down full tilt smash into the dust below—not twenty feet from where Frosty Winters was standing.

"Quite a sweet job, considering everything," gleamed Crash, watching the British officers below quietly break ranks and walk toward the Demons.

He saw them step to the cockpits and motion the Tirah pilots out at gun point.

"Those British observers hidden, in the back seats must be quite weary of those cramped positions by now," observed Crash as he brought the Hellion in.

"But what's this all about?" demanded the puzzled and somewhat breathless Daredale.

"Just a simple matter of obeying an order. Old Achmed Khan agreed to let you two birds go if Winters would turn all his Demons over to him," explained Crash over his shoulder.

"But I don't understand. Why ... Why, if they took them, why didn't they fly 'em away?"

"A mere matter of precaution," came Crash's reply. "We hid observers in each back seat behind the canvas spare-parts curtain, and when the hill men clambered in, believing they were aboard alone, they got the shock of their lives when they felt Webley pistols rammed in their backs. Using their own tribal lingo, the British observers ordered them to sit tight and keep their arms outside the cockpit until—"

"I get it," broke in Daredale. "Until you came and lugged us off the ledge. And boy, what a Carringer you are!"

"You're a darned good example of one yourself—riding a Hellion bare-back and picking off Heinkels with a machine gun," beamed Crash.

Then Frosty Winters came up puffing: "Confoundedly fine work. Carringer! We've got the lot. And that was old Achmed Khan you just shot down!"

"You can't beat us Carringers," laughed Crash, climbing down,

"What do you mean?" queried the Squadron leader,

"Well, I want you to meet Clarence Napier Carringer—Lord Daredale to the trade. He's my Limey cousin," said Crash gravely.

Frosty Winters gasped and swallowed hard. "You mean to say that you're related to this chap?" he demanded of Daredale.

"First cousins to a whisker," grinned Daredale.

"Good Lord! No wonder you're so balmy. And to think that I've got to put up with this sort of thing for your term of service."

"I'll take him if you don't want him," quipped Crash.

"Good Lord, no! Can't let Daredale go! Got to get him a ribbon for this, too!"

"But what about this Carringer?" demanded Daredale, indicating Crash.

"Him? Can't do much for him, except, well, except that I could suggest to the Air Ministry that they look into the matter of ordering a few dozen of these silly-looking pushers of his. They seem to do the work,"

"Can I rely on that?" asked Crash.

"Most certainly you can—on one condition."

"What's that?"

"Well, when you get to London—and I think you had better buzz over there right away—you've got to send me a few of that that"

"— Irish roll, panned shag and perique!" laughed Crash. "Sure! I'll send you a barrel."

"Fine! And I'll move one of the chairs out of my office to make room for it."

"And you'd better keep your word on that, Carringer," warned Daredale.

"Yeah! And he'd better keep his—or I'll blow the story of how he tried to give a squadron of Demons away!"