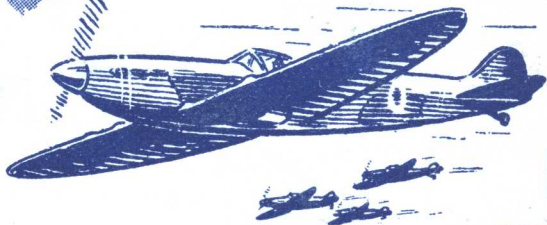




# FIGHTER CONTROLLER

by

SQUADRON LEADER  
J. D. V. HOLMES  
R.A.F.



No. 27

2/-

**BERNARDS (Publishers) LTD.,** THE GRAMPIANS, WESTERN GATE, LONDON, W.6

# FIGHTER CONTROLLER

*by*

Squadron/Leader

J. D. V. HOLMES

R.A.F.V.R.

## ILLUSTRATIONS

---

1. "As the bombs crashed down."  
(Page 12)
  2. "Knocked down one after another."  
(Page 13)
  3. "Twigs, leaves and rooks' nests flew in all directions."  
(Page 18)
  4. "Johnny and Birkdale walked the wings."  
(Page 20)
  5. "'A' Flight, Punching Squadron, now airborne."  
(Page 28)
  6. ". . . Just went into the street in pyjamas."  
(Page 38)
  7. ". . . Some good types there."  
(Page 42)
  8. "Every morning before breakfast."  
(Page 61)
  9. "You can't beat them."  
(Page 68)
- 

Sketches by

J. C. C. TAYLOR

## CHAPTER I.

There was little to distinguish it from any other evening at the Fighter Station. It had been a typically English autumn day, with the sky like a pale blue parasol. The brisk October air had sent the bronzed leaves from the elm trees fluttering down on the pathways and buildings of the mess, and the young beeches in the garden by the tennis courts were bowing to each other in the breeze.

There had been a show during the afternoon and the Wing had bounced some square heads in the vicinity of Cap Gris Nez. As was the custom on these occasions the pilot boys had gathered round the bar in the evening and were comparing notes over the odd half can of ale and a cigarette. Everyone was talking at once. The radiogram was playing Victor Sylvester's dance tunes . . . Peter barked.

Arranged round the walls of the bar were portraits and seascapes by Orde and Wootton: pictures of the fighter boys who had distinguished themselves at one time or another when operating from this famous station—types from the "Foot and Mouth," the "Tigers" and other squadrons . . . names which had made the headlines in the Battle of Britain, and were now household words wherever the name of the Royal Air Force was known. And some there were whose gay lives had gone to join the procession of those who die so that others may live.

Realistically depicted in oils by Wootton were scenes from combats over the English Channel in which the Fighter Station's squadrons had taken part, while around the walls of an adjoining room were paintings in water colours . . . bird studies by Peter Scott; pictures of the local landscape, the rugged English Coast and the South Downs:

" . . . so noble and so bare."

Over the fireplace hung the station coat of arms, bearing the names of the different Wing Commanders and the numbers of the squadrons which had operated from the station since the war began. In the centre of this impressive array of

names and squadrons was the cumulative total of enemy casualties inflicted by pilots from the station, and already it exceeded that of any other sector in the country.

Standing by the fireplace, and listening to the chatter of the lads, was Wing Commander Fontaine—the leader of the station Wing during the afternoon's show. It was due to his initiative, based on information received from the Controller in the Operations' room over the radio telephone, that the pilot boys had found themselves in a position of tactical advantage when they ran into the Huns off the French coast. But that was all part of the day's work, and he was now more interested in some chestnuts which the lads were roasting in the fire.

Flight Commanders and Squadron Leaders too were there, listening to the conversation; and through the haze of smoke in one corner of the rather crowded room, could be seen the familiar figure of "Spy," the Station Intelligence Officer, manipulating a glass of sloe gin.

"The trouble with sloe gin, Johnny," said the I.O., "is that it goes too quickly . . . Blitz, Blitz, where's Blitzey?" Spy snapped his fingers and gazed around the room in search of his vermilion hound with the pleading primrose eyes.

Johnny agreed. Johnny, by the way, was a pilot in the last war, the war to end wars, and was now a Controller in the Operations' Room . . . that holy of holies which has often been described as a Fighter Station's nerve centre.

He was leaning against the mantelpiece and talking to the Wing Commander when the conversation turned to the various squadrons each had served in.

"I was in Dizzy's squadron three or four years ago," remarked the Wing Commander, placing another handful of chestnuts in the fire, "and 'Groupey' Broadbent was in No. 19 too, at one time."

Johnny's ears pricked up at the mention of the old familiar squadron number. "What a remarkable thing . . . I was in that squadron myself in the last war, in 1917."

"Using a bow and arrow, I suppose," chipped in a nineteen-year-old pilot-boy at his elbow.

"Before I was born," croaked another, with a hot chestnut in his mouth.

"What have you done with your coat of mail?" enquired a third, a grey-eyed Australian squadron leader by the name of Hugo.

Johnny smiled—he was used to that sort of thing, but at forty-four he did not look upon himself as an antique emerging from fossilisation.

Actually, of course, the youngsters welcomed the older pilots, with their Mutt and Jeff ribbons and their tales of flying and confusion. Flying had certainly changed during the intervening years, but the fundamental principles remained the same. The chief Instructor was still "Newton," and the Hun had not altered anyhow. That was the great outstanding fact . . . the brutes had always preferred to step back into Hell rather than go forward into Heaven. The manacling of British prisoners of war was quite in keeping with the treatment meted out by the German General Von Haenisch to his victims in the last war, at Strohen Moor, Holzminden and other prison camps. Johnny was shot down while flying on the Western Front, and was there . . . he knew.

Leaning against the mantelpiece and talking to the pilot boys his thoughts went back to those days at Strohen—that barbed wire enclosure with its stagnant pool—on a gorse covered moor some ninety miles from the Dutch frontier. It was a sunny afternoon in the summer of 1917. Along the winding road which led across the moor from the station to the camp could be seen a little batch of newly captured prisoners, with their guards, slowly making their way forward to incarceration. As they drew nearer to the wire around the camp the older prisoners moved up to see whom they could recognise among the newcomers . . . but that was too much for the German Commandant. Rushing at the fence with his monocle stuffed firmly in his eye he shrieked and bellowed at the prisoners to retire. Slowly, and with all the appearance of pre-arrangement and rehearsal, each officer took from his pocket his numbered metal disc and placed it in his eye. The German "Oberst" yelled an order to the guard—his great voice booming out with rage. The little gate of wire and wood flew open, and into the neutral

zone of the camp rushed a score of German soldiers lunging at the hapless prisoners with their bayonets. Several were struck down . . . one, a medical officer, receiving a bayonet in the lung.

Then suddenly from across the sandy camp came the strains of the National Anthem. Who was responsible Johnny never knew . . . but someone played it that afternoon in the Common Room. Its effect was electric. The prisoners in their ragged clothes sprang smartly to attention. The grey-clad Huns stood by and grinned.

Strohen to Dieppe—not so far, for the Hun.

A terrific roar over the Mess brought a sudden stop to the conversation in the bar. Looking out over the valley in the fading light they could see the returning Spitfires from the last patrol . . . going up and breaking away in a perfect "Prince of Wales."

Johnny looked at his watch. It was half past seven, or nineteen-thirty as they call it in the service. He decided to have an early dinner and then write some letters before going to bed.

On his way to the dining-room he stopped in the corridor to read Daily Routine Orders, and the latest weather report, which had just been placed upon the notice board. According to the met. people the weather was going to remain poor throughout the night, with mist and industrial haze appearing before dawn. "D.R.O's" were concerned mostly with detailing officers and other ranks for the various religious services to be held the following morning, and with a list of the Officers for whom registered letters were awaiting collection at Station Headquarters.

At that moment the swing door leading into the hall was flung open and a tall dark Flight Lieutenant entered the Mess, hung up his service cap and turned towards the dining room. It was Middleton, the controller whose turn it was to go on duty for the night in the Operations Room. He would be taking over at eight o'clock and had probably been trying to get in some rest at his quarters before going on duty, as he would not be relieved until half-past eight the following morning.

"It's not a bit of use trying to sleep in the daytime nowadays," remarked Middleton, in a pained voice, on seeing

Johnny. "What with aeroplanes circling over one's bed, others squirting their guns at the butts, pongoes firing on the rifle range, batmen whistling, someone singing in his bath, and the tame pigeons cooing . . . I decided I'd had it, and got up."

"What you really need of course is a holiday in Devon and some cherry jam . . . in the meantime what about some food?"

"Yes, I shall have to, and there's not much time either," replied Middleton, looking at his wristwatch. "Oh, by the by, I borrowed your bag—I hope you don't mind."

"Not a bit . . . take anything you like." Johnny always seemed so cheerful and sympathetic when it was not his turn to be going on duty.

On their way into the dining-room they were joined by the Station Padre—the high-Cockney-low-Church Padre as he was known affectionately by everybody. And no wonder. If the pilot boys wanted a party at any time the smiling Padre would join in and play his fiddle: and he had even been known to drink a ginger ale.

Middleton arrived in Operations dead upon eight o'clock, and was greeted by Northwood, the Controller, who had been on duty during the dog watch. He also was a product of the last war, with the familiar Mutt and Jeff ribbon on his tunic—the "Order of the indication of Antiquity" as Northwood called it.

"Well, there's very little to hand over," he remarked to Middleton, lighting his pipe; "the weather's pretty foul and will probably get worse before dawn. I've got a relaxed state for the squadrons, and apart from those two keen types down there"—he pointed with a burnt match in the direction of two friendly plots on the large mapped table beneath him—"we have nothing flying."

"What about enemy activity?" enquired Middleton, "or is the weather pretty dud over their side too?"

"No, the hun has been fairly quiet on the whole, and I should think you're in for a quiet night, with some shut-eye for a change. Oh, there's one more thing, though," remembered Northwood, "Group want us to try and catch that early morning weather hun who has been stooging about

at daybreak lately . . . I've warned the morning readiness squadron, so they know all about it . . . O.K?"

"I think so," answered Middleton "If there's anything else I want to know I'll give you a ring in the Mess later on."

"Right ho—I hope you have a good night."

"Thanks. . . and I hope you have a good dinner . . . I had the harness but couldn't cut it!"

As soon as Northwood had left the Operations Room, Middleton produced a packet of cigarettes from his pocket, lit one, blew a cloud of smoke towards the ceiling and then took his place in the Controller's chair on the dais. Automatically his gaze went round the room . . . first to the squadron status panel, with its information regarding the various degrees of preparedness at which the aircraft had been placed, then to the weather board . . . with its up to the minute information from other aerodromes, the height and amount of cloud, visibility, speed and direction of the wind and so forth—then back again to the mapped table in front of him.

Middleton appeared satisfied with all he had seen, and sent another cloud of blue cigarette smoke curling up towards the ceiling.

Hayling, the Ops. B. Officer, suddenly called across the dais to the Controller, "I wonder what Raid 93 is up to down there, sir," he said, at the same time pointing to the South East corner of the plotting table.

Raid 93 had been hidden from the Controller's vision by one of the girl plotters changing the information symbols on the map, but now she was standing on one side again and he had an uninterrupted view of the situation.

"Goodness knows," exclaimed Middleton, his calculating eye taking in the position of the hostile aircraft and considering it in relation to that of our night fighters on patrol. "Anyhow, we are quite prepared to entertain our cousins, if they do decide to pay us a visit."

The plotters round the table continued to manipulate their different coloured arrows indicating the position of the aircraft—friend and foe alike—as the situation changed minute by minute upon the map. Seven minutes had now

gone by since the raid had first appeared and the Ops. B. Officer had pointed it out to the Controller . . . and still the arrows of the enemy bomber continued to point in our direction.

"I think he's going to pay us a visit after all," said Middleton almost under his breath, and his hands went out automatically to the microphone and transmitter switch situated by the monitor on the dais. A moment later he spoke on the radio telephone to the fighter nearest to the enemy raid.

"Hullo, Florin 42, Chaffinch calling. I think I shall have a customer for you shortly. . . continue in your present position, fourteen thousand feet."

The night fighter answered the Controller immediately. . . . "O.K. Chaffinch, Florin 42 answering Your message understood. Any further information? Over."

"Hullo, Florin 42. Not at the moment, but increase height to fifteen thousand."

"O.K. Chaffinch, Florin 42 listening out."

"The R/T is exceptionally clear to-night," Middleton remarked to the Signals' Officer who appeared at that moment on the dais. It was the duty of Signals to attend to such matters, but in spite of all their efforts speech reception was frequently distorted by atmospheric conditions.

The tracks of the two aircraft on the plotting table, shown by the coloured directional arrows, were now rapidly approaching each other, and a moment later the fighter aircraft called again on the R/T:

"Hullo, Chaffinch, Florin 42 here. What is the form now . . . over."

"Hullo 42, Chaffinch answering One bandit fifteen thousand feet approaching from the South East about ten miles away. . . keep sharp look out."

"O.K. Chaffinch. Understood approaching me now . . . listening out."

The telephone buzzer at the Controller's elbow temporarily distracted Middleton's attention, but he contrived to turn over the key to Group and at the same time listen to the aircraft by holding the microphone to his other ear.

"It's the Controller speaking," Middleton answered hastily to Group's enquiry. "Yes, we are right on the tail of Raid 93 now . . . sorry but I must cut off, I'm wanted on the R/T."

"Hullo, Florin 42, Chaffinch calling. Now steer one eight zero, you are right behind the bandit . . . same height . . . over."

"O.K. Chaffinch . . . understand one eight zero."

"Hullo 42, now ten degrees starboard . . . the bandit has jinked a bit . . . over."

"O.K. Chaffinch. Understand ten degrees starboard . . . how far am I behind? . . . over."

"Hullo 42. You are right on him now . . . sharp look out ahead."

"I should think he's close enough to bayonet him," remarked Hayling, the Ops. B. Officer, as he watched the tracks of the two aircraft become superimposed. But the words had scarcely passed his lips before the fighter called again . . . this time short and to the point . . .

"Hullo, Chaffinch . . . Tally Ho!"

"Good show, 42," came Chaffinch's reply, "listening out."

"Tell Group that Florin 42 has given Tally Ho on raid 93," shouted Middleton to Hayling, and immediately afterwards clamped the microphone tightly to his ear again to catch the slightest message from the fighter.

The minutes dragged on . . . the clock on the wall of the Operations Room ticked off the seconds . . . the plotters carried on recording the different coloured pointers and symbols on the plotting table, their plotting rods jarring simultaneously on the mahogany table and the Controller's nerves. Middleton continued to strain his ears at the microphone . . . on these occasions one never knew . . . the next call might be one of victory, or on the other hand it might be a call for help. One could never be certain. At last the voice he was waiting for came through.

"Hallo Chaffinch, Florin 42 here . . . have knocked one of his engines out . . . gave him all I'd got. He's a runner all right but I've lost him in cloud . . . any further news . . . over."

"Hullo, Florin 42, Chaffinch answering. Nothing at the moment; remain in your present position."

"O.K. Chaffinch, but I think I'll go down a bit and see if I can find him below this cloud."

"All right 42. Chaffinch listening out."

"It will be rotten luck if we've missed him," remarked Hayling disappointedly as he picked up the receiver and telephoned through to Florin Squadron for two more aircraft to replace those on patrol.

"Just a minute, Sir, I think I heard 42 calling them," said Sergeant Jolly, the deputy Controller, who was also listening to the R/T.

Middleton threw over the transmitter switch. "Hullo, 42 . . . Chaffinch here. Say again your message. Have you seen anything? . . . over."

"Hullo, Chaffinch . . . I say again I can see him in the sea on fire . . . a Dornier. Will you fix my position?"

"Good show 42. Yes, I know your position. Are you returning to base now? . . . over."

"Yes, returning to base, Chaffinch . . . 42 listening out."

Middleton turned to Hayling: "Ring up Group and the Station Commander, and then let Florin Squadron know that 42 is on the way home. Have you got a cigarette?"

"Yes, rather," replied Ops. B, as he struggled to unfasten the pocket of his tunic and carry on a conversation with Group and the Station Commander, all at the same time.

"You do take sugar, Sir, don't you," enquired a fair-haired W.A.A.F., carrying a tray of overflowing teacups of the railway refreshment room variety. Middleton selected one of the not so full ones and stirred the brownish liquid thoughtfully before replying.

"Yes—one spoonful if you please; but I hope there's no lipstick on the teacup."

\* \* \*

Johnny stood in the corridor of the Mess by the letter rack, and waited for the orderly to sort the huge bag of mail which had just come in. What a job it was. There were

letters and packages for officers who had gone away altogether—some of them overseas. Others, incorrectly addressed, had arrived for people who had never been at the station at all . . . and some there were for pilots who never again would experience the joy of opening a letter from home. By the time the huge heap of mail had been finally sorted he found himself with two letters, a postcard from his daughter at boarding school and the local Devon paper—all very welcome.

He moved away towards the bar and ordered himself a half can of ale.

One letter was from an old friend, a pioneer in the early days of flying, by the name of Birkdale. Together they had flown many hundreds of hours and carried many thousand of passengers from various parts of the country on pleasure trips, with their old rotary engined Avros. It was the first letter he had received from Birkdale since he had returned from a visit to the fighter Station five or six weeks earlier. It was a day which both of them were likely to remember for the rest of their lives—Sunday, September 15th, 1940.

The early morning mist had cleared away and the station was eagerly on the alert. A party had been arranged to take place in the evening at the Officers' Mess with a musical show by the Windmill girls beforehand at the camp theatre.

Johnny was due to go on duty in the Operations Room from one o'clock until five. After that he would be free to attend the party with his friend Birkdale, who was motoring down for the occasion. A spare camp bed had been fixed up in his bedroom on the second floor, a cheery fire was blazing in the grate, and various other arrangements made for the accommodation of his old colleague.

The time was somewhere about eight-fifteen, and he was sitting down to bacon and egg, tea, marmalade, and the Sunday paper. Elders, the Ops. B. Officer, had just come in from all-night duty in the Operations Room and was busily engaged securing porridge and coffee from the hot plate. After breakfast he would be going to bed.

And then the "party" started. The loud speakers round the camp broke into the peaceful morning atmosphere of the Mess:

"This is the Station air raid warning—Many hostile aircraft are approaching from the South East . . . All Station personnel not on duty are to take cover immediately . . . Switching off."

"May the Almighty paralyse the blighters," said Sam the chef in his delightful Yorkshire brogue, as he made his way to the shelter behind the cookhouse.

Johnny took a hurried mouthful of food and a sip of tea and then he too obeyed orders.

Outside the Mess in the garden was an amazing sight—officers in pyjamas, bedroom slippers and tin hats . . . others, just having tumbled out of their morning bath, had grabbed towels to wind around themselves—with perhaps the addition of a tunic on top. Some, caught in the middle of shaving, were there with beautifully soaped chins ready for the razor. A few had already gone down into the dug-outs, while others, preferring the fresh air, were standing in deep trenches round the mess buildings, where they were probably equally well protected.

Standing at the entrance to one of the grass-covered dug-outs was Bruce, another Controller, gazing up into the sky. Following Bruce's gaze Johnny was able to discern quite plainly the enemy bombers, like glittering specks, surrounded by the white puffs of the bursting ack-ack shells as they endeavoured to forge their way up the Thames towards London . . . it was the beginning of their greatest day, although of course nobody realised it at the time.

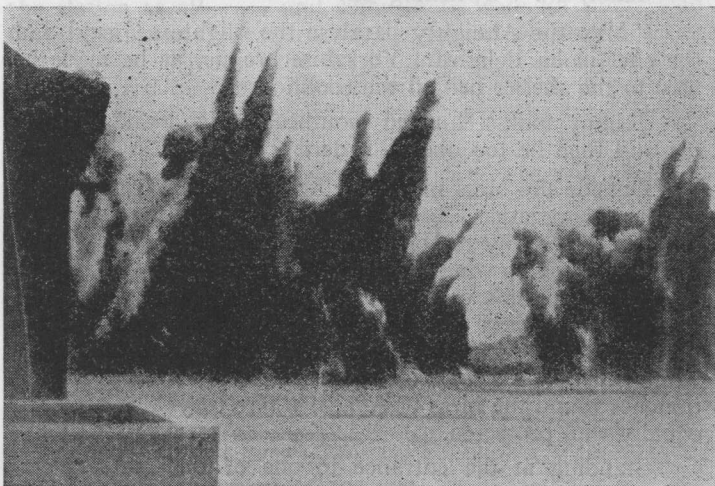
Across the Straits of Dover, in the Thames' Estuary and along the coast from the South Foreland to Dungeness came Goering's Luftwaffe over the fair fields of Kent.

The first wave probably consisted of about two hundred aircraft, and this was followed by another wave equally as big. The force consisted of bombers and fighters of all types, and they flew at heights varying from twelve thousand to twenty-five thousand feet.

Inside the Operations Room Roland, the duty Controller, had the complete picture in front of him on the large mapped table. Never before had there been so many aircraft, friendly and hostile, plotted at the same time, and the clatter of the rods on the table as the raid blocks and plaques



were constantly being changed filled the building with a staccato of sound.



"AS THE BOMBS CRASHED DOWN."

As the bombs crashed down and the foundations of the Operations' building seemed to sink—and then rise again—the crew of W.A.A.F.'s and airmen on duty looked up at Roland standing on the dais; but his innermost feelings were not betrayed by his outward appearance . . . he merely mopped his brow and puffed a cigarette. Pieces of shrapnel from the bursting ack-ack shells rattled down upon the roof . . . but other matters occupied their minds.

"Hullo, Hatchett Leader, Chaffinch calling . . . there are many bandits approaching Gravesend from the South-East at eighteen thousand feet—over."

"Hullo, Chaffinch. Hatchett Leader answering—O.K., we shall be there."

"Hullo, Punching Leader, Chaffinch calling—proceed to Gravesend and reinforce Hatchett aircraft."

"O.K., Chaffinch, Punching Leader answering—we are on the way—listening out."

And so it went on throughout the morning. The Controller in the Operations' Room, assisted by his efficient, nimble-minded crew, and in the air the fighters in their Hurricanes and Spitfires roaring into battle with the enemy. One was complementary to the other . . . both were essential for success.

For three-quarters of an hour the struggle raged fast and furious over the South-East portions of England; and a few of the bombers even reached London and the suburbs before being intercepted, shot to bits, or driven off. From London



"KNOCKED DOWN ONE AFTER ANOTHER."

(By kind permission of the Romford Times)

to the coast and farther—out into the Channel—the huns were being knocked down one after another. As the fighters returned to their base the loud speakers broadcast instructions from the Operations Room to the re-arming and re-fuelling crews—or issued orders to the re-forming Squadrons to take off again and re-enter the battle. But the Luftwaffe could not stand the pace. Already the huns were limping back across the Channel to lick their wounds and think again.

As the fight died down Roland was able to light a cigarette and drink a cup of tea, handed to him by a thoughtful W.A.A.F. Then he went to the Tannoy broadcasting instrument and put over the switches to the transmit position.

"This is the Station all clear—personnel may now revert to normal—switching off."

At one o'clock Roland was able to leave Operations—where he had been standing since eight o'clock controlling the fighters in their struggle. His place was taken by Johnny and arrangements made immediately to cope with the second big attack, which was already showing signs of milling up on the other side of the Channel.

The first indication symbols soon changed from tens to twenties and from thirties to fifties, until at the moment of commencing the attack some two hundred and fifty enemy fighters and bombers were plotted on the table together. The little directional arrows then started moving across the water in the direction of England—and the battle was on.

It was two o'clock in the afternoon. Standing on the dais of the Operations' Room and watching the scene unfold itself before him, he was reminded of some lines by Julian Grenfell . . . written during the British Retreat from Mons:

"And when the burning moment breaks  
And all things else are out of mind."

Strange how thoughts like these came into one's mind on such occasions.

Over the same ground the Nazis came again—apparently undaunted by the morning's losses. And into their midst plunged the waiting Spitfires and Hurricanes of Fighter Command, ripping and tearing them to pieces in furious combat . . . no quarter was given and none asked for.

By the evening of that day one hundred and eighty-five German aircraft at least had been destroyed, besides many probably destroyed and others damaged.

After tea Johnny went to the Camp theatre with Birkdale and sat in the second row of seats from the stage, while around them were the pilot boys who had wrought such terrific havoc with the hun during the morning and afternoon's operations. The theatre seemed packed, but two seats in the front still remained to be occupied. Suddenly

from the side door near the stage there entered the familiar figures of the Station Commander and his charming wife . . . it was the signal for the whole assembly to rise to its feet as one man and cheer them to the echo.

September 15th, 1940, had come to its glorious end. The British Fighter Pilot had come into his own.

"The thundering line of battle stands,  
And in the air death moans and sings;  
But day shall clasp him with strong hands,  
And night shall fold him in soft wings."

\* \* \*

"Gosh I do wish you could see yourself now!" said Johnny.

He was watching Bruce, his flaxen-haired friend and brother Controller, as the violet rays from the sun lamp spread themselves over his body and gave his skin a weird tint of greenish mauve.

He and Bruce, after many months spent in the oppressive atmosphere of the Operations Room—with its lack of sun and fresh air—decided to take a course of sun-ray treatment in the Fighter Station's sick quarters.

The Station Commander, "Groupey" Broadbent, was a great believer in sun-ray, and his healthy, bronzed appearance was sufficient recommendation for its value during the damp and misty weather at the aerodrome.

The two Controllers commenced their first day by taking three minutes' treatment each . . . carefully timed with a stop-watch. This they increased by one minute every day, until, after a fortnight, they could both remain under the lamp's rays for twenty minutes at a time.

The sun lamp was placed so that its rays shone down on a rug covered stretcher arranged in front of the fire. At one end of the stretcher was a pillow, and on the side away from the fire was placed a screen to keep away the draughts from the rest of the room. Every day they took their course of sun-ray treatment, remaining each time for an extra minute. This, and two or three games of squash each week, was almost their only means of keeping fit. The pilot boys, too, were regular visitors to the sun lamp, and the standard of health at the station must have improved considerably through its use.

Strolling back to the Mess one foggy afternoon after their visit to sick quarters, they halted suddenly to listen to what they thought was the sound of an approaching aircraft.

"It can't be anyone flying on a day like this, Bruce, surely," exclaimed Johnny. "It's impossible to see more than a couple of hundred yards, and there's been nothing up all day."

"I know," answered Bruce, "nevertheless it is someone, and not so far away, either."

At that moment the familiar outline of a Spitfire aircraft appeared through the fog—not more than a hundred yards away and flying just-above the tops of the buildings.

"I bet I know who that is," went on Bruce, "will you take me?"

"Not likely," answered Johnny, who had just then seen the identification letters painted on the fuselage of the aircraft. "There's only one man who can find his way about like that on a day like this . . . and that's 'Groupey' Broadbent." It was.

They made their way to the Mess, hung up their great-coats and caps and went in to tea. Roland was sitting by himself at one of the tables, so the newcomers poured themselves a cup of tea from the large common teapot and then went over and took their places beside him.

"Did you see 'Groupey' come in just now?" asked Bruce.

"I should think I did . . . I can't make out how he does it . . . seems to sniff his way about," said Roland.

"And never bats an eyelid, either," remarked Bruce, helping himself to a piece of cake. "He's just the same on a show . . . never flaps . . . and always the same calm voice on the R/T . . . what an incentive for the pilots."

"Sometimes, you know," remarked Roland, becoming pensive for a moment and watching the smoke curl upwards from his cigarette . . . "when I see how flying has advanced to-day, with radio telephony and parachutes, and aerodromes with everything so wonderfully organised . . . I somehow feel that the romance has gone out of aviation. I remember years ago, when it was almost an event to get

off the ground at all. And when one did start on a flight there was certainly no guarantee where it would finish up."

"What I used to enjoy," broke in Johnny, "was to look up a course on a map and then to take off and hope for the best. What fun it was straining one's eyes searching for the friendly puffs of smoke from the railway one had to cross . . . or suddenly discovering the canal one was looking for with the road and the ham-shaped wood alongside. There's nothing like that nowadays . . . with radio telephony to tell one where the nearest aerodrome is, the course to steer for it, and what the weather will be like when one gets there."

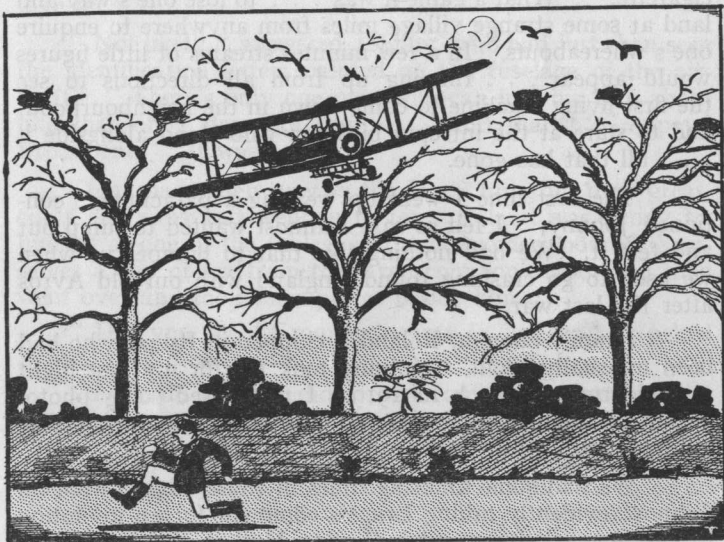
"I quite agree," remarked Roland, lighting another cigarette. "What a game it was . . . to lose one's way and land at some strange village miles from anywhere to enquire one's whereabouts. In a few minutes streams of little figures would appear . . . running up from all directions to see the first flying machine to come down in the neighbourhood, and to stare at the intrepid birdman who stood alongside it . . . all that has gone."

"The first time I went up wearing a parachute," continued Johnny, "I felt so safe I almost wanted to jump out and test it. We had nothing like that to hamper us when we used to go crashing round England with our old Avros after the last war."

"Funnily enough, Roland," chipped in Bruce, who had been unusually silent, "Johnny took me for my first flight at Kidderminster back in 1919. I recognised some photographs in his cutting book and also his little mascot dog Wilfred, too."

"We had some amusing times in those days," went on Johnny, evidently taking Bruce's comment for an invitation to continue. "I remember leaving Hull in the summer of 1921 after a fortnight spent there in passenger flying. The field we flew from was not more than three hundred yards long, and at the end was a row of elm trees about sixty feet high. Our old Avro was loaded with various items of equipment and personal kit, and, in addition, there was a pair of steps and a spare propeller lashed to the fuselage. Birkdale, another fellow and myself comprised the crew . . . plus Wilfred, the mascot dog. We taxied the aircraft to the best

position on the field for a long take off and pushed part of the tail into the hedge. A couple of keen types hung on to the wing tips until the engine was running full out . . . and then with a wave of the hand we were off. I think it was one of the most frightening experiences I have ever had—haring down the field with the elm trees getting nearer and nearer every second, and wondering all the time whether we should make it. Then, after what seemed an eternity, the wheels gradually came unstuck from the ground. By that time, of course, we could just about count the leaves and twigs on the elm trees . . . but we didn't count many. There was a terrific crash . . . followed by a blinding mass of leaves and twigs and rooks' nests. Everybody ducked—



"TWIGS, LEAVES AND ROOKS' NESTS FLEW IN ALL DIRECTIONS."

automatically—including Wilfred and the Avro. For some never-to-be-discovered reason we didn't hit the ground . . . the faithful le Rhone engine continued to rotate . . . with the propeller still on it. We recovered our senses in the realisation that we were still flying. After a few minutes, when we had gained a little height, we poked our heads over

the side to see whether the undercart was still with us, but could see nothing. No one spoke . . . probably we should have to land on the wings. It wouldn't matter much anyway, we thought—we were all stiff with fright and our spirits half in the next world already. In addition, we had forgotten where we were going and were floundering about in small circles. Everything seemed to indicate that we'd 'had it.'

"Birkdale, however, was soon to pull himself together . . . and he decided to climb out of his seat on to the wing and to try and examine the undercart from there. As I watched him climbing out of the fuselage I remember that it seemed a perfectly normal thing to do . . . rather like having a glass of beer and a cigarette . . . except that he was doing it so clumsily. In fact, I became impatient of the delay—hanging about out there on the wing while we might have been getting on with the flight. At last Birkdale appeared satisfied with what he had found and, with a nod of the head, climbed back into his seat. We landed safely at Burton-on-Trent and spent another successful fortnight there carrying passengers."

"The life of a nomad at its best," commented Roland, "and spent in God's fresh air."

Johnny required little encouragement to continue his story. . . . "Strangely enough," he went on, "Birkdale's effort in getting out on to the wing had an interesting sequel. We decided that it would be a good scheme to include a display of walking on the wings at all our future flying demonstrations . . . but to make it more spectacular we decided to carry out the performance with one of us standing on each of the bottom planes. This proved a tremendous success, and, from Burton-on-Trent onwards, at all the towns we visited we carried out an exhibition of walking on the wings. Wherever we went people came in thousands to watch, and paid for admission to the field."

"And you call that romance. Let's go and listen to the news" was Bruce's only comment.

The three Controllers stopped in the corridor to see whether any letters had arrived for them by the afternoon post, and then went into the ante-room. Roland did not

join them but made his way to his room for a few hours' rest before going on duty for the night.



"JOHNNY AND BIRKDALE WALKED THE WINGS."

The ante-room was more crowded than usual, as the bad weather had enabled Group to place the Squadrons at a relaxed state. Most of the pilot boys were there, waiting to hear the news at six o'clock. After that they would

probably go up to the village, a mile away, or perhaps to the camp cinema, before returning to the station for supper, and bed.

"Do you feel like a game of squash . . . the court is free from six-thirty for half an hour," inquired Bruce, studying the list on the notice board.

"A good idea, and it will just allow us nice time afterwards for a bath and a half can before supper. I'll see you on the court in ten minutes."

The little bar was crowded when they had finished their game, and the two Controllers had a job to squeeze their way inside. Some of the lads were sitting on upturned barrels by the entrance . . . others, on the bar itself, were kicking their legs. The remainder just stood. George, the steward with the imperturbable smile, coped to the best of his ability, his white jacket appearing even more spotless than usual.

Quite suddenly, from the direction of the garden, came a terrific crash, followed immediately afterwards by several other earsplitting detonations from the same direction. In the vividly contrasting silence which followed one could discern the uneven beat of a hostile aircraft somewhere in the vicinity. The ear-splitting racket had been caused by "Alfie" a nearby anti-aircraft battery, having a crack at the hun.

"Let's go and see the fun," shouted someone . . . a wise remark, which resulted in everybody getting jammed in the bar door at once.

Outside the Mess in the garden one was presented with the complete panorama . . . in the distance the dull red glow of stricken London . . . the searchlights traversing the sky . . . parachute flares like fairy Christmas trees descending slowly in the distance, away over the hedge, their brilliance illuminating the countryside for miles around. Overhead the uneven throb of hostile aircraft—many of them now—intermingled with the orders to the ack-ack gun crews.

"Alfie" was belching forth defiance at an incredible rate . . . the blinding flashes from the gun muzzles silhouetting the gunners as they went about their tasks.

Suddenly there was a terrific crash as a stick of bombs fell not a hundred yards from where the late occupants of

the bar were standing, and chunks of earth were hurtling in all directions. Johnny made a quick dart for the door of the mess . . . but in the rush tripped over the mat and fell headlong into the hall. Before he could pick himself up a dozen others, also beetling for the mess, had stumbled over him. Winded and limping, but trying to laugh, he got up and pulled his uniform into shape.

Suddenly a terrific cheer went up from the little crowd collected round the entrance to the Mess. Looking up into the sky they saw what appeared to be a sheet of flame streaking earthwards with a sickening whine. "Alfie" had got one all right: no doubt about that! Vertically down came the hun like a flaming rocket . . . no use trying to pull out of that dive . . . only a matter of seconds now. Then a blinding flash from the other side of the aerodrome indicated where the hun had gone right in.

Back in Operations Room Wortles, the Army Gunner Officer, called across the dais to Roland: "The guns say they've got one . . . he's done for all right, just west of the aerodrome."

"O.K." yelled back the Controller. "Where do you say he is?"

"I'll check up his position with the guns," replied Wortles, busying himself with the telephones.

A W.A.A.F. Corporal at the far end of the room, wearing a head set, was trying to attract the Controller's attention. She had risen from her seat and was looking in his direction with an expression of suppressed excitement on her face. At last she called the Ops. B. Officer: "The Observer Corps have just been through on the telephone, Sir, to say that a Heinkel has crashed in a corner of a field about three-quarters of a mile away and is burning out."

"Inform the Station Commander and Group," replied Roland, "and then telephone the Police."

The din continued throughout the night and died away only when the first rays of dawn spread themselves over the wounded landscape.

Johnnie and Duggie, the Army Major, decided to stroll over before breakfast and see the remains of the crash . . . they had purposely put their names down for an early call

the night before. The Ops. B. Officer, Elders, said he would walk over with them—he had not seen a fried hun for a long time.

The early morning light was spreading over the aerodrome and Mess buildings as they made their way past the tennis courts and Station Headquarters and continued their journey beyond the hangers and then across the wet grass by the dispersal points. In the distance they could discern a jangled mass of smouldering wreckage a few hundred yards from the perimeter of the aerodrome; not far from a row of houses and some trees.

"I expect the huns were done for when they crashed," the Major remarked casually as they approached.

"Yes," replied Elders, his keen eyes already having picked out a pair of German boots, filled with feet, in the middle of a mixture of glycol and hot blood.

Together they stood and gazed at the unholy mess before them.

"It's the only thing they understand, Major," he continued, "they asked for it and now they've got it."

They did not stay long. Strolling back to the Mess for breakfast the three of them were silent for some time. Johnny's thoughts were many miles away . . . at Croyde in Devonshire, where the smell of the shell-covered rocks and the sand and the sea mingled with the gay laughter of children playing on the beach, and placed in the background of his mind the burning Heinkel and its mutilated crew.

"To hear some people talk, Major, one would imagine that the telephone was no longer an instrument of war."

Duggie laughed.

Together they entered the breakfast room, and sat down . . . the bacon smelt good!

Almost immediately the familiar voice of the Group Captain was heard from the loud-speakers situated round the aerodrome and camp buildings:

"This is the Station Commander warning all personnel. During the night an aerial mine was dropped in the vicinity of the aerodrome . . . it probably contains sufficient explosive to blow up two battleships.

Arrangements have been made for its early disposal, but personnel are not to approach within three hundred yards of the mine until further orders."

After breakfast the Operations types who were not on duty strolled across the lawn and surveyed the scene from afar. About three hundred yards away, lying by itself on the grass was a long dark blue cylinder attached to a sea-green parachute.

"It might just as easily have drifted in through my bedroom window during the night," suggested Bruce, "and there I should have been with it curled up beside me in bed like a hot water bottle. I shall definitely close my window in future!"

Ops.B. Officer and one for the Operations Room notice  
CHAPTER II.

The next day was Sunday—they knew it was because the Sunday papers were there. Otherwise one day very much resembled another. The life of the station went on without interruption day and night . . . orders were given and carried out . . . the Fighter Wing continued its sweeps across the Channel . . . the night fighters patrolled the moonlit skies . . . engines and aircraft were inspected and overhauled in the workshops . . . armourers continued their task of replenishing the ammunition belts and drums . . . the Operations Room was manned constantly through each minute of the twenty-four hours . . . there was no difference, weekdays or Sundays.

In one corner of the ante-room by the fire sat Elders, the senior Ops.B. Officer. On his knee was a pad of paper and in his hand he held a fountain pen. A half can of ale was within easy reach on the edge of the mantelpiece. He had been sitting in this position for two hours at least and occasionally could be seen looking into space and then recording something on the pad. Every few minutes he would stop to light a cigarette and then would resume his thinking and writing again.

The work Elders was engaged upon was known as writing the Operations duty "Roster." All the officers engaged in the Operations Room carried with them a copy of this carefully folded piece of paper which they guarded jealously.

The Duty Roster was usually made up to cover a period of ten days, and had typed upon it the date and day of the week, the name of each Controller and his Assistant, or "Ops.B." Officer, together with the time of the day when each would be on duty. Periods of leave were also recorded upon it. Frequently it was their only guide to the date or day of the week, and without it they certainly did not know when they would be on duty or when they would be free.

By lunch time Elders had completed his work and he hurried from the ante-room to get the various copies typed by the administrative clerk: one for each Controller and

"Ops.B." Officer and one for the Operations Room notice board.

Later in the afternoon when Johnny came on duty he received his copy of the Roster and proceeded to study it carefully. Tomorrow he would be on duty from five o'clock until ten, and on Tuesday from eight o'clock in the morning until one. After that, as he had been granted seven days privilege leave, his name did not appear again until Wednesday week, when he was down for the all night duty at ten o'clock. Probably Roland would relieve him in good time on Wednesday, and if he did that would enable him to catch the afternoon train from Paddington to the West Country.

"Sir, there's a hostile raid approaching the coast from the East . . . just been placed upon the table."

It was the W.A.A.F. Ops.B. Officer speaking. The Controller hastily folded his copy of the Roster, put it in his pocket, and then went to his place on the dais. According to the information symbols displayed on the plotting table the enemy raid consisted of three aircraft flying at ten thousand feet, and it was now reported halfway across the Channel between Dunkirk and the Thames Estuary flying in a North-Westerly direction.

He had barely time to grasp the general situation when the telephone buzzed at his elbow, and he picked up the receiver to answer Group Headquarters.

"Is that the Controller?"

"Yes, Controller speaking."

"This raid coming towards the Estuary . . . can you do anything about it?"

"I've got 'A' Flight of Punching Squadron at readiness, and they can take off straight away."

"Right, get them off at once, then, and I'll pass you the order; but you will have to be quick."

He rang off immediately. Johnny replaced the receiver, walked across the dais to the Tannoy broadcasting instrument, turned on the switches, and started to speak. Instantly the order was heard from the loud speakers situated round the aerodrome dispersal points:

"Operations called 'A' Flight Punching Squadron. 'A' Flight Punching Squadron scramble . . . switching off."

The Controller returned to the dais and instructed Ops. B. to inform the Station Commander and the Intelligence Officer.

Two minutes later from the loud speaker in the Operations Room came the voice of the look-out from his observation post overlooking the aerodrome:

"'A' Flight Punching Squadron taxiing out, sir." A minute later the look-out spoke again from his position on the hangar top. "'A' Flight Punching Squadron now air-borne."

"That's pretty quick," said Johnny addressing Ops.B. and at the same time looking at the clock upon the wall, "A bare three minutes . . . tell Group they're off."

Wintleberry, the W.A.A.F. Ops.B. Officer, threw over the key to Group and asked for the Staff Officer.

"Hullo, Group, Ops.B. here. 'A' Flight Punching Squadron now air-borne."

"My word that's a good show," came the Staff Officer's reply, "you've certainly not been long; let me know when you have some news." Ops.B. replaced the receiver and commenced filling in the completion details on the pink order form which had just been placed in front of her.

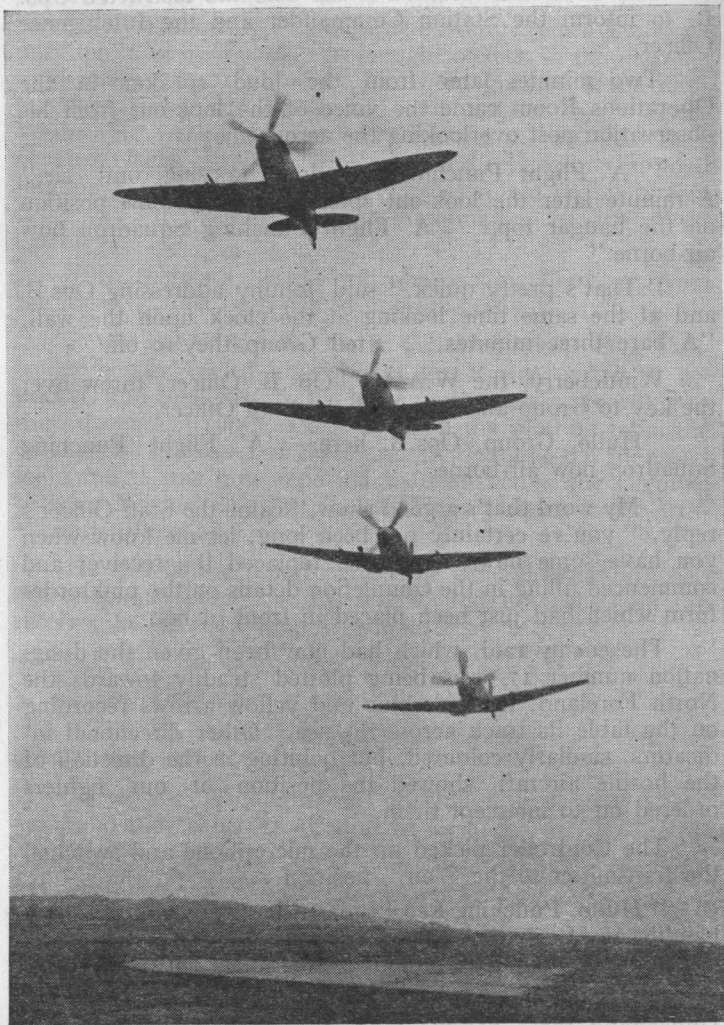
The enemy raid, which had now been given the designation number 17, was being plotted steadily towards the North Foreland; the red, blue and yellow arrows recording on the table its track across the sea. Other directional indicators, similarly coloured, but pointing in the direction of the hostile aircraft, showed the position of our fighters ordered off to intercept them.

The Controller picked up the microphone and switched the transmitter to the "on" position.

"Hullo, Punching Red Leader, Chaffinch calling. Three bandits at fifteen thousand feet flying North-West towards the North Foreland . . . about twelve miles out: over."

"Hullo, Chaffinch, Punching Red Leader answering. Understand three bandits flying towards North Foreland thirteen thousand feet. Listening out."





"'A' FLIGHT, PUNCHING SQUADRON, NOW AIRBORNE."

"Hullo, Red Leader, Chaffinch calling . . . No! fifteen thousand feet . . . over."

"O.K. Chaffinch . . . understand fifteen thousand feet, Listening out."

The raid was rapidly approaching the Thames Estuary, and, except for the clatter of the plotting rods on the table map, there was complete silence in the Operations room. Punch aircraft appeared to be in a good position to intercept. Weather conditions too were favourable. There was a small amount of cumulus cloud, the visibility was excellent, and the sun was behind the Punching fighters.

"Hullo, Red Leader, Chaffinch calling, the bandits have turned slightly South, still fifteen thousand feet, steer one nine five . . . over."

"O.K. Chaffinch. Understand one nine five. Red Leader listening out."

Another minute passed, with Red Leader turning his aircraft on to the course the Controller had given him.

"Hullo Punching Red Leader, Chaffinch calling. You are converging on bandits, about four miles to your port, continue on your present course and keep sharp look out."

"Hullo Chaffinch, Red Leader answering, I can see something about two miles away to my port, am going down to have a gander."

"O.K. Red Leader, Chaffinch listening out."

With the earpiece of the microphone clasped tightly to the Controller's ear there was nothing now to do but wait and watch.

The minutes dragged by. Then suddenly over the R/T—"Hullo Chaffinch I can see them now—Tally Ho."—followed by an order to the rest of the flight—"Red Leader calling, line astern, go."

"Tell Group Punching Red have given Tally Ho on the bandits," Johnny called to the W.A.A.F. Ops.B. Officer.

"Hullo Group Punching Red have Tally Ho'd on the bandits, they're about a mile behind at the moment."

"Well done, thanks very much," replied the Staff Officer. "Let me know if they get any luck."

More minutes went by, while the plots on the table map showed that our Fighters were closing with the enemy, now crossing the coast on the way out.

"There they are . . . three Dorniers at twelve o'clock below," came a sudden shout on the R/T.

"All right boys . . . follow me, down we go," answered a voice which the Controller recognised as Red Leader's.

The plots were now several miles out across the Channel and moving rapidly towards the French coast. Evidently the huns had abandoned their tip-and-run raid and were pedalling for home, with their noses well down.

"Hullo Chaffinch, Red Leader calling, did you receive Red Two's message. He says he thinks he's got one?"

"Hullo Red Leader. No, I did not hear Red two, did you say he's got one . . . over?"

"Hullo Chaffinch. Yes, Red two got a Dornier about half-way across . . . a flamer . . . it went right in: you should have seen it."

"Good show Red Leader . . . any luck with the others?"

"Hullo Chaffinch; they dived away into cloud," came Red Leader's reply, "I had a squirt at one and he may be damaged . . . I think I'll hang about out here for a bit . . . over."

"Hullo, Red Leader, O.K. Chaffinch listening out."

Soon the coloured arrows on the plotting table turned towards the English coast. Over the R/T Johnny could hear the Punching boys whistling and cat-calling to each other on their way home.

Suddenly there came a short transmission from Red Three which the Controller could not fully understand.

"Hullo, Red Three, Chaffinch calling. I could not get your message; say again . . . over." Red Three did not reply, and Chaffinch called again—this time to Red Leader.

"Hullo, Red Leader, did you receive Red Three's transmission? . . . over."

"Hullo, Chaffinch, Red Leader answering. Red Three has baled out. . . I think his engine packed up. Can you get a bearing on my position? I am following him down."

"O.K. Red Leader, keep Red Three in sight and I will fix your position . . . what height was he . . . over."

"Hullo, Chaffinch, seven thousand feet when he baled out . . . can you send the boats?"

"All right, Red Leader, everything is being done. . . I know your position but keep Red Three in sight as long as you can."

"All right Chaffinch. But for God's sake be quick."

The Controller made a rapid calculation on the pad of paper in front of him. Red Three was descending on his parachute at the rate of twenty feet per second, and this would mean that he would be in the sea roughly six minutes after baling out. Taking into consideration the direction and speed of the wind his position in the water would be about three quarters of a mile due North of the spot where the first bearing was obtained from Red Leader. Johnny turned to Ops.B., who was talking to the Group Staff Officer on the telephone. . . .

"Tell him to send the boats there," he said, pointing to a position on the map about six miles off the English coast . . . "there's no time to lose."

Then, calling to the Floor Supervisor:

"Place a disc three-quarters of a mile North of Red Leader's last position . . . there's very little more we can do I'm afraid . . . it's up to the boats now, but they should be there before long."

"Hullo, Chaffinch, Red Leader calling, Red Three is in the sea swimming, but can't get in his dinghy . . . for God's sake do something . . . over."

"All right, Red Leader, we are doing what we can."

"It's not all right . . . it's ruddy awful."

"Hullo, Red Leader . . . everything possible is being done. The boats are on their way."

He continued listening to Red Leader, still circling over Red Three in the sea.

The minutes dragged by.

"Hullo, Chaffinch, Red Leader calling. I think Red Three is getting in his dinghy now . . . I'll go and fetch the boats . . . how far are they away . . . over."

"Hullo, Red Leader, Chaffinch answering, the boats should be approaching you from the North-West, let me know when you sight them."

"O.K. Chaffinch, I think I can see something . . . listening out."

Five minutes later Red Leader called again. . . .

"Hullo, Chaffinch, he's O.K. now . . . am returning with the boats . . . are there any bandits about . . . over?"

"Hullo, Red Leader, good show . . . no, there's nothing near you," came Chaffinch's reply. "Listening out."

"I should imagine from the position they were in that the Dornier is in the drink about fifteen miles off the English coast . . . and if the Huns can't swim, now is the time to learn!"

The Controller was addressing no one in particular but merely expressing his thoughts aloud.

"Sir," called the Ops.B. Officer across the dais to the Controller. "The C.O. of Punching Squadron is on the telephone enquiring if we have any further news of Red Three . . . have the boats picked him up yet?"

"Tell him they have just this minute done so," answered the Controller, "and we have received a message from the Navy to say that he is quite O.K. apart from slight shock. He is probably splicing the main brace with the sailors at the present moment." The C.O. rang off.

"Runner," called Johnny to an airman standing a short distance away on the dais, "will you go and see if you can organise some cups of tea . . . one weak one with sugar for the Ops.B. Officer and one strong one without sugar for myself. Don't trouble about the cream. Oh . . . and see there's no lipstick on the cups." The runner grinned and hurried away upstairs to the canteen.

The Controller put his hand into his pocket and produced his copy of the duty roster. He studied it thoughtfully. Two more days . . . then off to Devon.

\* \* \*

He sat in the train watching the countryside slip by. He did not feel like reading. He just wanted to look out of

the window and enjoy the scenery . . . the fields and the brooks and the hills—and the pattern of the clouds in the sky. However wretched mankind had succeeded in making the world, he thought, Nature still did her best to keep it beautiful.

\* \* \*

The Battle of Britain had been fought out in the sky, and Goering's plans for the final conquest of this Island by the Luftwaffe's fanatics could be stowed away for ever in the dusty files of the "Reichsarchiv." The ceaseless daylight fighter and bomber raids over our aerodromes had failed completely in their object—the destruction of the fighting power of the Royal Air Force. But the next phase, the concentrated bombing of our cities by night, soon commenced. Here also the Luftwaffe failed in its primary task—the destruction of the morale and will to resist of the British people. But the nightly cavalcade of bombs and parachute flares and fire continued throughout the winter months their merciless burning and blasting of our homes and countryside.

If this savage bombardment achieved nothing else it certainly succeeded in revealing the good traits and, unfortunately the bad ones, in many men and women, and afforded an odd contrast in human nature. If one could admire the burning courage of the men and women who plunged themselves into this nightly inferno to rescue and succour those who had been struck down, it was equally difficult to understand those parents who made their children wait about the entrances to public houses, hour after hour, in the darkness and the cold, until their semi-inebriated fathers and mothers were ready to take them home.

Yet this was happening night after night during those weeks of raids in the areas round London. It was a shocking thing, and whenever they came upon it, and it was often, Johnny and his friends were filled with disgust. But what could they do. The little faces, seen in the dull glow of an electric torch, would light up with pleasure and relief when a few pennies or perhaps some biscuits were tucked into their wet pink hands. Sometimes a tactful word to the proprietor of the house would have the desired result and the parents would be sought out and told that they could not be allowed to remain on the premises with their children left outside in

such circumstances. But what was there to prevent their being taken on to the next public house and the same thing happening all over again?

There was one occasion at night when they found a small child, hardly more than five years of age, sitting alone, and fast asleep on a garden chair at the entrance to a public bar. Her head had fallen forward on her arms on a beer slopped table. Bombs were falling in the neighbourhood and guns, firing at the hostile aircraft, were shaking the foundations of the inn. Yet no one was with her. Here at least was one brand of freedom for which they were definitely not fighting: the freedom which permitted parents to neglect and ill-treat their children. They were not prudes, but this was the sort of thing that made them blasphemous . . . "suffer little children to come unto Me" . . . what a mockery!

A Hun bomber was shot down in a nearby orchard during the night. It came to a standstill with its wings jammed against two apple trees. The pilot had broken both his legs but the rest of the crew, unwounded, were standing round him with their arms held above their heads in surrender.

The Doc. went out in the night to attend to the injured pilot who was lying on the grass calling in German, "Mother, mother."

"That's enough of your mother, mother," said the Doc. in perfect German, to the surprised pilot of the Heinkel. "How many mothers and their families have you destroyed to-night?" After that the Hun was silent.

\* \* \*

Johnny returned from leave with a shocking cold, and immediately sought out George, the steward, for his advice. A large hot rum and then to bed was the best thing he could do according to George.

"If you go over to your quarters, sir, I'll get it ready and send it over with a small jug of boiling water when you are in bed.

Johnny thanked him and, with his hands thrust deep into his pockets, and with his greatcoat collar turned up, went out of his mess and made his way across the garden towards his room. Walking along the corridor he passed the open door of the Doc's empty bedroom . . . inside was a well-stoked fire flaming in the grate. Sticks were crackling and

there was a smell of burning wood. He stopped to watch it for a moment and then, unable to resist the temptation, went in and sat down on the bed and gazed into the glowing coals. Soon the approaching footsteps of the never-failing Cockroach, the night orderly, could be heard echoing along the corridor accompanied by the cheery tinkle of crockery upon a tray.

"Here you are, sir," he said, handing Johnny a jug of steaming hot water and a glass half filled with a delicate reddish-brown liquid. "I hope your cold will be better in the morning."

"Thank you very much Cockroach; don't forget to put my name down for an early call at seven o'clock . . . good night."

"Good-night, sir, I'll see you're called," answered Cockroach; and a moment later he was gone.

Johnny was reluctant to leave the comfort of the Doc's cheery fire but eventually went into his own room and climbed into bed. He mixed the hot water with the concoction in the glass but, still without his sense of taste or smell, he now experienced none of the glowing warmth usually associated with a large hot rum. But there it was . . . he had consumed his nightcap . . . his glass was empty and he soon fell asleep.

The next morning a sheepish Cockroach came into his room at seven o'clock: "I'm very sorry, sir, but that glass of rum I gave you last night wasn't rum at all . . . it was the remains of someone else's glass of beer."

"Ah, well, I'll forgive you, Cockroach. I'm staying in bed to-day anyway, and I don't suppose the rum would have made all that much difference. But you might take this note to Squadron Leader Bruce for me," and he handed Cockroach an envelope. "He will then be able to arrange for someone else to take my duty to-day and I shall probably be all right to-morrow."

It was the first time Johnny had missed a period of duty since the war began, but there was no point in walking about the station feeling half fit, and sneezing over everyone else into the bargain. So at half past eight he rang the bell at the side of his bed for his batman, and told him to go down to the kitchen and ask the chef for a pot of tea and some toast and marmalade, and the morning paper.

Lying back on the pillows he listened to the Spitfires running up their engines at the dispersal points, and to the intermittent rattle of machine-guns being tested at the butts. Then the Tannoy burst forth from the loud-speaker just outside the bedroom door: "This is a non-operational broadcast for test purposes only—one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, zero . . . end of Tannoy test." Johnny recognised the voice as that of the Controller, Roland. It was always interesting listening to other people broadcasting messages on the Tannoy, and wondering who it was speaking; although no one could mistake the well modulated voice of Roland, the actor.

At that moment the bedroom door opened and the batman entered carrying a tray with the various items of breakfast which Johnny had asked for, also the "Daily Telegraph" and two letters. Something to be said, after all, for breakfast in bed.

He looked first at the headlines on the main news page and then glanced over the leading article. After that he turned to the personal notices' column. Then he must have dozed off to sleep again because the next thing he remembered was Bruce standing by the side of his bed and telling him it was one o'clock. Elders came in soon afterwards carrying an armful of Lilliputs and London Opinions, and filled the room with smoke from his cigarette. He sat on Johnny's bed and chatted about the morning's work in Operations, which had consisted mostly of shipping patrols and local practise flying. Promising to come in again later in the evening Elders puffed his way out of the room leaving behind a blue haze of tobacco.

Johnny did not have any lunch, but asked the Chef for a pot of tea instead. Tea was his mainstay at any time especially when it was freshly made and not too weak.

The remainder of the afternoon and evening he spent looking through his collection of photographs and cuttings in his scrap book: a personal record of experiences which he valued more than any other of his possessions. Among its pages were photographs taken when a prisoner of war in Germany . . . portraits of famous German fighter pilots: the Richthofen brothers, Boelcke and Loewenhardt and others: also groups of their opposite British numbers, taken in the different camps where he had been in prison. On another

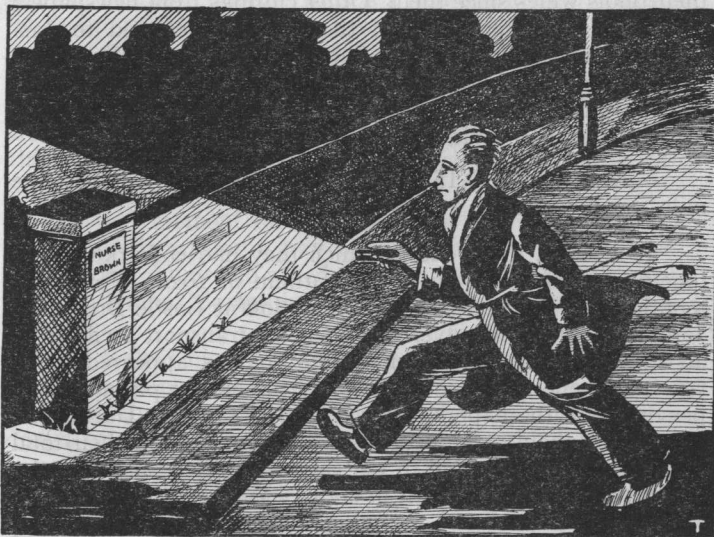
page was pasted his Pilot's Graduation Certificate from the Central Flying School on Salisbury Plain. He noticed that it was dated November 2nd, 1916, and that the number was 2513. How many thousands, he wondered, had received their pilots wings since then! Other cuttings from newspapers in widely separated parts of the country, referred to passenger carrying flights which had been made with his friend Birkdale in their old rotary engined Avro biplanes during the years from 1919 to 1923. One cutting which caught his eye, and recalled vivid memories of the past, was headed:

"AERIAL TAXIS TO BE ON HIRE. Seventy-five miles an hour in all weather."

It referred to a venture which they had embarked upon together at Birmingham in the autumn of 1922. For many months they had rented accommodation at Castle Bromwich aerodrome and had advertised their air transport facilities in all the principal newspapers. The charges appeared to be reasonable enough—one shilling and threepence per mile each person. But the experiment was a total failure. During the whole time they were operating from Birmingham their total flying receipts amounted to ten shillings only. Such was the interest and encouragement in civil aviation in the early days.

But that was not the only setback they received at Castle Bromwich: Birkdale became ill with acute appendicitis one night, when everyone had retired to bed. Apparently a burst appendix is not the sort of complaint which one can forget merely by "turning on to the other side," so there was nothing else to do but to get up and go in search of the local doctor. Birkdale's groans increased so rapidly in frequency and strength that Johnny did not stop to dress, but dashed off down the village street clad only in pyjamas, dressing-gown and slippers. In vain did he strike matches at all the likely looking name plates . . . every business and profession was represented but the doctor's. Left with an empty matchbox there was nothing else to do but return to the Bradford Arms, where they were staying, and rouse the landlord. Any sensible person of course would have done that in the first place; but when one's best friend develops appendicitis in the middle of the night, one is no longer sensible . . . one just walks out of the house and into the street in pyjamas.

There was no doctor in Castle Bromwich, and the only solution to the problem was to wake the maid and send her



“ . . . JUST WENT INTO THE STREET IN PYJAMAS.”

panting on her bicycle to the next village. An hour later she returned, followed closely by a doctor, and then the ambulance. Birkdale had to be removed to the Birmingham General Hospital at once; but before he could be transferred from his bed to the ambulance he had to be manoeuvred down the steep and winding staircase of the inn, without any violent movement of his body. This was accomplished by the landlord gripping Birkdale's head with both his hands while someone else clung to the patient's feet. Bumping down the stairs without mishap they eventually reached the little hall, and then the street. Five minutes later he was in the ambulance and on his way to hospital.

Birkdale made a quick recovery, and a month later was back again, assisting in the overhaul of the Avro biplane.

Turning the pages of his cutting book Johnny continued to feast himself on a kaleidoscope of past events—successful

and unsuccessful—in which he had been associated with Birkdale.

Farther on, among the pasted scraps of paper, was a report from a Somerset weekly paper, describing a flying demonstration at Wells—where their Avro biplane created a record for a single aeroplane by carrying one hundred and fifty fare paying passengers in one day. Everyone from the Town Council downwards had been taken for a flight upwards.

On another page was a cutting from a Staffordshire newspaper containing an account of their first night flight and firework display at Stoke-on-Trent on November 5th, 1921. They had been carrying passengers on “joy ride” trips from a field in the heart of the Potteries, at twelve shillings and sixpence per head, and November 5th was to constitute their final display. For this event they had purchased twenty pounds worth of fireworks in order to give a good show and had also arranged for an extra force of police to be on the ground to control the onlookers. Otherwise, of course, it would have been impossible to ensure that everyone came on to the field via the main entrance and paid the admission fee of sixpence. Goodness knows what would have happened had they not taken the precautions which they did.

By 8 p.m. dense masses of people were forcing their way on to the flying field and thousands were lining the ground outside. By constantly appealing to the crowd and pointing out that it would be impossible to fly at all unless strict order was ensured, the potters were kept temporarily under control. It was obvious, however, that this would not be the case for long and the police also were of that opinion. They therefore decided to make a flight. Petrol flares were placed at intervals of twenty yards down the centre of the field, to enable the aircraft to take off and land, the engine was started up, and the old Avro took off on her first flight into the night. Immediately the aircraft left the ground it was out of sight in the darkness, and the cheering crowds surged over the runway which was reserved for it to land, and trampled on the petrol flares. The uproar that followed, mingled with the noise of the exploding fireworks, and the Avro overhead, made it most difficult to keep a clear eye and close grip on the rapidly changing course of events.

The petrol flares had to be re-erected and the runway cleared for the aircraft to land. The question was how to do it. When they were almost at their wits end to know what to do, and the crowd outside had rushed the entrance and was pouring on the field from all directions—as well as over the hedges—a fresh force of police appeared upon the scene. Strenuous efforts were then made to clear the runway and re-erect the petrol flares, but it was a superhuman job to do it. After what seemed an eternity the familiar roar of the le Rhone engine could be heard approaching the field and shortly afterwards the Avro biplane could be seen—silhouetted by the petrol flares—coming up the runway. The aircraft made a perfect landing and was immediately taxied to one corner of the flying ground and surrounded by police to protect it from the crowd. Birkdale and Johnny made their way to the tent in which their advance agent and his gate receipts had been escorted by several burly constables, and there they waited until the crowd had left the field.

Later in the evening, after a meal, they set to work counting the takings at the gate. The heap of coins was jettisoned on to Birkdale's bed and the piles of pennies, sixpences and shillings totted up. The total amount for the evening's proceedings came to well over one hundred pounds—but they decided there and then to delete night flights and fireworks from their future programmes!

Johnny continued to turn the pages of his scrap book but by supper time he was tired and was glad to see friend Elders and his cigarette at the door again ready to relate the day's happenings in the Operations Room.

"How do you feel now?" he enquired lighting another cigarette. "Shall you be coming on to-morrow or not?" Elders was a man of few words. There were long gaps in the conversation when he spoke.

"Yes, I think so, Elders . . . I intend having a real glass of rum to-night and will see you at breakfast, ready to go on at eight o'clock! Perhaps you will let Bruce know."

That night he fell asleep feeling really warm . . . there was a distinct atmosphere of Jamaica about the room.

### CHAPTER III.

"Can you come and see me a minute?" enquired Bruce on the telephone. Johnny had just arrived on duty in Operations and Bruce, as Senior Controller, was speaking from his office upstairs.

"I'm awfully sorry, old man," said Bruce, when he had closed the door, "but a signal has just come in to say you are posted to Burton Hill; they want you over there as soon as possible."

For a moment Johnny experienced a sinking sensation in the pit of his stomach. He had been at this station since the beginning of the war, nearly two and a-half years now, and it would be a wrench to leave it. But still, they all knew that this sort of thing was likely to happen at any time. They were not their own masters and, in any case, there was a war on. Really he was lucky to have remained there so long.

"That's a bit of a blow," said Johnny when he had recovered from the first shock, "but it's not far away, and I know a few of the good types who are there. Let me see . . . there's the Admiral and Jamie . . . and Charles: and Group Captain Bradwell I have met before too. If I get cleared up here this afternoon and go over to Burton Hill in the morning I should think that would do."

"Yes, I think so, I'll ring through and tell them you will be there about eleven o'clock . . . have a fag?" Bruce produced a box of cigarettes from the drawer of his desk.

At that moment the telephone rang at Bruce's elbow, and he picked up the receiver.

"Yes, he is standing by me now . . . I'll tell him . . . they want you in Ops., old man, better hurry. I'll see you later."

Johnny dashed down the stairs and on to the dais. The Ops.B. Officer, Spratberry called him immediately.



“. . . SOME GOOD TYPES THERE.”

“The weather has closed in rapidly at forward base, sir, and Punching White One is asking for a course for home.”

One of the N.C.O. Deputy Controllers was still calling White One on the R/T, but evidently the pilot was not receiving his messages. Johnny picked up the microphone.

“Hullo Chaffinch,” came a voice so faint and far away that it could scarcely be heard, “give me a course for home . . . over.”

The plots on the table showed White One’s position about twenty miles out to sea off the North Foreland, and still going North.

“Hullo, White One . . . if you are receiving me, steer one nine zero, over.”

Twenty seconds went by, then White One’s voice, still fainter, called again: “Hullo, Chaffinch, give me a course for home.”

The Controller turned to Ops.B. . . . “Get through to forward base at once and order another aircraft off to relay messages to White One.” Then he called again over the radio telephone:

“Hullo, White One . . . steer one nine zero, one ninety, over.”

The only response on the R/T was a crackling noise which could not be understood. White One was too far away to be heard distinctly. The plots on the table map however remained in the same position, and it appeared that White One might be increasing his height in that locality with a view to improving his reception of the Controller’s messages.

“Hullo, Chaffinch. Red One here . . . what are your instructions? . . . over.” It was the pilot of the aircraft ordered off by Ops.B. to relay messages to White One.

“Hullo, Red One. Chaffinch answering . . . tell White One to steer one nine zero for base.”

“O.K. Chaffinch. Hullo White One, Chaffinch says steer one nine zero for base, is this understood, over?”

Johnny with his ear to the microphone tried to pick up White One’s response, but without result. He called Red One again:

“Hullo, Red One, did White One acknowledge your message . . . over.”

“Hullo Chaffinch. Yes, White One is steering one nine zero, over.”

O.K. Red One. Tell him he is fifteen miles North of base and to steer two one zero now.”



The plots from White One had turned South, and his transmissions could be heard again . . . gradually growing louder over the R/T.

"Hullo Chaffinch. White One calling . . . fire some rockets for me at base . . . over.

"O.K. White One. You are now seven miles North-West . . . steer one five zero."

"Steering one five zero. Is this correct . . . over?"

"Yes, White One. Look out for rockets ahead, you are approaching base."

But the Controller's transmission was jammed. White One was calling at the same time:

"Hullo Chaffinch. I can see base now . . . thank you very much."

"Hullo White One. Understand you can see base . . . listening out."

Johnny called Red One: "Hullo Red One, White One says he can see base. You may come in now . . . over."

"O.K. Chaffinch, coming in now."

"Thank heaven for that," said Johnny to the Deputy Controller, as he put down the microphone. Ops.B., will you check up on the weather at forward base. It has evidently deteriorated considerably since our last report. Our information on the weather board is that the visibility is a mile and a-half, but White One was right over the aerodrome before he could see it."

Ops.B. turned over the key on his telephone switchboard and was immediately connected to the duty pilot at the forward base.

"What is the weather like with you now?" he inquired. "White One was right over the aerodrome before he could see it."

"Yes," replied the duty pilot. "There is a heavy sea mist coming in . . . it was quite all right here half-an-hour ago: this has all blown up since."

Ops.B. exploded. "How many times have I told you how essential it is to telephone Operations at once if the weather commences to close in. You must keep us informed."

Spratberry switched off, feeling better for having administered a mild raspberry to the occupant of the Watch Office.

"I take a dim view of that fellow," he said turning to Controller, "it's not the first time he has let me down over the weather; definitely a poor type."

He shuffled in his chair and picked up the receiver to speak to Group.

"Is that the Staff Officer? . . . Yes, it's Spratberry here. The weather has closed in at forward base. It appears to be fairly general all round the coast. Is there any chance of a reduced state for the Squadrons?"

The Staff Officer consulted the Group Controller, while Ops.B. kept the line open waiting for a decision.

"Yes," came the reply a few moments later. "The Controller says you may keep a section of aircraft at readiness at home and forward base, and the remainder may go to thirty minutes."

"Thank you, very much," said Ops.B., turning off the Group switch. He then set to work altering the Squadron states panel and telephoning to the pilots at dispersal.

As flying had now ceased for the time being Johnny opened the Controller's logbook, in which was recorded the happenings in Operations during each period of duty, and started to write. It was his last watch at the Station where he had been so long. Dunkirk and the Battle of Britain had been fought out during his two and a-half years there as a Controller. The big bombing raids too had come and gone, and now the pendulum was swinging in the other direction, and our fighter sweeps were carrying the war to the enemy's side of the Channel.

His last entry in the Controller's log was not strictly conventional:

"And now the time has come to say good-bye to those with whom I've worked to help men fly. I know I'll miss them more than I can tell. But here's good luck, good hunting and farewell."

He closed the log book and awaited the arrival of his relief.

Back in his room he surveyed the assortment of articles piled upon his bed. How on earth he was going to pack them all into his three suitcases he could not imagine. There were books, items of underwear, squash shorts, pairs of shoes, shaving tackle, maps, photographs, pipes and all sorts of other things mixed together in one glorious muddle. Johnny lit a cigarette and removed his tunic.

Two hours later he had managed to squeeze most of the things into the bulging suitcases, but his squash racquet, three pairs of shoes, a mackintosh and two spare tunics had to be left outside. These could be placed in the back of the transport which was taking him over to Burton Hill. Johnny called the batman and explained the situation and then went downstairs to the dining hall for tea. He had exactly an hour left in which to say good-bye to the Station Commander, pay his Mess bill, sign the "Out" book, get his clearance certificate completed by the various departments and handed to the Station Adjutant, before the time arranged for his transport to arrive.

\* \* \*

The journey to Burton Hill took nearly two hours, and he arrived feeling rather like a boy at a new school. A room had been reserved for him in a house a short distance from the aerodrome; and he discovered later that all the Operations personnel lived there together. There was no wash basin in his room, a luxury he had enjoyed at his previous Station, but the bathroom was handy and at least he had a room to himself.

Johnny decided to unpack his belongings and get generally straightened out in his new surroundings before reporting to the Adjutant, the Station Commander and the Senior Controller. Acting upon the assumption that the baby who squeaks loudest receives the most attention, he called the batman and enquired whether he could produce a cup of tea. The batman thought he could, and Johnny settled down to unpack his suitcases in comfort.

Later in the evening he strolled over to the Mess and into the ante-room. Several officers were there reading the papers and periodicals and one, a Squadron Leader wearing an Observer's Wing on his tunic and the familiar Mutt and

Jeff ribbons of the last war, came up and enquired if he were the new Controller. He introduced himself as Hammers. There was something about Hammers which seemed to ring a bell in Johnny's memory. He felt sure he had seen this last war Observer somewhere before . . . not during this war but many years ago. Perhaps he would remember presently.

Over a half tankard of ale Johnny and Hammers chatted about the new Station and the Squadrons that were there, the Operations Room, the periods of duty and the Controllers. He discovered that the times of the watches were rather different from those at his last Station, but there was the same number of Controllers; and the Senior was Squadron Leader Igonson, an Irishman. Johnny had spoken to him on the telephone many times before but had never met him.

"Where were you stationed in the last war?" enquired the newcomer of Hammers after they had been talking for a while.

"Oh, I was in France, observing," he answered casually, "until I caught a packet and then I finished the remainder of my time as a prisoner of war in Hunland."

"I was a prisoner too," rejoined Johnny becoming suddenly more interested. "Were you ever by any chance at Strohen, or at Schweidnitz?"

"Good lord, yes—Schweidnitz—that's where I was!"

"What an amazing coincidence. I was at Schweidnitz from Christmas 1917 until the end of the war. I have a photograph which was taken there of all the old Flying Corps people. I bet we are there together. I'll go over to my room and fetch it."

He drained his tankard and walked across the garden to his billet. A few minutes later he was back again in the ante-room with his cutting book under his arm. Hammers gazed over his shoulder in anxious anticipation while Johnny turned the pages of his scrap book.

"Here we are," he said at last, his finger pointing to a group of officers standing against the wall of a barrack block. For a moment the two ex-prisoners were silent; they were both scanning eagerly the rows of faces in the photograph. Hammers was the first to speak:

"Here I am," he said, "at the end of the back row," and he dabbed a finger on the photograph. "Whereabouts are you?"

Johnny pointed to a position a few places away along the same row. "Well I'm blowed," they both exclaimed together!

They ordered two more half tankards of ale and from then until supper time they swapped yarns about the old prisoner of war days, quite oblivious of the other officers in the anteroom.

When at last they noticed the time, they had been talking for more than an hour, and Hammers suggested they should go into supper. He guided Johnny to a table where two other officers were sitting, and indicated a place at the end of the table facing the window.

"This is Johnny, the new Controller," he said by way of introduction; and "this is Squadron Leader Igoson, our Senior Controller and Flight Lieutenant Cheshire, the senior Ops.B. Officer." Johnny took a quick glance at both his new acquaintances. His first impression was favourable, but he realised immediately that here were two entirely different types—Igoson, the embodiment of rugged efficiency—a fellow who would work hard, and play hard too. Cheshire, on the other hand, struck him as a cheery "life and soul of the party" type. He was attracted immediately by both personalities.

Hammers handed the menu card across the table, and a waiter moved up to attend to their requirements.

Looking round the room he noticed one or two familiar faces . . . old friends who had been at his last station in the Battle of Britain days. At one table, near the entrance, was the "Admiral," the leader of the Station Wing, and one of the finest and most successful fighters in the country; while seated next to him, in earnest conversation, was Squadron Leader Jamie, another prominent fighter with at least a dozen victories to his credit.

He began to feel at home already.

"I expect you would like a day or two in which to become acquainted with Operations Room, before going on the roster," suggested Igoson, looking at him across the table.

Johnny thought he would; there were all sorts of things that would be strange: the plotting table would cover a different area, there would be the new call signs of the Squadrons and Ground Station to become accustomed to—new faces and new names to learn and by no means least of all, new idiosyncracies of individuals.

"Very well," went on Igoson, "I shall be going down to Ops. with Cheshire first thing in the morning, you may as well come along with us and have a look round . . . how about some coffee?"

Igoson and Cheshire rose from their places and Hammers and Johnny followed them across the hall into the ante-room. Coffee was available there from a large urn which, together with several metal jugs of milk, was standing on a hot plate near the Broadwood piano.

After listening to the news Igoson excused himself, as he wanted to be up early in the morning, and soon afterwards Johnny also decided on bed. He collected his service cap from the peg allotted to him in the corridor outside the ante-room and made his way across the garden to his room.

He was awakened at the crack of dawn by shouts and splashings coming, so it seemed, from the direction of the garden. He jumped out of bed and looked out of the window. At the bottom of the lawn, surrounded by laurel trees and rambler roses, was a swimming-pool completely fitted up with spring-board and shower. For a moment he could scarcely believe his eyes. This was something he had not heard about the night before when he arrived. Cheshire and Igoson were there already enjoying a before breakfast dip, and were floating about the pool on inflated motor-car tubes. Here was certainly something to commend Burton Hill to a newcomer, and it was not long before he had turned out his bathing shorts and joined his new acquaintances in the water.

After breakfast the three of them jumped into Igoson's car and drove round to the Operations Room. The old familiar clatter of the plotting rods, greeted them as they walked in. The general lay-out of the room was rather different: the Squadron status panel and weather board were situated differently and the Controller's dais was arranged beneath the Ops.B. Officer, instead of being on the same level. The room itself was not as large as the one to which he had been used, but that was really of no consequence.

Igonson introduced Johnny to Webster, the Controller on duty, and then went to his office to attend to the various routine duties connected with Operations. Johnny produced cigarettes and enquired whether he might remain with Webster for the remainder of his watch and pick things up as he went along. Webster said he would be pleased, and called the floor Supervisor to produce another chair.

Johnny listened to everything that was taking place, and it was not long before he grasped the main differences between Burton Hill and his old Station. Here, apparently, the Controllers' call sign was "Sharpshooter" and he noticed that "Barking" was the Squadron at readiness with "Rifle" Squadron at available. He remained with Webster during the remainder of the morning, and by the time they were due to be relieved he had got the layout of the new Operations Room buttoned up.

One thing that struck him rather forcibly, after the large and airy building he had been used to, was the temperature of Burton Hill Ops. Even with their tunics discarded and their sleeves rolled up the W.A.A.F.'s and airmen on duty still appeared hot. This might have been due to the more confined space in which they were working or to the sunny weather outside . . . or both. Anyway Johnny was looking forward to another dip in the swimming pool when he returned to the Mess in the afternoon.

The Group telephone rang at that moment and the Controller picked up the receiver and pushed over the switch.

"Yes, Webster here . . . I see . . . coming through now is it? . . . Yes, all right, I'll tell the Wing Commander at once and notify the Squadrons."

It was fairly easy to guess from the few odd words of Webster's conversation that a show was being put on for the afternoon. Evidently it would be taking place soon and the Group Controller was giving the fighter stations preliminary warning.

Webster turned to Johnny, "A pretty big show by the sound of it . . . the Operation order form is coming through now . . . rendezvous at 14.00 hours. Won't give them much time for lunch and briefing."

"Don't let me get in your way, carry on with your telephoning; they'll get red hot in a minute. . . . I know what it's like."

"Just my luck to have to lay on a show like this at the last minute," continued Webster with a smile, "there's no justice."

The little red indicator lights on the telephone switchboard were soon resembling a gas fire; everybody was telephoning the Controller at the same time, and each one was expecting an immediate response. The little tabs above the lights revealed the origin of the calls, and, for a moment, the Controller had visions of a dozen men, varying in rank and responsibility, all muttering to themselves the same thing at the same time—"There's Ops. again . . . why don't they answer!"

Johnny thought Webster was coping with a difficult situation in a remarkably able manner. Forms, orders and requests were coming in from all quarters: by telephone, teleprinter and by runner. Group had an amendment to make to the original order, the Wing Commander wanted the time of briefing for the Squadrons put out over the Tannoy, the pilots wanted their lunch. . . . "And what about it?" Intelligence department wanted full details of the operation at once, or sooner; the Controller wanted a breather. In due course, however, all were attended to, and the gas fire at Webster's elbow turned once more from red to black.

"Well, I think that's everything," said Webster at last, surveying the various order forms all neatly arrayed before him. "It should not take long to hand over to Squadron Leader Igonson when he comes on: the 'gen' is fairly straightforward . . . our Wing is to act as target support for the bombers, and there will only be a couple of patrols going apart from the big show."

He turned to the Ops. B. Officer, busy with his telephones on the dais behind him. "Don't forget the Air Sea Rescue people are to be on the top line by 13.50 hours."

Ops. had warned them already.

The door leading into Operations room had opened without Webster noticing it, and Igonson was standing by his side ready to take over . . . he was two minutes early.

The W.A.A.F.'s and airmen forming the oncoming crew could now be seen lined up in the corridor outside, awaiting the Floor Supervisor's order to relieve the watch on duty. The Floor Supervisor was trying to catch the Controller's eye.

At last he succeeded: "All right to change over now, sir?" he enquired.

"O.K.," replied Igonson, "but only one at a time, and as quickly and quietly as possible."

Johnny walked out into the freshness and sunshine of the outdoor world to await Webster's arrival . . . the airmen and the W.A.A.F.'s . . . into the artificial light and filtered air of Operations to await . . . what? That fair-haired girl over there regarding herself in a hand mirror and patting her curls into shape, or the airman standing by the steel door with his hands behind his back reading Routine orders, may presently, by his or her efficiency in recording accurately some vital last transmission, be instrumental in rescuing a baled-out pilot from the drink. Or again, those two girls now passing into the brick-built building to take up their positions at the plotting table, may, later in the afternoon, make their contribution to the battle by displaying swiftly and correctly some precious piece of information which can be passed to the leader of the Fighter Wing by the Controller on his radio telephone.

On their way back to the Mess Webster and Johnny passed some cyclists pedalling their way along the wooded sunlit road . . . one was whistling. And then some children picking daisies. In the distance a bus, loaded with passengers, was doing its steady thirty into Town—and the pictures. It all seemed so unreal . . . and yet, surely, there was a war going on somewhere!

"They've got something to thank the fighter boys for," remarked Webster, who had evidently been thinking on the same lines. Johnny was brought back to earth with a bump.

Before they had time to finish their lunch the Spitfires could be heard across the road taking off, and a moment later they appeared in front of the windows of the Mess, "Barking" Squadron leading. It was a magnificent spectacle as they all came hurtling by in rapid succession: to disappear down the valley on their way out over the Channel . . . into battle.

Igonson, in Operations, divest of his tunic and with sleeves rolled up, watched the Air Armada moving swiftly over the table map in front of him. Presently the Huns would be joining in the fray—he hoped! In the meantime

he smoked a cigarette and listened, with the microphone clamped closely to his ear. The coloured arrows now disappeared across the coast. Any minute now and the fun would begin. Igonson had not long to wait!

"Keep your eyes skinned and keep together," came the familiar voice of the "Admiral," who was leading the Fighter Wing. "If you don't keep up, Yellow Two, you've had it," came the same commanding voice again. No time this for soft words or sloppy phrases. Do as you are ordered and do it quickly was the motto.

"Hullo, Admiral, Jamie here. Above and behind . . . those blokes don't look too friendly . . . 109s, I think."

"Yes, I can see them . . . keep together everybody."

"Coming down behind you," shouted a voice without a call sign, "look out . . . 109s on your tail."

"Don't tell me . . . get into the brutes," came the "Admiral's" voice again.

"Up sun, six o'clock, the sky's full of them."

"Below, now, Red One."

"O.K., down after them, boys, 'Admiral' calling."

"Down everybody, Jamie here."

And so the battle thundered on. The air was choked with voices. Away in front the bombers, closely escorted by other squadrons of fighters, forced their way on towards their target—a mile or two ahead. Behind them came the "Barking" and "Rifle" boys fighting it out with the 109's.

"Watch your tails everyone," the Wing Leader called again.

"Got him," broke in an excited voice as an M.E. streaked down to the grey-green earth below in a sheet of flame and smoke.

Back in Operations the Group telephone rang at the Controller's side, and Igonson answered the Staff Officer.

"Yes, they are heavily engaged . . . fighting all the way," he replied to Group's enquiry. "The bombers should be turning back now . . . they were due in the target area four minutes ago." He hung up the receiver.

"Turning to Port now, everybody. . . 'Admiral' calling."

"O.K., 'Admiral,' Jamie here."

"Are you O.K., Barking Leader?"

"Yes, I'm O.K."

"'Admiral' calling. More of them ahead of us . . . keep together boys."

The enemy appeared to be coming round in an attempt to intercept the bombers and the fighters on the way back to the coast. The Wing Leader could see the formations spread out in front of him, waiting for an opportunity to pick off stragglers; but if they clung together for another five minutes they should be clear of the French coast.

"Hullo, 'Admiral.' Rifle Leader here . . . 109's to Port five o'clock . . . they are coming down, I think."

"O.K., Rifle Leader."

"Green Three calling . . . they're coming round behind . . . look out."

"Here they come. Watch your tail, Blue Two, watch your tail."

It was now or never for the 109's, and down they came out of the sun, making a last diving attack before turning for home.

"'Admiral' calling . . . now's your chance for a bounce, boys . . . into them."

After the retreating Huns went the Rifle and Barking chaps, blazing with their machine guns at the 109's beneath them.

"Have you any more news?" enquired the Group Controller, in a voice which seemed strangely quiet after listening to the R/T.

"Only that they've been scrapping pretty well all the time," replied Igonson from the Controller's dais. "I should say they probably have a good bag, especially as they were favourably situated for their last bounce near Gravelines. But I'll give you details immediately they land."

"Thanks very much," answered Group Controller, "let me know as soon as you can."

"O.K., I will."

According to the symbols on the plotting table the bombers and their escort of fighters were nearly half-way back across the Channel. They had been airborne exactly one hour and twenty minutes, and so far had kept well up to the schedule of time laid down in the Operation Order.

"Hullo, 'Admiral,' Sharpshooter calling. Are you O.K. . . . over?"

No reply. Igonson waited for a few moments and then repeated his message.

"Are you O.K., 'Admiral' Sharpshooter calling . . . over."

"Did you hear anything?" asked the Controller of the Deputy at his side, who was also listening to the R/T.

"No, nothing at all, sir."

Igonson was about to call again when the "Admiral's" voice came through . . . "Watch your petrol everyone, and land forward if you are in doubt."

"It's all right, he has called," shouted the Controller to Ops. B. "I won't worry him again. Let the Watch Office know the Squadrons will be in soon."

Back at the Mess Johnny's wrist watch showed that the time was just four o'clock. He decided to change into his bathing shorts and sunbathe on the lawn. Collecting a bath towel from the back of a chair in the bedroom, he put on a pair of sunglasses and went downstairs. There was no one bathing in the pool, although it would probably be crowded with the pilot boys presently, so he decided to bask in the sun for five minutes, have one plunge in the shimmering water, swim a couple of lengths, and then sunbathe on the grass again. After that he would call Scotley, the batman, to bring tea out on to the lawn. Tea usually consisted of tomato sandwiches and rock cakes, and where could there be a pleasanter spot for it than on the freshly cut grass, among the Dorothy Perkins roses.

Johnny had been lying there for about a quarter of an hour when he heard a car drive rapidly up to the Mess, followed immediately afterwards by the slamming of a car door. Looking over his shoulder he saw the familiar figure of the "Admiral" . . . his tunic was already un-

fastened, and he was loosening his collar and tie as he walked. Following closely upon his heels were two dogs; his faithful little terrier, with his big expressive brown eyes, and a lolling white bull pup. The white bull pup had belonged to one of the "Admiral's" friends in the old Tiger Squadron days, but one afternoon his master did not come back, and the bull pup waited on the aerodrome for a long time . . . long after the last aeroplane had landed. So the "Admiral" took him . . . which is what his master would have wished. Just that.

"What sort of a trip did you have, 'Admiral'?" asked Johnny, as the Wing Leader sat down on the grass beside him.

"Oh, pretty tough . . . one of the toughest I've had, as a matter of fact. It must have been a good Hun I smacked down on the coast. Two others came at me immediately afterwards and followed me out over the Channel. Determined blighters they were, too . . . smashed my instrument panel and compass. I think I've got some glass in my eyes . . . they feel like it and they're pretty bloodshot. Can you lend me your sunglasses."

A tinkle of china behind them announced the arrival of Scotley with a trayful of sandwiches, rock cakes and tea, which he placed on the grass beside them. The "Admiral's" terrier immediately helped himself to a cake from the plate and the bull pup followed his example.

"I've never known him do that before," said the Wing Leader, stretching himself on the grass and closing his eyes. "He's showing off in front of the pup."

"Are you going to have a bathe before tea, or wait until afterwards?" asked Johnny. "You can use my room if you care to."

"Better change now, I suppose . . . it's so sweltering hot and I need all the sun I can get."

The "Admiral" got up from the grass, walked into the Mess and up the stairs to Johnny's room.

"Better cover up those cakes," he called a moment later from the bedroom window.

Waiting for the "Admiral" to change Johnny walked over to the swimming pool and gazed into the water.

"Sam," the bull pup, did the same; but like all inquisitive creatures he was not satisfied merely with gazing. To him a pool meant something he could drink, and the flavour of the chlorine treated water appealed to his clean pink tongue: he just went on lapping it up.

"Have you heard the score?" shouted Igoon across the lawn, as he returned from his duty in Operations. "Five destroyed, one probable and three damaged. . . . We lost two."

"How did the bombers get on?" enquired Johnny.

"All back safely. . . . I'll be with you in a minute . . . just going to change. Wait for me."

For half an hour the three of them splashed and shouted in the pool, while the two dogs barked themselves into a frenzy round the sides. Then they hosed each other down with fresh cold water from the shower, while the bull pup, soaked to the skin and smiling, opened his mouth to catch the drops that splashed in his direction.

"He's an amiable silly fool," said the "Admiral," "one cannot help liking him."

"What are we going to do now" enquired Igoon, who always had to be on the move. "Shall we have a game of quoits on the lawn or are you chaps going to hang about here in the sun?"

Igoon's energy literally made one wince! If he was not on duty in the Operations Room he would almost certainly be found on the squash court, or the tennis court, or somewhere with a ball to chip. His bedroom furniture consisted of a toothbrush, a pair of shorts and a rugger ball, and in a corner by the mantelpiece was a squash racquet.

"Well, personally, I feel like some more sun," said the "Admiral." "Let's stay here for half-an-hour and then we can have a run in the car for a beer somewhere before supper."

Johnny agreed with the "Admiral."

"All right, then," continued Igoon, not to be outdone, "I know a nice little place in the country where we can have a drink and probably fix up a four at darts, or shove-halfpenny, perhaps."

The "Admiral" smiled. He had not been leading the Fighter Wing during the afternoon to suddenly find himself being led into something he did not want to do in the evening. Lazing on the lawn in the sun they watched the grey squirrels in the trees, chasing each other from twig to twig and branch to branch with incredible pace and judgment. However destructive he is reputed to be, the grey squirrel is an attractive little animal to watch when he thinks he is not being seen.

But their study of wild life in the trees was to be short-lived. Igonson was looking first at the "Admiral" and then at Johnny, and then turning from one position on the grass to another.

"There you are, Johnny," he remarked, shading his eyes with one hand as he watched the squirrels leap, at tremendous speed, from one tree to another, "that's life all over. There should be more youth handling the world's affairs . . . people with lightning minds and lightning action . . . speed in decision is what we need."

"Meaning, I suppose, that I cannot jump about like a squirrel."

"Exactly," said Igonson, and his Irish jaw snapped like a rat trap.

"Well, I don't know that I want to be a grey squirrel, anyway," retorted Johnny, "except that I should like a little more hair, or perhaps I should say fur. But if the argument is that people are too old at forty-five, fifty-five or even sixty, we might as well start by getting rid of the Prime Minister, President Roosevelt and Joe Stalin. Surely there is no one barmy enough to suggest that boys of twenty or twenty-five could do their work more efficiently—it's all baloney."

"So what!" said the "Admiral," raising himself on one elbow and lighting a cigarette.

"Oh, I've had it," Igonson said at last, "I'm going in to put some clothes on . . . cheerio chaps."

"All right, we are coming in too," called Johnny, picking up his towel and collecting the remains of the tea

things from the lawn. The Wing Leader and the dogs followed them into the Mess.

Twenty minutes later and they were in the "Admiral's" car winding their way through the flower decorated lanes towards the village inn. The two dogs sat together on the back seat, their little white heads poking through the window, sniffing the cool country air. After they had been driving for perhaps a quarter of an hour the car slowed down to negotiate a sharp right-hand bend by a row of lath and plaster cottages, and then pulled up outside a Pickwickian establishment of beams and brick. Above the oak entrance door of the inn hung a wrought iron sign. Here was a piece of old England with a vengeance. The "Admiral" led the way into the cosy bar, followed by Igonson and Johnny: the dogs remained in the car . . . the bull pup had already quenched his thirst at the swimming pool.

"Three tankards of ale, please," called the "Admiral" to the landlord, who had just then looked up from his evening paper. Igonson produced a case of American cigarettes: "I call this a fitting finish to the day, don't you, Johnny?"

"Yes, rather . . . bosche, bathing and beer, so to speak . . . cheers, 'Admiral,'" and he raised his tankard.

Igonson was looking round the room, his eyes having become accustomed to the comparative darkness after the glare of the sun outside: but the dartboard was being used, and there was no shove-halfpenny. They stayed in the bar for perhaps half-an-hour, yarning, and enjoying the old-world atmosphere of the inn; and then drove back by a fresh route to the Mess. After three tankards of ale apiece the world was no longer a vale of tears!

There were still a few pilot boys in the swimming pool when they arrived, and Johnny and the "Admiral" watched them for a while diving for pennies on the light green tiles at the bottom of the deep end. Igonson had dashed off to Operations room to see if anything was going on; and the others then returned to the Mess for supper before listening to the nine o'clock news and going to bed.

Hammers, the ex-prisoner of war, was reading an evening paper when they entered the ante-room and Johnny



went up to him. The "Admiral" had stopped by the door to talk to Jamie and some of the pilot boys about the afternoon show, and to discuss the possibilities for the morrow. There was nothing on the cards, as far as Hammers was aware, and he had just come from the Operations room himself. However, shows were laid on at such short notice nowadays that anything might happen in a few minutes.

"I am going on duty with Webster in the morning," said Johnny, "and I think I shall then know the Sector well enough to carry on myself. In the meantime I am shooting off to bed . . . good-night Hammers."

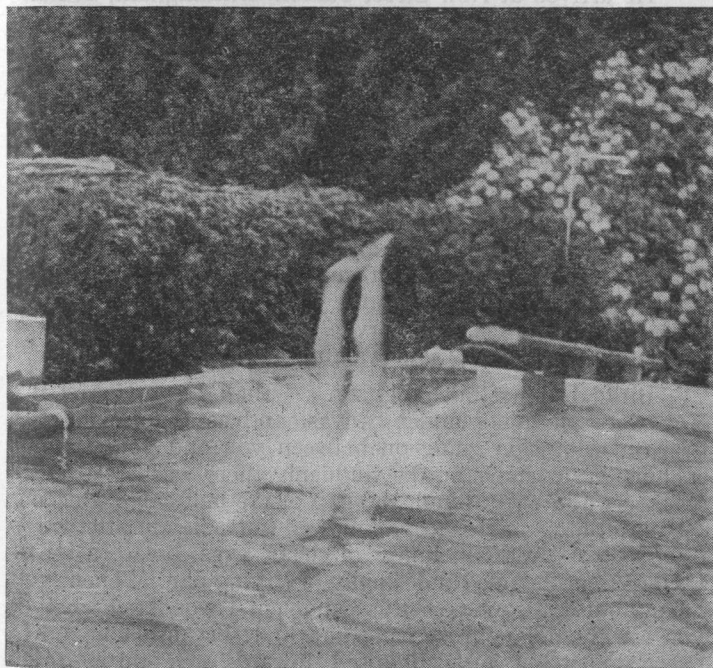
"Good-night, see you in the morning."

The pilot boys were still bathing and shouting in the pool as he made his way across the garden to his room.

## CHAPTER IV.

He had been stationed at Burton Hill six weeks, and was now quite at home in his new surroundings. Almost daily he had spoken to the Controllers at his old station on some matter or another connected with operations; and with the familiar voice of Bruce or Roland or Elders on the telephone he did not feel so far away after all. Perhaps it was not a good thing to be stationed at one place too long: there was a tendency to become parochial in one's outlook.

The six weeks spent at Burton Hill had passed by quickly, too. It was the season of fighter sweeps and bomber attacks on an ever increasing scale . . . hourly the air war was mounting in intensity. One roaring hectic day came to an end only to be followed by another. There was the early



"EVERY MORNING BEFORE BREAKFAST."

morning dash to the swimming pool; with Man Friday footprints left upon the dew-soaked grass, a quick sweep round with a net to remove the over-night collection of beetles and water-boatmen from the water . . . a plunge, then out again and under the icy sprinkling shower. Then back to shave and dress by half-past seven for breakfast. At eight-fifteen the Controller, with his Ops. B, and Gun Liaison Officer would start for Operations room: the lifting haze and cloudless sky portending another scorching day of activity. Across the way the engines of the Spitfires would be heard bursting into life, getting ready for the day's first "Show." At half-past eight they would walk on duty—and into the fray. And so it went on, throughout the breath-taking days and weeks of the sweltering summer.

Then Johnny had a break of forty-eight hours.

He arrived at New Street Station, Birmingham, at half-past four in the afternoon, and was met on the platform by his old friend Birkdale. They did not remain long in the traffic congested centre of the city, but drove as quickly as possible to the country outside—to Solihull and beyond, on through the leafy lanes and meadows of Henley-in-Arden, towards Stratford. It was good to be on leave.

"I was thinking," said Johnny, "of the day when I met you for the first time. Do you remember? I was flying in South Wales with my Brother and Joney . . . quite twenty-two years ago it must be . . . and we had had very little business because passengers were scarce on week-days. I think our nerves were rather on edge as a result, and then I saw you walking across the field."

Birkdale burst out laughing. "Shall I ever forget it? You were all living under canvas, and as I approached I heard a discussion going on between you and Joney about cooking the evening meal. Suddenly there was a clatter of crockery, and out through the flap of the tent came whizzing a handful of sausages, to be followed immediately afterwards by a hail of tomatoes, lumps of sugar, eggs, bread, a jar of Oxford marmalade, and finally a frying-pan. Then you looked out and saw me. For a moment I wondered whether you always did your cooking like that, because you didn't even smile, but just advanced towards me, through the groceries and said 'Hullo!'"

Johnny and Birkdale continued to laugh and swap stories until the car made a sudden detour to the right and then pulled up at the Crabtree Inn, an old house of carved gables and wrought iron, where they ordered pewter mugs of beer. Here indeed was peace at last; amid old English surroundings and in the heart of the countryside.

"I hope you won't mind," said Birkdale presently, observing the clock on the oak shelf above the bar on which were standing some green wine glasses, "but on our way back I have promised to call in at the Air Training Corps Headquarters to see the lads for a few minutes. I thought perhaps you would say a few words to them as well: it doesn't matter particularly what you talk to them about, but they appreciate that sort of thing, you know."

"All right, Birkdale," answered Johnny, without realising quite what he was saying; his thoughts absorbed more by the hollyhocks and roses, and the collie dog over there by the entrance to the "Crabtree," blinking in the evening sunlight.

"I suppose," he remarked, rather nervously, as they started off towards the A.T.C. Squadron Headquarters, "there will not be more than half-a-dozen boys, or perhaps seven, in the room where you are meeting these lads?" He had visions of a fireside chat, with one elbow resting on the mantelpiece, and smoking a cigarette.

"Yes, that's about it," replied Birkdale a few moments later, as the car swung into a courtyard and came gradually to a standstill by the entrance doors of a building scarcely less imposing than the Albert Hall. A few minutes later Johnny found himself in a large Assembly room, confronted by some two hundred and fifty eager-looking A.T.C. boys, all anxious to become members of the Royal Air Force in some capacity or another. The majority, of course, wanted to become pilots—either of fighters or bombers, others looked forward to the day when they would be the proud possessors of the Air Gunner's badge. A few wished to graduate as Radio Operators, and so on. Johnny was struck by the appearance of these lads . . . keen, alert, well disciplined: all healthy, virile members of the supposedly decadent Britain; and all here in training of their own free will. Surely there was something rather fine about that?

Perhaps, after all, the older generation had not so completely failed the new one. Perhaps its main fault had been, not so much what it failed to achieve, but that it attempted to achieve too much; and with so many unwilling co-operators.

He returned from his reverie in time to hear Birkdale concluding his introductory address . . . "and I will now ask our visitor to-night to say a few words to you."

For a few moments Johnny hesitated. His throat seemed to gum up. And then, almost as quickly, his mind became perfectly clear and his head was filled with ideas . . . things which the older types, who helped to muck things up last time, could say to those who were not going to muck things up this time.

"I don't want you to feel that you are fortunate in being here to listen to me," he began. "On the contrary, I consider myself fortunate for being permitted to say a few words to you, when in reality it would be more fitting if I came round and listened to your conversation. Never allow anyone to mislead you into imagining that age alone entitles one to be heard. The fact that I was flying aeroplanes perhaps twenty-five years ago is, in itself, merely evidence of antiquity. There is nothing wonderful about that. But there is one thing which cannot be obtained until you do grow up: and that is experience. As far as all of you here are concerned you are on the threshold of a fine clean life, and at the beginning of a great adventure. By virtue of our democratic way of living you have been brought up in surroundings where your father and your mother and your home life mean something precious to you: where the Church and the school, the football ground, and the cricket field all represent, in their different ways, an important part of your life: and have all contributed to the building of your character. You cannot visualise a land where these benefits do not exist, where children are taught at school to despise and spy upon their parents: and where the state is everything, and the home just less than nothing. You have been brought up to play the game, and doubtless you expect other people to play the game with you. But that will be one of your chief disappointments when you eventually make contact with the German. Playing the game is something the hun does not understand. The slightest sign on

your part of generosity towards him as a foe will be immediately interpreted as sloppy weakness. As a race, our greatest fault is having too large a heart and too short a memory: so one thing you want to do is to lengthen your memory in dealing with the hun, and contract your heart. That was where we went wrong after the last war: there was too much slapping the hun on the back—poor old Jerry perhaps was not such a bad type after all: merely wrongly led! The huns loved it, and our big-hearted people simply lapped it up too. You all know the sequel to that. When you join your squadrons and go into action you will find yourselves up against an enemy who is completely and utterly ruthless in every way, and who will stop at nothing. So just keep on hitting him all the time, until he is not only down but down and right out."

Johnny also talked about the value of discipline and esprit-de-corps; and then passed on to the period which will be so difficult for these youngsters—the days following the end of the war.

"When you have finished with the hun, and the fighting is over, you will be faced by an even sterner task . . . that of placing our country in the forefront in the sphere of civil aviation—the organisation and operation of huge air services all over the world. People have now become accustomed to being killed in aeroplanes, just as they have become accustomed to being killed in motor-cars; and airline travel will undoubtedly be the thing of the future. So let us hope in the days of peace, just as much as in the days of war, our country will be blessed with a man of vision. He may well be one of you here."

Johnny and Birkdale motored back to the hotel where they were staying and ordered a pot of china tea in the lounge. In a nearby room a girl could be heard singing that delightful ballad, "I hear your voice." Birkdale produced a packet of American cigarettes, lit one and puffed a blue-grey cloud of smoke into the air.

"I was rather interested in what you said just now about the hun, and lengthening one's memory. There's no doubt about it, half the people simply do not realise that the young hun of to-day, especially the Hitler youth type, is a dangerous fanatic: he is not a normal being at all. When the war is

over it will mean keeping permanent control of Germany for at least half a century and changing their entire system of education into the bargain."

"Exactly," answered Johnny, at the same time trying to persuade his pipe to draw properly. "As a matter of fact I'm altogether fed up with education, or rather the lack of it, in our own country. I think the whole system is wrong . . . it must be . . . one has only to look around and see the products of it. I admit I was no good at school myself, not that that has anything to do with it, but we were taught such useless things. Imagine teaching me to say, in French, 'the pen of the Aunt is in the garden'! When I went to France my Aunt was not there with me, and even if she had been she was not the sort of Aunt who would leave her pen in the garden anyway."

"Be serious for a moment; how exactly do you consider education to be wrong?"

"Well, for one thing our hospitals are full of sick people, with a variety of complaints, mostly due to a lack of elementary instruction."

"Such as . . .?" interposed Birkdale.

"The case in this evening's paper, if you like," answered Johnny: "a child falls in a bath half full of boiling water and is taken to hospital badly scalded. The mother said her back was turned only half a minute while she was getting a jug of cold water to put with it. Had the woman been taught something about mothercraft before leaving school she would first have placed the cold water in the bath and added the hot water afterwards. The same with the dentists. One has to wait a week for an appointment nowadays simply because from childhood the wrong system of diet has been followed. The people's teeth are rapidly falling into disuse through eating prepared soft foods and not enough raw things that require biting. It's only because parents do not know better . . . how many animals does one see in need of a new set of teeth? Health is the first wealth, Birkdale, and half a child's school life should be devoted to the study of it. The next generation would then be brought up properly."

Birkdale continued to smoke his cigarette. "Yes, I suppose there is something in what you say."

"I am jolly well sure there is . . . how about another cup of tea?"

Birkdale poured the contents of the hot water jug into the teapot. The girl in the adjacent room had finished singing "I hear your voice," and, by way of contrast, was now playing "Jersey Bounce" on the piano.

"Going back again to lengthened memories," said Birkdale, "I think it is extraordinary how some apparently trivial happening, years previously, will stick out in one's memory for a whole lifetime."

"I quite agree, it is extraordinary. I always recall very vividly the first glimpse of England I had when I returned from Germany after the last war. There were several hundred ex-prisoners on board a ship called "Huntsend," an old North German Lloyd vessel of about ten thousand tons, and we were on our way across the North Sea from Copenhagen. It was very early one January morning, and still quite dark, when my cabin door was suddenly burst open and in rushed a friend of mine. He was almost too excited to speak, but I gathered that he wanted me to look out of the porthole—which I did, with my nose pressed against the glass. Miles and miles away through the inky blackness I could discern a tiny flash of light, appearing for a few seconds and then disappearing again. 'What is it?' I enquired, only half awake. 'What is it?' my early visitor gasped in astonishment. 'Why, it's England!' Believe me, Birkdale, when I say that the Resurrection morning will not appear more beautiful to the dead."

Johnny arrived back at Burton Hill the following evening and, after unpacking his bag, went into the ante-room to read the letters which were awaiting his return. Webster was standing by the mantelpiece puffing at his pipe, and Johnny sensed immediately that there was something wrong . . . he went over to him. "Well, what's happened?"

Webster regarded him quizzically for a moment before replying. "Charles was killed this afternoon in an accident. . . ."

So that was it . . . poor Charles, whom he had known and worked with since the beginning of the war.

"Well, I am very sorry," was Johnny's only comment, and he walked out of the ante-room and back across the

garden to his quarters. In another hour he would be on duty again in Operations. He decided to ring up Northwood, the duty Controller, and enquire what was taking place.

"Hello . . . what's the form, old man. Anything going on?"

"Oh, nothing much. A hun has just flown into the cliffs at Hastings; that's all."

"Has he hurt himself do you think?" asked Johnny, sympathetically.

"Not much," answered Northwood, "he has only blown himself to ruddy smithereens."



"YOU CAN'T BEAT THEM."

The ante-room of the Fighter Station was filled with Yanks. One had to search the place to discover any Air Force blue at all, and for once Johnny felt strange and out of place. What were these fellows really like, these tough-looking types from across the Herring Pond, about whom one had read so much but knew so little? And, surely, they seemed to wear some funny clothes . . . leather jackets with their names on the pockets, gold and silver bars, and leaves and things on their collars and shoulders. And they loved peanut butter and "cookies," and marmalade with their bacon, and treacle with kidneys; and milk. And they drank chilled beer on freezingly cold days, and preferred it; and smoked cigars. For news they read the "Stars and Stripes."

"It's no use going on like this; let's face it," thought Johnny, as he decided to say something to a cheery-looking type on whose pocket was painted, in brilliant colours, an eagle and the one word "Hank."

"How do you like the diet over here?" asked Johnny, feeling at once that he had said something stupid.

"Oh, not so bad," answered the smiling captain of the Army Air Corps, "but you've got no fruit. Over in my country there are oranges growing in the back garden, and peaches too—that's way back in Georgia."

"I remember a song in the last war, something about 'Everything is peaches down in Georgia' . . . so it's really true, is it?" enquired Johnny.

"True? I should say it is! Why I'll show you a photo of a real peach," and the American produced a snapshot from his pocket of his wife, taken in the garden of their home. A slip of a girl she was, in a white dress, and with her husband's Air Corps cap tilted attractively on the side of her head.

They moved along the corridor to the "dispense" and ordered a couple of ryes and dry. Other Americans collected round, and Johnny found himself being introduced to "Pete"—a tall fair-haired fighter, wearing two British decorations on his tunic, beneath his pair of silver Air Corps Wings: and Oscar, another cheery type, and Jake and Smithy and Slim and Don, and Andy, the train buster.

So these were the Yanks! A big-hearted, cheery, friendly lot of lads: full of guts and full of fight—and could they fly!

"I had to bale out, my feet were getting so darned singed. I couldn't sit there any longer," said Book, when he returned to the Mess after being fished out of the drink six miles off the North Foreland. Only a few hours previously, in Operations, the Controller had heard the last few warning transmissions, over the radio telephone, that Book was going to jump, and had telephoned Group Headquarters to inform the rescue boats. But the queerest conversation of the lot did not come from Book at all, but from his two companions flying at his side. They, too, had heard his call to the Controller, and knew their friend was "stepping out."

"If you're going to jump, Buddy, the sea looks mighty cold down there," said one.

The Controller, sitting in Operations, could scarcely believe his ears. He thought he had heard most things over the R/T during three and a-half years' experience, but this . . . well!

"It's time you had a bath anyway," called the other a moment later.

And then Book slithered over the side of his Spitfire into space. His parachute opened quickly, and his leg pulling friends circled round him as he floated down towards the sea. They stuck to him like leeches to the end, and only left him when the boats had picked him up and were well on their way for home.

Well, you can't beat that. And that's the Yank!

"Have some gum?" said Don, offering Johnny a green paper packet with a silver tissue lining.

"I don't think I will, thanks. I'll wait until they produce a gum with the flavour of celery and the odour of forgetmenots."

---

FINIS

---

... they were the Yanks! ... they  
trandy lot of kids. Full of guts and full of fight and they  
they fly.

"I had to hole out; my feet were getting so damn  
singed, I couldn't sit there any longer," said Book, when he  
returned to the Mess after being fished out of the drift six  
miles off the North Fensland. Only a few hours previously,  
in Operations, the Controller had heard the last few vagrant  
transmissions, over the radio telephone, that Book was going  
to jump, and had telephoned Group Headquarters to inform  
the rescue boats. But the nearest conversation of the fit  
did not come from Book at all, but from his two companions  
lying at his side. They, too, had heard his call to the  
Controller, and knew their friend was "seeping out."

"If you're going to jump, Buddy, the sea looks mighty  
cold down there," said one.

The Controller, sitting in Operations, could scarcely  
believe his ears. He thought he had heard most things over  
the R/T during three and a-half years' experience, but this  
well.

"It's time you had a bath anyway," called the other  
a moment later.

And then Book sithered over the side of his Spitfire into  
space. His parachute opened quickly, and his leg pulling  
friends circled round him as he floated down towards the  
sea. They stuck to him like leeches to the end, and kept him  
when the boats had picked him up and were well on  
their way for home.

"Well, you can't beat that. And that's the Yanks."  
"Have some gum?" said Doc, offering him a green  
paper packet with a silver tissue lining.

"I don't think I will thank you. I'll not eat any  
produce a gum with the flavour of misery and the odour of  
fingertouches."

FINIS

## BERNARDS' TECHNICAL BOOKS.

No. 1	Amalgamated Engineering Ref. Tables ...	1/-
" 2	"Little Marvel" Vegetable Ref. Book ...	1/-
" 3	Services Signalling Manual ... ..	1/-
" 4	Radio Manual ... ..	1/-
" 5	Elements of Mathematics ... ..	1/-
" 6	Electrical Engineers Handbook ... ..	1/-
" 7	Manual of Metals and Alloys ... ..	1/-
" 8	Manual of Modern Automatic Guns ...	1/-
" 9	Manual of Photography ... ..	1/-
" 10	Manual of Mathematical Tables ... ..	1/-
" 11	Manual of Cycle Maintenance aud Hints ...	1/-
" 12	Manual of Commando and Guerilla Tactics: Unarmed Combat ... ..	1/-
" 13	Manual of Commando and Guerilla Tactics: House to House Fighting ... ..	1/-
" 14	Manual of Small Arms and Special Weapons	1/-
" 15	Manual of Wartime Household Repairs, usual series ... ..	1/-
" 16	Illustrated Engineering Practice Machine tools and productive processes	2/-
" 17	Manual of Rifles, usual series ... ..	1/-
" 18	Weapons and Armaments of the Modern German Army ... ..	2/-
" 19	Manual of Map and Compass Reading ...	2/-

No. 20	Manual of Gliding and Motorless Flight ...	2/-
" 21	Manual of Science. Covering Mechanics, Statics, Physics, etc. ... ..	2/-
" 22	Manual of Radio Circuits. How to build your own receivers and transmitters ...	2/-
" 23	Manual of Hand Grenades, Mines and Bombs	2/-
" 24	Uniform, Rank Badges and Intelligence Data on the Modern German Armed Forces	2/-
" 25	Strategy and Tactics of the Modern German Army ... ..	2/-
" 26	Tanks at War—Friend or Foe? How to recognize them ... ..	2/-
" 28	Income Tax for the Working Man ...	1/-
" 30	Manual of Radio Valves, British and American with Characteristics and Data equivalents and alternatives ... ..	3/6
" 31	Explosives.—Nature, variety and uses as Projectile Fillings, Propellents, Mines, Demolition Charges, etc., etc. ... ..	2/-

---

## BERNARDS' FICTION SERIES-

No. 27	Fighter Controller by S/L J.D.V. Holmes, R.A.F.V.R A tale of the R.A.F. based on Fact ...	2/-
No. 29	Did this Really Happen? by S. Gainsley Short Stories at their best ...	1/6