

Bill Barnes Takes a Holiday

**A
Complete
Air Novel**

By
George
L.
Eaton



air trails 1

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From across the bleak reaches of the Atlantic came an S.O.S.—In a crisis demanding the most of man and machine. Bill frustrates a ruthless plot

BILL BARNES slowly pushed back the chair in which he was sitting in the living-room of his bungalow on Barnes Field, Long Island, got to his feet and moved over to a window overlooking the myriad concrete and tarvia runways that crisscrossed the field. The transverse bands of yellow-and-black pigment painted across the runways, to aid in night or fog landings, gleamed in the glare of the morning sun.

He gazed across the field with eyes that were red and swollen. He did not even see the electrified wire fence that contained burglar alarms in the strategically placed guard posts, or the armed guards patrolling their beats. He didn't see anything because he was close to complete exhaustion.

He stared, almost stupidly, as one of his yellow-and-black-and-scarlet Snorters came plummeting down out of nowhere to fishtail in for a landing. He saw I. Kinter Hassfurther, better known as Shorty, slide over the side of the forward cockpit to the concrete.

That is, he saw him, but it didn't register. He was too tired even to think. Wearily, he turned back to his desk and the pile of papers on it. He had been going at top speed for months past—now he was working on nervous energy alone. He was nearing the breaking point. He had sapped his reserve vitality and his nerves were beginning to scream.

He started violently as a knock sounded on his door and Shorty Hassfurther, his chief of staff, pushed it open. Bill turned half around, grunted and swung back to his desk.

Shorty's hard-bitten, blue eyes were narrowed as he dropped into a chair and studied Bill's haggard face. He shook his head slowly from side to side.

"Just plain dumb," Shorty said quietly.

"Eh?" Bill snapped. "Who's dumb?"

"You are! I've always had the idea that you were a reasonably smart boy.

But I've changed my mind. No one but a half-wit beats his head against a stone wall because it feels so good when he stops."

"Listen," Bill said, "when I want your opinion and advice I'll ask for it. In the meantime, please get the hell out of here. I'm busy."

"Yeah," Shorty said. "And I'll be even busier when I'm not only doing that work you're doing, but spending half my time running out to some sanatorium to try and cheer you up."

"Don't worry about me," Bill growled. "I'll make out."

"Somebody's got to worry about you," Shorty said. "You don't seem to have enough sense to worry about yourself." His voice suddenly grew sharper. "Listen, Bill, we're all worrying about you. You've got to lay off ; and get a rest or you're going to pieces. .

"This bird who calls himself the Saver of Souls ran you ragged for months— while your regular work piled up. You're human like all the rest of us. One of these days you'll begin to see little men in pink pants and yellow jackets running around the ceiling. Then it will take you months to get well instead of the two or three weeks' rest you need now."

"I've got to get this stuff out of the way first," Bill said. But his voice didn't carry conviction. It was the voice of a man who knows that he can no longer think straight.

"You aren't in any shape to get anything out of the way," Shorty said, his tone soft and soothing now. "I got my lesson at that stuff during the War, Bill. I was only nineteen years old then and thought I was tireless—that nothing could break me. I was with the British and my C.O. tried to make me take a rest. But I was too smart. I wanted to keep on knocking down my German every day instead of taking time out to eat an apple. I finally went to pieces and a Heinie nearly shot my head off. He trimmed my buttons off properly, and I was in the hospital for three months. I didn't have enough sense to take a rest when I needed it most.

"The same thing will happen to you," Shorty went on. "Something really important will come along and you won't be in any shape to handle it. You'll get your ears pinned back and spend a few months wondering how it happened."

Bill threw a pencil down on his desk and looked at Shorty out of bloodshot eyes. For an instant he seemed to have more than a little trouble controlling himself. "I am tired," he admitted. "I'm so tired I can't seem to make any decisions. But who is going to take care of this stuff if I don't?"

"Now you're talking like a sane man," Shorty said. His round, Pennsylvania-Dutch face broke into an encouraging smile. "We can handle things while you take a holiday Bill.

None of this stuff is half as important as it seems to you. You'd realize that if you weren't so tired. It's just run of the mill stuff. A couple of surveys, requisitions and orders. You've lost your perspective as to what is important and what isn't."

"Perhaps you're right," Bill said. "I'm in a daze. If I could only get some sleep. But I can't eat or sleep. I----"

"Listen, fellah," Shorty said. "You're going to get some sleep. Red Gleason and Sandy and I decided to take the matter into our own hands. Bev Bates and Scotty MacCloskey are in on it, too."

Scotty has a half dozen grease monkeys and technicians going over the Lancer right now. He's tuning her up for your trip. Sandy is going with you."

"Trip?" Bill said.

"To England," Shorty said as though he was speaking about a ride uptown in the subway. "We all know you've been wanting to get over there to check up on some of their new ships for months. Well, now you're going and Sandy will hold down the rear cockpit in case you fall asleep on the way over."

"Ridiculous!" Bill exploded.

"No, it's very logical. And right now you're going to bed. Doc Humphries is coming over here in about ten minutes and give you something that will quiet you down and make you sleep. If the weather is right you and Sandy will hop anytime after sunup in the morning. You're going to have a holiday whether you like it or not. So you might as well get used to the idea. If we see you around here before three weeks are gone we'll throw you out on your nose."

"Now listen. Shorty," Bill began.

"Listen, hell! Get out of those clothes!"

The two triple-bladed, automatic-pitch props of the Lancer were ticking over slowly when Bill Barnes came out on the apron early the next morning. The rays of the rising sun played across the alloy steel and shining dural of the big ship and made it appear like a thing alive.

His bronzed face was lined and haggard, but his eyes lit up with pride as they flashed over the Lancer from the tip of her spinner to the trimming tabs on her rudder.

Gathered on the apron were the remaining members of his famous little squadron of flyers: Shorty Hassfurther, his chief of staff; the carrot-topped Eric ("The Red") Gleason; the brown-eyed Bostonian with the Harvard accent, Beverly Bates; and the last and youngest, the irrepressible Sandy Sanders, who drove them all halt mad with his thousand and one hobbies.

With them was that lugubrious old Scotsman, Scotty MacCloskey, who was Bill's head technician and had been a British ace before wounds and accidents-incapacitated him for flying. He was fluttering around the Lancer like a mother dressing her only child for its first party.

He inspected the 37mm. automatic engine cannon that was built integrally with the motor in the Vee of the cylinders and fired through the hollow prop shafts. It could pour explosive, incendiary or armor-piercing shells at the rate of three hundred shots a minute.

From troughs along each side of the engine peeped the noses of two .50-caliber guns. The guns were set on either side of the pilot's seat in the forward cockpit, within easy reach in case of jams. They were equipped with automatic ammunition counters and engine-driven synchronizing gear. A dull, burnished-metal, telescopic sight was directly before the pilot's eyes.

At the ends of the silver, all-metal cantilever wings gleamed navigation lights, and underneath the belly, protruding slightly, were the slots containing emergency landing flares.

The pilot's cockpit, just back of the rear-wing spar, contained a complete set of blind-flying instruments, including the Kreusi short-wave direction finder, along with all the other instruments to be seen in Bill's ships.

The rear cockpit was equipped with a complete set of duplicate controls and navigating instruments and a flexible .30-caliber Browning mounted on a track in the rear of the pit. A sliding inclosure of shatterproof glass covered both cockpits completely, with an arrangement that permitted the rear section to be telescoped forward out of the gunner's way when in action.

In the fuselage, immediately behind the rear cockpit, in a locker, was the usual Barnes emergency equipment including a small outboard motor, a .45-caliber Thompson submachine gun, one Springfield rifle with a telescopic sight,

and a repeating shotgun. There was also a mattock, a hatchet, a keg of water and emergency rations.

The radio installation was easily accessible between the cockpits, with duplicate controls on each instrument panel. The headsets were adaptable for use as intercockpit phones.

The whole world seemed to be alive with thunder as old Scotty gunned the twin Barnes-Diesels in the nose of the big ship. Then, after checking the infrared ray telescope that permitted Bill to see through rain, fog and the dark of night, he cut the throttles and climbed out, his gray head nodding with satisfaction. He was as proud of the Lancer as Bill.

"She's sweet, boy," he said. "She sings a lullaby when you open the throttles."

"See if she can sing *Bei Mir Bist Du Schoen*, Scotty," Bed Gleason suggested.

Some of the acute tenseness seemed to leave Bill Barnes' face as he joined the others laughing at Scotty's dignified discomfiture.

"All right, fellah," Shorty Hassfurter said as he saw Bill's glance sweep anxiously about, taking in the, hangars, airplane factory, administration building, hospital and even the fire house. "Let's see you shove. And don't stick your homely mug around here again for three weeks."

"That's right, boy," Scotty said. "We'll take care of things. You'll keep in contact by radio and cable?"

"By radio and cable," Bill said. "I gave Tony Lamport instructions this morning." Tony Lamport, a black-eyed, Italian-American, was chief radio operator and superintendent of communications on Barnes Field.

Climbing into the forward cockpit, Bill suddenly asked, "Where is that brat. Sandy?"

Sandy had completely disappeared. But a moment later he came tearing around a corner of the administration building, his white helmet and overall napping. "I forgot my autograph book," he panted as he scrambled into the after cockpit. "I'll probably have a chance to get some swell signatures in England."

"Do you want my autograph before you go, Nimrod?" Shorty yelled.

"Sure, mister." Sandy opened the little black book and thrust it over the side.

Shorty looked at him suspiciously, then wrote his name on the page Sandy had designated.

Sandy took the book back, tore out the page, folded it and threw it at Shorty. "See if they'll let you in the zoo with it!" he shouted. "Let her ride, Bill."

Bill's hand came above his head in farewell salute as Tony Lamport gave the all clear signal. He released his brakes and the gleaming, silver ship rolled down the runway. At the center of the field, where the runways converged, he tapped the rudder to kick it around into the wind and whipped it off the ground with his characteristic touch. The landing-gear light on the instrument panel gleamed as the amphibian gear folded completely into the fuselage and wings, and what had been a sesquiplane became a silver bullet that was a monoplane.

II—S.O.S.

A LITTLE over three hours later Bill shot a "sun sight" as the tip of Cape Race flashed under the wings of the Lancer. He eased back his engines to about sixty-five per cent throttle, as a twenty-mile tail wind came out of the west.

Every half-hour he had been talking to Tony Lamport on Barnes Field giving him his position and the weather so that Tony could check it against the forecast. At the same time Tony took a radio bearing to crosscheck the position Bill gave him.

"You're going to run into a couple of high fronts pretty quick," Tony told him as St. Johns faded away behind them.

"Okay, Tony," Bill said. "I'm going to throw the controls to Sandy if he isn't asleep. Hell check with you."

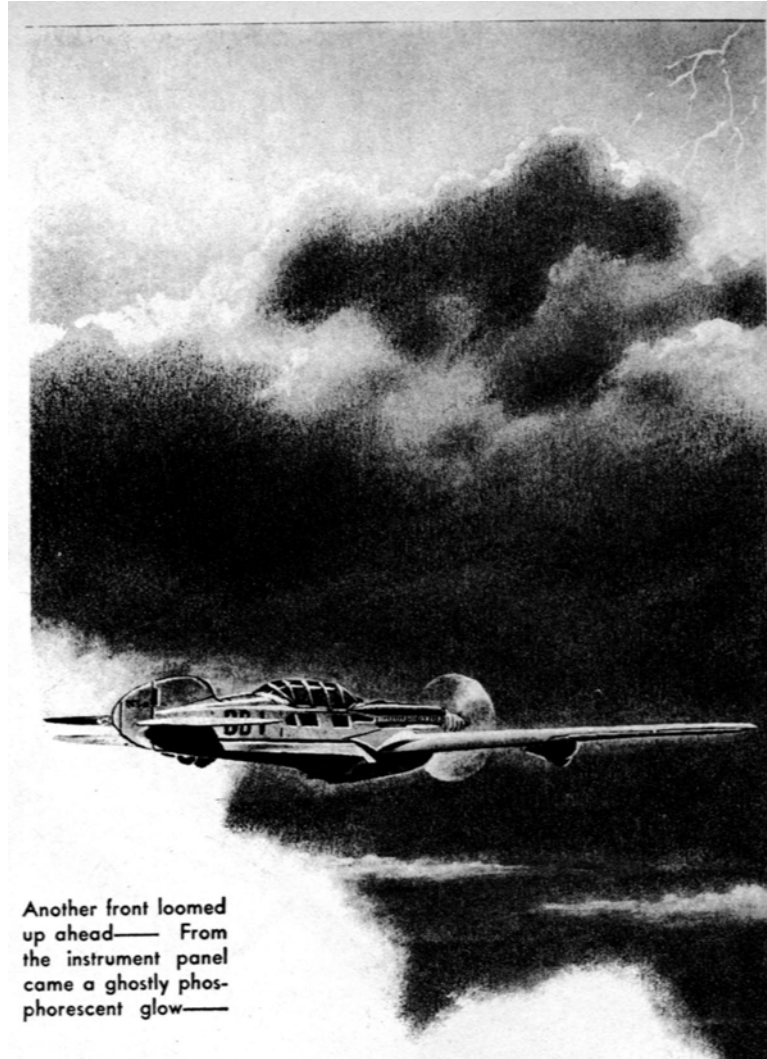
"BBX signing off," Tony said.

"Want me to take her, Bill?" Sandy asked.

"Just a minute." Bill checked their fuel consumption, climbed to fifteen thousand feet and increased their speed forty miles an hour to get maximum efficiency. "You'll get a wind shift before you strike that first cloud wall," he then said. "If it gets bad wake me up. I'm going to sleep."

"I've got her, Bill. I'll take radio bearings if it closes in. Sweet dreams."

An hour later Sandy stuck the nose of the Lancer into a front, or cloud wall, that rose to twenty thousand feet from the surface of the Atlantic. Blade rain that was half hail beat down on the overhead hatches, and a sudden gale snatched them, buffeting the Lancer around like a cork on an angry sea.



For a moment Sandy debated about waking Bill; decided against it. From the dials on the instrument panel came a ghostly phosphorescent glow. He could barely see his navigation lights far out on the wing tips. A wrench and a twist dropped the big ship three hundred feet. Then it glided up an ascending current of air—and down again, as though its belly were attached to the rails of a roller coaster.

Sandy flipped his radio switch and began to chant Tony Lamport's call letters into the microphone. The wail that came back to him was like the eerie screams in a melodramatic movie. He closed the key with eyes roving over his instrument panel and coming to rest on his artificial horizon. His arms ached from trying to keep the big ship steady on her course. He was fighting a cross-wind that made him take his bearings every few minutes.

The storm had swallowed them up completely, locking them tight in a world that was a mass of ominous fog and wind and driving rain. The wind was slashing in against the windshield so hard he could not see two feet in front of him. He was flying entirely blind and fighting his controls every instant.

In the forward cockpit Bill Barnes was sleeping the sleep of a man who has left his worries and nervous tension behind him. Not even the fearful buffeting the Lancer was taking could disturb him.

Almost without notice the Lancer popped out on the other side of the front, and Sandy found that the wind had shifted two hundred and forty degrees. But now there were dear, sunlit skies ahead with an almost unlimited visibility. He nosed the Lancer down in a long power glide, hoping to pick up a more favorable, wind at a lower altitude. Flipping his radio key, he made contact with Tony Lamport and checked his dead reckoning navigation against the Barnes Field radio station. He was glad that he had not awakened Bill.

But after two hundred and eighty miles of sunshine another front loomed up ahead. Sandy raised the nose again, trying to get above it, but the ominous mass seemed insurmountable. Leveling off at twelve thousand feet he began that same desperate fight all over. This time a light snow began to collect on his windshield.

Once again his radio screamed with static as Sandy threw the key and tried to make contact with Tony. Then, after adjusting his volume and wavelength, he spun the master tuning control and sought to get the Irish radio terminal at Foynes. More angry static was the only answer.

Suddenly he leaned forward, tense and eager, as the faint, far-away sound of a high-pitched, desperate voice came to his ears. Feathering the control, he strained to hear what the voice was saying. One time it sounded like a general S. O. S., but he wasn't sure. Then the words,

"Transatlantic Airliner Memphis calling . . . Transatlantic Airliner Memphis calling.... we are falling.... they are pouring in. . . ." Then the voice rose and faded away into an eerie scream as static intervened.

The palms of Sandy's hands were wet with perspiration. He shouted Bill's name into the intercockpit phone, and reached over the instrument panel to awaken him with a push on the head.

"What's the matter, kid?" Bill said as he sat up, his eyes only half open.

"I think it's the Transatlantic's big ocean airliner Memphis calling for help," Sandy said into the phone. "You'd better tune in and see if you can pick her up. There's so much static I couldn't hear what her radioman was saying. But she sounded as though she was in distress."

"She was scheduled to leave Foynes: this morning," Bill said. "It's her first passenger-carrying trip after all those test hops. What wave length did you have?"

"I'm not sure Bill. Some place around 1480. You'll have to tune to get her."

For the next fifteen minutes Bill worked with the radio while Sandy fought the Lancer and the weather.

"I can't seem to get her," Bill finally admitted. Then, "Wait a sec! He's coming in but I can't hear what he says." Quickly he chanted into the microphone: "BB answering Airliner Memphis. . . . BB answering Airliner Memphis. Are you getting me? Are you getting me? Go ahead go ahead. BB answering Airliner Memphis."

The scramble of words that followed was unintelligible to Sandy, because he was using all his powers of concentration to keep the Lancer on an even keel, but Bill's expression showed that some of the meaning had come through to him.

"Quick, kid!" he snapped at Sandy after motioning him to throw his radio switch and use the intercockpit telephone. "Give me the controls. She's in trouble, but I can't make out what. Something has happened to them. They can't make contact with any ships or land stations. He was sending out their position. I think I got it. Check our position and check theirs against it." He handed Sandy a piece of paper with the position of the Memphis written on it. "Work fast, kid! It

sounds as though we are the only ones who picked up their S. O. S."

Bill poured soup into the mighty power plants in the nose of the Lancer and hung her on her props to take her above the storm and head winds she was fighting.

He tried again to pick up the enormous airliner that was on her maiden voyage across the Atlantic with passengers. But only the screech of static and complete silence came back to him.

III—TRIPLE ATTACK

THE GREAT AIRPORT at Bundorick Head in the mouth of the Shannon on the east coast of the Irish Free State was a place of indescribable activity on that morning. Everywhere men were in action: engine mechanics, machinists, traffic men, dispatchers, radio inspectors, porters, pilots, engineers, navigators and officials.

A loudspeaker blared from the administration building of the Transatlantic Transport Airways to add to the excitement.

"The Airliner Memphis will leave on her first passenger-carrying trip for New York City, U. S. A., in fifteen minutes. Have all passengers had their luggage weighed and put aboard? Have all passengers had their luggage weighed and put aboard?"

There was intense excitement in the air. It crept under people's skins and brought a flush to their cheeks and sometimes a ripple of aimless, senseless laughter to their lips. The official passengers and their friends and families stood gazing through the gates at the enormous monster in the water beside the quay. Tears and laughter intermingled as the sun crept higher and higher into the heavens.

The four twin-row, radial, air-cooled Meredith Vulcan motors increased their crescendo as Flight-Engineer Hawkins spoke over the telephone to the first pilot and to the four men stationed in the engine nacelles.

The captain, Arnold Morton, a veteran flyer with twenty-five years of experience behind him, licked his lips nervously as he went down the gangway from the bridge to the anchor and gear room in the nose of the great forty-five-ton ship for

a last inspection. He glanced at the mooring post through the open hatch and over the neatly arranged gear that was ready for any emergency, then returned to the bridge. Nodding grimly to the first and second pilots at their posts at the controls, he went through the sound-proofed room to the navigation and radio room behind it. There the radio officer, flight-navigator and flight-engineer sat at their desks with earphones clamped to their heads.

Giving only a few moments to the cargo hold, crew's quarters and baggage compartment, Captain Morton proceeded to the galley and dining lounge and the seven passengers' compartments stretching along the length of the ship.

The furniture was made entirely of duralumin to keep down its weight, and the windowpanes were of a plastic lighter than glass. The walls were covered with porous fabrics so that the sound waves would pass through them instead of being deflected. The fabrics were colored light green, beige and light blue, and had the effect of making the compartments spacious and airy without being too bright in the sunlight above the clouds.

In the de luxe compartment in the tail of the ship was a cocktail table and a bookcase beside a long, low couch. The ladies' and men's washrooms were equipped with leather-covered stools and bright duralumin fixtures.

From the passenger compartments Captain Morton went down into the hull, where a gasoline pump drove gas from the sponsons up into the wing tanks and engines, and where auxiliary cargo was stored. A hasty inspection here, and he returned to his office. Sitting in the chair behind his desk, he closed his eyes, his lips moving silently.

He was back out on the bridge as the big silvered-hull monster cast off and taxied across the mouth of the Shannon for a takeoff, great geysers of water cascading upward on each side of the hull as it cut down into the wind.

At precisely the measured time for the hull to leave the water, the enormous high-wing monoplane zoomed upward and took to the air with its engines bellowing at ninety percent throttle.

"Wind ten miles, thirty degrees," the navigator advised the skipper from his post in the celestial observation turret.

"Best altitude twelve -thousand feet," he said a moment later.

A half-hundred monoplanes and biplanes fell into position beside the giant transport to escort it out to sea as the first pilot cut his throttles to cruising speed.

The flight-engineer began a check of the engines from his swivel chair in front of the control board, as the gasoline consumption at take-off was tallied. All compasses were checked and compared as the flight-navigator took a "sun sight" to be sure they were true. The flight-engineer reported the amount of fuel aboard to the captain, and the captain checked their progress against the gasoline consumption.

Every half-hour the radio operator tapped out a position report to land stations, while the navigator checked the ground speed by celestial observation.

At the same time the radio operator got a radio bearing from the nearest land station, to cross-check the work on board the Memphis. In the meantime the shore station had apprised itself of the positions of all surface ships within two hundred miles of the plane's position and route, and had transmitted it to the skipper and navigator so the Memphis could obtain radio "fixes" from them.

Every thirty minutes the skipper and the first pilot relieved each other at the controls. And the flight-engineer and his assistant relieved each other, too, in the regulating of the pumping of fuel from the hull to the wing tanks and making up a log by repeated checks on their one hundred and forty-one instruments.

From the skipper down to the galley stewards, the ship was being manned with a precise efficiency that left nothing to chance. The men worked silently with a crisp confidence that conveyed itself to the passengers. On this maiden trip those passengers were all officials of the Transatlantic Transport Airways and a sprinkling of reporters and scientists, and the twenty-five aboard represented only half of the ship's capacity.

Three hours out, cruising at twelve thousand feet, the Memphis ran into the first fronts dotting the air above the Atlantic that morning. The big ship flew through the fog and rain with scarcely a tremor to indicate that it had gone from fair weather into foul. The passengers were more interested than frightened by the fog curling along the sides and the rain slashing against the windows. They were air-minded and they had perfect confidence in Captain Arnold Morton and his crew.

Captain Morton was munching a sandwich in his little office, when the first of those three dun-colored, low-wing, tear-drop biplanes came diving out of the fog above the giant transport. The roar of their motors came to the captain's ears faintly and he was just getting out of his chair to investigate the sound when the pilot of that first ship damped down on the trip of the two machine guns synchronized through his propeller.

He had aimed at the back of the neck of the flight-navigator in his navigation turret on the roof of the fuselage. The bullets chopped into the duralumin skin of the big ship and crept forward as the flight navigator lifted his head at the sound of the diving motors. He never saw what was behind and above him because a hail of lead nearly tore his head from his shoulders. He slumped off his little platform and his sextant clattered to the deck, while the bullet line continued forward and tore into the body of the radio operator and the first pilot, who was at the controls.

As that first dun-colored biplane raced above the nose of the big ship at terrific speed, the second biplane came out of the fog with its guns yammering.

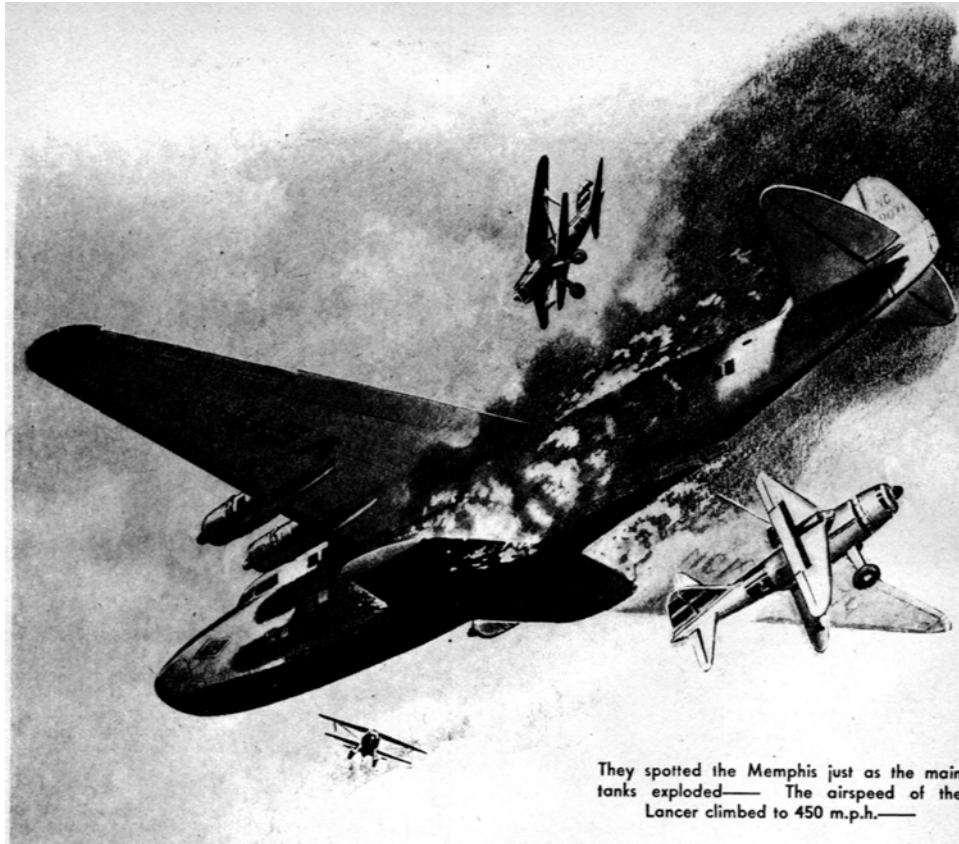
Its bullets tore into the top of the Memphis a little to the left of the trajectory of the first ship. Captain Morton had opened his mouth to bellow an order when those bullets tore into his back. They slammed him against a bulkhead where he slumped to the floor, his arms and legs grotesquely spread.

The assistant radio operator leaped to the blood-spattered microphone as he saw the chief operator slide out of his chair. He tried desperately to make contact with the nearest land stations and ships, but the radio apparatus seemed to be smashed beyond control. He began to chant incoherently into his mouthpiece, sending out a general call for help. No specific station answered him, but he kept giving the position of the Memphis and trying to tell what was happening, although he did not know.

A steward had been carrying a tray of food from the galley to the dining saloon when that first long burst of fire drove into the body of the first pilot.

Before the second pilot had grabbed the controls, the big ship lurched and the steward landed in the lap of one of the vice-presidents of Transatlantic Transport Airways.

The next instant the passengers went mad. The third dun biplane had dived in below the tip of the port wing and was spraying the middle deck that contained the passenger compartments with a withering fire of lead. One moment the guests were chatting gayly, the next a quarter of them were dead. The faces of the rest were twisted into weird masks, and in their eyes was the fear of death. They bellowed and screamed like caged, angry animals, while the second pilot fought the controls and tried to right the ship.



After a bit the Memphis plunged out of the wall of fog that had encompassed it. The three dun biplanes climbed above it and drove incendiary bullets into the wing tanks. A tank exploded and the whole ship was engulfed in a great mass of smoke, out of which a giant tongue of flame leaped upward.

Then one of the biplanes was diving underneath the Memphis, firing round after round of incendiary bullets at the sponsons containing the main gasoline supply. For some reason this attack failed to bring about the intended holocaust, and the pilot, circled and returned for another try.

Suddenly, rivers of flame seemed to pour out of the big airliner from wing tip to wing tip and down the length of the entire hull. It became a fiery furnace of exploding tanks and twisted, white-hot metal struts as it plummeted to its death in the calm Atlantic.

IV—TELLTALE MANEUVER

BILL BARNES watched the instruments on his flight panel as he held the Lancer hard into the rain and fog and tried to climb above them.

He could not tell from the garbled message from the Memphis' radio operator exactly what was happening, but he knew the ship was in imminent danger.

He eased his throttles open until the Lancer was racing through the storm at nearly four hundred miles an hour.

And it took all the strength in his powerful arms and shoulders to hold her on her course.

"Fasten your safety belt and adjust your parachute, kid," he said into the telephone to Sandy.

But Sandy had already done that.

He gasped, "Wonder how bad it is, Bill?"

"No telling," Bill said. "We ought to be coming up alongside them pronto if that position was correct."

Then the Lancer sped out of that dense fog, and they were out in the open with the sun shining brightly in the blue sky above them and the Atlantic like a mill pond far below.

Twenty miles away and far below they spotted the Memphis just as the main supply tanks exploded. A string of curses leaped to Bill's lips as he saw bursts of fire coming from the three dun biplanes darting in and out around the airliner. He opened the throttles of the Lancer wide, saw the airspeed indicator climb to four hundred, and fifty miles an hour. Nursing his machine-gun trip, he fired a short burst to be sure his guns were ready.

"What's happening, Bill?" Sandy panted into his microphone, as they saw the Memphis become a great ball of smoke and flame and start her plunge toward the sea.

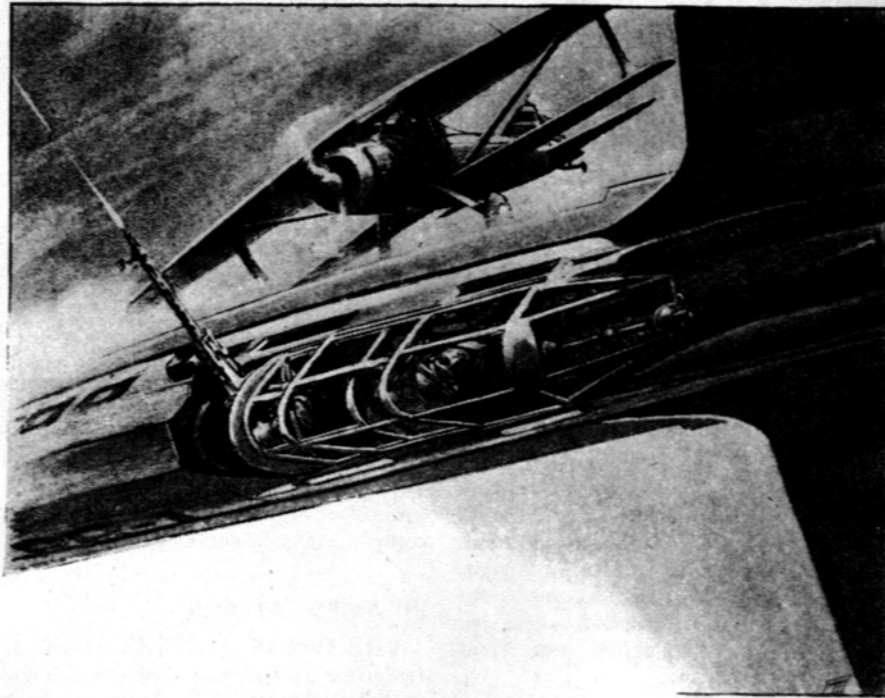
"Break out that swivel gun!" Bill said.

"Those three biplanes have murdered the Memphis and all her crew and passengers. They'll come after us now because we saw them."

He nosed the Lancer down, pointing it at the flaming mass ahead, hoping against hope that there might be some survivors, though realizing in his heart that no one could survive that flaming hell. He eased out of his dive as what remained of the Memphis struck the surface of the water. One final explosion occurred, followed by a half dozen minor ones, and then the skeleton of the giant ship plunged to its last resting place.

Bill circled low above the great oil spots spreading over the surface, trying to locate a possible survivor. But there was none. He was placing his binoculars back in a pocket when the sound of screaming props struck terror through his whole being. For an instant he was motionless. Then his eyes swept the sky above him as Sandy shouted,

"They're diving on us. Bill!"



"Give it to 'em!" Bill said into his microphone, hearing Sandy's swivel gun chattering behind him— He yanked the control stick back into his stomach and hung the ship on its props—

The three fast, tear-drop biplanes were converging on them from three sides! They were only three hundred yards

above him and traveling at terrific speed. He yanked the control column of the Lancer back into his stomach and hung it on its props. The three diving ships were easing out of their dive to come up underneath him as he poured juice into the engines of the Lancer and took it upstairs.

"Give 'em hell, kid!" Bill said into his microphone, hearing Sandy's swivel gun chattering behind him.

He leveled off a thousand feet above the three biplanes and came around in a vertical bank as they nosed up to form a Vee. His finger hovered over the electric trip of the 37mm. cannon. Suddenly, he opened up the throttles of the Lancer for a moment and went up and back in a flashing Immelmann turn as the three biplanes leveled off. They were coming at him head-on now. When they were four hundred yards away they opened fire with their six machine guns. The concentrated fire was terrific.

Bill skidded the Lancer out of range and eased back on the stick as the three ships passed by him. As he saw their rudders bite into the air to return to the attack, he yanked the stick back and came up and over on his back just as they began their turn. At the top of his loop he neutralized his controls for a moment, then eased the nose down in a steep inverted dive.

He got the first of the three ships under his hair sights for one brief instant. His finger came down on the trip of his 37mm. cannon. The rapid-firer threw five high-explosive shells within the space of a second, but Bill's speed was too great and his dive too steep for accurate shooting. Between the time he had the ship under his sights and when he tripped his trigger the little fighter had passed out of his range of fire.

Bill cursed, leveled off and half-rolled the Lancer upright. The single seaters were coming around on one wing tip as he lifted the nose for altitude. He knew he could get away from them if he wanted to, but the thought of the whole-sale murder he had seen them perpetrate had enraged him almost beyond reason.

He knew he should broadcast what he had witnessed, but something held him back, something he did not understand.

"Why," he asked himself as he spiraled upward; "did they do it? What is behind it?"

His hand started forward toward his radio switch, to open it and tell the radio station at Foynes what had happened and ask them to send him aid. But something stopped him. Suppose, he thought, I lure these three ships in toward shore to meet planes that are sent out to help me, and in the mixup that follows they escape; then they will never get what is coming to them. They may escape entirely.

He was trying to justify his desire to give battle when he became aware of a screaming prop that roared underneath him. He rolled the Lancer completely over and whipped it up and around to reverse his direction. He dropped the nose and poured a burst of ten shells at the little dun-colored ship arrowing up at him. But again his aim was bad and the little ship kicked its tail in the air and dived out of danger.

"You don't have to make any decision," he said to himself. "If they want trouble give it to 'em!"

He gunned his engine and dived on the tail of the single-seater. His line of tracer smoke curled above the head of the pilot. He eased his stick forward a little and his bullets crashed into the tail assembly and climbed forward along the fuselage to the engine block. A half-dozen of those powerful .50-caliber bullets nearly tore off the pilot's head. He slumped forward over the stick, while the ship kept straight on toward the waters of the Atlantic.

And then the air seemed to be choked with slashing, roaring dun-colored biplanes as the other two fighters came back into the battle. Bill realized instantly that these fellows knew their jobs as combat pilots. They were like darting hawks as they converged their fire to get Bill between them. They were everywhere, charging in from all angles, their guns screaming lead.

Bill's mind and muscles had to coordinate with the speed of light if he were to survive that terrific onslaught. He eased the throttles of the Lancer open another notch and took it through the air with the speed and fury of a flaming meteor. He saw his bullets tracing designs on the sides of the dun biplanes, but his own speed was too great for accurate shooting.

He felt the Lancer buck and shiver as bullets drove into it from that never-ceasing hail of lead. But he fought on while he gasped for breath, his face tense and terrible in its absolute concentration on the horrible job before him. He whipped the Lancer up and down, skidded and side-slipped, zoomed and dived and rolled to avoid the fire of those two

fast fighters. He knew, only too well, that one single error in judgment would be his last.

He could hear Sandy's gun chattering at intervals as he drove them off his tail and he could hear Sandy complaining in his ear that he, Bill, never gave him a chance to get in a telling shot.

"Can't you level off and give me a straight shot at 'em once!" Sandy pleaded.

"I can't, kid," Bill gasped. "They are almost as fast as we are and they have as much maneuverability. I can't give 'em a chance to get set or they'll get us. They'll smash you into bits if I do."

Then the two ships got him inside a tight circle that he could not break. Each time he tried to break out a terrific burst of fire would cut across his path, forcing him to deviate from his course, and then they would be on him again, forcing him back so that one of them could get him under his sights.

Bullets drummed all around them, and Bill's breath was coming in quick, agonized gasps. His right hand seemed to be frozen to the control column, so tight was his grasp. He was using all his inherent genius as a flyer, getting the utmost from the Lancer's great speed and maneuverability, while Sandy desperately tried to keep the enemy off their tail.

Then the two ships began to tighten the circle again, their guns spewing fire and lead and death. Bill waited until they almost had him between a crossfire. He waited until one of the biplanes became overconfident. Then, for that brief moment that is enough, he got the dun ship under his sights. His finger clamped down on his 37mm. gun. He fired a burst of five shots as he pushed the throttle of the Lancer wide open and nosed down in a power dive.

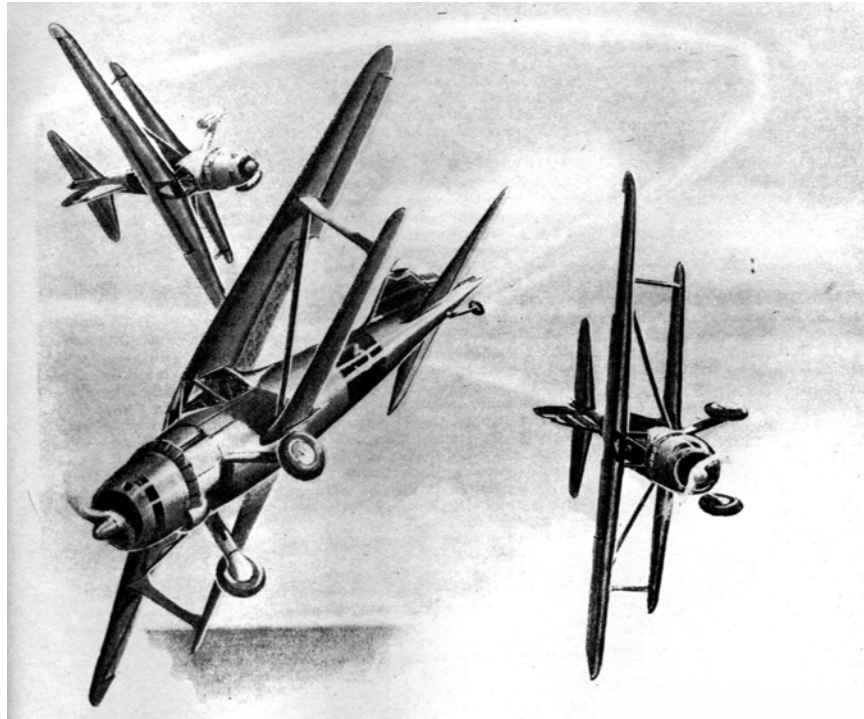
The dun biplane became a great mass of black smoke and orange flame, the explosive shells taking it apart with a finality that was appalling. The other dun ship zoomed upward to escape the shooting debris as it exploded.

Bill looked back and up as he pulled the Lancer out of its dive. The remaining biplane was diving on their tail, and Sandy tried to get him under the sights of his gun. As Bill began a tight turn to the right, the other ship went underneath him and nosed up eight hundred yards away.

Then they were roaring toward each other head on, each striving to find the other under his sights.

When only fifty yards separated them, the pilot of the single-seater suddenly swerved it in fast to the left for a death-dealing burst of fire just before they passed. Bill shouted, involuntarily, then threw the Lancer out of its mad path to avoid the crash that for an instant seemed inevitable.

Bill yanked back on his stick and zoomed the Lancer up and over on its back, while the biplane continued on its course. At the top he half-rolled level and gazed over the side. His face was white and his eyes were wide with disbelief as he watched the dun ship flip over and come back. He couldn't believe what he had just seen and yet he knew it was true.



He knew that he had come in contact with only one man during all his aerial combats who used that particular swerve in to the left before he tripped his guns. And that man was his most deadly enemy. Yanking back on the control column. Bill took the Lancer high into the heavens as the tear-drop biplane tried to come up beneath him. He wanted to get some place where he could think. He took the Lancer steadily upward until his altimeter read 25,000 feet.

"Hey, Bill!" Sandy shouted. "Where the—where are you going? That other ship can't get up here. He's wallowing!"

"I know it, kid," Bill said calmly. "Close your hatch and turn on the oxygen. I don't want him to get up here. I don't want to shoot him down. I want to follow him and take him alive."

"Who is he?" Sandy asked. His voice was a combination of anger and disgust because they were peeling off in the middle of a fight.

"He's our old friend," Bill said. "And by a coincidence that is stranger than fiction he had another chance to try to murder me."

Through Bill's mind were racing a thousand and one thoughts. Only his own loyal men knew that he was flying the Atlantic that morning. It had been his men who had urged him to do it, even insisted. Had one or more of them betrayed him—got him out where he would be at the mercy of the man who hated him above all else?

"Who is he?" Sandy persisted.

"The man who calls himself the Saver of Souls," Bill said. "I didn't recognize his tactics until he came at me with that swerve, head-on."

And Bill was aware that his voice was unsteady and trembling. He watched the dun biplane slip down in a power glide, then dropped the nose of the Lancer to follow it.

"And. this," he said grimly to himself, "is the beginning of my holiday!"

V—"HE MUST BE SILENCED!"

MORDECAI MURPHY, the man who had led that little element of three dun-colored biplanes on their murderous flight over the Atlantic that morning, sank into an overstuffed leather chair in the lounging saloon of his hundred-and-eighty-foot, oil-burning yacht *Haman*, as it moved silently out into the Irish Sea from the Isle of Man.

Riding low in the water, the *Haman* was as spick and span and trim as the man who owned her. She was passing the tip of Langness, that narrow strip of land, jutting into the sea, which divides Castletown Bay from Derby Haven, the airport, before Mordecai Murphy came out of his reverie and

spoke to the florid-faced Wetherby Duncan, who was his companion.

"I will tell you what happened now," Mordecai Murphy said in his pleasant, cool way. "I'm sorry I was so abrupt when I came aboard. But I was in no mood to talk. I hadn't got over the amazing thing that happened to me today—the most amazing coincidence that has ever occurred to me. No fiction writer would dare to use it in a story."

"You destroyed the Memphis?" Duncan asked in a low voice.

"We destroyed the Memphis."

"Where are Chamberlain and Lorenzo?" Duncan asked.

"Dead," Murphy said, and his eyes were as hard and brittle as two pieces of ice. "Stop asking me so many bloody questions and I'll tell you about things.

I'm trying to figure how, or why Barnes happened to be out there."

"Bill Barnes?" Duncan asked.

"I told you something about my previous encounters with Bill Barnes, the American," Murphy stated.

Duncan nodded.

"It is uncanny," Murphy continued, half to himself. "I told you how I set a trap for Barnes over the Great Smoky Mountains in North Carolina?"

"Yes," Duncan said.

"Did I tell you that the man who lured Barnes down there where I could get an unhampered shot at him was a stock broker in New York who told Barnes he knew a man down there who owned a block of Transatlantic Transport stock?" Murphy asked.

"No," Duncan said, "you didn't tell me that."

"That," said Murphy, "is the why Transatlantic came to my attention. Barnes didn't get the stock because my agent shot himself the same day Barnes and I had our encounter."

"And Barnes came out on top?" Duncan said, and immediately regretted having said it because of the deep color that suffused Murphy's face, and because of the way his eyes froze.

"But later on," Murphy said, "Barnes got hold of a large block of it. Almost enough for control. I happen to know that he is having quite a task carrying it. That is one reason why I was willing to listen when you came to me with your proposition to make Transatlantic Transport look bad so that you could build up confidence in our own line, International Airways. I knew I would be killing two birds with one stone in destroying the Memphis."

"You said Barnes was out there today?" Duncan said.

"I did." There were two little creases between Murphy's worried eyes, and his mouth was a straight line across his strong jaw.

"We dove on the Memphis, riddling her with incendiary bullets," he went on after a moment. "She was falling in flames when Barnes suddenly appeared out of nowhere. I don't think he could have received a call for help from the Memphis herself because I studied her layout so carefully that I am sure I got the radio apparatus and the operator on my first dive. But there he was. He came down in a long power dive and circled above the Memphis as she struck the water. He was, probably, hoping to find some survivors."

"Were there any?" Duncan asked.

"Not a one," Murphy said, and there was no trace of regret in his expression. Rather, it was one of elation.

"And then?" Duncan said in his maddeningly cool way.

"He was too much for us," Murphy said. "That man is without a doubt the greatest aerial fighter who ever lived. He is astonishing and he has the luck of——"

"His record doesn't sound as though there was any luck about it," Duncan said. "How did it happen he didn't get you?"

"I don't know," Murphy said frankly. "I learned my lesson in two encounters with him. No one can stand against him in the air. That is why I decided to leave him alone, at least in the air. There *must* be an element of luck about it."

"He shot down Chamberlain and Lorenzo?"

"He tore them and their ships to bits with his 37mm. cannon," Murphy said. He wet his dry lips with his tongue. "I was next."

"You're here," Duncan said, a smile flitting across his face.

"Only by the grace of God," Murphy-said. "I admit that Barnes is my superior in the air now. But he won't always be. My day will come. ... He came at me head-on, and I used a trick I learned from diving falcons. I have a room in my New York apartment where I train and watch them attack their prey. While I was getting ready for that combat with Barnes I learned that just before they strike their prey, after their dive with their wings wide and their talons spread, they swerve in to add force to their strike.

"I practiced the trick, keeping my ship out of line of fire of my opponent until just before we pass, when I swerve in to the left with my guns firing. At the last moment I zoom above him and then straighten out."

"You used that trick on Barnes over North Carolina?" Duncan asked.

"Yes, and I used it again today."

"Then what happened?"

"Barnes hung his ship on its props and took it upstairs," Murphy said. "So far upstairs I couldn't follow him. I began to wallow at 35,000 feet and I didn't have any oxygen so I started for the Irish coast."

"With Barnes following you?"

"Yes, but I lost him in a wall of fog just before I struck the coast. It was fortunate it was there or everything might have been different."

"Yes," Duncan said. "You would, probably, not be here. Barnes must have recognized that falcon trick and identified you. Either that or he didn't want to kill you because he wanted to know who you were. It might be either one. Does he know who you are?"

"He knows me only as the Saver of Souls," Murphy said. "He has tried to find out who I am before. That is why I decided to leave him alone for a while. I was afraid he would learn."

"What did you do with the fighter you were flying after you landed?" Duncan asked. His eyes were worried now. As the head of International Airways, a competitor of Transatlantic Transport in the flying of passengers and cargo from Europe to the Americas, he could not afford to be mixed up in any

way with the villainous plot he had brought to Mordecai Murphy to execute.

Like a host of other men all over the world, he was indebted to Mordecai Murphy, the man who called himself the Saver of Souls. And like those other men whom Murphy had snatched out of jails and dungeons and the jaws of death, Wetherby Duncan had learned that Murphy did not do his saving for humanitarian reasons. Instead, he had learned. Murphy had saved him, as well as all the rest, to serve in his astounding mill of evil.

"I did what I had planned doing with all three ships," Murphy said. "I bailed out after I had locked the controls so that it would dive into the Irish Sea off Maughold Head. Sneed was waiting there in a car to bring me down to



Castletown."

"You're sure you lost Barnes?" Duncan asked anxiously.

"Certain," Murphy said. "But how did he happen to be there? If he had been engaged to convoy the Memphis across the Atlantic we never would have got a crack at it. He would have been on us before we could fire a gun. There is a chance that he just happened to be flying above the North Atlantic and picked, up an S.O.S. from the Memphis. But if he did that why didn't the shore stations get it? The only

word that has come out about the Memphis up to now is that the land stations suddenly lost contact with her. After so many hours destroyers and planes were sent out to look for her, but the theory is that for some reasons her radios went bad."

"They'll know better after Barnes talks," Duncan said.

Murphy leaned over and snapped a button on a small radio that was built into a bookcase. He twirled the dials for a moment as he looked at the watch on his wrist.

"——interrupt our program," a voice said through the loudspeaker, "to bring you further news about the Airliner *Memphis* of the Transatlantic Transport Airways that left Ireland this morning on its maiden voyage with passengers and cargo. The planes that were out searching for her had to return to their bases when night overtook them. But a half-dozen destroyers and other ships that were in the vicinity of the position she was last heard from are speeding toward the spot. It is still hoped that only her wireless has gone out of order and that she is continuing on her journey to New York, although captains of ships along her route say she has not passed above them. Of course, she may be flying high to avoid the areas of fog that are forecast along her regular course. We will bring you further news about the *Memphis* as soon as it is received. This is——"

Murphy clicked off the radio and a little smile curled the corners of his mouth. "They'll have to do a lot of searching," he said. "A few things that wouldn't sink may have escaped the fire, but not many. They'll find, patches of oil and come to the conclusion that something caused an explosion and that she was lost with all hands aboard."

"Until Barnes talks," Duncan said dryly.

"But he hasn't talked yet," Mordecai Murphy said. "And I don't think he ever will. He doesn't like publicity and he works as a lone wolf a great deal of the time. He only has four flyers working with him since Hawkins and Henderson were lulled. You see, he has a pretty big interest in Transatlantic Transport himself. If the stock begins to toboggan because of the loss of the Memphis it is going to hurt him. He will have enough sense not to talk until he has proof of his story. He knows his story will be discredited because he is a large stockholder in Transatlantic. He knows the newspapers would laugh at him if he said that he just happened to be flying the Atlantic and saw the ship shot down in flames. A thing like that could happen only to a man

like Barnes. But people wouldn't believe it unless he has conclusive proof. That's why he isn't talking yet."

"But he will talk," Duncan said. "If he recognized you by that flying trick you spoke of they'll comb the earth for you and they'll find you. This isn't any little personal fight between you and Barnes. It's an international incident. It's like those mysterious submarines that were sinking shipping in the Mediterranean that aroused the whole world and brought half the sea power of the world there. You don't seem to realize that it is a big incident. It——"

"Sh——" Murphy Said, extending the palm of one hand outward. "You talk too damned much, Duncan. I told you I did not believe Barnes would ever talk. I'll tell you why: I have a dozen agents waiting to inform me where Barnes has landed, in both Ireland and England. Sneed, my secretary, made contact with them as soon as I landed this afternoon and gave instructions.

"I am expecting to have word from one of them at any minute. When I know where Barnes is I will take steps immediately to seal Barnes' lips forever. I would rather do it myself, in the air. But that is not feasible now. I'm not asleep, Duncan. I have never been caught napping. If I had been I would be dead or in jail. And," he added as an afterthought, "so would you."

Duncan's face became even more florid than it had been and it took no little effort for him to hold back the words that sprang to his lips.

"I see," he said finally. "We'll both hang if you don't succeed. He has got to be silenced."

"He will be silenced. And International Airways will have the bulk of the Atlantic trade. Transatlantic will never be able to recover from the blow."

"That was our idea," Duncan said quietly. He got to his feet, crossed the lounge and picked a book up from a table. He turned the pages until he came to the place where he had stopped reading and sat down again under a light. But he did not read. His eyes kept straying from the words before him to the face of Mordecai Murphy, and he could not help thinking that Murphy was a most amazing man.

The world knew that Mordecai Murphy was a paradox. The people who knew him knew that one moment he could be a person of rollicking good humor who bellowed peals of

hearty laughter, and the next he could freeze them and make them feel as though they had ice water creeping up their spines.

No one knew anything about his antecedents. His enormous wealth was supposed to have come from South American oil and emeralds. He was said to have a finger in affairs in every part of the world. But no one knew which finger or which part of the world. He had been decorated by three nations during the War for his air feats. It was known that he made his home aboard the *Haman* when he was not visiting one of his half-dozen homes scattered around, the globe. Many items appeared about him in the press. But never anything definite. He was truly a man of mystery.

He traded in men, making them his tools. His files were filled with dossiers on a long string of men whose destiny he once held in the palm of his hand. Men he had saved from paying the penalty of their crimes. Men who had promised him great promises in return for his seeming acts of charity and kindness. To them he had been the great emancipator. The Saver of Souls.

But most of them knew now that he had saved them that he might force them to help him with his nefarious enterprises.

VI—BOUND FOR CROYDON

AS BILL took a position eight thousand feet above and behind the dun-colored amphibian he tried to piece together some of the startling facts that were racing through his mind.

When he thought back to the two encounters he had had with the man who called himself the Saver of Souls, he remembered that his tactics and strategy in combat were identical with the tactics of the pilot below him. There could be no doubt he was the Saver of Souls, the culprit who had plotted on two occasions to murder him.

But why had he led those other two planes in the destruction of the *Memphis*? Had he, in some mysterious manner, been instrumental in arranging things so that he could get another chance at Bill far out over the lonely Atlantic? Had he thought that with the aid of the two other planes he would be successful? Did the fact that Bill owned a large block of Transatlantic stock have anything to do with the set-up? Had he in some way been able to influence Bill's

men on Barnes Field so that they sent him out to be murdered without knowing what they had done?

All these possibilities flitted through Bill's mind, but he could not fit them together. The thing didn't make sense. He had anticipated making contact with the Transatlantic Airliner Memphis a little later in the day, but no one except himself knew that. He remembered that he had mentioned something of the sort to Scotty MacCloskey. But Scotty hadn't paid any attention and the subject was dropped.

While he tried to straighten the puzzle out Sandy interrupted him twice.

Each time he was told, unceremoniously, to "Shut up!" Now Sandy could stand it no longer.

"Hey, Bill!" he said. "I think you're right about that being the Saver of Souls. You know he jumped me over

Chesapeake Bay. I remember that swerve in to the left just before he tripped his guns. He was coming in on my starboard side, out of line of my guns. Just before we passed he kicked his ship around so that his bullets would slash right across my nose.

He underestimated his speed or he would have knocked my head off. Then he zoomed as I stuck my nose down."

"That's right," Bill said.

"But I don't understand what this is all about Bill. I can't put it together. What—"

"Listen, kid," Bill said. "Don't ask me any questions. I don't know any more about it than you. That's why I'm going to stay on his tail and find out."

"You want to be careful he doesn't lead us into a trap," Sandy advised with all the wisdom of his seventeen years.

"I'll watch that," Bill said, "while you see if you can pick up Tony Lamport on the radio."

Sandy worked with painstaking care while Bill held the Lancer on the tail of that dun-colored ship. He tried to get Tony on both of their secret wave bands without success. Finally he gave up.

"We're out of range Bill," he reported.

At the same time Bill became aware of the cloud wall ahead. At first it was almost imperceptible. But as they

neared the Irish coast the little amphibian ahead became a mere dot in the damp, swirling fog that engulfed it.

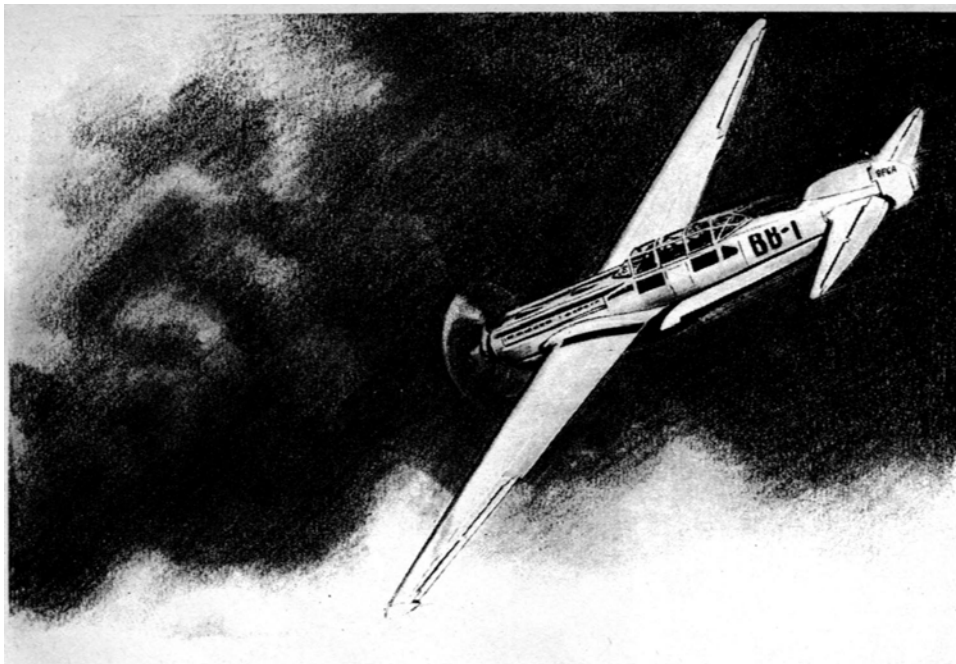
Bill tried desperately to stay on its tail, hoping the front would break before he lost it entirely. He plunged the Lancer into it, holding the same airspeed and course, flying entirely blind. When he came out on the other side the dun-colored ship had disappeared.

He cursed softly as he reached for the master tuning control on his radio panel and picked up the radio operator at Foynes, near the mouth of the Shannon. He got the direction and force of the wind and learned that he would have unlimited ceiling.

Forty-three minutes later he took the Lancer into the Irish air terminal for a workmanlike landing.

The manager of the terminal and the superintendent of operations met him on the apron. Behind them were a score of "tin knockers," mechanics, grease monkeys and inspectors. They were there to get their first glimpse of Bill Barnes and his famous Silver Lancer. He killed his power plant to avoid injuring them as they swarmed toward him. He waited until the manager had cleared a way for them, then he and Sandy dropped over the side.

In the manager's office Bill tried to keep the excitement out of his voice as he casually asked about the Memphis.



A worried expression fastened itself on the big Irishman's face. "We're worried about her, Barnes," he said. "I thought perhaps you'd have some word about her. I thought you might have picked her up on your radio out over the Atlantic."

"What's the matter?" Bill asked, quickly, to forestall a possible question he didn't want to answer.

"We don't know," the manager said. "When she was three hours out we suddenly lost contact with her. She reported she was making good progress through a fog area. After that there was silence. We have made contact with steamers in her urea but they haven't been able to give us any information. Unless something went wrong with her motors she may be on the way back here. We're going to wait another half-hour before we send out an alarm. It may be only her wire-less that is out of order. We expect to hear from her at any time. But we can't help worrying. You must be worrying about her, too, being a large stockholder in Transatlantic."

"I am," Bill said. "I wonder if it is possible for me to get a telephone call through to the Duke of Malbury at Arunway Castle in Malthrop, England?"

"We can try," the manager said, reaching for the telephone. "I'll start our operator working on it. You want to speak to the Duke of Malbury personally?"

"That's right. Have them try to locate him if he isn't at Arunway."

Bill kept up a constant conversation while he waited for his connection to be made. He avoided answering direct questions about the Memphis a half-dozen times. He didn't want to tell this man about the things he had seen because he didn't know how the other would handle the situation. Bill realized he must get to the foundation of the thing and find the men who were responsible for the destruction of the Memphis if he was to save Transatlantic Transport. He knew it would be the death of the line if he could not tell the story and then prove it; He remembered quite distinctly how a ban had been put on the ships of a certain company after several unexplained mishaps. The company had disappeared into oblivion. And there was nothing he could do for the Memphis, her passengers or crew. They were beyond help.

He started nervously as a telephone bell clanged.

"Here's your party, Barnes," the manager said. "They located him in London."

Bill's hands were shaking as he took the instrument. "Hello, Mace," he said into the mouthpiece to Norman Edward Chatagnier Elliott. Mace, the seventh Duke of Malbury, whom he had saved from death while he was excavating in the Valley of the Tombs of the Kings in Egypt.

"Are you there, Barnes?" Norman Mace answered with his precise British accent. "This is delightful."

"No, it isn't," Bill said, hoping Mace would get the idea. "I'm at Foynes on the Irish coast, as you know. I'm going to hop to Croydon within a few minutes. Can you meet me there?"

"I say, Barnes, what's up?" the Duke of Malbury asked.

"I'll tell you when I see you at Croydon in—about an hour and a half. Right?" Bill said.

"Right," Mace repeated. "I'll be there, Barnes. And I repeat it will be delightful. Cheerio."

Bill put the instrument in its cradle and immediately began a great fuss and bustle about getting away. He didn't want to be asked any more questions.

As he took the Lancer into the air, a man who was a visitor to the air terminal approached the manager on the apron. He was a small man with an olive skin and dark eyes. He might have been a native of any one of several countries of southern Europe.

"Wasn't that that American chap, Barnes?" he asked the manager in excellent English.

"That's right," the manager said, admiration shining in his eyes. "Bill Barnes."

"That is a great ship he has there. What is he doing over here?" the small man asked.

"I don't know," the manager answered. "He's on his way to Croydon." He looked down at the little man as Bill's ship became a mere speck in the air to the east. "Why?" he added.

The small man shrugged his shoulders with a true Latin gesture and moved away without answering.

VII—SPY SYSTEM

LONDON was a great mass of blurred lights through the fog hanging over it as Bill cut south to pick up the steady beacons of Croydon. He circled the great airport twice as he received landing instructions from the radio control tower, then took the big ship in with a precision landing that was characteristic of him.

He climbed out and saw the lean, tanned face of the man he had first known in Jogam as Colonel Mace, and later in Egypt as the Duke of Malbury, coming toward him. He noticed that his hair was a trifle whiter and his military mustache more closely clipped than the last time he had seen him. And then they were shaking hands. They were genuinely glad to see one another. When Malbury had finished with Bill he turned his attentions to the grinning Sandy.

"Are you still reading those books that teach you how to be the master of your fate?" the Duke of Malbury asked Sandy.

"No," Bill said. "He has a new one now. At the moment he's collecting autographs. You'll hear about it."

"Thanks for breaking it. Bill," Sandy said, whipping the little leather-bound book out of an overall pocket. He turned over the pages and stuck a pencil in the Duke's hand. "Just sign it there."

The Duke of Malbury wrote his name and chuckled. "You still work fast, eh?"

"Can you arrange things so that they put the Lancer under lock and key for me here?" Bill asked him.

"Easily," the duke said. "I have a motor here. Well roll down to London. I'm anxious to hear your story. Knowing you, I know it won't be prosaic."

A short time later the three of them were settled in Malbury's chauffeur-driven Sunbeam landaulet.

"You'd better plug up that speaking tube so your chauffeur won't hear us," Bill said when Malbury asked him a question.

"Righto." Malbury stuck a handkerchief into the mouthpiece.

Then Bill unfolded the things that had occurred to him during the past twenty-four hours, interspersing them with an account of the man he called the Saver of Souls.

They were deep into the heart of the great city of London before Bill had finished. Malbury had only interrupted a half-dozen times to ask questions.

Now, his breath exhaled through his lips in a long, low whistle. His eyes were half-closed as he shook his head slowly from side to side.

"A tale I would not believe if it hadn't come from you, Barnes," he said. "A most incredible thing."

"It is," Bill said. "I wouldn't believe it if it hadn't happened to me. The thing is, where shall we start to find this man? He must be somewhere in the British Isles. You know the ropes. You know who to go to to start such a search. The man must have a vast amount of money. You wouldn't hunt for him in the places you would look for the average dangerous character. Every possible landing place in Ireland and England must be checked to get trace of those dun-colored-biplanes."

"We'll have to know everything before we release the facts," Malbury said. "I have a friend, a pal. Lord Hereburn — he's the man to go to. We must start the ball rolling from the top. He is high up. All the machinery of the home office will begin to click if he gives the word. An ant couldn't get out of England then if they didn't want it to."

"Where can we find him?" Bill asked.

"Easy does it, my boy," Malbury said. "I'll have to locate him and talk to him alone first. He isn't the kind you can walk in on. You said you were going to the Hotel Cecil? You're sure you wouldn't like me to put you up at one of my clubs?"

"No," Bill said. "I prefer to go to the Cecil until this thing is over. Then, I would like to spend a few days with you at Arunway. This," he added bitterly, "is supposed to be a holiday for me."

"Yes," Malbury said. "We'll rest up out at the old pile of rocks when we get this thing straightened out. I'll drop you at the Cecil and start my hunt for Hereburn. I may reach him immediately, or it may be morning before I find him. You look as though you needed rest. You'd better get it now because there is nothing you can do. We'll have the jolly old ball rolling when you wake up."

Malbury's chauffeur helped them into the lobby of the Cecil with the luggage they had brought with them.

"I'll ring you sometime tonight or the first thing in the morning," Malbury said as he turned away.

"Eight," Bill said. "I'll be anxious to hear from you."

His eyes were two bright coals and his face was lined and haggard. Reaction had set in and he was tired as he could never remember being before.

They were assigned two rooms with a bath between them in a quiet spot on the third floor of the enormous hostelry. Bill picked up the telephone in his room and asked for a waiter with a menu.

"I suppose we've got to eat something," he said to Sandy.

"Eat something?" Sandy said. "Say, if I don't get some food pretty quick something serious is going to happen. I'm famished. I haven't had anything to eat since we left Barnes Field."

"Who ate all those chicken sandwiches you brought along—your automatic pilot?" Bill asked in disgust.

"I ate them," Sandy said. "But there were only twelve of them."

Bill ordered a light meal for himself and then turned the menu over to Sandy. He got a bath while Sandy was ordering because even the mention of food made him a little sick.

When the food was brought Bill couldn't help noticing the way the waiter's eyes roved over the room and their possessions. When the man brushed against him and let his hand flick across the two patch pockets in his dressing gown, he knew he was trying to find out if they were armed.

"The Saver of Souls knows how to handle his cutthroat business," he said to himself. "He is probably going crazy because I stuck my nose in his little scheme."

After they had finished eating Bill said to Sandy, "You hop in there and turn your light out and get some sleep, kid." He followed Sandy into his room and saw that the fire escape that was outside his own room did not reach to Sandy's. There was a sheer drop of thirty feet to the roof of the next building.

"Good night, kid," Bill said. "I'll let you know as soon as I hear from Malbury."

"Okay, Bill," Sandy said. "Gosh, I'm sleepy."

VIII—THE QUIVERING KNIFE

WHEN Bill went back into his own room his nerves were jangling. He was tired to the point of exhaustion, yet he didn't want to risk falling asleep. He was almost certain that an attempt would be made to kill him before morning, and he realized he couldn't stay awake to defend himself. He thought of trying to get in touch with Malbury again and have him secretly get a couple of men from Scotland Yard to guard him while he slept. He discarded the idea as not being feasible. He finally decided that his nerves were jumpy and his imagination was running away with him.

But he didn't sleep in the soft, three-quarter bed that was in the room. Instead he rolled up a blanket and put it in the bed where he should have been. At the end of the blanket on the pillow he placed an overall bunched up to give the general outline of his head.

Then he lay down on the couch that was against a wall, determined to stay awake as long as he could. In three minutes his eyes were closed and he was deep in sleep.

The room was shrouded in darkness, except for a thin stream of moonlight cutting across the bottom of the window sill. There wasn't any sound or the faintest rustle to disturb the quiet of the night.

Suddenly Bill was wide awake. Instinct warned him not to move, not even to raise his arm to look at the luminous dial of his wrist watch. The muscles in his body became tense, and he could feel perspiration oozing from his face. He knew that something was in the room. He continued to draw deep, even breaths as though he was still sleeping.

Then a tiny beam of light danced across the bed and was gone. For an instant a lean brown hand had appeared in the beam of light—a hand that clasped a knife. The blade was only four inches above the form in the bed.

Bill waited to hear the knife swish down into the bedclothes and rolled blanket. But no such sound came to his ears. He knew that the person holding the knife had

detected his ruse and was silently waiting until he located the spot from which the sound of breathing came.

Cold sweat ran into Bill's eyes as he conquered an almost overwhelming desire to shout or leap to his feet and snap on a light. He knew that when he moved he must be sure of the location of that figure or the knife would find a resting place in his body.

He saw a faint shadow moving toward the little hallway that led into the bathroom and Sandy's room. Slowly, without moving the rest of his body, he brought his legs up. He knew he must stop that form from getting into Sandy's room. Like a streak of lightning he whirled his body off the couch to the floor.

For sixty long, horrible seconds he stayed as still as death itself while he tried to locate the breathing of the intruder. His nerves were taut and screaming as he wriggled silently toward the wall. He tapped gently on the baseboard, then flattened himself out with his cheek hugging the rug.

Something swished above his head and thudded into the wall, where it vibrated back and forth angrily for a moment. Then the room was absolutely still again. He listened for the faintest sound, the scrape of a button or the exhaling of breath. When he could stand it no longer he began to edge along the floor toward the hallway, a fraction of an inch at a time. He knew the man across the room was waiting for another move, probably worming his way toward him.

A button of Bill's pajamas scraped the floor and he hugged the rug again. After a bit he continued. Beaching the ether side of the room he began circling it inch by inch. His eyes began to become adjusted to the dark, and he could pick out various objects. None of them faintly resembled a man.

He pulled himself upright along the wall where he knew the light switch was located, and still there was no movement in the room. He cursed himself for not having stuck an automatic in his pocket before climbing out of the Lancer at Croydon. Switching on the light meant he would be a perfect target if the intruder had a gun. And it was beyond reason to hope that he didn't have a gun.

The cold, grey London dawn came creeping in the window while he stood there trying to make up his mind what to do. He was certain that the door to Sandy's room had not been opened, yet he was half afraid that it might have been.

As the room became lighter and lighter he realized that in some mysterious manner the prowler had vanished. He switched on the light.

The room was empty.

His piercing scrutiny stopped when his eyes fell on the knife sticking in the wall, mute evidence that he had not been dreaming. He took two quick steps and threw the door of Sandy's room open. Sandy was peacefully sleeping.

Back in his own room he found that the door that led to the corridor was unlocked. He was positive that he had locked it before he lay down on the couch. He found the key on the floor and knew that it had been pushed out of the keyhole from the outside.

He searched the room for some further evidence of the intrusion but found nothing. The only memento was the wicked-looking knife sticking in the wall. He decided to leave it where it was until he had talked with Malbury again and it could be dusted for finger-prints. He knew that the waiter might easily have been the intruder. He wondered how he had managed to get out the door without making a sound.

After locking and bolting the door and window he climbed into the bed. He was comparatively safe for the time being.

It was broad daylight when the peal of a telephone bell awakened him. The clerk announced the Duke of Malbury calling.

"Please send him up," Bill said, adding, "And give me room service."

He ordered a pot of coffee and went into the bathroom to splash some water on his face and comb his hair. He was hoping desperately that Malbury had turned up something into which he could set his teeth. He was beginning to blame himself for not having taken more drastic action the night before. If Malbury hadn't uncovered something that would lead him to the Saver of Souls, the man would be able to escape entirely.

And Bill knew that if he told his story without proof at this late date he would be laughed off the face of the earth.

IX—"LEAVE ENGLAND!"

BILL BABNES threw a dressing robe over his pajamas and answered the knock on his door. Outside stood a uniformed bellhop.

"The Duke of Malbury, sir," the boy said and turned away as the dim figure behind him stepped into the room and closed the door behind him.

The man who stood there looked more like a duke than the Duke of Malbury. But he was not the duke. He was a pleasant-faced man with iron-grey hair and a strong face tanned by sun and wind. His pale eyes were twinkling as he watched Bill's astonishment.

"You——" Bill began.

The man entered the room and threw his light-grey fedora and gloves on a chair and opened his light fall coat.

"No," he said, "I'm not the Duke of Malbury. But he told me to use his name. He said you might not admit me unless I did. It's a nice morning, isn't it?"

"Yes," Bill said grimly. "It's a nice morning. And who the hell are you?"

"My name is Aird, Mr. Barnes," the man said, and a pleasant smile played on his lips as he held out his hand. "I'm sorry to have walked in on you this way, impersonating the Duke of Malbury. When I saw your astonishment I decided I'd better get into the room and close the door before you threw me out. I'm with the Air Ministry. I've spent half the night talking with Malbury and Lord Hereburn. When we came to a decision they asked me to come and talk to you."

"But why didn't Malbury come?" Bill asked.

"We decided the whole thing should be handled on a strictly formal basis," Aird said evenly. "Malbury was of the opinion, because of the friendship that exists between you, that he could not present our decision to you fairly. Malbury was entirely on your side, Barnes, against Lord Hereburn and myself. He asked me to convey his best wishes to you and wanted me to tell you that he would write to you and see you at Barnes Field, Long Island, very soon."

"Malbury isn't going to see me again?" Bill gasped.

"No," Aird said. "We are of the opinion, Mr. Barnes, that the sooner you get back to the States and forget this thing the better off things will be for everyone."

"Forget it!" Bill shouted, and he could feel the blood beating against his temples. "Like hell I'll forget it!"

"Perhaps I put that wrong," Aird said. "I meant forget it as far as other people are concerned. We know you can't forget what you saw but you can keep it to yourself and muzzle young Sanders."

"Listen," Bill said desperately. "If I'm not mistaken you are Sir James Aird with D. S. C. and so forth after your name. You're known around the world in aviation circles."

"That's right." Aird said. "I know this is a frightful blow to you, Barnes. But the thing must be kept quiet."

"You mean," Bill said, "you're going to let those murderers get away with it? Let them destroy a ship worth nearly a million dollars and wipe out thirty or forty people? Why, it's a criminal action on your part. You'll become an accessory after the fact. You'll be as guilty as they are."

"Take it easy, Barnes," Aird said persuasively. "Calm down. There are times when even nations must condone such things. Here is the situation: We are of the opinion that this man you call the Saver of Souls had nothing to do with the destruction of the Memphis. We——"

"Nuts!" Bill exploded, "to use a vulgar expression. I have engaged that man three times in the air and I know his tactics. You are treating me as though I was a child. Don't you suppose I know——"

"That particular trick by which you identified the man to Malbury is an old one, Barnes," Aird interrupted. "I first used it twenty-two years ago when I was a lieutenant in the Royal Flying Corps. I learned it from a famous German ace. So, you see, you have nothing to establish your identity of the man. Besides, you don't know who he is."

"That's what we've got to find out," Bill said. "That man has been in my hair long enough. I'll find him myself if you won't help me."

"No," Aird said firmly, "you won't. And I'll tell you why. England and the United States are not the only nations that are flying the Atlantic with passengers and mail and cargo. Remember that France, Germany and Italy are doing the same thing. England and the United States have the jump on

them with larger and better planes. We have also made more thorough surveys. Doesn't it occur to you that, possibly, one of several companies in each of those countries might be anxious to present Transatlantic from becoming the premier carrier across the Atlantic? Suppose we go nosing into this thing and find that, with the situation as delicate as it is today in Europe, one of them is guilty? What will it mean if it is released to the public? Only one thing. *War!*"

Bill Barnes stood in the center of the room, his legs widespread as though to absorb the shock of a physical blow. His face was a mask of hopeless fury. He could understand the wisdom in Aird's presentation of the problem, but he refused to accept it. He told himself that he would find the men guilty of the crime or die himself in the attempt. Then he told Aird.

"That is all right," he said as calmly as he could. "I understand your point of view. But what about Transatlantic Transport? It means the death of the company. They will never be able to survive the unexplained loss of their first passenger-carrying plane. Even though I didn't have a large interest in the company I could not stand by and see them ruined by such tactics."

"They can reorganize under another name and the public won't know the difference," Aird said. "Their loss is probably covered by insurance."

"That isn't the point!" Bill roared. "You fellows can take it lying down. But I won't! They sent a man here to this room last night to murder me because I know what I know. Do you think I'm going to keep on running away from this man who calls himself the Saver of Souls? He wrote me a note one time telling me there was not room in the world for both of us. I laughed at it. But now I know he was right. There isn't room for a murdering rat, who kills defenseless people with the connivance of the British Air Ministry, and me!"

"Those are pretty strong words, Barnes," Aird said softly. "And I wouldn't advise you to go about repeating them. We're not interested in your personal feud with the Saver of Souls. We're only interested in the safety of England and we can't afford to become embroiled with an enemy over this thing. We will, of course, put our secret agents to work and when we reach a conclusion we will take suitable steps."

"You can't tie my hands!" Bill said. "I'll go ahead until I find him. And I'll tell the world what happened!"

"Not while you're in England," Aird said. "Which will not be long. Hereburn, Malbury and I decided that you must get out of the country. We have enough troubles now without having you around with a tinder to start more. I have been asked to respectfully request you to leave the country at once."

For once in his life Bill Barnes was speechless. He could scarcely believe what he had heard. A thousand thoughts flashed through his mind as he stood there staring at Aird. A thousand thoughts that had to do with the existing friendship between England and the United States and his small part in it.

It is impossible to tell what he might have said at that moment if Sandy Sanders had not opened the door of his bedroom and stuck his tousled head out into the little hallway.

"Hey," he said, "what's all the shoutin' for? Can't you let a young fella get a little sleep?"

He hitched up the bottoms of his pajamas with one hand while he rubbed his eyes with the other. Then he strolled into Bill's room in his bare feet.

Some of the rage left Bill's face at the sound of his voice, and the man who called himself Sir James Aird laughed outright.

"This," he said to Bill, "would be that young demon of the air. Sandy Sanders."

"That's right," Bill said grudgingly. "Sandy, this is Sir James Aird of the British Air Ministry."

"Is that so?" Sandy said as he shook hands with Aird. "I've heard a great deal about you, of course. It's quite an honor to——" Suddenly, he stopped talking and grabbed at his pajamas with his free hand. His face lighted. "Say!" he said. "What about your autograph?"

"He collects 'em," Bill explained while Sandy darted into his room and returned with the little leather-covered autograph book.

"Right there, please," Sandy said, opening the book and handing Aird a pen.

Aird wrote his name and handed the book back to Sandy.

Sandy shook his head. "You didn't finish it," he said. "Put those V. C.s and D. S. C.s and things like that on, too."

"Righto," Aird laughed.

"Get some clothes on kid," Bill snapped at him.

"Righto!" Sandy said, echoing Aird. He went back into his room. Bill waited until he had closed his door.

"All right," he said to Aird, and there was utter hopelessness and defeat in his voice. "I'll get out of England. I'll get out and I'll never come back. But you can't muzzle me when I get back to the States. I'll talk and I'll have young Sanders to verify what I say."

"That," Aird said smoothly, "is entirely at your own discretion. We can't stop you from talking then. But I think, when you have had time to cool off a bit and give the matter a little thought, you'll decide to keep quiet. You'll do it to prevent people from calling you a liar."

Bill didn't answer him. He knew he was licked and he was afraid to speak because of what he might say. He stood in stony silence while Aird bade him good-bye and closed the door behind him.

Then he gave vent to his feelings. He was still cursing when the door to Sandy's room flew open and Sandy came tearing in.

"Bill!" he screamed. "Where is he?" Sandy was waving his autograph book.

"He's gone, damn him," Bill said vehemently.

"Listen, Bill!" Sandy said, barely able to talk because of his excitement. "That guy wasn't Sir James Aird. He's the rat who calls himself the Saver of Souls!"

Bill gazed at him for a moment as though he thought he was crazy. Then he got hold of himself because something in Sandy's expression impressed him that he knew what he was talking about.

"Quick, kid," he said. "How do you figure it?"

"Remember I was studying handwriting and ventriloquism on our last trip to South America when you first tangled with him? He wrote you a note at that time and I studied it quite thoroughly and remembered it. When I saw Aird's signature I was sure I had seen that writing before. Finally, it came to

me. And remember his voice the day he broke in on the radiophone? They talked like the same man!"

For a split fraction of a second Bill stared at him. Then he leaped for the telephone. He got the bell captain on the phone and asked him to find out from the starter in front of the hotel where the man who had just left his room had gone.

Then he started on a telephone quest for Lord Hereburn. Here Bill's name worked magic. The telephone operator had located and had Lord Hereburn on the wire within a few minutes.

"I'm sorry to be short, sir," Bill said to him. "But I've got to hurry! Did the Duke of Malbury find you last night and talk to you?"

"Ah—ah—no," Lord Hereburn said.

"I haven't heard from him in——"

"Right!" Bill snapped. "You didn't see him! Listen carefully. The Duke of Malbury dropped me at the Cecil Hotel last night at ten o'clock. He was going to try to locate you. He was being driven by a chauffeur in a Sunbeam landaulet. You'd better start tracing what happened to him after that. He was to get in touch with me as soon as he had talked to you. I believe he has met with some kind of foul play. I can't explain further but I'll get in touch with you as soon as I can."

He hung up abruptly, snapped at Sandy: "Get into your clothes, fast, kid!"

Again the phone rang, and Bill snatched it.

"The starter says he directed a cab driver to take him to Croydon Airport outside London," the bell captain reported.

"Thanks," Bill said. "Have a fast car ready for me when I come down in a few minutes. Did the starter know who the man was?"

"We know him as Mr. Mordecai Murphy, an American, sir," the captain said.

"Thanks again!" Bill shouted, slamming down the receiver.

His mind was a seething mass of emotions as he made a connection with Croydon and gave instructions to warm up

the Lancer. He could hardly believe what the bell captain had told him.

Mordecai Murphy! The Saver of Souls! They were one and the same! The mystery man who was reputed to be a munitions king, an international banker, a fomenter of human misery and suffering.

"Hurry like hell, kid!" he shouted at Sandy. "We have a real job on our hands!"

X—FINAL TRICK

"DO YOU believe the Saver of Souls is Mordecai Murphy?" Sandy asked Bill as their cab raced toward the great airport south of the city.

"I do," Bill said. "The part fits him perfectly. No one has ever been able to explain Murphy. He is known to have his finger in things all over the world. He has been accused of a thousand crimes in the press. But no one has ever been able to prove anything against him. He is a cunning, shrewd manipulator."

They saw the twin, three-bladed props of the Lancer idling on the apron as they stepped out of the cab. At the same instant they saw Mordecai Murphy, alias the Saver of Souls, alias Sir James Aird, climb into a low-wing monoplane; he blasted the tail around and jockeyed down across the field.

In that instant it came to Bill how close he had come to letting Murphy bluff him out. He knew that in another few hours he would have been at Croydon for an entirely different reason than he was there now. He would have been making preparations to fly the Lancer back to America. And he knew that he would have left his self-respect behind him in England.

He raced across the apron with Sandy at his heels and dove into the forward cockpit of the idling Lancer. The low-wing monoplane with Mordecai Murphy at the controls was streaking away to the south as Bill hung the Lancer on its props in pursuit.

"Get your swivel gun out, kid," Bill said into his telephone. "I'm going to get him this time. He's going back and he's going to talk. I should have had enough sense to know the

British Air Ministry would never send Sir James Aird to me with any such orders."

"You going to shoot him down. Bill?" Sandy asked.

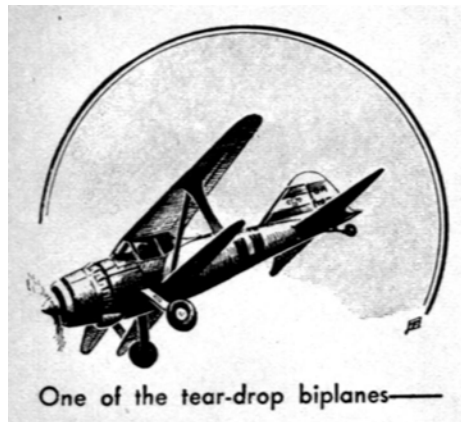
"No," Bill said. "I'm going to force him down. I don't know where he's heading. I want to stop him before he gets over the Channel."

"Do you think his ship mounts any guns?" Sandy asked.

"No," Bill said. "I don't think so. But be ready. That bird may pull anything out of his hat. I'm going above him and trim off his nose to force him lower."

The great chalk cliffs of Beachy Head were under their wings as Bill got the nose of the low-wing monoplane under his telescopic sights. The next instant his finger clamped down on his 37mm. cannon. He fired a burst of five shells that were all tracers just above the nose of the speeding plane.

He saw Mordecai Murphy's upturned face as those five shells danced above his head. Then he banked the Lancer



around on its right wing tip as the monoplane flipped its tail into the air in a diving turn that brought it closer to the choppy waves of the Channel three thousand feet below.

Again Bill stuck the nose of the Lancer down to fire a burst as they raced westward along the coast. This time the face of the Saver of Souls was white and strained as he gazed up and back at the man who rode his tail so relentlessly.

Bill knew that now he had his enemy where he wanted him. The other was unarmed and flying a plane that was in no way a match for the Lancer. For the first time Bill was

engaged with him with the odds on his side. He resolved that if he could not force him to land he would shoot away his controls and force him to bail out.

Then the crumbling promontory of Culver Cliff on the Isle of Wight flashed under their wings and they were above the rolling hills and tranquil villages of the "bowl" at the southern end of the island,

Bill opened the throttles of the Lancer and raced ahead of the low-wing monoplane. Then brought the nose up and around in a climbing turn to race back at it with his Brownings yammering. He was trying, desperately to force it back above the rolling country-side where it could make a landing. He lifted the nose of the Lancer to keep his bullets from driving into the cockpit of the little monoplane.

He was only fifty yards away from the little ship when he saw Murphy lift the nose and heard the staccato chatter of a machine gun that was not his own. At the same instant he felt bullets drumming into the metal surface of the Lancer and felt it buck from the impact. He yanked the stick back into his stomach and heard Sandy's scream of warning as Murphy's bullets drove up through the belly.

As Bill leveled off he looked back and down and saw the machine-gun trough along the engine housing of the monoplane, and he cursed at himself for not having noticed it before. It was only a single .30-caliber gun, but in the hands of Murphy it was equal to a half-dozen weapons. He poured soup into his power plant and brought the Lancer up and over on its back and rolled it level.

Murphy had dropped the nose of his little ship and was racing away to the northwest.

Bill's face was a grim mask of determination as he eased the stick of the Lancer forward and gunned his engines. Ahead the precipitous cliffs of Fresh-water Bay climbed out of the Channel into the gorse and heather of the downs. Everywhere the cliffs were cleft by jagged ravines and glens, cut under by the sea and hollowed out into waterside caverns. Bill knew that no one could survive a forced landing at the base of those cliffs where deadly under-tows raged.

Back and forth from Blackgang Chine to The Needles along one of the most rugged and lofty coasts of England raced the two ships. A half-dozen times Bill could have blown the low-wing monoplane out of the air with his explosive shells, but he wanted to take Mordecai Murphy

alive. He was entirely convinced now that Sandy was right. That the man was Moredcai Murphy and also the Saver of Souls.

Suddenly, the black monoplane was zooming up underneath him with its single machine gun spewing burst after burst. Lead chewed through the leading edge of his port before he could slam the Lancer out of range.

The monoplane roared upward until it almost stalled, then flipped over and came down on Bill's tail as he started a sweeping turn to the left.

Bill heard the chatter of Sandy's 80-caliber machine gun as he half-rolled out of that deadly hail of lead. The next moment they had leveled off again and were roaring at one another with terrific speed. Bill's fingers clamped down on his gun trips, only to have Murphy slip the monoplane away. He came up and around in a lightning like chandelle and dived on the speeding black ship. But when he clamped down on his trips the monoplane crabbed out from under his sights as though some unseen hated had flicked it out of danger.

Bill shook his head in disgust as he realized that he had underestimated the skill of Mordecai Murphy again. Because he knew the Lancer was superior to Murphy's ship he was not bearing down hard enough. He was letting Murphy slip away from him, knowing in the back of his mind that he could shoot him down at any time if he wanted to. But he was trying to puncture his tanks instead of wounding him. He wanted him alive to tell his story.

Then they were roaring at one another again with their guns vomiting fire and death. And this time Mordecai Murphy swerved his little black monoplane in to the left for a death-dealing burst of fire just before they passed. Bill kicked the Lancer off to his right to avoid the monoplane as it zoomed upward.

They came up and back, each in a flashing chandelle, and now Murphy seemed determined to stay in the fight instead of running away. He was handling his ship with uncanny skill as they roared at each other again at terrific speed.

Again Murphy pounced in to his left just before the two ships passed. But this time his gun was silent and he did not zoom upward to avoid a crash. Instead he held it hard on until it was too late for Bill to realize his mad intent. The tips of the props of the two ships bit into each other with a blood-

curdling Impact as metal met metal. The crash was like a mighty clap of thunder. For one terrible moment they hung together, seemingly leashed, dangling in midair.

Then they fell away and began a twisting, tortuous descent toward the delicately colored cliffs of Alum Bay, just beyond the gaunt, projecting rocks reaching up to embrace them that were The Needles.

Bill Barnes struggled with all the power of his will to get his eyes open. The dim room rolled around him in a dizzy circle that left him sick.

"Take it easy. Bill," he heard a vaguely familiar voice say, a voice tense with anxiety.

"He'll be all right in a bit," another voice said, and he was conscious of something cool being rubbed over his face.

"Easy, easily, old chap," another voice said, and he could feel a restraining hand on his arm as he tried to struggle upward.

Finally, he collapsed backward and closed his eyes again. After a time he opened them. Things no longer danced before him. He gazed at the anxious blue eyes and freckled face of young Sandy Sanders until he recognized it.

"Hello, kid," he said. "What the hell happened?"

"Do you remember anything, Barnes?" another voice said, and when Bill studied its owner's face for a moment he recognized the Duke of Malbury.

"A little," he said weakly. "How long have I been out?"

"Three days, Bill!" Sandy said. "And was I worried!"

"What happened?" Bill asked again.

"We were tangled up with Mordecai Murphy, the Saver of Souls," Sandy said. "He rammed us."

"Am I all right?" Bill asked.

"Just a bad concussion and bruises, and a broken arm," Sandy said. "You've been conscious but delirious."

"Listen!" Bill said. "Did Murphy talk? Did he tell the truth about the Memphis?"

"He couldn't talk. Bill," Malbury said. "He's dead. But we got Duncan. "

We found him aboard Murphy's yacht at Cowes. That's where Murphy was headed when you followed him. We found Duncan and we thought there must be some connection because he was the head of International Airways. He finally talked. The whole story has been released just as you told it to me. All of England has been praying for your recovery."

A man who looked like a doctor said. "You'd better not tax his strength too much at first, sir."

"Wait a minute," Bill said. "What happened to you, Malbury? Evidently Lord Hereburn found you."

"Yes," Malbury said grimly. "They found me. I was being detained, to put it mildly. But you'd better rest now. Bill. A surgeon had to perform an operation to relieve the pressure on your brain. You'll be all right in time but you'll need a long rest."

"Yeah," Bill said, and he managed a thin grin. "A holiday! That's what I came over here for. What about you, kid? Didn't you get banged up at all?"

"Just a few bruises and a couple of cuts on my head when I rammed it into my crash pad," Sandy said.

"He did a really masterly job," Malbury said. "He brought the Lancer out of a spin without any power and set her down right side up."

"What about the Lancer?" Bill asked.

"She'll need a lot of patching up."

Sandy said doubtfully. "I learned of an amphibian airplane factory on the Isle of Wight. I had her hauled over there."

"Good work," Bill said. "How soon do I get out of this place?"

"In a few days'," Malbury said. "You were lucky you didn't have a fracture.

When you get out you're coming up to Arunwav Castle for a good long rest."

"Yeah," Bill said again. "For a holiday!"