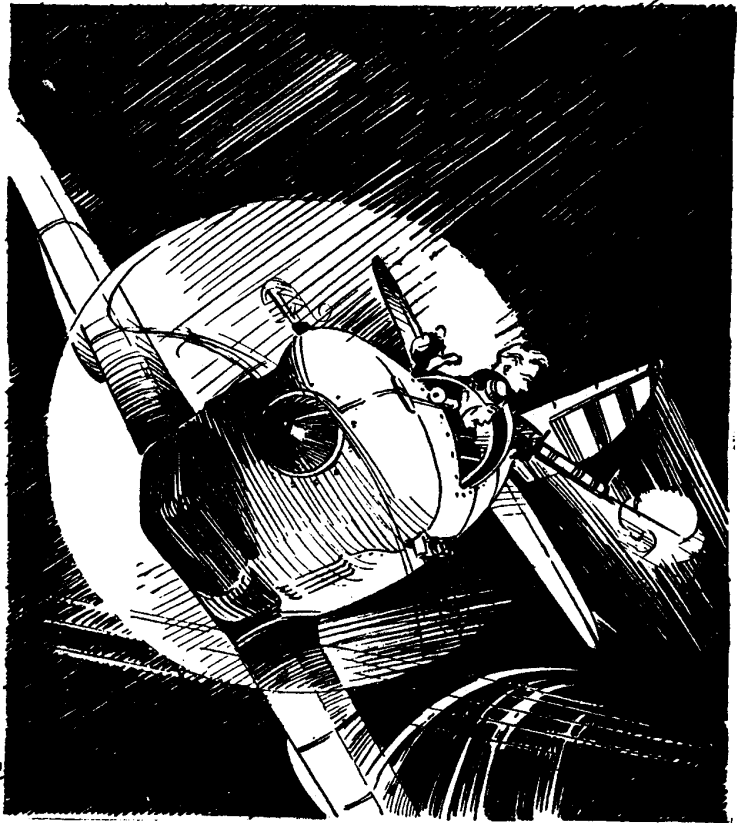


Death Spans the Pacific

It was a quirk of Fate that brought "Buzz" Benson to take off for the North without first examining the rear cockpit of his Lockheed XP-9. If he had glanced into that tiny observer's "office," he would never have known that behind that withering flame of war that lit the skies of the Pacific there lay a deadly secret. He would never have learned that only one American held its key.



Illustrated by Alden McWilliams

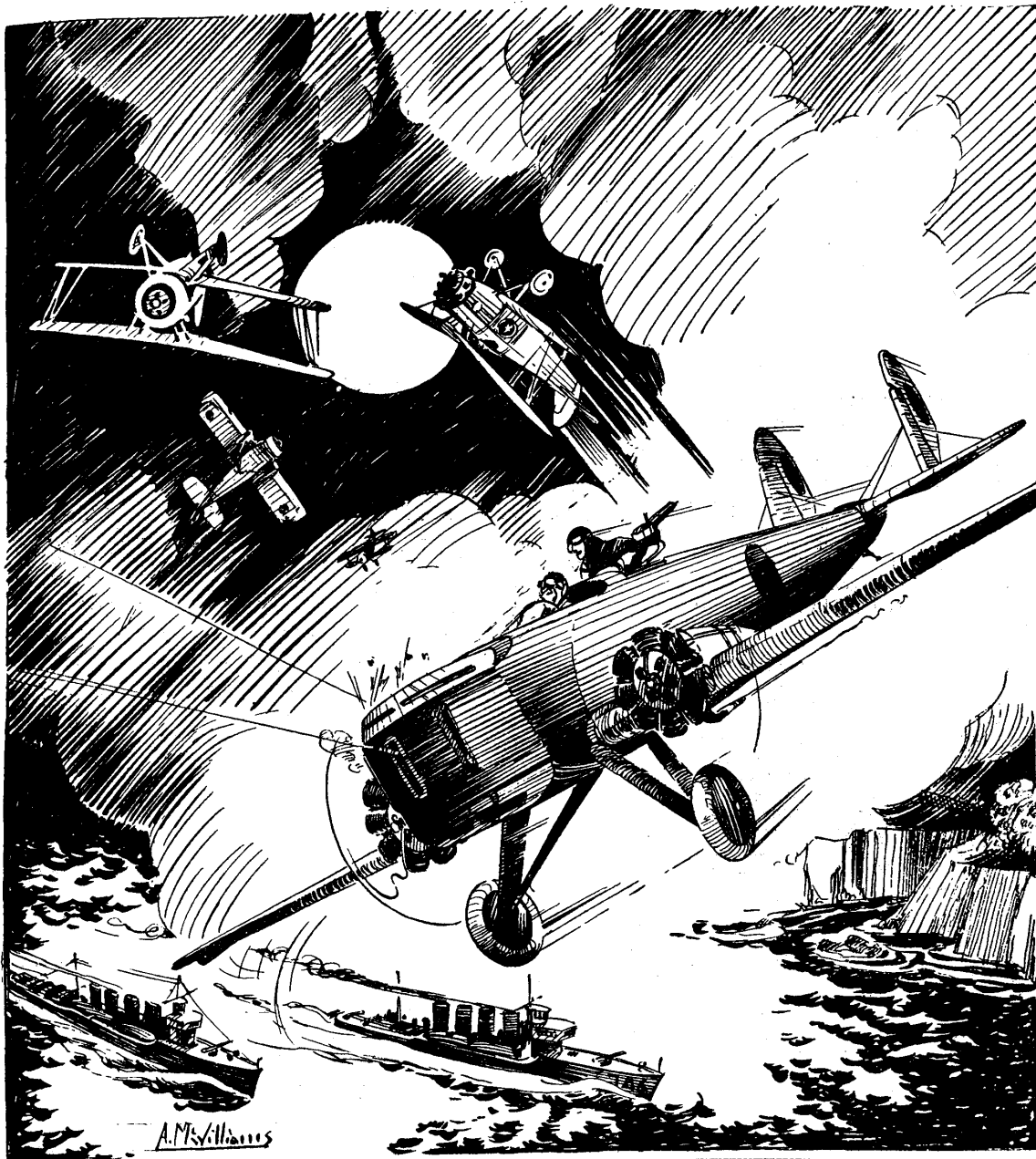
* * *

by Arch Whitehouse
illustrated by Alden McWilliams

WHEN the Japanese Foreign Minister addressed that closed session of the Diet at Tokyo on July 27th, stringent measures were exercised to keep his words secret. In fact, so thorough were those measures that the world at large never learned the exact content of that speech until 1940 when Baron Okia Kawamura finally set it down in print in his noted history of the Japanese-American conflict.

It then came to light that the Minister had said ---

.... We will make clear our resolve to tolerate no further interference with our hereditary rights. This may not actually mean war-but if war comes we can face it with calmness. ... Our Naval strength is such that conflict with America can be undertaken with every assurance of a happy issue. We must strike



now before our newly won military position in China is threatened. ...Our relations with other powers, particularly European powers, rules out every possibility of their materially aiding either China or

America. ...For one thing, this move will completely erase the new demon of anarchy which has been rampant in our country of late. A war will purge our country of the baneful poison injected by foreign agitators;

and what is more important, we can now set up impassable barriers against the flood of Western influences which have threatened to engulf our peoples. ...For those of you who may fear that our military and Naval might be insufficient to engage America, I again point to our air strength. In the last two years, our sky forces have been increased ten-fold. Indeed, Japanese aircraft now have a radius of action twice that of any other power - for we figure only the outward distance. Our brave men never consider the return ...

But the people of America knew nothing of all this. To them, the whole thing began on July 28th when a noted radio commentator, speaking over a national hook-up, declared ---

All United States Naval vessels in Atlantic waters have just received urgent orders to proceed at once through the Panama Canal and join the Pacific Fleet somewhere off Hawaii for a proposed cruise to the Philippines.

The Navy Department promptly denied such an order had been given. It did admit that a few vessels had been ordered into the Pacific, but only in line with ordinary routine. The report of a Naval cruise to the Philippine Islands was likewise soundly denied.

Three days later all communication with the Philippines and Guam was completely cut off!

A HAGGARD, weary-eyed man

strode into the Operations Office of the Army Air Corps at Crissy Field just as the late afternoon sun was throwing long shadows across the runways. He was greeted with unmistakable reserve by the Staff Colonel.

"I haven't much time to give you, Mr. Benson," the Colonel said. "We have been under trying times here at Crissy, and you must not expect too much attention. You will have to take things as they come. We have, however, got your ship ready."

"I know. I realize what you have been through, sir," Billy "Buzz" Benson replied crisply. "On the other hand, I want you to understand fully that this is not a job of my asking. I'd sooner be back in Los Angeles."

"You're a newspaperman, I understand." "I am-when I'm not under the orders of Major Norton in Washington."

"It's all very irregular, of course," the Colonel sniffed- "A civilian on active duty-free-lancing all over the place in the best machines we can get our hands on."

"Irregular? It's a damn nuisance, sir," Benson agreed. "You say the word and I'll clear out." .

"Oh, no! You don't understand. We need you, Mr. Benson," the Colonel stammered, "but you see-well, there's no precedent for me to work from."

"What you are really trying to say, colonel," smirked Buzz, "is that you would like to have full control over my movements, bawl me out when you are upset and generally man-handle me."

"I can see that you are not that sort of man, Mr. Benson," the Colonel smiled wanly. "Let's get on with the business."

"Let's!" agreed Buzz. "Now first. What are the latest reports?"

"There are none. We know nothing-except that the Japanese fleet has destroyed the American Asiatic Squadron in a battle-off Lubang Island. Enemy vessels of the Kongo class engaged them at 24,000 yards and destroyed every vessel within forty-five minutes."

"That's bad."

"But it's much worse than that. A complete flotilla including two new aircraft carriers has been spotted off Queen Charlotte Island-that's near the coast of British Columbia. We are expecting news of a naval air engagement at any time."

"Have we any planes in that area?"

"Only a few two-place naval observation jobs - no match for what they are sending up against us."

"Where's the main body of the Pacific Fleet?"

"I'm not sure. But I believe they were drawn as far west as Hawaii before they were recalled. It will be days before they can get back."

"How's the Canal?"

"All right, so far. It is now closed to merchant shipping. Only Navy vessels allowed through."

"The Philippines and Guam have been taken?"

"As far as we know. We've had

no news from either post in several days."

"You say you expect an aerial engagement somewhere south of British Columbia, colonel?" asked Buzz. "What naval vessels have we in that area?"

"All I can tell you is that we have three almost obsolete cruisers, each carrying four spotter seaplanes. That's twelve aircraft. I am not certain, but the new Yorktown may be in the area, too, and she can offer considerable help, if she is there."

"That's the new light aircraft carrier, isn't it?"

"You're right. But I can't be sure where she is."

"Then as things stand now, the Japs should have no trouble in getting through and bombing industrial areas around Seattle and perhaps even as far south as San Francisco!"

"I expect news of such an engagement any minute."

"Then the sooner I get into the air, the better."

"Your machine is waiting at No.4 hangar. Here's your special identity card. That's all I can do for you now."

"That's enough, thanks."

THE new Lockheed XP-9 stood in the lowering shadows of the No. 4 hangar when Buzz made his way through the wild flurry of tense activity that marked the concrete aprons in front of each shed. The machine was a new low-wing monoplane fitted with a supercharged Curtiss "Conqueror"

engine which gave the two-place fighter a top speed of 226 m.p.h.

He studied the machine carefully for several minutes. Then he ordered the mechanic to stow the rear gun - a 7.5 m/m Browning fitted to a movable mounting - under the camel-hump cowl of the rear pit.

"Going alone!" the mech asked.

"Yes. I want to make time."

"You'll wish you had a gunner in back there, if you ever run into any of them Jap Nakajimas. They're hell on wings, they say;"

"How do you know!" Buzz snapped.

"I seen 'em when we wuz in the Orient."

"How'd you like to come along!" asked Buzz with a wry smile.

"Not me, brother! I'm a monkey-wrench soldier. You ain't gettin' me up there to be shot at."

Buzz laughed aloud and went across the hangar and drew a new white coverall and a pack 'chute. He dressed carefully, buckled on a gun belt, and selected a few maps. The mechanic watched him with interest.

"Where you going, anyway!" he finally asked. "Looking for trouble," replied Buzz. "Anything else!"

"Nothing in particular."

"You ain't going to look for Cressford, are you!" "Cressford! Cressford! You mean the guy who went West a short time ago on a non-stop from Tokyo to Seattle?"

"That's the guy. He was flying a Lockheed, too."

"Right! I'd forgotten all about him. Wonder where he cracked up," Buzz said, frowning.

"I wonder why he cracked up," the thin-faced mech argued. "He could have flown all the way to New York with the bus he had."

"That's stretching it a bit, brother," Buzz smiled. "Still, considering everything, he might have had one put over on him."

"You keep your eyes open if you get up around Charlotte or even further along. You might find the guy, yet."

"You sound interested," Buzz said.

"I am. Lauren Cressford was my brother and I could tell you something, only you wouldn't believe me. It sounds screwy."

"Say!" gasped Buzz. "No wonder you don't want to fly."

"It ain't that, exactly. Read this. It's part of a letter I got from him - mailed in Tokyo before he took off. It only got here a few days ago."

Buzz took the sheet of crumpled paper and read:

... I should make it, but in case anything happens, I want you to take care of Lionel. I ought to be able to make it, but something tells me I'm going to be jobbed. I ran into something out here, that has me scared stiff, and the quicker I get to Washington and explain it, the better for all concerned...

"Whew!" whistled Buzz. "Who's this Lionel?"

"That's his kid - a swell kid, too. I'm taking care of him at a place just outside the field. We really call him Lonny."

"I wonder what it was he found out."

"You can bet it was something to do with all this mess."

"You've got too much brains to be on this job," Buzz said, peering into the man's eyes. "Why not come along with me? I can use you. I can fix it with the Colonel."

"No. ...If anything happened, who'd take care of the kid?"

"That's right. I'd forgotten. Well, wind her up. I'm getting away before it gets too dark."

They hoisted the Lockheed fighter up in a dolly and rolled her out. Buzz climbed in and set the throttle for starting. The little mechanic wound the starter and Buzz kicked her over. With a bellow, the motor caught and Buzz eased her down for the warm-up.

Cressford, the mechanic, climbed up on the wing, again barked into Benson's ear: "Where you going, anyway?"

"North, on a special job."

"Keep your eye open for that Lockheed, Will you?"

"Sure will. Stick around, I may be back before mid-night."

"You'd better. You only got about four hours in them tanks."

"I'll be seeing you," grinned Buzz,

pulling back the sliding covers.

THE new Lockheed raced away through the moon-streaked sky and headed north. So many things had happened in the last twenty-four hours that Buzz was glad of the chance to sit back and relax while he went over the whole situation.

For one thing, the Japanese government had broken off diplomatic relations. The move had been timed perfectly and it had caught the United States flatfooted. Already the Asiatic Squadron had been wiped out and to all intents and purposes both Guam and the Philippines had been taken over with all cable communications obliterated.

It had all happened so suddenly that none could figure what it actually meant. Would it be a naval war? Would it be a mighty clash of military aircraft? Or would the forces of the Rising Sun actually get a foothold on the American mainland?

Events in Europe had distorted the actual understanding in the Pacific. Scare-head news writers had inadvertently twisted the focus of American international interest to a flea-bitten desert hole in Northern Africa rather than on the all-important Asiatic situation.

Even the great attempt of Lauren Cressford to span the Pacific in one hop had been completely lost in the unjustified interest displayed over the European situation. Little did the nation know that when Cressford disappeared, the key to an amazing international intrigue went with him.

Buzz now was crossing over to the shore-line that ran toward Cape

Mendocino. He was climbing all the time, clipping off miles at a tremendous rate. He fingered his 13 m/m gun that fired through the airscrew, made certain it was properly loaded. In addition he had a 7.5 m/m synchronized gun set on the other side of the cockpit.

The sky cleared slightly and the moon spread a silver curtain across everything. The Pacific below was a vast bluish-black counterpane, but here and there he caught the fan-tail trails of destroyers that surged northward.

Then things began to happen! He caught a quick glimpse of exhaust tubes, the flash of gun muzzles and belch of explosives.

"Hell-o-o-o!" husked Buzz. "Now we're heading for it. The aircraft are engaged off Cape Blanco, and there's the destroyer flotilla."

He was about to nose down to hurtle into the crazy storm of wings, wires, and tracer bullets, when something caught his eye.

A pencil line of scarlet and yellow flashed past his head. He twisted hard as something behind him rattled. Then before he could turn to inspect the damage, there was a thunderous rattle, the ominous vibration of snarling guns. Out of the corner of his eye he caught telltale streaks of fire that spat out of his rear gun.

"What the devil?" Buzz swore, twisting around. "Who's that?"

He could see the slim shoulders of someone crouched over the gun, peering along the sights. He could see a mop of light hair, swirled in the

slip-stream that flipped along the cockpit cover. He could see a youthful figure directing a terrible death stream at an onrushing two-engined raider that had suddenly plunged from the moon-lit clouds that fringed the melee of raging planes.

There was a low throb, distinguishable through the rattle of the Browning gun. Then came a sudden plop, a blinding glare. An explosion echoed across the sky and the two-engined Mitsubishi 93 belched its last gulp, ripped itself apart!

Buzz yelled, pawed back at the slim figure in his rear cockpit. Was it a boy or a girl? He managed to slap the slim shoulders and the figure turned around, "a picture of youthful determination.

It was a boy, a slim handsome lad of about fifteen. He turned and pointed at the tangle of burning wreckage which was falling in uneven swings toward the inky sea below. Buzz could not remember when he had seen a more manly lad, but he was somewhat annoyed to find that something had been "put over" on him.

But there was no time to ask questions now.

The engagement had driven them smack into the wild charges of the Nakajima 90-II's which were slamming at a small formation of silver Vought Corsairs.

"Say!" Buzz growled through his clenched teeth, "those Jap ships are not unlike the Corsairs. No markings to speak of. It's hard to distinguish them when --you consider that the Corsairs have different colored tails,

depending on which vessel they came from."

But the lad in the back seat was now in action again. He picked off a black-tailed Nakajima while Buzz hurled the Lockheed smack at the leading Jap. Two ships were going down almost together, one with a wing off, the other in flames. A three-ship element abruptly bashed at them from above and Buzz heard the rear gun rattle again. The sparky tracers seemed to split the raiders in two. Buzz wanted to yell, but he was still somewhat upset over the kid being in there.

All around them crashed anti-aircraft shells from the destroyers below. It was dangerous gunnery.

Buzz slammed in and out, broke up attack after attack. The Lockheed, its wheels tucked up into the wing roots, slid through openings, poured terrible bursts in all directions. At one time there were seven planes tumbling into the sea below-and two of them were Corsairs.

How long it lasted, Buzz never knew. But eventually they cut the raiders down, forced them to turn back toward the north. The Corsairs were weary, too. They had performed the task set for them and they were more than ready to reform, prepare to get back to their battleship bases, refuel and rest.

Suddenly Buzz felt the small fist of the lad thumping behind him. He turned, saw that the lad was pointing past his tail assembly. .

Buzz glanced back, could see nothing. He glanced quizzically at the boy's face.

"What is it?" he asked anxiously. "Another lot - going inland. Look! Big two-engined machines."

Buzz whipped the Lockheed over, tore toward the coast line. In a few minutes he began to catch outlines of the ships the lad had seen.

"You sure have good eyesight, kid," he muttered.

THE Lockheed with the 730 h.p. Conqueror nosed down, raced after the bombers. As soon as he could get within reasonable range, Buzz got out his night glasses and judged that they were more Mitsubishi 93's heading inland.

He glanced at his fuel gauge, realized that he had little time to waste. Beside, his ammo boxes were jangling ominously. He had expended nearly all his heavy caliber stuff.

Then began a mad race inland, Buzz pouring the sauce to the Lockheed while the Japanese Mitsubishis seemed to be drawn on by some unseen force.

"They certainly can travel," Buzz growled. "Where the devil are they heading for, anyway?"

They had crossed somewhere south of Salem, Oregon, and were still heading inland, apparently for the open country and foothills between Mt. Hood and Mt. Jefferson. There seemed to be no reason for this move, for they evidently were giving Salem and Portland a complete go-by.

Something told Buzz they were up to no good, even so, and he

nosed down again, went at them from long range. But it was no go. They spat short bursts back at him from the rear turrets and while the aim was none too steady, there were spattering flecks here and there that were not any too reassuring.

"They're heading toward the Tik-Tok Indian Reservation," Buzz mused as he saw them suddenly turn to the south-east. "Wonder what they think there is down there to blow up. After the First American, I guess."

But levity had no place there, and Buzz knew it. Those Jap bombers were not heading deep inland for the pleasure of flying. They were now nearly 150 miles inland.

"Where did they come from?" the lad behind suddenly bawled into his ear.

"Somewhere out at sea, I suppose," Buzz barked over his shoulder.

"But they are fitted with wheels," the lad argued.

Buzz jerked at that. Of course they were! They certainly had not taken off any aircraft carrier. If they had, they would soon have to be turning back unless they had an unusual range of action. He turned, peered over his shoulder again at the lad behind him. He wondered where this boy had come from and how he knew so much about planes -and guns.

"Where do you hail from?" Buzz asked in a friendly manner.

"Back there at Crissy. I got in while you were getting your 'chute."

"But how did you get into the field?"

"I live near there. I know the way to slip in."

"You're taking a long chance, young fellow. Why did you pick on me?"

"You got a Lockheed - and I think Lockheeds are the greatest ships in the world!"

The sincerity of tone startled Buzz. He turned around further, studied the lad's face. Again he was struck by its clear complexion, its healthy tone in color, the steady gaze of the blue-grey eyes, the firm jaw.

"That seems like a strange reason to stowaway like this," Buzz tried to argue.

"My father flew a Lockheed," the lad went on in a low tone.

"Oh, yes? Is he an air line pilot?"

"No, he was an engineer-a former Navy man. And he had some swell ideas about planes. He tried one of them out, but I guess it didn't work."

"What do you mean?"

"He had some ideas about a new carburetor that would save fuel and he tried to fly the Pacific from Tokyo to the United States. ...but he .. he didn't get here."

"You mean Lauren Cressford was your father?" Buzz said with a catch in his voice.

The lad did not answer, just nodded his head a trifle.

"It worked every time he tried it out over here," the lad went on. "They. ... they must have done

something to it over there."

"The Japanese?"

The lad nodded again, stared ahead. While Buzz studied his face, fascinated by the character reflected there under the dim illumination of the dashboard lights, he saw the boy's lower lip tremble a trifle. Then the lad's eyes suddenly opened wide and Buzz wheeled around.

"They've gone!" young Cressford cried. "While we were talking. They've gone. ...somewhere. Through those clouds."

Buzz nosed down through a thin layer of cirrus, tried to spot the Jap bombers. There was no trace of them anywhere! Not a flash of exhaust! Not the fleck of a prop! Below them for miles in every direction swept a vast blanket of dull, greenish black. But he knew that blanket was spiked with the towering tips of Oregon pine.

"Whew! They certainly put one over on US that time," Buzz snapped. "But they couldn't land anywhere down there."

"It was my fault," the lad muttered. "I should not have talked to you."

"Forget it, son. They're around here somewhere, and we'll find them eventually. They don't just disappear in thin air, you know."

"What are you going to do now?" demanded the lad.

"There's an emergency field near the Dalles beacon. I think we'll pull in there for tonight and see how things lay. Then I'll have to find a way to get you back to San Francisco."

"But I don't want to go back to 'Frisco," the boy argued. "I want to stay with your Lockheed."

"You're Lockheed-loony, aren't you?" Buzz gagged. "We'll talk about it later."

THEY turned north, picked up the silver ribbon of the Deschutes River, eventually spotted the beacon at Dalles and landed. There were several sleepy-eyed soldiers on guard there and Buzz was at once covered-until he showed his new identity card. Then they helped him run the plane into a small canvas hangar. Then, when they saw the boy they began to be suspicious.

"Don't worry about him," grinned Buzz. "He's a real soldier! I'll be responsible for him."

A bow-legged top-sergeant came up, got the story, then showed Buzz where he could bunk. They found another cot for young Cressford while Buzz went to the telephone and got in touch with Crissy field. He did not mention the boy, though.

"Now then, young fellow," he said, when he came back to find the boy deep in a tin can of hot milk, "let's get your story straight. It somehow gets under my skin. When did your father take off from Tokyo?"

"It was about 8 o'clock at night, on July 18th. That was Tokyo time, I guess. They heard his signals aboard the steamship Sampoon Maru almost twenty-four hours later."

"Twenty-four hours?" muttered Buzz. "Then he must have gone at least 4,000 miles!"

"If everything went okay, he did," agreed the lad, peering out of the tent into the darkness beyond.

"Then if he was on a normal course he should have been somewhere along the coast of Alaska-or even as far down as British Columbia."

"He was- to follow the Kuril Islands, cut across to the Aleutians, pick up his course at the tip of the Alaskan Peninsula, follow the southern shore along to Juneau, then come down the Pacific coast to Seattle. It seemed safe enough," the boy explained.

"You're sure about that Sampoon Maru business-and the time?" demanded Buzz.

"Sure! Here's some clippings from the papers," the boy said anxiously.

Buzz had forgotten most of the important details of the flight, but the clippings soon brought it all back.

"All I can say, kid," Buzz said, "is that if he was in the air for twenty-four hours, he must be on the mainland somewhere."

"But now this war business stops all chance of anyone going out to look for him, doesn't it?"

"That guy back there at Crissy Field. He's your uncle, isn't he?"

"Sure, my father's brother. Did he tell you about me?"

"In a roundabout way, yes. I never thought I'd get up to 5,000 over Gold Beach and find you popping up in the back seat. What was the idea, anyhow?"

"I don't quite know now. It seems silly and crazy to you, I suppose," Lonny Cressford went on slowly, "but then, when I saw that Lockheed, something made me get in and hide. I think I thought you were going to look for my father, and I wanted to go along."

"Don't worry. Maybe this will work out yet. Your father was a pretty smart guy, wasn't he?"

"He knew about everything," the lad said proudly. "He taught me all about guns, but he never let me fire one. That's how I knew how to handle that one in the back of your plane."

"Did he ever tell you anything about this carburetor business he invented?"

"No, not much. That was his pet idea and nobody was in on it all. He first tried it on a car and it worked. Then he tried it on a boat and it worked, so then he made another to fit the back of a Wasp engine and eventually it was tried on his Lockheed Altair. He used to say he could fly from Japan to New York if the weather was anywhere near reasonable."

"In an Altair?" asked Buzz. "Sure. That's what he was flying." "Why the Altair has a cruising range

of 1,025 miles or thereabouts. Did he have any special tanks put in for the Pacific flight?"

"One, in the mail compartment." "All right, but even so at the best that would only bring the normal range up to about 2,000 miles. Do you mean to say his carburetor idea would increase it that much? That would be

three times as much if he expected to do even six thousand miles non-stop."

"He said it would, and I believe him," the boy said quietly, still staring out into the night.

"Whew! Then this puts an entirely different angle on it all. Suppose the Japs copied that idea somehow and put it on their planes?"

"Golly, sir. I guess I'd go crazy." "Those Mitsubishi machines we just lost," Buzz went on as though he were talking to himself, "suppose they were fitted with Cressford's idea. They could fly across the Pacific, bomb important points, and get back again. What that would do to modern military science- Wow!"

"My dad said it was a very simple idea-something about air-mixture jets that used more air than the ordinary carburetor, and so did not use so much gasoline."

"They've been working on that idea for years, but never got anywhere with it," Benson went on. "Did he leave any blueprints or models of his idea?"

"No, he said he wasn't taking any such chances as that. No one outside of us knew what he was doing. He just built these carburetors and when they did not work he destroyed them."

"Then the Japs didn't know just what he was doing?"

"They weren't supposed to." "That makes it even more complicated," said Buzz. "Let's cork off for a few hours. Maybe something will turn up."

BUZZ lay for hours, pondering on his strange day and attempting to figure out a solution to the many twists. Young Cressford lay near him, tossing and talking in his sleep. Buzz listened for some time and realized that the youth was dreaming about his father.

Buzz got up once and sat near the boy. Finally, Lonny relaxed, settled back to a sound sleep. How long they slept, Buzz never knew; but he was aroused next morning by the boy who stood near him with a tray of breakfast.

"Whew! This is service," said Buzz sleepily. "How long have you been up?"

"Not very long. ...just long enough to lift some chow from the field kitchen outside. How do you feel?" the lad asked cheerfully.

"I'll be okay when I've had a wash or a shower. Any chances?"

"Sure. I had one over there in the men's quarters. Hurry up, we got a lot to do today."

Buzz wandered off and came back in about fifteen minutes more refreshed and clean. The breakfast was simple but encouraging and they sat on some ammunition cases and read a morning paper while they ate.

"No news of the Pacific Fleet yet, I see," Buzz said as he munched his bread.

"No news of my father, either," added young Cressford. "What was a mere war where his father was concerned."

"No. And they can't find any trace

of the two Pan American Clipper ships that started out from Guam two days ago."

"I'd like to know where those big two- engined ships went," young Cressford broke in again. "By the way, Mr. Benson, what were you heading up this way for, anyhow?"

"I have a special job, Lonny. A Japanese military plane of some sort has been seen around the southern end of Alaska-somewhere off Point Beauchaire. No one seems to know what it is up to and it refuses to answer Coast Guard signals."

"Gee! Maybe we might find some trace of my father if we went up that far. Let's get going," young Cressford boomed. ,

"Take it easy. Your father didn't come into this picture. I'm supposed to nail this Jap. He probably was selecting a spot suitable for a landing."

"Do the Japs have marines?"
"Sure they do, and it might be a good move for them to get a foothold somewhere in that area. You see, it would mean that we would have to get permission to go through British Columbia to get at them, and that might not be forthcoming."

"Gosh, the Canadians will help us, won't they?"

"I think they would, but those things are not settled in a few hours. It might take months, for it would involve the whole British Empire and we have to think of the British situation in the Pacific, too."

"It's all pretty complicated, isn't it? Still, we might go up that way and look around. I feel certain my father

is down somewhere in that area."

Buzz smiled at the boy and admired his courage, but he wondered how they would find Cressford, should they come upon his plane.

"I'm not afraid," the lad said. "I realize that if we find him, he might be dead, but I want to know what happened to him. I want to know whether he got a square shake on that show."

"Pack up!" said Buzz with authority. "If you can take it, I can."

"Swell! I'll see that everything is stowed away, Okay. You take care of the ship, eh?"

Buzz smiled at the manner in which the lad assumed his responsibilities. He felt that he could trust him to the finish.

He made another call through to Crissy Field, then checked the ship, fuel and guns. The available mechanics had done a good job on the Lockheed, but they were somewhat puzzled as to what it was all about. All about them hummed the mad activity of a squadron on active service. Men arrived in trucks, others went thundering out. Labor corps were set to work filling sandbags and building up defense gun emplacements. Overhead flights of fighters, bombers, and observation machines churned out toward the coast, all intent on a valiant stand against-the unknown.

Reports went out that Seattle had been badly bombed during the night by machines that had appeared out of the east-not the west. Buzz and young Cressford exchanged glances

at that. Then they heard that a minor naval engagement had been staged off Queen Charlotte Island and that only the excellence of the American gunnery had staved off a major defeat. As it was, the stronger Japanese force had been evaded and left to grope out of a smoke streaked area that was a death trap owing to the daring of Yankee submarine commanders.

More newspapers came out with more rumors and deeper and blacker headlines. Troops were pouring across the country toward the Pacific Coast. Three troop trains running over the tracks of the O. C. & E. lines were bombed from the air fully 500 miles from their destination. No one knew how, or by whom. A troop transport working its way through the Panama canal ran aground in Gatun Lake and sank in a mysterious manner, but most of the passengers and crew were saved and official Washington breathed a deep sigh of relief that no such disaster had happened in one of the locks.

"It's getting to be quite a war, son," Buzz said, folding his map to show a new area. "Let's get going before they draft us for some real service."

"Okay, skipper," replied young Cressford. "But I still think we pulled a boner when we let those Mitsubishi jobs get way from us last night."

"You're telling me?" snapped Buzz. "But there's no way of finding them, working blind. We've got to get something to base our movements on. Next stop somewhere in Alaska."

"I hope it's warm," said young Cressford.

"Don't worry. I got you an outfit inside. You'll be warm. You can slip it on when we get upstairs."

"You're a swell, guy, Mr. Benson," said Cressford.

BUZZ made sure he would have enough gas for the 600 mile run up to the southern tip of Alaska and in his heart he wished he had one of Cressford's fuel-saving gadgets, for he realized that they would have to economize pretty closely to make it on what they were able to carry. If they got into trouble, they might have to come down in British Columbia. That might take a lot of explaining and no end of international complications would result.

They climbed in, these two Argonauts of the air, and took off. The staff of the Dalles field had little time for them; for they were preparing to accommodate a fast pursuit group coming in from the East, and a lone, free-lance Lockheed had little standing with them. Could they have known what an important part that mere Lockheed was to play in this mad drama of war, they would have given it more attention. But Buzz was perfectly satisfied to get away without any unnecessary flourishes.

They climbed carefully with their load, shot across the state of Washington, headed for the tip of Cape Flattery, and then cut wide of Vancouver Island and studied the ground of the Canadian territory closely through glasses as they sped on for the indistinct blot of Moresby Island. Young Cressford worked hard all the way up, taking his turn at watching the sky all around them

and then the sea beyond.

It was an eerie trip, watching the fuel gauge, the British Columbia coastline, and the furtive movements of surface vessels below. Once they passed a wide-spread formation of Navy scouts that came up close, then sheered off again after identifying Benson's ship. The Pacific below was leaden and surly with few whitecaps to add a frill to its dull scowl. Buzz wondered what conditions were like farther out.

Then young Cressford tapped him on the shoulder quietly, as if he was uncertain.

"What is it?" Buzz said over his shoulder. He also noted at the same instant that they were now nearing the strip of water between Queen Charlotte Island and the tip of Alaska known as Dixon Entrance.

"Look! Down that way toward those rocks along the mainland," young Cressford said. "I keep seeing something, but I can't keep my glasses on it."

Buzz eased over, for he had a lot of respect for the lad's sight. He slammed the Lockheed through a thin wisp of mist, curled away toward the mainland again.

"Shut down a bit," said Lonny. "Let's go down lower and look carefully."

Buzz nodded, then suddenly caught the flash of a steel prop and the glint of a newly doped wing.

"There it is," he said quickly. "Look, over there, flying low over the rocks."

"Whew! That guy's taking a

chance," young Cressford said.

"And for a reason, I'll bet. He's looking for something."

"Let's go after him." Buzz wheeled closer inland, skudded through the ribbony cirrus clouds, and coursed after the strange ship they had seen skirting the dangerous coastline.

"You know what that is?" Buzz said suddenly when they got their first real glimpse of it.

"Looks small to me," said Lonny. "It is. It's one of the new Aichi folding-wing seaplanes they carry on the new Kawasaki subs. Now we're getting somewhere."

"Where's the submarine?" "Lord only knows. Those new Jap subs have a range of about 3,000 miles. That plane down there is unusual. It is not particularly fast because it has a light powered engine, but it nevertheless has a wide range of action. They say they can be stunted to a fare-thee-well and it is almost impossible to hit one once the pilot starts throwing it about."

"What's he looking for, though?"

"You got me. Perhaps for some of his own men - or a Jap plane that has been shot down or lost."

"Let's get him!" snapped Cressford. "Okay! Let's go."

YOUNG CRESSFORD broke out the rear gun, set out his shop for action. Buzz smiled at his thoroughness and opened the motor wider. The Lockheed slammed down toward the Aichi which was now

about two miles away. Buzz was uncertain what to do about it and decided to attempt to cut it off and drive it inland, but young Cressford was anxious and before Buzz could do anything about it, he had ripped back the cockpit panel and was pouring a long- range burst at the flickering Aichi.

"Wait a minute!" Buzz yelled.

But the youngster's shots had told already. The Jap plane jerked, twisted in agony, then suddenly sheered off and shot toward the coast line.

"Golly!" gasped Buzz. "What's he up to now?"

They saw the tiny seaplane curve in toward a jagged spire of rock that jutted out of the water like a storm - swept cathedral. The Jap pilot screwed past the tip of it; with inches to spare and suddenly nosed down. His guns chattered for a minute at something neither Buzz nor young Cressford could see. Then it came up from beyond the jagged spire and seemed to jerk twice.

"Bombs!" yelled Buzz. "He's bombing something!"

Then, as the small fragmentation missiles swept out from the light racks under the Aichi, there came several other detonations that crashed out all about the Lockheed!

BA-ROOM! BONG! BASH, Buzz charged at the Aichi, whipped a crashing burst of heavy caliber stuff at it, and saw its nose jerked again. The Aichi swept over on one wing, side-slipped beautifully over the spire of rock, and nosed for the water.

Buzz shot at him again, made him twist. The Jap hurtled through an opening between two towers of rock, disappeared again. They raced after him and heard two more bombs belch somewhere among the rocks.

"What the hell is he after" Buzz muttered under his breath.

But young Cressford was screaming in his ear,

"What's up, You hit?" demanded Buzz. But when he turned he saw the youngster directing a stream of fire at something out to sea.

BAH-ROO~! BONG! Two more heavy concussions bashed out above them, and now Buzz saw the source of the shell fire which had menaced them. A long gray submarine, its deck dripping and sleazy, was belching fire and smoke from a fixed gun mounted forward of the conning tower. Two more shots crashed about them, and Buzz whipped away, tried to clear.

"So that's where the Aichi came from! Well, here goes. Glad we brought the hardware along."

Young Cressford was spinning back and forth in the aft cockpit, firing short bursts.

"Hold it! Hold it!" Buzz roared. "We'll need all that stuff in a minute. Where did that Aichi guy go?"

"I don't know. He disappeared down there behind those rocks."

"Well, hang onto your eye-teeth, youngster. You're going to witness the first real victory of this war. Here we go!"

Buzz shot the Lockheed up hard, climbed in crazy jerky circles while

the gunners aboard the submarine peppered at him with everything they had. Buzz crawled back and forth then for a minute under slow speed, broke up their calculations.

"Now, then, hang on and give 'em plenty when we zoom up again."

The youngster turned, steadied himself behind the gun and felt the Lockheed heel over. Buzz let her dangle there for a few seconds and faked a hit. Then, when they held their fire for the fraction of a second, he let her have her head and reached for the bomb rack plugs. He drove the blunt nosed fighter down dead on the conning tower of the Jap sub. The wind screamed past their coupe top, the steel bladed prop raged madly. Buzz caught the sub's outline in the bomb sight and pulled two plugs. The Lockheed jerked with the loss of the weight and he could see the grimaces of fear on the faces of the men along the rail. He whipped up as they leaped for the gun again.

Behind, as he zoomed up, young Cressford braced himself and drew a long bead on the groups huddling against the conning tower. He blazed away. Then came two terrific explosions. One of Benson's bombs had caught the stern and elevating fins of the sub while the other bounced off the sleek back of the undersea boat and exploded below the water. A great jet of greenish-black water went up and came down with a flop all over the front gun. The other blew chunks of metal out of the steering gear and the undersea boat heeled over badly.

"That's the stuff!" Buzz yelled.

"Keep them away from that gun while I have another crack at them."

Cressford swept his gun back and forth wildly, and Buzz charged point blank into a salvo of three-inch stuff and released two more bombs. The first hit square under the conning tower - at an angle, and a grim sheet of flame belched out. The second caught the stern again and twisted the gear even worse. Cressford, screaming at the top of his lungs, battered them again and carefully picked out the groups of men that were attempting to break out another gun.

TRAT-TA-TAT-TAT-TAT! Buzz feinted a move, then cut away again. He watched the frantic efforts of the men as they tried to break out more weapons and hold him off. He steadied the youngster behind him, then suddenly tore at the sub again. They tried to hold him off with a light machine gun and the wild gun-laying of the three incher, but this time, Buzz was out for neck or nothing. He steadied the nose as the Lockheed danced in the wild concussion and directed two light, but effective, bombs at her hull from a low angle.

He raced at the sub at top speed, then let drive with two bombs. They spurted out of the racks like metal slugs from a giant catapult and caught the big Kawasaki boat square in the midsection. There was a wild glare of strange flame, a tremendous roar, and Buzz whipped her out of danger.

"That was her magazine," he yelled. "Give 'em what you got left. It will be charitable, at least. They'll never get away from that."

But Lonny Cressford was pouring it to them without any invitation.

They watched the sub flounder once and roll hard to port. The hull showed great gaps through which spumed fire and smoke. Another explosion blew the conning tower awry. Then the craft threw her stern high, showing her screws, and went down nose first. It was a quick and merciful finish for all concerned and Buzz winced as he realized what a few small bombs had done.

"Well, what about that Aichi sea-plane?" demanded young Cressford;

"Golly, yes! I almost forgot about him. Where did he go?"

"Down behind those rocks."
"What was he bombing?"

"Let's go over and see."

BUZZ rounded her clear again and headed back toward the mainland. Throughout the action against the submarine he had forgotten all about the little Aichi and was amused at the spirit and enthusiasm of the youngster who, had reminded him of it.

They headed for the tall needle of rock that marked the spot and climbed high to get a better view above the jagged necklace of rocks that swelled out and left a snugged lagoon of sheltered water lapping against a bright yellow fringe of sand.

They peered down saw the Aichi bobbing aimlessly in the lagoon. Buzz stared down amazed.

"How did he get in there-right

side up?" he said.

But young Cressford was yelling: "Look. ...NR 333YNR 333Ylook! On that wing!" Buzz looked, but all he could see was the small Aichi with Japanese Naval markings.

"What are you talking about?" he barked at the lad.

"Look! On the wing down there NR333Y.... NR333Y. On that Lockheed wing, over there. Not the Jap ship!"

Buzz wheeled over again, stared down at the far end of the hidden lagoon. Then he saw what the youngster was yelling about-a reddish wing leaning against a pile of rocks. And across it, in bright lettering, he read: NR 333Y.

"What do you make of that?" he asked the lad.

"What are you waiting for?" young Cressford yelled. "That's my father's plane-or at least a wing from it. Those are his numbers-NR 333Y."

"Holy Moses! No wonder that Jap guy was bombing in there. He was trying to finish off your father's his plane."

"What are you waiting for?" screamed the lad again. He was pulling the cowl back, seemed to be all set to leap out and take to his parachute.

"Wait a minute! Take it easy. You'll kill yourself trying to drop in there! "

Buzz took another look at the wing, then studied the layout below. It was a risky attempt, but it was worth it, he figured. The Lockheed was well down in fuel and should

handle easy as far as her gliding angle was concerned. "If she only had flaps!" he mused.

"Look here," he yelled over his shoulder. "I'm going to try to get in there and run along that sand. You're sure those are your father's identification numbers?"

"Positive!" young Cressford yelled, fumbling through his outfit for the inevitable bundle of newspaper clippings. "I'd know that number a mile off if it was printed on the leg band of a homing pigeon!"

"Okay! Hang on, I'm going to try to get her in. If we crack up, we can start digging in for the winter."

"That's what my father's probably done-dug in."

"I hope so. With that guy dropping fragmentation junk in there like that."

"I'll kill him if he hurt him," young Cressford barked.

"Don't worry. That Jap's as dead as a door nail. Look over there."

Young Cressford looked down at the Aichi. The pilot was hanging half out of his cockpit and there was a tell-tale pennon of scarlet dripping down on the lower wing.

"Uh! I hope I didn't do that," said young Cressford.

But Buzz was now trying to figure a way into the lagoon and the possibility of landing on the stretch of beach below.

"You'll never get in there," young Cressford said anxiously.

"That Jap did. Look at him. Didn't crack a strut."

"Sure, but look at his bus. Small light biplane - but I think you can do it, Mr. Benson. Let's have a go at it!"

"You make me do the funniest things, Lonny," Buzz said. "Well, here goes."

They circled again and Buzz cut the gun considerably and watched for the wing. He dropped a smoke bomb that spluttered on the water and disclosed that there was little or no wind in the lagoon. Then he lowered his wheels and set the XP-9 into a slinky side-slip. The wingtip dropped below the level of the rock spire and they knew then that they had to go through with it.

They slid frantically for some depth, then Buzz jabbed the throttle forward an instant, got some headway, and nosed down. The Lockheed leaped forward, then Buzz held her in a tight spiral, timing every circle so that he could touch the sand beach on the correct side.

He stiffened as the wing-tip all but brushed a rock, then he held her steady again. The Lockheed eased around once more and he fishtailed madly to hold her back. Then he slammed the wheels down, rammed on the footbrakes, shut his eyes, drew his arm up over his face-and waited.

There was a rumble, and the next thing Buzz knew, young Cressford was blazing away with the rear gun. The shots echoed out across the lagoon and Buzz peered out. He was fighting a mad duel with the supposedly-dead pilot of the Aichi who now sat up pouring a terrible storm out of the nose of the gently bobbing biplane. The Aichi was

slightly tilted, however, and the Jap's shots went over their heads a foot or so.

Buzz ducked, then the shooting suddenly stopped and he realized that young Cressford had nailed the Jap this time. He peered over his nose, saw that they had pulled up not ten feet from a sand-streaked rock.

"I thought you said that Jap was dead," remonstrated young Cressford.

"Sorry, my mistake," replied Buzz with a side glance at the lad. "You're a handy hunk of kit to have along on a show like this. Do you do card tricks or sing.

"I'll sing, if we find my father!" the lad replied getting up to get out. "By the way, that was a swell landing, Mr. Benson."

"I had to do it."

"Had to?"

"Sure. I couldn't let the House of Cressford down, you know."

"You're a swell guy, Mr. Benson." "Thanks," said Buzz realizing that in those few words he had received a very sincere and loyal expression of trust.

They both climbed down and young Cressford started down the sands.

"Wait a minute!" snapped Buzz. "We don't run off like that you know."

"What do you mean? My father-"

"Sure, but we make all arrangements for a quick get-away-just in case, son," Buzz said in a friendly tone.

"Okay! Sorry! What do we do!"

"Turn her around first so that we can get away quick-if we have to. Then we don't go unarmed, either. And if your father is down in here we had better take a first-aid kit and some grub along."

"Golly, and I used to think I was a pretty keen Boy Scout," said Lonny with a guilty grin.

"Never mind. Let's work fast. Anything may happen, yet."

THEY turned the Lockheed around and then selected stuff out of the emergency locker. Buzz took a pistol and stuffed it in his coverall pocket. Then they set off down the sands to where they had seen the Lockheed wing.

They made their way carefully along the sand, watching the Jap plane that still bobbed gently on the lagoon. The Jap was out cold this time and Buzz realized that he had made one final gallant effort and had passed out. With the assistance of young Cressford's gunnery, the limit of human endurance had been reached.

They measured the stretch of sand off carefully, figured that it gave them about one hundred and thirty yards of take-off space. But on all sides there were jagged fingers of rock, lowering columns of wind-swept granite and frowning crags that made their take-off almost impossible.

Young Cressford was naturally anxious to get to the wreckage of his father's plane and he kept Buzz

moving along at a stiff clip. They found the wing and studied it for several minutes. It was evident that it had been ripped away from the main wreckage and laid out so that it would form a ground signal.

The lad's face dropped: "Where's the rest of it?" he asked in a pained tone.

Buzz inspected the rocks all around and tried to find evidence of the direction it had been dragged. He paused, stared all about for several minutes, then began to clamber over the rocks.

All around them the crags and shelves were pitted with the shrapnel or steel fragments that had exploded from the bombs that had been released. But there was no sign of any other part of the Lockheed. Without a word they clambered about, inspected the rocks closer.

Suddenly the lad halted, stared about. His face was tense and drawn and he seemed to be listening for something. Then, like a deer he sped across the great boulders and began tearing at a jumble of heavy slabs. Buzz followed, puzzled. By the time he reached young Cressford's side, the lad was working like a madman and calling: "Dad! ... Hey dad! ...It's Lonny and Mr. Benson dad!"

"What the deuce are you up to?" demanded Buzz.

Then he, too, listened carefully and caught a low cry from somewhere beyond the rocks.

"How did you know he was in there?" demanded Buzz, climbing out of his heavy parachute harness and coverall.

"Something just told me he was buried in a cave, or something, here."

"You two must be a swell pair of pals," panted Buzz, tugging madly at the rocks.

IT was more than an hour before they could get an opening wide enough to get through with safety, but eventually they succeeded and young Cressford, with a glance of gratitude toward Buzz, clambered through, yelling at the top of his lungs.

Buzz crawled in after him with first-aid kit and flashlight. He flashed the bright gleam about the dank cave for several seconds and finally brought it to a trembling stop in a far corner. He saw young Cressford clambering at a recumbent form.

He knew they had found Lauren Cressford!

For minutes they worked on the man who was gaunt, unshaven and only partially alive. He sobbed, clutched at the shoulders of his son who worked like a beaver.

First they dragged the flying man clear and got him outside in the air and sunshine. They built a fire of stringy driftwood and propped him up against a flat stone. They used their chute-packs and coveralls for bedding and tried to get his story as they worked.

Buzz found some medicinal brandy and a tube or two of concentrated food. They found water, boiled it, and made weak tea to start with. Gradually, Cressford was brought out of his half-stupor.

For nearly an hour they worked on him, bathing his face, massaging his legs, and enticing the strength back into his limbs. He spoke in disjointed sentences at first, then went to sleep. Young Cressford sat staring at his father, then appealed to Buzz with wide eyes.

"Don't worry. He'll come through, all right," Buzz encouraged. "But what happened?"

"He came down somewhere near here and crashed, I suppose. Then he ripped off that wing and laid it out as a signal. In the meantime the Japs found him and tried to bomb him-to finish him off. But he evidently slipped away in that cave and the resulting explosions of the bombs started that rock slide that trapped him."

"But where's the rest of his ship?"

"Not far from here, I'll bet."

"You see," young Cressford said anxiously. "I was right. He did have something put over on him, but he escaped this far."

"I think you're right. He's sleeping now and he'll feel much better when he wakes up. Let's go and see if we can find his plane. That may help."

They did not have long to look. The Lockheed with the remains of a crumpled wing still bolted to the battered fuselage, lay in a shallow gully about 300 yards away and further inland. They clambered over the rocks to it, stared at the wreckage. How Cressford had walked away from that crack-up was a marvel.

Suddenly Buzz hurried up to the nose of the ship. The Wasp engine

was still in position under the high-speed cowling, but the cowling told the story.

Buzz pointed. , "Bullet holes!" young Cressford said. "Yes, and they were not fired from above, either. They were fired while the machine was in the air. Notice how they all come up through the bottom?"

"Then he was fired on and shot down?"

"Positively!" They stood staring at the wreckage, reading its silent story. Then they heard a faint cry from the elder Cressford.

"Lionel! Lionel!" the voice called. They rushed back to the clearing before the rocky cave. The transpacific pilot was on his hands and knees trying to crawl back to the cave.

"Take it easy!" the boy yelled pulling his father back to the fire.

"Lionel. ...Who's this?" the man said faintly.

"This is Mr. Benson, dad. He found you and he brought me along."

"He means he found you, Cressford," broke in Buzz. "I just came along and learned a thing or two. He's a great boy. How do you feel?"

"Benson Benson? ...Ah, yes, I know of you. Glad you came.

Awfully tired of sitting in there. But they'll be back. They'll be back. They've been trying hard to get me. ..."

"They won't get you now. We finished them off," Buzz said quickly.

"Thought no one would ever come. I put the wing out and it only brought those swine."

"They shot you down, didn't they?" "You found the bus?"

"It's still over there. We were just looking at it."

"They knew I knew!" Cressford suddenly muttered.

"Who. ...what?" snapped Buzz. "Their game. ...I learned something in Tokyo by mistake. Wait until I get to Washington. I'll tip them off."

"Tip them off? ...It's too late. The war is on already. It's been on for nearly a week," Buzz said, suddenly realizing that the man had probably been bottled up in there for some time.

"The war is on? ...Already?"

"Sure. They've got Guam and the Philippines and they've destroyed the Asiatic Squadron. Seattle has been bombed and several minor naval engagements have been staged off the Pacific coast."

"My Lord!" gasped Cressford, staring at his son. "What's the date?"

"August 1st, dad," young Cressford replied.

"August 1st? Then. ...then we still have time?"

"Time for what?" asked Buzz puzzled.

"That's what I found out. They have a hidden air field at Silver Lake in Harney County, Oregon. Silver Lake is a dried-up lake bed, you know, and was once a part of the old Malheur volcano which somehow disappeared about one hundred

years ago. The lake is an unusual affair, offering a marvelous landing area that is well sheltered. And in addition, the great caves left by the old volcano are perfect for underground hangars."

"How do you know all this?" demanded Buzz.

"Remember those two-engined ships we saw yesterday, Mr. Benson?" young Cressford broke in.

"That's right, son," the elder Cressford went on. "They are the new Mitsubishi bombers. They came all the way across the Pacific on their own!"

"Your father needs a rest, Lonny," Buzz broke in.

"Don't get me wrong, Benson," the elder Cressford said seriously. "They did it - with my carburetors. Now, do you realize why they shot me down - and have since tried to finish me off."

"Whew! Then that jet idea really does work?"

"No question about it. They stole the idea while I was waiting for the weather in Tokyo. They're out to bomb Washington-tonight, if this is the 1st. I found that out, because one of those damn fool Japs who had been fooling around my machine, left a copy of his secret orders in my cockpit."

"Wait a minute. That might have been a plant."

"No, it wasn't-because I got it back to him without his knowing he had mislaid it. It's no plant. It's serious!"

"Say, let's get this straight,

Cressford," said Buzz taking out a map and a pencil.

"All right. Their secret field is at Silver Lake-that's about 225 miles south-east of Portland, near Silver Creek and a town named Wagontire, of all places."

"I got it! Go on!" snapped Buzz. "They were supposed to get a full Army squadron-that's eighteen of that type-in there by the 30th. They were to have a day's rest, which brings it up to the 31st, and on the night of August 1st they were to take off for the 2,100 mile flight to Washington- fully loaded."

"You're sure they intend to make the trip and get back again on their gas load?" asked Buzz still unconvinced.

"They made it all the way to Oregon from Tokyo, didn't they?" Cressford argued.

"If they're at this Silver Lake place, they must have done it," said Buzz puzzled.

"Well, we saw those Mitsubishi ships, didn't we, Mr. Benson?"

"I sure am being talked down this time," smiled Buzz.

THEY were busy making Lauren Cressford comfortable during all this conversation. Young Cressford was sponging off his face, chest and arms. Buzz was massaging new life back into his legs, giving him short but refreshing drafts of beef broth, and brandy in warm water. As he talked, the elder Cressford seemed to come out of his semi-coma. He

glanced around and studied his son and the man who had flown him in.

But even so, Buzz was worried about him.

"What- are we going to do?" demanded the youth.

"I'm trying to make up my mind. There's no radio in that ship of mine, you know, and I presume yours is dead, Cressford."

"Went out soon after they fired on me. No, we can't warn anyone in that manner, and don't forget you have got to stop those devils-somehow," said the elder Cressford with spirit.

They both looked at him and marvelled at the fire in his eyes. After all, Lauren Cressford was only a few steps removed from the grave.

"But father!" cried young Lionel. "What can we do. You come first, remember. We have to get you out of here."

Benson and the elder Cressford exchanged knowing glances. Both admired the lad and sensed that he had said something that had taken all his will- power. They both knew he was itching to get his young fingers around a gun again and train it on the Mitsubishi ships that had eluded them.

"You're a grand guy, Lionel," smiled the elder Cressford, "but you're a rotten actor. I know how you feel and I appreciate what you just said, but I've been here so long that a few more days won't make any difference: It's up to you- and Mr. Benson-now."

"Swell," agreed Buzz, with a smirk. "Only both of you, in your act,

seem to have forgotten one thing."

"What's that?" asked Cressford, twisting in his bed.

"We have only about fourteen gallons of gas in my boiler and that's not enough to get her really warm."

"Whew!" whistled young Cressford. "Then we're sunk."

The elder Cressford closed his eyes. "It means they'll get through-unless we can think of something."

"Wait a minute," said Buzz suddenly. "That Jap seaplane-the Aichi out there on the lagoon."

"There's an idea. He may have some left unless I shot his tank full of holes," Lionel jabbered.

"Go and take a look," said the elder Cressford.

They wrapped him up again in their extra clothing, then went over the rocks to the lagoon. Together they stripped on the sandy beach and swam out to the still-bobbing Aichi.

They climbed up on the blood-spattered pontoon, stared inside. Young Cressford clambered on the wing and studied the ship carefully with his youthful enthusiasm, but Buzz was more interested in the tanks.

"Let's get it ashore and see what we can do there," Buzz suggested.

"Okay. Here's a rope in the side locker. Let's attach it to the strut of the pontoon and tow it across."

No sooner said than done and in about ten minutes they had the bullet-slashed Aichi upon the sand and securely anchored to a rock

near the Lockheed. Then they carefully drew the dead Jap pilot out and dragged him across the sand to the cover of the rocks. There they huddled him away under one of his own motor covers and planted the edges down with rocks. Then they went back to the plane and seriously undertook the fuel question.

The only gas tank they could find was fitted in the upper center-section of the wing. Fortunately it had not been hit by any of the wicked bursts both young Cressford and Buzz had smashed at it.

Benson rapped on the metal tank. The resulting hollow sound was none too reassuring.

"Sounds bad," he said. "Get a wrench and the collapsible water bucket in our bus. We'll run what's left off and put it in the Lockheed."

"Right away," said Lonny with enthusiasm.

They carefully unhooked the copper supply pipe and let the gasoline run into the canvas service bucket, but when they were through they had not added more than three gallons to what was left in the Lockheed tanks. They went over the Aichi again, but they could find nothing more-no other tanks anywhere aboard.

"Well, they really didn't need an awful lot on a machine of this type," Buzz explained. "She was probably launched off a catapult as near to her target as was possible, and any weight they could save, would be worth considering."

"Sure. But where do we come off with those guys starting out

sometime tonight?" moaned young Cressford.

"They're about 900 miles away from here," Buzz growled, "and even if we are able to get to the mainland and get a message through, what chance have we of making them believe us? Can you imagine the mug on the Chief of Staff when we tell him that eighteen two-motored Mitsubishi bombers are leaving the West Coast to bomb Washington tonight? Can you imagine what he'll say?"

"What will he say?"

"It will go something like this : 'Hm. Think I care to listen to such drivel as that. How can machines of that type get across the Pacific and then continue on across the continent to bomb Washington?' "

"It will sound silly, of course," young Cressford agreed, wagging his head like a weary old man. "But if we could tell him that my father did it and was shot down before he got to the American mainland, they would have to believe it."

"Wait a minute!" gasped Buzz. "That motor of your father's!"

"What about it?"

"That carburetor! If we put it on the Conqueror", Buzz went on.

"That's right! I wonder. ...Say! Come on. Let's see what he says."

BOTH were stunned by the realization of the whole situation. For fully a minute both Buzz and the lad stood staring at the big Conqueror motor.

"But the Conqueror has two carburetors," husked Buzz. "The Wasp has only one."

"Gee!" young Cressford said hopelessly.

"Wait a minute," Buzz said suddenly, whipping around and glaring at the Aichi and her Jimpu engine. "Perhaps-"

They gently raised the cowlings flaps of the Aichi and stared behind the Japanese radial. Then young Cressford let out a whoop.

"Sure enough! " he cried. "That's one – that copper attachment that fits over the float chamber. Let's unscrew it."

Buzz was not certain, but he let the boy unscrew the somewhat complicated attachment and crawl down off the pontoon.

"So you fellows had the same idea I had," a voice faltered behind them. They whipped around and saw Lauren Cressford standing near them with one of the strange copper tubing gadgets in his hand. He was swaying like a drunken man, but he was game to the core.

Buzz leaped, caught him before he keeled over.

"Yeh. Let me sit down somewhere, and you birds do as I say."

Lonny Cressford was unrolling a kit of tools and selecting the small glinting wrenches that were designed especially for the Stromberg carburetors.

"Now get this straight," the elder Cressford was saying. "I know the Stromberg and these things will go

on okay if you attach them in through the air-bleed tube and tie it up with the economizer metering jet. You'll notice that once it is attached correctly and the control bar placed back, the device will be working at its most economical efficiency when the throttle is set in the intermediate position on the quadrant. Be sure you leave sufficient room for easy movement of the two pistons in the carburetor throttle openings. Get it?"

"I'm beginning to," muttered Buzz. "Why in hell didn't someone think of that idea before?"

"They did," grumbled Cressford, "but they were working backwards. What they were thinking of was to bleed more air into the mixture rather than cutting down the quantity of gas vapor necessary. That sounds crazy I know- but, you see, my device not only cuts down the amount of gas used, but it actually creates a more efficient mixture at normal cruising speed. Of course, if you want to go crazy and get 300 m.p.h. out of this barge of yours, you'll have to open the air-bleed wider and suck in more gas. So until you actually go into action, keep her at half throttle and she'll maintain normal cruising speed."

And while Buzz and young Cressford attached the economy devices to the Strombergs, they planned their next moves.

"What are we going to do with him. Mr. Benson?" young Cressford muttered when they had their heads under the cowlings.

"He's ready to accept it. He'll have to stay here until we can get back or until we can send help for

him."

"How long can he hold out?"
"Hard to say. He's not so bad now. We can leave him what grub and medical supplies we have and we can make him comfortable with stuff from the smashed Lockheed. "

"You think we'll ever get him out?" "Why not!" demanded Buzz, as he adjusted the last throttle connection. "I hope so. He's a grand guy, and it would be tough to lose him now-after all this."

"Don't worry. He'll hang on, now." They finished up and tested the motor.

Buzz kicked the starter and let her idle while the elder Cressford listened and made suggestions for the minor adjustments. At last he was satisfied. He nodded to Buzz to cut her.

"How many gallons of fuel have you got aboard?" he asked.

"A little over seventeen-perhaps eighteen," said Buzz. "How far can we go on that?"

"Nearly 600 miles," said Cressford, figuring mentally.

"Well, we might make Seattle, then." "You should. But you've got to have the breaks and use that throttle right." "But that Silver Lake place is more than 300 miles from Seattle," wailed Lonny. "What good will that do?"

"Well," mused Buzz. "That's the best we can do. We can at least argue with someone and try to get help. There's one of the Attack Groups in that area somewhere. If we get there--to Seattle -in time, we

can pick up a gang of the boys and go in and do a swell job."

"Yeh," growled the elder Cressford, "but it's dollars to doughnuts that no one will give you a tumble."

"That's the risk we have to take," snapped Buzz. "Now come on. Let's get moving, if we are to get out of here in time. Who's to go with me?"

"Don't be silly," snapped the elder Cressford. "You'll have to take him. He's lighter, for one thing, and he's in shape to help you if things get tough. I can stick it out here for a few more days now. You get going-but get me back to that cave and gather me some wood so that I can at least keep warm."

Buzz hurried about it, for he realized that the longer they hung about the more chance there was that young Cressford would break down, and he did not want that now. Too much depended on him.

In half an hour they had the elder Cressford fixed ~p as comfortable as conditions and available equipment would allow. They piled driftwood near the entrance to the cave and built an extra shelter with chunks of the wings and other parts from Cressford's Lockheed. Then they backed off guiltily and tried to act as though they had done the same thing hundreds of times. But Buzz had to lug young Cressford away.

His father waved gamely and simply said: "Shove off-and good luck to you. I'll be here when you get back."

They scrambled off and clambered into their flying kits under

the lee of the fuselage. Then they climbed in and Buzz wound the starter again.

The Conquerer caught without a hitch, then Buzz stared about the lagoon, wondered how they would get out.

But there was nothing to question now. They had to get out-somehow.

He tested the motor several precious minutes and let her warm considerably before risking the mad attempt. Then he nodded to young Cressford and ordered him to fasten his belt.

They stood there poised on the yellow sand, the nose of the XP-9 smirking at the cruel crags and walls of granite ahead. Buzz figured his distances again and jammed on his foot brakes. He opened the motor to the limit and held her there until she threatened to stand on her nose. Then with a jerk he loosened the brakes and the trembling Lockheed leaped away and tore down the sandy stretch.

"Hold on!" screamed Buzz. The Lockheed sped for the far wall at breakneck speed and Buzz lifted the wheels at once and tucked them away. With inches to spare he whipped her around and slammed down the lagoon in the other direction.

Again the Lockheed seemed headed for an impassable wall and again Buzz whipped her out just in time amid the tremendous roar of the Conqueror. They paced back once more and Buzz now threw all caution to the winds. He hoiked her clear and slammed his wing- tip down just when it seemed that he must wash

the ship out on one of the spires of rock. They curled through between two cruel points of rock and cleared out into the open.

Buzz breathed a sigh of relief, then cut round and headed down the coastline, his fingers fumbling to get the throttle into the intermediate position so that the Cressford economizer would go into action.

Immediately the Conqueror assumed a quiet contented purr and the air-speed needle trickled back to the 190 m.p.h. mark.

So far, so good!

COLONEL HOMER DODD, C.O. of the Eighth Pursuit Group now huddled on the small Barling Field just outside Seattle, listened with mingled feelings of amazement and incredulity as Buzz Benson and his youthful passenger told their story.

The clock on the wall was well past eight before they had finished and Buzz was getting frantic.

"But you don't mean to stand there and tell me you came all the way down from Alaska on seventeen or eighteen gallons of gasoline with a cock and bull story like that, do you?" the Colonel demanded, thumping his desk.

"I'm telling you and you're listening!" Buzz raged. He was pretty fed up with military minds by now. "We found Lauren Cressford piled up a few yards inland, being bombed by a Jap Aichi. We 'got' the Aichi and the submarine he was working from. Now all we're asking of you is some help to 'get' the rest of them-before it's too late."

And for the second time Buzz went over Cressford's amazing story, while Colonel Dodd sat and tapped the table with his pencil. Young Cressford broke in every so often with a few words that made it all the more binding.

"All right, Mr. Benson," Colonel Dodd agreed finally. "I'm inclined to believe you, but what can we do? I can advise Washington, but I'm certain they'll take me for a madman-a man who has cracked under the new war strain. They'll do nothing about it."

"I know that, sir. That's where we come in. There's no use in trying to stop them over or just outside Washington. You know the Japanese air code: 'Our ships have it on any American plane because we always have a range of action twice that of yours. We only figure the distance out. We do not plan to come back!' "

"Yes. ...Yes, damn them," husked Colonel Dodd.

"We've got to stop them over Silver Lake, or we're licked!"

"But how? I can't give you help," Colonel Dodd said.

"If those Mitsubishi bombers get anywhere near Washington, you can have 500 fighters in the sky to stop them, but you won't. They'll just put their noses dead on the Capitol, shut their eyes, and ram the throttle forward. There's no defense for that, Sir!" Buzz raged.

"I agree, but my orders are to stand by here to stop raids on Seattle and the aircraft factories in this section. I can't spare a ship or a

pilot."

"There's eighteen Mitsubishi 93 bombers hidden away at Silver Lake. Each carries three tons of high explosive. Figure that out! A man risked his life to cross the Pacific flying solo to let us know about it. Are you going to turn him-and this lad, his son-down, Colonel?" Buzz pleaded.

He glanced up at the clock. "We've got only a short time to do something and you're the only man in the world who can do it, colonel. It's the biggest chance you ever had, or ever will have, if this war goes on for forty years. You may save a whole nation with a word-not just a troop, not a mere regiment, not a division. A whole nation, Colonel!"

"I either do that, or I fail miserably," muttered Colonel Dodd. "I'm either a hero or-a wash-out."

"Are you afraid to fail, colonel?'," "I'm not sure."

"If I fail, colonel-if we fail, this lad and I," Buzz went on, buttoning up his coverall, "we'll never know much about it. If you fail, they'll send you a nasty letter-and that's all. If you win--well, you win, and how!"

"I'll tell you what I'll do," Colonel Dodd said with a gesture of resignation, "I have a squadron-a new squadron of mad-cap kids, just organized a few days ago. I don't know how good they are. They're probably terrible. They're flying what we had left-a few old Curtiss Hawks. ...a lot of old iron, as far as I can make out. You know, the old models."

"Perfect!" said Buzz. "They won't

run away from me. Go on."

"A Major Ralph Grace has them so far, and as far as you are concerned, he still leads them when he can yell over their incessant babble. I think you will be doing me--and the group in general -a good turn if you take them for a little night show up to Silver Lake- just in case you have a bum steer. Get what I mean, Benson?"

"Perfectly. And it's a grand way to handle it."

"I'll get you a gunner too, for your bus. He'll report before you leave."

Young Cressford made a quick move, but Buzz stopped him.

"That's out, colonel," Buzz said quietly, and the colonel knew he had pulled a boner. "Young Cressford has been with me on this show since it started, and he's going to finish it."

"What about his father?"

"That's next. He's up there and you must arrange for someone to get him out tonight or early tomorrow. A Coast Guard cutter would do it easily, or even better one of the Coast Guard amphibians. Here's the pin-points and full details of how to get in to him."

"I'll have that taken care of at once," Colonel Dodd said, giving young Cressford another glance. "How soon do you want to get off?"

Buzz looked up at the clock. "At once, sir. We have little time to lose. You couldn't get any other help for us, could you-from any other field?"

"They wouldn't even listen to such a story, Benson. Beside, the rest are all down around San Diego

trying to work with the Navy. It's all yours-and you can have it, if what you say is true."

"Thank you, sir. We'll love it!"

THE activity on the Barling Field now increased in tempo, with the scream of sirens, the growl of motors, and the rattle of guns being tested. Youthful pilots raced back and forth, picking up the tag ends of their equipment, snatching at maps and signing log books. Flood lights were tested, then doused until they were ready for the actual take-offs. More sirens screeched, more bells jangled, and loud-speakers barked from their metallic throats.

Colonel Dodd, Major Grace and his three young flight commanders huddled around Buzz and his kid gunner. In quiet tones, Colonel Dodd explained that the squadron was being sent off on a special night show, mainly for experience, but that they were to expect anything. But when he explained that their objective was a dried-up lake bed 300 miles inland, a few of them sniffed and decided that it was nothing but a routine experience patrol.

"Make no mistake about this, gentlemen!" Colonel Dodd said in a quiet but authoritative tone. "Every man and machine has to reach Silver Lake. There will be no shirking, no horse-play because of the presumed nature of the mission. Every man must get there. What happens when you do get there is another matter, and it will be entirely in your own hands then. I wish you all the luck in the world, That's all, gentlemen!"

They stiffened into attention, saluted and raced away. But one or two cast suspicious eyes on Benson and his kid gunner. They tried to fathom that, and realized that there was more to it than met the eye.

In fifteen minutes three formations of Hawks, garish in new paint and varnish, but weary and worn underneath, slammed into the star-flecked sky and took up their position behind a mysterious Lockheed attack ship piloted by an unknown civilian who carried a youngster in his back seat for a gunner.

The race against time to Silver Lake was on.

NINETEEN to eighteen! Buzz contemplated the situation as they raced south and tried to figure out a plan. Nineteen against eighteen-and the eighteen were high speed, multi-gun bombers manned by fanatics charged with an insane patriotism.

The Mitsubishi ships carried at least six high-speed guns. There were two men in the armored nose turret and two in the rear cockpit firing over the tail, and in addition the rear gunner had two more weapons mounted on a bracket that fired through a metal tunnel under the tail.

He hoped these kids behind him had been instructed in the art of attacking bombers of this type. He hoped they had-but he wondered, for as far as he knew no true method 'had ever been devised.

"Well," he said, trying to find some solace, "at least they are young and enthusiastic. That may help. The less they know about

these babies, the better off they'll be."

He hoped they would get there before the Mitsubishis had left the ground. If they could time their arrival with the take-off of the first flight, they would stand a good chance of getting the rest. If they arrived late, it meant that they would have to chase them until they ran out of gas, and that would not be long.

Three hundred miles to go!

They had to do that in less than ninety minutes to stand any chance at all. It was well after 10 o'clock when they cleared the Barling Field and the Mitsubishis were scheduled to leave on the dot of midnight.

Buzz hoped. He was thinking of the man huddled up beside a driftwood fire nearly one thousand miles away who would be wondering. He knew Lauren Cressford would be counting the minutes and checking their every move in his mind. He knew he would be figuring the carnage that would be taking place on the dot of midnight, and he knew he would be hoping and praying for his courageous son.

"We've got to win," Buzz prodded himself as he led the formation across the Washington-Oregon border. "We've got to win-if only for this kid in the back. He's given everything for this and I couldn't think of him suffering a defeat at this stage of his life. No, we've got to stop these devils!"

Then for another half hour he sat and guided the thrumming Lockheed through the night sky, checking every so often with Major Grace who flew in the plane just above him.

"Well," mused Buzz once. "They may be old Hawks, but they are still hammering along. Everyone is still here. If they can only hang on a few more minutes, we'll give those kids something to let off steam."

He was glad they had all carried light fragmentation bombs.

They'd come in handy if they could get a few on the ground.

SILVER LAKE blew into their sights some time before Buzz expected.

There had been a very friendly tail wind and they were over the strange sparkling lake bed before they realized it. Buzz glanced at his watch, saw that they had arrived exactly at 11: 50. That might, or might not, give them a break.

He signaled to Major Grace to split his formations up into three elements of six planes and deploy them off in echelon until Buzz could discover what was actually going on.

He soon had his mind made up for him. In the jagged shadows of a wall of pinnacled rocks, that loomed like gaunt sentinels, Buzz caught the first tell-tale flashes of Jap-Jupiter exhausts. He gave the Army signal for attack on ground target by flipping his ailerons. He shoved a signal pistol in Lonny Cressford's hand and bawled: "Fire that directly up!"

The red flare shot straight up in the air and Buzz yelled: "Get ready-and don't waste a round. I'll handle the bombs. You shoot at anything that has two motors. All set?"

Then began the merciless movements of the Hawk leaders.

They flipped their attack signals by rocking their ships and pointing at the tiny flashes that snorted from the steel nostrils of the Jupiters below. Even then, most of the youngsters had no idea what was expected of them, but they eased back, took up positions as they caught the extended arm of their squadron leader, Major Grace.

Then a strange triangle of flickering lights suddenly crawled across the dry lake bed like a monstrous arrow-head. Buzz knew that one of the Jap flights was taxiing out. He frantically fired another red light.

The natural bowl below now bubbled with a broiling stew of Mars. Six turret-nosed Mitsubishis came up at them through the velvety blackness and spat Kobe lead from twelve tubes of death. Buzz cringed, huddled behind his Conqueror. They came on and the signal lights from Major Grace's cockpit deployed his three flights out to cut them off from acute angles.

Buzz opened his heavy caliber gun first and picked off the lead ship. His fire was deadly, for he had held his bead until it seemed that the Mitsubishi and the Lockheed must crash head-on. He tripped the firing lever, held her in aim as long as he dared. Then he flipped his nose up, slashed over the body of the bomber, and charged at the sub-leader in the rear rank.

Immediately, the gun in the back turret began to chatter. But young Cressford, steady as a rock, mowed

the No.2 ship down with amazing coolness. His bullets had struck a gas tank, and the first blood had been scored by the Americans!

Buzz raced headlong at the sub-leader, slammed a long burst at him, and made him turn. It was another victory, for the sub-leader in his eagerness swung too wide and locked wing-tips with the No.6 ship. They swerved into each other and fought with spars, longerons, ribs and whirling props like two fantastic broadswordsmen. They belched fire, exploded together, and, locked in a frantic embrace, went down with a terrifying crunch to the lake-bed.

But Buzz had no time to watch collisions. He continued on through and sought the spawning ground to nail the next flight before they got off. He was too late. Already the second spearhead was churning across the dry lake-bed to make its get-away.

Behind him, Lonny Cressford was hammering short, punching jets of fire at every Mitsubishi that was attempting to cut clear. The Hawks were coming down at them now, hell for leather. Two Hawks, misjudging their speed, plunged head-long into a faltering bomber. The three went down in a tangle and then went up in the eruption of explosive that lay in the belly of the bomber.

BA-ROOM! The glare from the burning wreckage threw mad shadows across the natural bowl and another flight of Hawks came out of a climbing column of smoke and slammed pell mell at the climbing Mitsubishis. There was a harsh grating of metal and clangor of gunfire and two more bombers

nosed down. A Hawk shot up the sky clawing for breath with its spatted wheels poised like anguished claws of a slug-spattered bird. It slid back on its tail, wagged its gaunt head once, rolled over into a slow spin and hit the ground, burying the engine fully five feet.

"That's the way to get it, If you have to," muttered Buzz. "He 'went out' fighting with his boots on."

The remnants of the first formation of bombers were being driven back over the lake by the No.3 Flight of enthusiastic youngsters. They tried to re-form with the bombers that were coming up, but Major Grace slammed in with the four Hawks he had left and cut two more down.

Meanwhile Buzz and young Cressford were bashing through the tail-end of the second formation of bombers and were fighting like mad to get at the machines that were still on the ground. Buzz was blocked off once by a bomber that swung out of position and threw a curtain of machine-gun fire across his path, but young Cressford, screaming his wrath, picked it off with a snap-shot that all but cut the Jap pilot's head off. The Mitsubishi was too low to be saved. When the pilot went over his stick, her nose went down and there was no time to rip her out. Then the other Japs tried gamely, but she hit the ground, bounced hard, came down to her knees, and rolled over, a bundle of flame.

"Great! " yelled Buzz. "Now watch my tail. I'm going to bottle the rest up."

He slammed the raging Lockheed

at the black wall that was dotted with caves. He held her steady and zoomed up the face of the rock, pulling his bomb-toggles as he climbed.

CRASH! BONG! CRASH! Insane explosive bashed against the granite walls, belched fire and concussion. The Lockheed caught it full and went over on her back. Buzz yelled, hung on and nosed her down toward the ground to get up speed before he dared try to wing her over again.

From their crazy position they could see the Hawks pounding the Mitsubishi's to mangled metal. They lost a Hawk here and there, but there were still fully a dozen left to continue the battle.

Buzz now saw the ground coming at him. Upside down, he risked a roll. The Lockheed came out with a jerk, groaned. He cleared with but inches to spare, raced across the sunken bowl, and hurled at a skulking Mitsubishi that was trying to escape through the smoke screen the burning bombers were putting up. The Lockheed caught her, danced through a torrent of lead, and tangoed up to a position dead behind the Mitsubishi's rudder where both guns were blanked out.

He pressed his trigger for a short burst, got the line, and gave the Jap ship a long belch. The Mitsubishi rolled once, scraped her wing-tip into the dirt, then slammed her turret nose into the dust and lay there a wreck.

Lonny Cressford was yelling and Buzz turned. The Hawks had driven the Mitsubishi's back all the way to the walled caves and were

hammering them literally into the granite. Hawks tore in from every angle and spat fragmentation bombs among the remaining planes below. The burning ships added to the weird glare as the Yankee single-seaters slashed in and out, picking off the weary Mitsubishi's and bundling them to earth.

BUZZ charged the wall again and blocked off all attempts of the Japs to get the last flight out. His bombs, heavier than those carried by the Hawks, had sufficiently blocked the passage through which the bombers had to be wheeled to get onto the lake-bed.

Once he signaled to Major Grace while young Cressford picked off a Mitsubishi that was trying to get clear by taxiing into the darkness beyond. Grace gave him an answer and put up a signal: "Land by flights!"

The flight commanders fishtailed and set up a series of short zooms and dives, indicating what was desired. They went down, six of them, and lined up between two burning bombers. Their guns were trained on the cave wall opposite while Buzz and young Cressford raced around in widening circles and counted the piles of blazing wreckage.

"One got clear!" snarled Buzz. "Hello, there he goes! "

He shot the juice to the Lockheed and tore after a slinking bomber that was climbing madly through the still piling smoke columns. They saw it clear two jutting spires of rock and disappear. Buzz snarled again and plunged on, checking his guns as he

did so. They came tip to the spires and slipped through, just as the Mitsubishi had.

As they slammed out, dancing on the gusty eddies of air formed in the rocks, they were met with a terrific curtain of fire. The Mitsubishi had attempted to trap them. There was no way out, they had to go through and face it.

Buzz yelled: "Duck!" Then he pressed every gun trip he had and let her go. The weapons raged under the cowlings and Buzz had to sit back-and hope. There was a tremendous explosion that seemed to make the Lockheed stop dead in its tracks, and then they staggered on through a crazy quilt of flame, smoke, battered metal, and debris that a moment before had been a beautiful airplane.

"Whew!" they both said, sitting back and letting the Lockheed have its head.

"Well," Buzz said finally. "I think that's the last one!"

"I'm certain of it. I've been counting them all the time. The others are still in the caves. Let's beat it back and see the Major," said Cressford.

They arrived to see the Hawks-ten of them-lined up, blocking off any attempt of the Japs to get off again. As a matter of fact, Benson's bombs had securely blocked off the main passage into the big cave and six brand new Mitsubishi's lay beyond, completely gagged.

Buzz found Major Grace and congratulated him, while the young pilots went in and mopped up the

mechanics and grounded Jap airmen. It was hours before the job was complete, for they had to make certain that every ship had been accounted for. But by the time the first specks of dawn crept through the spire-like crags, they had completed their report and Buzz was ready to fly back to Seattle.

The secret of the Mitsubishi bombers and their long range had been solved. The nation's Capitol had been saved. And Lauren Cressford's fuel economizer had passed another severe test.

* * * *

Back at Barling Field Buzz and Lonny Cressford crawled into bed, exhausted but happy.

"Give us ten hours of real sleep, colonel," Buzz said, "and then we'll go up and see that they bring Cressford in Okay."

The colonel smiled at the boy, nodded to Buzz, and left the room.

The dull buzz of a radio spark clicking off its message came along the corridor and lulled them off before the foot- steps of the colonel had fully died away.

Flying Aces - August, 1936