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## Introduction

The first Biggles book I read was *No Rest for Biggles*. My elder brother had the Armada paperback, and passed it to me with the comment “It isn’t very good.” I remember reading the story in a few days, in our home in Freetown, Sierra Leone, and also in the garden of a small bar near the Army barracks. I enjoyed the story rather more than my brother. The only thing that annoyed me, in fact, was the ludicrous portrayal of Liberians. As I lived next door to Liberia, even as a ten-year old I had an inkling that the author hadn’t got things right in that respect!

A few months later our family moved to Australia, and I read my brother’s next Biggles book. This was very different; it was a hard-cover Dean edition of *Biggles in the Cruise of the Condor*. This book thrilled me to the bone, from the opening scenes, all action and excitement, to the breakout in Manaos, the landing on the plateau, the discovery of the treasure, the giant condor...

From that time on I was hooked. Fortunately, I was a boy living in the 1970s. At that time a large number of Biggles books were in print in Armada and Dean editions, and second-hand bookshops still carried quite a number of books that had been published only ten or twenty years before. And they were cheap – the familiar red Hodders seldom cost more than ten or twenty cents apiece. I soon assembled a large collection, although a number of mysterious titles on the rear jackets of old hard-covers continued to elude me. It would be years before I finally managed to read *Biggles Flies East* or *Biggles Sees it Through*.

Our next door neighbour (who gave me a copy of *Biggles and the Gun Runners*) told me that the best Biggles stories, the ones he had enjoyed the most as a boy, were those written about the First World War (or Great War). A short time later one of my teachers gave me a copy of *Biggles of the Special Air Police* to read, and I thrilled at the White Fokker, the camouflaged gun, the Ace of Spades and the arrival of Algy. Then one afternoon, at a supermarket, I hit the jackpot, finding new Dean editions of *Biggles of the Camel Squadron*, *Biggles of 266* and *Biggles Pioneer Air Fighter*.

Like many other children during that era, when I opened my copy of *Biggles of 266* for the first time, I experienced a curious sensation as I read the Foreword. “These are some of the earliest Biggles stories,” declared W. E. Johns. “They appeared in “The Modern Boy” about 1932, when the events of the Kaiser’s war were still fresh in mind, and deal with that period of air combat when one could only qualify for the title ace by shooting down a certain number of enemy aircraft.”

My young mind drank it all in. The definition of an ace! Early Biggles stories! And the Modern Boy! What was that? One of my mother’s friends told me it was an old magazine that his father had read, and contained only Biggles stories set in the First World War. Oh to find copies of that magazine, I thought. For years, however, my wish was unfulfilled. I grew older, collected all but about a dozen of the Biggles books, and went to university. And then

one day, at a local library when I was still only 18, I discovered a copy of *By Jove Biggles!* After a few brief hours, I felt like stout Cortez, when with eagle eye he first looked upon the Pacific. My horizons had expanded, and a new hunger possessed me. Now I knew about *The Modern Boy*, and *Popular Flying*, and half a dozen other magazines. Uncollected Biggles stories! Never again published! First World War versions of stories I had read in *Spitfire Parade!* Books I had never heard of – and what titles! What mysteries could underlie a book like *Biggles and the Deep Blue Sea*? Oh for a copy of *Biggles in France!*

I then had a stroke of luck; entering a second-hand bookshop in Elizabeth Street, with owners whose manners were as surly as their prices were high, I found a *Modern Boy's Annual* from 1937. Of course I knew what I had found! Had I not read in *By Jove Biggles!* that it contained one of those uncollected stories? Trembling, I turned the pages, and there it was – the story “Biggles’ Exciting Night.”

After that I searched high and low in second-hand shops all over Sydney, but found no magazines with Biggles stories and very few new books. I did have some luck; I found a copy of *Biggles Flies East* at the Glebe Library and devoured it in one breathless night that still lives in my memory; and in a small shop in Newtown I found not only *Biggles Sets a Trap* but, a year later, *Biggles Sees Too Much*. My main experience, however, was frustration. Shop after shop simply had a few Deans or Hodders which I had long possessed. I tried new approaches; looking up second-hand bookshops in a copy of the London Yellow Pages at the British Consulate, I sent a dozen letters – and the only bookshop to reply artfully cashed my bank draft and never sent me the promised copy of *Biggles and the Plane that Disappeared*.

This did lead me to another bright idea. As magazines and story papers seemed to be impossible to find, why not ask the British Museum for photocopies of stories? I knew about the British Museum Library, as it was then called, and knew it was purported to have a copy of everything published in England. So I sent a letter asking for copies of the uncollected stories from *The Modern Boy* and waited with fingers crossed. Two weeks later, the reply came; all the stories I had asked for could indeed be copied, at a price. A few weeks later, I had copies of all the uncollected stories and read them in one glorious evening instead of working on my Classical Greek homework.

Over the next year, I plumbed the British Library for as much as I could get. I received copies of the original First World War versions of the stories from *Spitfire Parade*, which had been published in *Biggles in France*, a title that then inspired in me a feeling of hushed reverence others might reserve for a Gutenberg Bible or a Shakespeare First Folio. I received copies of “The Mountain of Light” and “Castle Sinister” from *The Modern Boy*. I received copies of the first six stories published in *Popular Flying*, and of “Storm Troop of the Baltic Skies” from *War Thriller*. The only thing, it seemed, that the Library could not supply was “The Fledglings,” as its copy of *The New Book of the Air* had been destroyed in the Blitz.

Years rolled by, and these increasingly tattered and dog-eared photocopies travelled with me wherever I went. I discovered the fanzine *Biggles & Co*, answered an advertisement in that paper and soon was the proud owner of my first Biggles stories in magazines – about twelve issues of *Popular Flying* and “Biggles At School” in the *Boy’s Own Paper*. More time passed, and I discovered the Internet and another new vista opened up. Soon I was bidding on Ebay like a veteran and writing to booksellers in the United Kingdom and elsewhere like old friends. In 2008 I managed to buy the final issue of *The Modern Boy* I still did not have containing a Biggles story. I have now collected nearly all the Biggles stories published in magazines, story papers and comics in the United Kingdom during W. E. Johns’ lifetime.

In this book I try to pass on some of the magic one feels when collecting those Biggles stories. The book discusses all the Biggles stories which appeared in British story papers, magazines and comics between 1932 and 1963 (when the final Biggles story to be serialised, *Biggles and the Lost Sovereigns*, appeared in *Look and Learn*). It does not consider serialisations in magazines overseas, meaning that *Silver Jacket* or *Chuckler’s Weekly* will not be mentioned again. It concentrates on the stories written by W. E. Johns, but for the sake of completeness the final chapter discusses the various manifestations of Biggles in comic strip form.

The book pays special attention to one of the aspects that intrigued me when I first read those photocopies of stories in *Popular Flying* – the various changes that were made to the text of the stories. I try to work out who made the changes and why. I also discuss the contexts in which the stories appeared, the artists who illustrated them and the difficulties facing the collector in finding copies of some issues. I also offer lists of stories and papers that are as comprehensive as I am able to make them, given the small but uncomfortable gaps in my own collection.

With Biggles books published during the 1930s and 1940s becoming increasingly more difficult to find in dustjackets – and increasingly more expensive – one hobby that is still relatively inexpensive is collecting the stories as they appeared in magazines, comics and story papers. These offer considerable interest to the collector, for not only is one often holding a true first edition of a story in one’s hands, but the stories are also very attractive to collect, given the marvellous illustrations that accompanied them. Furthermore, the changes that were made to the stories by editors range from the trivial to the bizarre, and these offer interesting variations to collect. Although a few papers are very rare or very expensive, by and large one can assemble a representative collection in only a few years.

Most of the chapters in this book first appeared in the now sadly-defunct *Biggles’ Friend Magazine* between 2004 and 2007. I have taken the opportunity to add new knowledge and correct some errors. The chapter on the *Boys’ Own Paper*, for example, has some changes, including an entry for a story that I had missed at the time. Similarly, I have been able to offer a fuller list of the episodes of “Biggles Flies Alone” that appeared in the *Air Defence Cadet Corps Gazette*. I have changed my mind somewhat on some points I had previously offered on the *War Thriller* and have a little more to

say on the *Eagle*. I have also added chapters that I had not got around to writing before the BFM's demise, on *Popular Flying*, the *Boys' Friend Library*, *Junior Mirror* and *Look and Learn*. And overall I have taken the opportunity offered by a somewhat larger canvas to say just a little bit more about the stories as they appeared.

I have received help from a number of people over the past seven or eight years. The original articles on which this book is based benefited from comments and information from Steve Holland, Malcolm Kite, Gary Krohn, Kim Miles, David Schutte, Nandu Thalange, John Tipper, Alfred Uhlherr, Brad Weier and Norman Wright. John, Norman and Malcolm provided valuable comments on drafts of this book. Any errors that remain are of course my own.

### **Box 1. W. E Johns before Biggles**

W. E. Johns was born on 5 February 1893, the first son of Richard Johns and Elizabeth Earl, in rural Hertford, some 25 miles north of London. Upon leaving school in 1907 he was indentured as a trainee to the County Municipal Surveyor. In 1912 he secured a post as a Sanitary Inspector at Swaffham in Norfolk, where he met his first wife, Maude.

On 4 October 1913 Johns joined the Territorial Force. This required him to spend his weekends and holidays learning soldiering. He joined the King's Own Royal Regiment, Norfolk Yeomanry, a cavalry regiment. After the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914 he was placed in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the 1<sup>st</sup> Norfolk Yeomanry, meaning that he remained on reserve in England. He must have joined the machine gun company of that Battalion, because in 1916 he was transferred, along with other machine gunners in other Army Battalions, to the new Machine Gun Corps. He was promoted to Lance-Corporal on 7 August 1916, meaning that he was the member of a machine gun unit who fired the gun (which explains the realism of his writing about firing Vickers machine guns!). He served in England until 15 September 1916, when he was posted to Salonika in Greece.<sup>1</sup>

During 1916 British troops on the Salonika front actually saw little of the city of that name, serving instead in trenches in the swampy valley of the Struma. They fought Bulgarian and German troops. H. Collinson Owen, who was at Salonika throughout the war, recorded that patrols were sent out from the trenches night after night to capture prisoners or raid the enemy, and Johns himself would later write a piece describing such a patrol.<sup>2</sup>

The summer of 1916 proved to be fiercely hot, and British troops succumbed to malaria in enormous numbers. Nearly 30,000 were admitted to hospital with the disease in that year, and 21,902 were sent to Malta on hospital ships. Between 1916 and 1918 34,672 British soldiers were invalided home with malaria, nearly two Divisions.<sup>3</sup> Johns later recalled that he went down with malaria at Salonika, and his service record shows he was admitted to hospital at Salonika on 25 October 1916, sent to hospital at Malta on 11 November 1916 and invalided to England on 14 December 1916.<sup>4</sup>

Johns returned to the Machine Gun Corps and was posted to the Mansfield Park Camp in early 1917. During May 1917 he applied for a commission. His War Office file shows that he originally wanted to apply for a commission in a cyclist regiment or the Machine Gun Corps, but crossed these out and replaced them with his parent unit, the 2/1<sup>st</sup> Norfolk Yeomanry. It is not clear how he changed to the Royal Flying Corps, but the file shows that he was selected for the RFC on 11 August 1917 and passed medically fit for pilot's duties on 1 October 1917. From entries in *Flight* and a supplement to the *London Gazette* we can see that he was appointed a temporary Second Lieutenant on probation on 26 September 1917, and his discharge certificate from 4 Officer Cadet Battalion is dated 25 September. His War Office file

shows he was posted to the RFC General List and ordered to report to the Commandant, School of Military Aeronautics, Reading.<sup>5</sup>

Johns' RFC records are not available to the public, but he later wrote that he served as a flying instructor, flying a variety of aeroplanes including the RE.8 and the Sopwith Camel. According to *Flight* (12 September 1918) he was confirmed as a Second Lieutenant on 20 July 1918. He joined 55 Squadron, part of the Independent Force, in August and flew five missions on DH.4s.<sup>6</sup> He was shot down on 16 September 1918 near Hagenau; his observer, Lieutenant Amey, was killed. Johns was first reported missing and then reported a prisoner of war.<sup>7</sup> His repatriation is listed in *Flight* (23 January 1919) under the heading "published 17 January [1919]".

Johns' literary career before he invented Biggles is still imperfectly known, although quite a lot has been revealed in recent years. Peter Ellis and Jennifer Schofield, in *By Jove Biggles!*, observed that Johns penned some "racing tales in the manner of Edgar Wallace" while he was on the RAF Unemployed List during 1919-20.<sup>8</sup> Some manuscripts of these stories, with the by-line "William Earle," were discovered with Johns' effects after his death, but it is still unknown where or if they were published. Johns did see print shortly after that, however; in 1922 his novel, *Mossyface*, was published as No. 121 in the *Weekly Telegraph Novel* series.<sup>9</sup> Johns seems to have given up writing fiction at that time, perhaps because he was too busy with his job; since 23 November 1920 he had been back in the RAF on a Short Service Commission, with the rank of Flying Officer (*Flight* 9 December 1920).

Towards the end of his career with the RAF, Johns published twelve paintings in the *Illustrated London News* (ILN), in four different issues leading up to the 1927 RAF Air Display at Hendon. Johns was on the organising committee for the Air Display and appears to have targeted the ILN to advertise the display.<sup>10</sup> He also illustrated the poster and brochure for the display.<sup>11</sup> Johns left the RAF in October 1927 and remained on the RAF Reserve list until October 1931, when he relinquished his commission but was entitled to retain the rank of Flying-Officer.<sup>12</sup> In 1927 he set up as an aviation artist with his *de facto* wife, Doris Leigh, and fellow artists John Bowman and Frank Westley. They established a new company, the Aircraft and General Fine Art Co. This company gained some success as a distributor of calendars and Christmas cards, according to brief notices in the popular aviation magazines *The Aeroplane* and *Airways*.<sup>13</sup> The company won commissions to draw advertisements for firms like Vickers, and some of these advertisements can be found in old copies of *The Aeroplane* and *Flight* and in brochures produced for the Royal Air Force Displays at Hendon.<sup>14</sup> Johns produced cards, calendars, prints, playing cards and posters for the company for several years and also published a folder of 12 pictures entitled *White Wings* (1928)<sup>15</sup> and an illustrated *Flying Log Book* (1929) including "notes on the identification of aircraft and a glossary of aeronautical terms."<sup>16</sup> One of his posters is widely available today (as a reproduction of the original) and depicts the first Short Calcutta flying boat ever built. Printed in 1928, it advertises the (then) brand new Imperial Airways England – Egypt – India route.

Johns also published his aviation art in magazines, drawing perhaps on his flying contacts for introductions. He contributed front covers to *Airways* from May 1928 to February 1929, and again in July 1929.<sup>17</sup> *Airways* was edited by T. Stanhope Sprigg, the brother of John Stanhope Sprigg who was a regular contributor (as Arthur Cave) to *Popular Flying*. At the end of 1929 Johns began contributing aviation pictures to the boys' story paper *The Modern Boy*, which was under the overall control of C. Maurice Down, an ex-RFC balloon captain.<sup>18</sup> During 1930-31 Johns published paintings in a range of journals, including the *Journal of the RAF Cadet College Cranwell*,<sup>19</sup> *Flight*,<sup>20</sup> *Bystander*<sup>21</sup> and *Graphic* (edited by the old RFC pilot, Allan Bott). He continued to publish paintings in *The Modern Boy* during 1930-33 and the publishers of that paper, the Amalgamated Press, also commissioned his artwork for the boys' story papers *Chums* (1932)<sup>22</sup> and *The Ranger* (1931-32)<sup>23</sup> and for the *Greyfriars Holiday Annual* (single plates in each annual from 1932-35 and again in 1937).

We do not know precisely when – or where – Johns began to write articles for journals, but we do know that his articles appeared in *The Graphic* and *The Modern Boy* during 1930-31. He became *The Modern Boy's* resident air expert, writing articles on everything from learning to fly to new machines and events, from joining the RAF to service life on the North West Frontier or in Iraq.<sup>24</sup> Many of his articles were illustrated with his own drawings. In relation to the *Graphic*, Johns' first article appeared on 30 August 1930 titled "Bombing the Afridis," and his second article appeared on 28 February 1931 on "Opening the Airway to the Cape." After this he was invited to take over the role of the *Graphic's* resident air expert from no less a person than the one-time war ace "Billy" Bishop. Johns started a new column, "Air Notes and News," which appeared on an irregular basis between 6 May 1931 and 20 February 1932. Again, these articles were often illustrated with his own drawings. A few articles appeared under the heading "The Sports Page." After the *Graphic* underwent a change in design and name, becoming the *National Graphic* in April 1932, Johns published one more article, on Air Aces, in the journal on 23 June 1932 along with another of his brilliant colour paintings. Johns returned to fiction at the end of 1931, publishing the short stories "Happy Landings" in *The Graphic* on 14 November 1931 and "Fortune of War" in the *National Graphic* on 14 July 1932. Both of these stories are semi-autobiographical, featuring characters from 55 Squadron and locations in France where Johns had served.<sup>25</sup>

Johns formed a strong relationship with the Juvenile Department of the Amalgamated Press, being commissioned to edit a book, *The Modern Boy's Book of Aircraft*, for it. This appeared in August 1931. Johns contributed seven articles to this book as well as many line drawings and five colour plates. In that same month the book *Wings: A Book of Flying Adventures* appeared, and this was also edited by Johns, but this time was published by John Hamilton, a company which was beginning to specialise in aviation. During 1931 Johns contributed to other Hamilton books, illustrating several books including aviation novels by the American author Covington Clarke and *German War Birds* by Vigilant. He was also commissioned to produce, with Flight Lieutenant Harry Schofield, *The Pictorial Flying Course*. This was

published in May 1932. This new relationship with John Hamilton was to prove a significant step, for early in 1932 it led to Johns being offered the job of editor of a new magazine, *Popular Flying*. This job, as we all know, led to the creation of Biggles.

## Chapter One. Popular Flying

To a casual observer, the attitude of the little group of pilots clustered around the entrance of “B” Flight hangar was one of complete nonchalance. MacLaren, still wearing the tartans and Glengarry of his regiment, a captain’s stars on his sleeve, squatted uncomfortably on an upturned chock; the steady spiral of smoke from his quickly-drawn cigarette, lighted before the last was half-consumed, gave the lie to his bored expression. Quinan, his maternity tunic flapping open at the throat, hands thrust deep into the pockets of his slacks, leaning carelessly against the flimsy structure of the temporary hangar, gnawed the end of a dead match with slow deliberation. Swayne, bareheaded, the left shoulder of his tunic as black as ink with burnt castor-oil, seated on an empty oil drum, was nervously plucking little tufts of wool from the tops of his sheepskin boots. Bigglesworth, commonly called Biggles, a fair-haired, good-looking lad still in his ’teens, but an acting Flight Commander, was talking; not of wine or women, as novelists would have us believe, but of a new fusee spring for a Vickers gun which would speed it up another hundred rounds a minute. He had killed six men during the past month – or was it a year, he had forgotten. Time had become curiously telescoped lately. What did it matter, anyway? His careless attitude told one story, but the irritating little falsetto laugh which continually punctuated his tale told another.

With these immortal words W. E. Johns introduced Biggles. The words are amongst the most famous of all those in the nearly one hundred Biggles books. Most Biggles fans enjoy the stories set in the First World War the most, and the very first such story carries a historical and emotional significance for them.

Hardened Biggles fans, however, will immediately notice something odd about the quote. To those of us brought up on the Dean book *Biggles of the Special Air Police*, the opening phrase should be “to *the* casual observer.” Furthermore, we will remember a brief description of Biggles’ “deep-set hazel eyes” and the “graven little lines” on his face, and the comment about his hands, “small and delicate as a girl’s.” We will also remember Johns’ sarcastic joke that Biggles knew he had to die some time and had long ago ceased to worry about it.

Our memories would not be playing us false. When Johns published the story ‘The White Fokker’ in *The Camels are Coming* – and later, in *Biggles of the Special Air Police* – he did include all of these phrases. The quote above comes from the very first publication of the story, in volume one, number one of *Popular Flying*, dated April 1932.

Clearly, Johns revised the story when he included it in his book. One of the many interesting aspects of the Biggles stories published in *Popular Flying* is, in fact, the many textual variations in the stories compared to the versions that were published in book form. While no story has a completely different plot,

many experienced major change, with many sentences rewritten, new paragraphs added and sometimes entirely new scenes as well.

Before discussing these textual variations further, let us look at the background to *Popular Flying*, the Biggles stories contained within it, and Johns' aim in writing the stories.

*Popular Flying* was originally published by John Hamilton, for whom Johns had recently produced two aviation books and illustrated several others. Johns was clearly beginning to gain something of a reputation for aviation journalism, based on his contributions to *The Graphic* and *The Modern Boy*, and this must have been a key factor in helping him win the job as editor of *Popular Flying*. The magazine was a high quality journal, printed on good chalk-surfaced paper which has preserved remarkably well today. In appearance it was very similar to other aviation magazines of the time, notably *Airways* and *Flight* (the papers were about the same size and printed on similar paper), but in an attempt to carve out a new market niche *Popular Flying* offered a more populist approach to aviation. *Flight* focussed on aviation news and aerial engineering, and carried no fiction. Its main attraction today is the photos it carried of contemporary aeroplanes. By contrast, *Popular Flying* contained numerous photos and paintings, fiction, reminiscences about the First World War and articles by well known aviators. In other words, it was enjoyable as well as informative.

Johns hinted at these aims in his editorial in the second number of *Popular Flying*:

Broadly speaking, *Popular Flying* will cover the whole field of aviation without necessarily segregating each section into separate departments. So far as current events are concerned we may find it impossible to publish in detail the mass of indiscriminate information which reaches us daily. If so, we shall select such items as appear to be of lasting significance and set them down with any general relevant information or appropriate historical background; this should be sufficient to give the reader a clear idea of how aviation is progressing. Those who wish to learn more about flying generally will find it presented in a new form which we believe will be more digestible than the old.

Each issue of *Popular Flying* contained reminiscences of war flying, articles on war pilots and pictures of First World War aircraft. Johns wanted in particular to inform his readers of the exploits of British pilots during the War. In April 1933, on the occasion of the paper's anniversary, Johns responded to criticism that his journal had too military a tone:

That, I may as well say at once, was the result of a carefully considered policy which had before it the welter of cheap American air magazines now flooding the country in which the achievements of the R.F.C., R.N.A.S. and R.A.F. fade into insignificance before the inspiring brilliancy of American pilots.

Johns wished to prove that British pilots had done their bit in winning the War, and to ensure that their efforts were not forgotten. He later wrote that the limelight afforded by popular literature and the cinema to the pilots of other nations “had the effect of throwing the efforts of our own boys into the shade, with the result that the growing generation in Britain might well have wondered what the pilots of the R.F.C., R.N.A.S., and R.A.F. were doing in those years...Indeed, there came a time when claims were made by certain foreign journals in respect of exploits that were certainly carried out by British airmen; and as few people in this country knew the truth they were not contradicted.”<sup>26</sup>

As a result, Johns would later observe, he created Biggles:

I was the editor of an aviation magazine and needed an air story to counterblast some of the war-flying nonsense that was being imported in cheap papers. It seemed to me unfair to my comrades of the old Royal Flying Corps to see other people claiming the credit for every successful show.<sup>27</sup>

“Looking up,” Johns continued, “I saw Biggles sitting there.” The “cheap American air magazines” that Johns was referring to in *Popular Flying* were pulps with titles like *Sky Birds*, *War Birds* and *War Aces*. The stories in these pulps were primarily about the American Air Service in France, and sometimes quite fantastic. A few titles published prior to 1932 give some hint of the general flavour. They included “The Finger of Death,” “Satan Has Wings,” “The Yankee King of the Khyber” and “Spawn of Devil’s Island.”<sup>28</sup>

Some British authors also contributed to these pulps, notably Arch Whitehouse who also wrote for the very British *Air Stories*, *Thriller* and *The Modern Boy*. To Johns, however, these pulps clearly distorted the truth about the war in the air and hid the great deeds of the British flyers. They obviously made Johns want to create his own British hero as a counterweight.<sup>29</sup>

As a result, Biggles appeared in “The White Fokker” in the April 1932 issue. Over the next few months, as the new magazine established itself, Biggles appeared regularly. Seven Biggles stories were published between April 1932 and October 1932, all featuring his exploits during the First World War. These stories, along with ten others, appeared in the first Biggles book, *The Camels are Coming*, in August 1932. Like *Popular Flying*, this book was also published by John Hamilton.

Biggles reappeared in the January 1933 issue of *Popular Flying* in the story “The Professor,” and four more First World War flying adventures appeared over the succeeding months. These five stories later appeared in March 1934 in the book *Biggles of the Camel Squadron*, also published by Hamilton.

In June 1933 *Popular Flying* introduced what was tersely described as “a new series of Biggles stories” with “The Gold Rush,” the first story in the book that would appear, in August 1934, as *Biggles Flies Again*. Eleven chapters of the book appeared in *Popular Flying* between June 1933 and May 1934. At the end of the story “The Sheikh and the Greek,” readers were informed that the series was now over, but would be published with the remainder of the stories

in book form. The book added two more chapters – “Yellow Freight” and “The Last Show.”

The first seven Biggles stories, when published, were attributed to “William Earle.” When “The Professor” appeared in January 1933 it carried the by-line “By W. E. Johns.” This was the only Biggles story in *Popular Flying* to be accompanied by its author’s real name. The next story, “The Joy Ride,” simply added “A Biggles Story,” and all further Biggles stories carried only that tag. Johns may have been concerned that readers would be confused by the difference between “William Earle” and “W. E. Johns.” Clearly, however, by late 1932 he had decided to use his real name for the Biggles stories. In January 1933 the stories from *The Camels are Coming* also commenced publication in *The Modern Boy* under his real name.

If we return to *Popular Flying*, it should be stated that Johns never referred to the Biggles stories in his editorials, and made only one comment on a story in the magazine. In a box printed with the story “The Maid and the Mountains,” the second episode of *Biggles Flies Again*, he observed “there is more in this series of Biggles stories than mere fiction. Each story demonstrates, not only the usefulness of aircraft in unusual circumstances, but the fact that it is carrying to a successful issue a service or duty which could not easily be undertaken by any form of service transport.” Once again, Johns had didactic purpose in his writing; his magazine was a beacon for the benefits of aviation, both civil and military. Indeed, his increasingly strident commentary on British military policy of the time, and in particular appeasement and the running down of the R.A.F., made him unpopular with Government circles and, we are led to believe, led to pressure on the publishers to remove him as editor.<sup>30</sup>

*Popular Flying* grew steadily under Johns’ control. In a humorous editorial in the first issue he had informed readers that the publishers were printing 12,000 copies. “We may have to throttle back a bit; on the other hand if it flies well we may install a supercharger and do better.” In the next issue, clearly rather gratified, he told readers that, the day after the magazine went out, the publishers had asked him to give back one of his two copies, such had been the demand. Sales increased steadily, and in April 1933 Johns informed readers that average monthly sales for the six months ended December 1932 were 22,576, and that sales had increased steadily since July 1932. He was also at pains to note that this figure was “authorised by the Audit Bureau of Circulation” and therefore real. As he noted, *Popular Flying* now had “the highest net monthly sales of any aviation journal in Great Britain.” By January 1934 Johns was reporting that the printing order for the magazine had reached 34,000 copies.

Johns edited *Popular Flying* until May 1939, but Biggles did not appear in the paper after May 1934. By then, Johns had found his market for Biggles; the character was appearing regularly in *The Modern Boy* and was destined to remain a hit with children for many years to come. Johns appears to have decided that the more juvenile tone of the Biggles stories he wrote from 1933 no longer fitted the requirements of *Popular Flying*.

If we turn now to the textual differences between the stories in *Popular Flying* and their later appearances in books, the first thing to note is that we are lucky in this instance. As Johns was the editor of *Popular Flying*, he self-evidently wrote the versions in both the magazine and the books, so he obviously made all the changes himself. There are many changes of varying kinds, ranging from corrections of humble typos to the addition of pages of new material. Quite often, the versions published in *Popular Flying* are shorter than the stories that were published in books, although this is true only of the First World War stories. That Johns expanded the stories for the books, rather than cut them back for the magazine, appears likely given that the shorter versions appeared first.

The first story, "The White Fokker," was fleshed out with many new sentences and paragraphs, and the occasional change of word. There are 40 changes to the story in all (see Box 2). Most of these changes are designed to describe feelings or events a little more thoroughly; they do not really alter the fast pace of the story. The next three stories were only slightly amended. One interesting change is at the very beginning of the second story, "The Packet;" the magazine version referred, for the first time, to "Captain James Bigglesworth." This was the first mention of Biggles' Christian name, but was removed when the story was published in *The Camels are Coming*.

The next story, "The Blue Devil," was also much edited, with 19 changes in all. The most interesting change is that Johns, in this case, actually cut some sentences (although the book version is longer overall). The magazine version originally ended with the following sentences after "Pity Wilks wasn't watching:"

He felt his way through the archie over the lines and dropped down at 287 Squadron aerodrome.

Wilkinson ran out to meet him. "Hells Bells, laddie," he cried aghast, staring at the battle-scarred Camel and the pilot's blood-stained face. "You look as if you'd run into a broken bottle."

"I did," replied Biggles shortly, "- a bluebottle."

The pun is rather poor, which may explain why Johns later deleted these sentences.

Johns made only minor changes to the texts of "The Boob" and "The Battle of Flowers" when they were republished. One interesting change in "The Boob" is that Johns added the scene in which Biggles spots the wreckage of the Hun which Algy claimed to have shot down at the corner of Mossyface Wood. Presumably he later felt it important to provide confirmation of Algy's claim.

The next five stories, from *Biggles of the Camel Squadron*, were significantly expanded when they were republished in that book. The book version actually reprinted the stories as they had appeared in the story paper *The Modern Boy*. The longer versions of the first five stories therefore appeared in that story paper first, only shortly after the originals appeared in *Popular Flying*

(the stories appeared in *The Modern Boy* from 15 July 1933; they had appeared in *Popular Flying* between January and May 1933). The main difference was that the titles used in *The Modern Boy* (which would have been dreamt up by that paper's editor) were not used; Johns instead used his own titles, including the original titles he had given the first five stories in *Popular Flying*.

Johns noted in his introduction to *Biggles of the Camel Squadron* that the stories had been "written more for the entertainment of the younger generation than the hard-baked warrior,"<sup>31</sup> and it can be seen that he made several changes to the first five stories to make them more suitable for children. Several references to swearing and drinking were removed from "The Professor." The line "he swore luridly as he pulled up" was deleted, and the words "damn" and "Hell" were omitted. It is also interesting to compare the following two versions:

"If you think you can knock Huns over by drawing lines, go ahead; but if you knock my beer over you'll be something you've never heard of before – go steady with those glasses!" (*Popular Flying*)

"If you think you can knock Huns down by drawing imaginary lines, you go ahead!" (*Biggles of the Camel Squadron*)

Clearly Johns wished to remove the reference to beer. He may also have decided to tidy up a joke that falls somewhat flat.

In "The Bridge Party" and "The Bottle Party" more cursing and alcoholism was removed. In the first story Henry originally observed that he knocked back a rum or two when he got back to the British side of the Lines. In the second story Biggles had joked that MacLaren would soon empty bottles if there were not enough for the plan. "He can lap liquid faster than my Bentley." A slightly risqué reference was also excised; at the beginning of the story Biggles was originally reading a well-thumbed copy of a saucy French periodical, *La Vie Parisienne*; this became "a well-thumbed paper."

Johns also cut passages that, it would appear, he considered too technical for younger readers. In "The Bridge Party" Johns originally wrote "for an area of a mile round the structure the earth was pitted and pock-marked with holes of various sizes, from the huge craters of 230 and 112-pounders laid by D.H.9's and 4's to the smaller blackened areas caused by 20lb. Coopers and baby incendiaries." On page 50 of the Hamilton edition of *Biggles of the Camel Squadron* this became simply "for an area of a mile round the structure the earth was pitted with holes of various sizes made by the British air bombs."

A similar desire to avoid using slang that children might not have understood probably led Johns to replace Henry's description of the bridge being "fanned down" with "blown up" (page 48). This is somewhat ironic, as later editions of the book retained the new phrase, even though Johns thoughtfully added a glossary to those editions in which he defined "fanning down" – which did not appear in the book!<sup>32</sup>

Johns did not confine himself to changes that made the stories suitable for children. He also took the opportunity to expand the stories by adding several new scenes. He added a whole page at the beginning of “The Professor” in which Biggles theorises on the art of shooting at an aeroplane from the ground, along with the entire description of Henry’s flight (pages 25-31) and further text in his conversation with Biggles on his return.

In the next story, “The Joy Ride,” the entire sequence recording the suspicions of the yellow Albatros about Biggles’ identity was added (pages 40-43). In “The Bridge Party” many new scenes were added, including Biggles’ battle with the Pfalz, infantry-strafting and flight from the Fokkers (pages 53-57). Johns also added a battle with Fokkers to “The Bottle Party” (pages 72-74). Finally, in “The Trap,” the last First World War Biggles story in the magazine, a great deal of additional material was placed at the beginning of the story, and Biggles’ berserk rage and breathtaking attack on German units was all new (pages 86-91).

A few other changes were made. In “The Bridge Party” Henry originally referred to “Thirty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea”; Johns corrected this to “Twenty” in the book. One change defies explanation. In “The Bottle Party” each machine originally carried twelve bottles; in the book each carried nine.

## Box 2: Revisions to “The White Fokker”

Page references are to the 1935 John Hamilton edition

Page 17:	Original: “To a casual observer.” Description of Biggles added.
Page 18:	“He knew he had to die and had long ago ceased to worry about it” added. Original: “the irritating little falsetto laugh which continually punctuated his tale <i>told another.</i> ” Original: “ <i>mek-emmas.</i> ” “As a matter of fact, it should have been in ten minutes before” added. “He would not have admitted that he too shared the common anxiety, but he fell in line with the watchers on the tarmac to await the arrival of the overdue machines” added. Original: “at not more than <i>a thousand feet.</i> ”
Page 19:	“A sheet of flame leapt skywards” added. “cap-and-goggles-less” added.
Page 20:	Original: “leaving <i>the protected skin of his face</i> like a white mask.”
Page 21:	“I think Mahoney’s right” added. “for a sign of Bigglesworth’s flight” added.
Page 22:	“maintaining his height until he reached the line and only taking his eyes from aloft to see that Manley and Forrest in the other two Camels were in place” added. “A cluster of black archie bursts far away to the north showed where some allied machines were moving” added.

Page 23:	<p>“a black spot had appeared against the cloud <i>and disappeared again almost before he could fasten his eyes on it</i>” added.</p> <p>“What the Hell” added.</p>
Page 24:	<p>“We ought to be riding scooters <i>in Kensington gardens</i>” added.</p> <p>“but I didn’t see ’em at first; must have been hiding” added.</p> <p>“They were into us just before we hit the cloud” added.</p> <p>“poor Mad going down <i>in flames</i>” added.</p> <p>“and I’m <i>damn</i> lucky to get here” added.</p>
Pages 24-5:	<p>“Bigglesworth’s going to bits fast, but if he can get that Fokker it’ll restore his confidence” added.</p> <p>“<i>First of all</i>, you’ll notice that this Fokker doesn’t go for the leaders” added.</p> <p>“I’ll hang back <i>and the others will go on ahead without me</i>” added.</p> <p>“I’m having an extra tank put in my machine <i>so that I’ll have some spare juice when he’ll reckon I have none left</i>” added.</p>
Page 25:	<p>““That sounds all right to me,” he said. “I’ve only one thing to say, and that is”” added.</p> <p>“Even now a bracket of archie sent him careering wide from the formation” added.</p> <p>“they searched every section of the air <i>around, above and below</i>” added.</p> <p>“Far above them a Rumpler was making for home followed by a long line of white archie, but he made no attempt to pursue it. Far to the north-east a formation of “Nines” was heading out into the blue; high above them he could just make out the escorting Bristols. He gazed upwards long and anxiously” added.</p> <p>“Now and then he dived a little to gain speed so that the watchers above might think he was trying to keep in position” added.</p>
Pages 25-26:	<p>“They were well over the line now. The two other Camels had dropped to 5,000 feet, but he hung back slightly above them. Once he threw a loop to show his apparent relief at being safely back over his own side of the line” added.</p>
Page 26:	<p>Original: “Suddenly Biggles.”</p> <p>“There was no sign of archie, so he concluded that the Fokker had shut his engine off and had not yet been seen from the ground” added.</p> <p>“Biggles opened his throttle wide and put his nose down slightly in order to get as much speed as possible without alarming the enemy above” added.</p> <p>Original: “It was coming in now.”</p> <p>“bursting far above it <i>showed that the pilot had cast concealment to the winds</i>” added.</p> <p>“He had a vivid impression of the face of the man in the pilot’s seat, looking at him” added.</p>
Page 27:	<p>“another Fokker whirling down in a cloud of smoke and” added.</p> <p>“If he rolled the Fokker would roll too, and still be in the same position. If he spun the Fokker would spin” added.</p>

The eleven chapters of *Biggles Flies Again* that appeared in *Popular Flying* are very close to the text of the book. There are some minor word changes here and there, and two more notable amendments. In the book version of "The Gold Rush," the comrades discover a piece of eight during their excavation. This small scene did not occur in the magazine. More intriguingly, at the end of "Fair Cargo" in *Popular Flying*, Biggles originally stated, when he realised that Juanita and Don José had fooled him by swapping identities:

"Good-looking couple – might pass for each other in the dark, if they swapped clothes."

This line is not in the book versions. Johns may have deleted it because it states the obvious, although it should also be noted that the line ensures that the story in *Popular Flying* fits neatly at the end of a page. Johns may have added it to the story for that reason.

The first series of Biggles stories in *Popular Flying* was brilliantly illustrated by Howard Leigh, who drew some memorable Sopwith Camels, Fokkers and other aeroplanes of the First World War. Leigh was Johns' protégé and Johns seems to have helped him get his start in 1931 when he published some paintings in *The Ranger* and *The Modern Boy*. All issues of *Popular Flying* contain many of his spectacular colour and black and white pictures. Leigh would later achieve fame from drawing the marvellous dustjackets and interior pictures for the Biggles books published by both John Hamilton and the Oxford University Press. He illustrated books by a number of other aviation authors, including Geo Rochester, J. Railton Holden, Hauptmann Heydemarck and David Lindsay. Hamilton also published some books by Leigh, including *Planes of the Great War 1914-1918* and two aircraft modellers' guides. Furthermore, Leigh published a column in *The Modern Boy* on model aircraft.

Leigh's artistic skill did not really run (like Johns' as well, it must be said) to drawing people. As a result, although he again contributed pictures of First World War aircraft to the second series of Biggles stories in *Popular Flying*, perhaps the more significant occurrence was the addition of some wonderful studies of groups of pilots by Edward Oldham. The pictures at the beginning of "The Professor" and "The Joyride" are especially fine. Oldham also illustrated all the stories from *Biggles Flies Again* that were published in the magazine, although some small decorations were also contributed by Mendoza. Little else is known about Oldham. He illustrated other stories in the magazine, including stories by Arthur Cave, and his drawings occasionally turn up in other adult papers of the period. Mendoza contributed illustrations to a wide range of adult and juvenile papers, and would later illustrate *Biggles Charter Pilot*.

Overall, the Biggles stories in *Popular Flying* are well worth collecting. They were the first Biggles stories published, and there is a certain magic in holding them in your hands and knowing this. The magazines themselves are full of fascinating articles and spectacular artwork. Finally, the stories as published in the magazine are more direct, blunt, and also much more adult in tone than their later versions. I sometimes reflect that it is a pity that Johns did not

continue to write Biggles stories for “the hard-baked warrior,” largely because I enjoy his sense of humour and his directness in these tales. In reality, however, it was Johns’ decision to write for children that guaranteed Biggles’ popularity and longevity. Let us therefore turn to the paper that ensured this – *The Modern Boy*.

*Table 1. List of Biggles stories in Popular Flying*

<i>Volume</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Title</i>
1.1	April 1932	The White Fokker
1.2	May 1932	The Packet
1.3	June 1932	J-9982
1.4	July 1932	The Balloonatics
1.5	August 1932	The Blue Devil
1.6	September 1932	The Boob
1.7	October 1932	The Battle of Flowers
1.10	January 1933	The Professor
1.11	February 1933	The Joy-Ride
1.12	March 1933	The Bridge Party
2.1	April 1933	The Bottle Party
2.2	May 1933	The Trap
2.4	July 1933	The Gold Rush
2.5	August 1933	The Maid and the Mountains
2.6	September 1933	The Blue Orchid
2.7	October 1933	Fair Cargo
2.8	November 1933	Beauty and Beast
2.9	December 1933	Bob's Box
2.10	January 1934	Savages and Wings
2.11	February 1934	The Oriental Touch
2.12	March 1934	Down in the Forest
3.1	April 1934	Three Weeks
3.2	May 1934	The Sheikh and the Greek

## Chapter Two. The Modern Boy

### Introduction

*The Modern Boy* first appeared in February 1928 and came out every week for eleven years (on Mondays at first, and from December 1932 every Saturday barring occasional bank holidays or Christmas), perishing shortly after the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939. Issued by the Amalgamated Press, the paper was one of the so-called “Companion Papers” under the general control of C. M. (Charles Maurice) Down. The Juvenile Department at the Amalgamated Press contained a number of separate sections; Down controlled the one that produced the papers that have become the most famous in modern times. In 1928 it boasted *The Magnet* (the home of Charles Hamilton’s great character, Billy Bunter of Greyfriars School, created under Hamilton’s pen-name Frank Richards), *The Gem* (the home of the chums of St. Jim’s school, created by Hamilton under another pseudonym, Martin Clifford), *The Popular* (largely reprints of Hamilton’s stories of Greyfriars and St. Jim’s, but also containing very fine original cowboy tales about the Rio Kid, again by Hamilton but using the name Ralph Redway), the *Schoolboy’s Own Library* (again, largely reprints of Hamilton’s work, although another popular author reprinted in the library was Edwy Searles Brookes, while others such as Michael Poole occasionally appeared) and the *Boys’ Friend Library* (see chapter four). Over the next few years the *Nelson Lee Library* would be briefly added to the Companion Papers before being incorporated into *The Gem*, as would *Chums* (after the Amalgamated Press bought it from Cassell’s) before being merged with *The Modern Boy* in 1932, and *The Ranger* for four years from 1931 when it succeeded *The Popular*.

When *The Modern Boy* began, accordingly, as will be obvious from the preceding paragraph, the main author of the Companion Papers (and, indeed, the star juvenile author of the Amalgamated Press) was the indefatigable Charles Hamilton. *The Modern Boy* was no exception when it was added to the stable in 1928. He created the signature character for the early years of the paper, Ken King, known as King of the Islands. This was a South Seas series and was originally credited to Hamilton and the famous aviator of the 1920s Sir Alan Cobham (although it is certain Cobham did nothing more than lend his name to the piece, as the stories were credited to Hamilton alone when reprinted in the *Boys’ Friend Library*).

However, *The Modern Boy* wanted to emphasise modern things, and catered for boys’ interest in modern transport and machinery and their role in thrilling adventure. As a result, from the very early days of the paper there was an accent on aviation. In 1928 it carried a series of aviation tales by Geo Rochester, who had been in the same P.O.W. Camp as Johns at one time in 1918, as well as a weekly feature entitled ‘All About Aeroplanes.’ Over the years a number of other aviation stories appeared in the paper. Rochester produced a range of different stories in the first few years, including his story of air piracy “The Black Squadron.” From 1932 he began to produce stories

about his First World War spy hero Grey Shadow, and from 1936 a series of tales about the British Camel pilot and spy Scotty of the Secret Squadron (the two appeared in one series together in 1938). Other aviation heroes to appear regularly in the paper included Percy Westerman's Standish of the Royal Air Constabulary and John Templer's Jaggars of the Air Police.

To this list was added, in January 1933, W. E. Johns' Biggles. Johns had contributed to the paper since December 1929, at first as an artist and then as an aviation writer. Some articles attributed to *The Modern Boy's* "Air Expert" appeared during 1930 and may have been by Johns, although articles did not appear under his name until later in 1930. From then until late 1939 he contributed articles under his real title Flying-Officer W. E. Johns, as he was nearly always described in Amalgamated Press papers.

Johns had not contributed any fiction to the paper prior to 1933 (although some of his articles were very tall tales indeed). It is not clear why the editor of *The Modern Boy* at the time, Charles Boff, decided to run Johns' Biggles stories in *The Modern Boy*. The two would have become acquainted through their relationship as editor and contributor, and Johns would also have shared a bond with Boff's boss, C. M. Down, as both came from Hertfordshire and had been members of the Royal Flying Corps. A rare account by one of the staff of the Companion Papers in the early 1930s, Jim Caudwell, indicates that Johns was a frequent visitor to the office, so it would seem likely that he knew the editorial staff reasonably well.<sup>33</sup> Down was also aware of *Popular Flying*, publishing an article in the journal in April 1935.<sup>34</sup> It may also be significant that Johns contributed to several of Down's other publications prior to 1933, including *The Ranger*, *Chums* and the *Greyfriars Holiday Annual*. This may indicate that he was viewed as a reliable contributor on aviation matters, and it would therefore have been a fairly easy and natural step for Johns to show Boff and Down his Biggles stories and get them accepted for publication.

From Johns' perspective, his work for the Amalgamated Press would have provided him with clear evidence of the great popularity of flying stories. As noted above, *The Modern Boy* carried a lot of aviation fiction. The more adventure-minded of the Companion Papers also eagerly sought material of this genre. *The Ranger* had the long-running RFC series "Baldy's Angels." Similarly, Geo Rochester published several First World War flying yarns in *The Magnet* and aviation stories in *Chums* and the *Nelson Lee Library*. Other writers like Wilfred Tremellen and Arch Whitehouse also contributed aviation stories to these papers. Indeed, during the 1930s all boys' story papers regularly published aviation tales. Flying was a new and exciting pastime, and public interest in it was high.

In this environment, it was perhaps inevitable that Johns would be drawn to move Biggles from the adult market to the juvenile market. He stood to earn much, much more from the ready market for his fiction.

During the 1930s, Biggles' name would become virtually synonymous with *The Modern Boy* as far as his juvenile fans were concerned. Between 1933 and 1939 the first outing for our intrepid hero was nearly always in the pages

of *The Modern Boy*. Johns would print there every single Biggles story he published during the 1930s except three – “The Ace of Spades” from *The Cockpit*; “Fair Cargo” from *Biggles Flies Again*; and *Biggles in the South Seas*, which was serialised in *The Gem* at the end of 1939 but was probably originally submitted to *The Modern Boy* prior to the paper’s demise. In total, Biggles stories appeared in 207 issues of *The Modern Boy*, far more than Johns would ever publish in any other paper.

### The Biggles Stories

But let us go back to December 1932. In issue No. 255 the editor’s column informed readers that an exciting series of aviation tales would shortly appear, written by Flying-Officer Johns.<sup>35</sup> In the next issue, the very last of the year, the editor placed a small quarter-page advertisement on page 9. This carried a picture of Johns above a portrait of a young man in a flying helmet.<sup>36</sup> “He has written a Series of Complete Flying Stories that will Thrill you to the Marrow!” gushed the editor. “The first of them will appear in NEXT WEEK’S MODERN BOY. They concern the exciting War-time adventures of one Captain James Bigglesworth, an amazing flying man known to his comrades as “BIGGLES.” Here he is. Make his close acquaintance Next Week!”

On the back page of the same issue the editor discussed the new series again, noting that it would start with “Biggles and the White Fokker” and adding “a fellow’s blood would have to be made of water for him not to be stirred to the very marrow of his bones during the reading of it!”

No. 257 duly appeared on 7 January 1933, adorned by a thrilling cover illustration of the white Fokker shooting down a Camel over Maranique. This illustration is not signed but has generally been attributed to Johns. A special article by Johns, “Charmed Lives,” accompanied the story. The article was actually Johns’ introduction to *The Camels are Coming*. It proved to be the first of several such features by Johns that would accompany a new Biggles series in *The Modern Boy*.

At the back of the issue the editor observed “You’ve chummed up with dare-devil Biggles good and proper, haven’t you? He’s a magnificent fellow, and FLYING-OFFICER JOHNS has another splendid and thrilling story about him in Next Saturday’s Modern Boy. I believe you will find it better even than the Biggles story in this present issue!”

The editors of Amalgamated Press story papers had a habit of writing stuff such as this. Every new story was portrayed as one of the best ever, thrilling, magnificent, not to be missed; such comments were usually followed by a plea to the readers to make sure they didn’t miss it by placing an order with their newsagent. The editor’s comments form a sort of running background to the Biggles stories in *The Modern Boy*, and it is entertaining to record them when relevant.

### Box 3. Boys' Story Papers

In 1932, when *Biggles* was first published, the average newsagent in England would have been filled with a wide range of story papers for all sorts. Many of these carried fiction for adults, from the mass circulation papers like *The Graphic* to the prestigious *Strand* and *John Bull*. There was also a thriving market providing fiction for boys and girls. As the illustration shows, in 1932 there were a large number of boys' story papers. A few of these were single papers published by one company. The *Boy's Own Paper*, for example, had been published by the Religious Tract Society since 1879 and had carried a wide range of famous children's authors and informative articles (see chapter eight). *The Scout* was the "weekly official organ of the Boy Scouts" and likewise carried stirring fiction and articles on issues of interest to scouts – camping, cycling, scouting and craft. *Boy's Magazine*, remembered today as the "pink 'un," was published in Manchester by Allied Newspapers and offered a range of adventure, humour, westerns, sport, detective stories and fantasy.

The majority of boys' story papers, however, were published by two companies, the Amalgamated Press, based at Fleetway House in London, and D. C. Thomson & Co, based in Dundee, Scotland. D. C. Thomson published the "Big Five," *Adventure*, *Rover*, *Skipper*, *Wizard* and (from 1933) *Hotspur*. Each paper had five or six stories per issue, usually with fantastic characters and plots. One famous character, Wilson the Wizard, was immortal and not only helped win the War for England, but also helped it win back the Ashes! D. C. Thomson's papers, from the mid-1920s, built up a huge following, some selling up to 250,000 copies a week.

Their main competitor was the Amalgamated Press, which offered a wider range of papers to suit a variety of tastes. Its best-remembered juvenile papers are the "Companion Papers," which in 1932 included *The Gem*, *The Magnet*, *The Modern Boy*, *The Nelson Lee Library* and *The Ranger* as well as the *Schoolboy's Own Library*, the *Boys' Friend Library* and *Chums*, which had been purchased from Cassell & Co. in 1927. These papers were all produced by one little department within the Amalgamated Press's juvenile division. Another department produced the very popular detective papers, the *Sexton Blake Library* and *Union Jack*; another produced *Triumph* and *Champion*, both of which imitated Thomson papers, and their pocket library, the *Champion Library*; another put together the horror paper *Bullseye* and another the crime paper *Thriller*. The star sellers, towards the end of the 1930s, were *Thriller* and *Champion*. We do not know the circulation of any paper in the early 1930s.

The picture in 1932 is of considerable variety; yet if anything, in 1932 the market had consolidated. Boys' story papers had existed since the end of the eighteenth century, but the first to achieve any fame – or perhaps that should be notoriety – was *Boys of England*, which achieved tremendous success after 1871 thanks to the long-running adventures of its key character, Jack Harkaway. This was swiftly followed by the infamous "bloods" such as Charles Fox's *Sweeney Todd*, *Black Bess* and *The Black Highwayman*. These early papers concentrated on blood and thunder, stirring adventure with plenty of

violence. In this regard they followed the famous “penny dreadfuls” of the middle years of the nineteenth century, which appear to have instigated the British reading public’s fascination with cheap story papers.

By the end of the nineteenth century the penny dreadfuls had disappeared, replaced by the “halfpenny dreadfuls,” to quote A. A. Milne. These papers largely eschewed the random violence, horror and brutality of earlier times. The accent was on adventure and humour, and at this time the key themes in the boys’ story paper began to crystallize. Among the range of standard topics were the school story, the war story (often featuring an invasion of Britain), the adventure story set in the Colonies or some other exotic location, sports, pirates, Robin Hood, detective stories (including those major detectives of schoolboy fiction, Sexton Blake and Nelson Lee) and westerns.

Several companies were now publishing boys’ papers. In addition to those long-lived papers the *Boy’s Own Paper* and *Chums*, both published by separate companies, other companies to publish papers included Pearson’s (*Big Budget*, *Scout*), Newnes (*Dick Turpin*, *Bulldog Library* and *Captain* – famous as the paper in which P. G. Wodehouse published most of his school stories), Trapp Holmes (*Vanguard*, *Funny Cuts*, *Picture Fun*), Harmsworth (later to become the Amalgamated Press – its first paper was *Marvel*, followed by *Union Jack*, *Pluck* and three papers created by Hamilton Edwards which later became very famous – *Boys’ Friend*, *Boys’ Realm* and *Boys’ Herald*) and Aldine, which published many brightly coloured pocket libraries featuring Dick Turpin, Robin Hood, Claude Duval, Buffalo Bill and Deadwood Dick as well as a range of detectives and sportsmen.

This early flourishing of companies would be rationalised by the 1930s, so that only the Amalgamated Press and D. C. Thomson had several papers on their books. Some papers were bought by other companies, and some simply went under for lack of readers. The basic ingredients of boys’ story papers, however, remained essentially unchanged from the turn of the twentieth century. At the time Biggles began appearing in *The Modern Boy*, the same standard topics were the norm – adventure, sports, detective stories, westerns, Robin Hood, pirates and school stories. All of these stories appeared in the same issues as Biggles stories. It is always important to remember that Biggles appeared in this context, as in some respects it clearly influenced Johns, both in style of writing and choice of plots. For example, the science-fiction themes in *Biggles Hits the Trail* may reflect influence from other characters in *The Modern Boy*, such as Captain Justice. Often the titles chosen for Johns’ stories had been used before – “Wings Over Spain” was used for another story in *The Modern Boy* in 1938 and “Sinister Castle” was the name of an issue of the *Sexton Blake Library* in 1932. In this regard, however, it is worth noting that there is very little in Johns’ work that appears to be derivative. His descriptions of aerial combat and aviation are different from those of his contemporaries, and I would argue far better. Johns also had a great ability to develop atmosphere. As a result, although his stories reflected their context, in many respects they transcended that context; had they not, it is unlikely that they would still be in print today.

The next story to appear in *The Modern Boy* was “Peril Over the Line,” better known to modern fans as “The Packet” from *The Camels are Coming*. This appeared in No. 258. For the next twelve weeks the paper printed the stories from *The Camels are Coming* in order, but with most of the titles changed. “The Blue Devil,” for example, became “The Blue Demon;” “The Balloonatics” became “The Duneville Sausage;” and “The Bomber” became “The Flying Arsenal” (see Table 2). It is nice to report, however, that that lodestone of Biggles stories, “The Boob,” kept the same title when it appeared in *The Modern Boy*.

With the publication of “The Duneville Sausage” the editor observed “When you see a Flying-Adventure story coupled with the name of FLYING-OFFICER JOHNS, you know you are on to a good thing!” Two stories later, publishing “The Mystery Gun” (a.k.a. “Camouflage”), the editor was moved to place a small box on the same page as the story offering his thoughts:

Biggles is a young fellow like thousands of others who might have been sitting on an office stool had not the Great War broken out. He became a flying man instead. And FLYING-OFFICER JOHNS has made him the hero of his present series of air adventure stories.

A few weeks later a new feature appeared alongside the stories. This was a small box captioned “Biggles Says.” The purpose of the box was to explain technical terms. In this case, the box appeared with the story “Secret Orders” (a.k.a. “The Zone Call”) and reprinted Johns’ note from *The Camels are Coming* on zone calls. Editors faced particular difficulties in reprinting notes in the three-column story paper format, and including a small box as a sort of comment on the text was a good way of getting around the problem. Such boxes would later become a regular feature of the First World War Biggles stories in *The Modern Boy*.

All of this first series of Biggles stories were accompanied by illustrations drawn by two artists. One artist concentrated on scenes involving people and, on stylistic grounds, can be identified as Radcliffe Wilson, who drew illustrations for the Biggles stories in *The Modern Boy* until 1939. The other artist concentrated on pictures of aeroplanes and dogfights. Only one of these pictures is signed, by Johns himself. All of these paintings are in a similar style and one is therefore tempted to attribute them all to Johns, but this would probably be a mistake. Several of the illustrations are actually the same as the pictures that accompanied the stories in *Popular Flying*, which of course were drawn by Howard Leigh. Leigh had a very similar style to Johns, especially in his early years. Consequently, where a picture can be clearly shown to be the same as one that appeared in *Popular Flying* it is probably wisest to attribute it to Leigh. Other pictures could be by either Johns or Leigh.<sup>37</sup>

On 15 April 1933, with the publication of “Lost in the Sky” (a.k.a. “Fog”), the first series of Biggles stories ended. A second series commenced on 15 July 1933 and comprised all 13 stories from *Biggles of the Camel Squadron*. After that, the final two stories from *The Camels are Coming* were published. It is interesting that the editor chose to delay the publication of these two stories. It

seems likely that the editor knew, at the time the first series ended, that he would be publishing more stories and therefore held the two stories over as fitting finales for the series as a whole.

The second series began with "The Flying Professor." This series of stories, like the first, was illustrated by both Radcliffe Wilson and Johns. The editor also introduced a new, semi-regular feature, a box article accompanying the story and containing explanations of technical terms. The first such box appeared with "The Flying Professor" and was headed "Biggles explains" and defined terms such as "RFC," "rocking wings," "inclinometer," "Bowden lever" and "fanning."

With the next story, "Biggles' Joyride," the editor once again decided to trumpet the series in his column:

When one talks about planes one naturally thinks of BIGGLES. I actually heard a fellow the other day ask innocently: "*Who is Biggles?*" You should have heard the jeers that greeted him! All the school could have answered him. Anyway, he's now reading *Modern Boy* – and looking for someone else to work off jeers upon, on his own account!

With the end of this second series of stories, Biggles was away from the pages of *The Modern Boy* for about half a year. It is interesting that the editor did not attempt to use *The Cruise of the Condor* at this time, even though the book had now appeared. It seems that, at this time, the editor wanted War flying stories featuring Biggles, not his post-war adventures. When Biggles did reappear, in No. 323 on 14 April 1934, it was in a new series of First World War adventures set before the events of "The White Fokker." These adventures were later published as *Biggles Learns to Fly* and *Biggles in France*.

Given that Johns had recently published *The Cruise of the Condor* and was just finishing serialising *Biggles Flies Again* in *Popular Flying*, it would appear that at the time he wanted to write stories set after the war. As a result, I suspect that he returned to writing war stories because he was asked to do so by his editor at the Amalgamated Press. In No. 322 of *The Modern Boy* the editor published his own account of the origins of the new batch of stories. This account has all the marks of high romance, but there may be a kernel of truth in it. According to the editor, he did indeed suggest to Johns the idea of writing stories of how Biggles learned to fly, doing so during a visit to the Schoolboy's Exhibition when Johns introduced a new Air Ministry film:

It was then that the idea of a new series of Biggles war stories was born.

"Look here Johns," said I, "you have shown us Biggles as a first class scout pilot, a real professor in a crack Camel squadron. But in the Great War no one *started* as a crack pilot that I ever heard of. You had to learn *that* job by bitter experience that could be and usually was thrilling and dangerous and terrifying!

‘How did Biggles get into a Scout Squadron? How did he first learn to fly? How did---?’

Johns smiled and cut me short.

“All that,” he said, “is another story.”

“And I’ll bet it’s a great story, too!” I cried enthusiastically.

“You’ve said it,” said Johns emphatically. “It is a great story – greater than anything I’ve written yet! And by Jove, I’ll write it straight away...”

No boy with British blood in his veins will want to miss a line of it!

The first of these new stories, entitled “Biggles Learns to Fly,” was given considerable editorial attention. It was accompanied by an editorial feature and a special article by W. E. Johns. The editorial feature was a small box article on the first page of the story with a picture of Biggles. The editor stated: “The picture shows him as a full-blown pilot, wearing his wings. Here you read about him when he was a fledgeling – getting his first taste of flying and qualifying to take his proud place among the Fighting Pilots at the Front.”

Johns’ article was illustrated with his picture. It later formed the basis of the introduction to *Biggles Learns to Fly*. Johns repeated his didactic aim in this article: “I hope that you will be able to pick up a good deal of information from these stories, because they are the observations of first-hand experience in air warfare.”

The second story in this third series, “Biggles’ First Fight,” is an issue that is rather in demand amongst Biggles collectors. For the second time in *The Modern Boy* the Biggles story was featured on the front cover of the paper. This time the front cover illustration was of the young Biggles himself – a picture painted by Johns that had originally appeared, in mirror-image, in *Popular Flying* to accompany the story “The Balloonatics.” Another brilliant illustration by Johns or Leigh appeared inside, along with *The Modern Boy’s* by-now standard illustration of Biggles and notes on technical terms. Johns or Leigh would supply illustrations to three more stories in this series, but most stories were now illustrated by Wilson alone. The last illustration by either Johns or Leigh for a Biggles story in *The Modern Boy* accompanied “Biggles and the Runaway Tank” in number 336.

The stories in Nos. 323-334 would later be republished in *Biggles Learns to Fly*, although for some odd reason one of the stories, “Knights of the Sky,” was clumsily re-written to change the setting from 169 squadron to 266 squadron, and Biggles from a two-seater pilot to a single-seater scout pilot. The change in the setting meant that the story also had to be shifted out of sequence. This change continued in later editions of the book brought out by Hodder and Armada, which makes it likely that the change was sanctioned by Johns, even if he had not originally made it. It was not until Red Fox republished *Biggles Learns to Fly* in 1992 that the original story was published in its correct order.

After the stories that would be published in *Biggles Learns to Fly* finished, the series continued without a break with the stories that would later form the first half of *Biggles in France*. Obviously, the books broke a natural series into two – doubtless because the entire series would have been too long to fit into a single edition of the *Boys' Friend Library*. The stories included several that were re-used for Second World War tales by Johns when he published *Spitfire Parade*, but whose original versions would later fade into obscurity, as they were not re-published when Thames brought back the First World War stories in the 1950s. The remainder of the stories were later published in the 1950s in *Biggles of 266*. *Biggles in France* was a phenomenally rare book until Red Fox published a new edition in 1993, and so for many years only a few people would have read the original versions of many of the stories. The stories included “Biggles and the Runaway Tank” (which was split in half when published in *Spitfire Parade* as “Taffy Trundles In”; the other half was later published in *Biggles of 266* as “The Challenge”), “Biggles and the Mad Hatter” (published in *Spitfire Parade* as “Cuthbert Comes - And Goes”) and “Biggles' Sky-High Hat Trick” (published in *Spitfire Parade* as “The Record Breakers”).

“Biggles and the Runaway Tank” is worth collecting in *The Modern Boy*, as most subsequent versions were abridged. The original contains a number of unfortunate remarks about Indo-Chinese coolies that were left out of the second edition of *Biggles in France*, although Norman Wright recently restored the original text in his limited edition of the title. As noted above, the story itself was split up when reprinted in *Biggles of 266* as part of it had already been re-used for *Spitfire Parade*. The version in 266 contains some of the material that was later cut out of the second edition of *Biggles in France*, but still leaves out portions of the original text including the most outrageous comments.

With the publication of “Biggles' Sky-High Hat Trick” in No. 339, this series of First World War stories came to an end. Biggles would continue, however. The editor placed a box with the story announcing next week's tale. Next to a picture of Johns, he stated that the author “has beaten all his previous best with a magnificent new Biggles serial story.”

The Great War over, Biggles is enjoying a peace-time holiday when Adventure falls into his lap out of the Sky.

He goes up into the skies on its trail – on a Treasure Hunt that lands him into Excitement and Perils that were never surpassed even in his War-flying days.

The next issue, No. 340, was what is known as a “boomed” issue. Three new stories and a new feature were offered, as well as a free gift. The combination of new stories and the gift was intended to promote sales and thereby boost long-term circulation. The issue was also described as the “Extra Special Bank Holiday Number” and came out on Friday as opposed to the normal Saturday (which would have been the Bank Holiday). Finally, the Biggles episode, at 8 pages, was extra-long and began on the inside cover, which indicates that it was one of the star attractions of the issue (along with the new

serialised life story of the cinema cowboy Tom Mix, which featured on the front cover, and incidentally makes this issue difficult to find as competition is fierce from American fans of movie cowboys!).

The new Biggles story was “Wings of Fortune,” otherwise known as *The Cruise of the Condor*. *The Modern Boy* supplied a new portrait of Biggles, again in flying-helmet, but no longer in uniform to mark his transition to peace-time flying. Johns penned another of his introductory notes, about “The New Biggles,” which I reproduce in full as it has not been included with subsequent editions of the book:

When the Great War ended and the fighting career of the young Bigglesworth – known far and wide as Biggles, air-man hero of the Western Front – came to an end, chance flung into his way an opportunity to fly again and pursue adventures in the air that were the breath of life to him – as you read in the opening chapters of this story.

His machine no longer bore the red, white and blue of the R.F.C., but the nationality marks of its country of registration – Great Britain. With this, and Captain Algernon Lacey (an old comrade of No. 266 Squadron), and his former flight-sergeant, Smythe, he set off – and a far distant land provided the rest.

The adventures I relate in “Wings of Fortune” were the first that came to him after he reluctantly laid aside his R.F.C. tunic for the sober jacket of civil life. That he was able to combat the forces of man and Nature arranged against him was due, beyond doubt, to his own fearless courage and the initiative and resource that he had acquired in the War.

The scene was changed. The conditions were changed. But Biggles remained unchanged. High above the sun-drenched swamps and jungles of tropical America he was the same Biggles who had once scorned “archie” (anti-aircraft gunfire) even as he had sought battle with the pilots of the German Black Cross.

I am confident that You will enjoy reading this story of mine as much as I have enjoyed writing it.

The story ran for seven weeks. With the second part of the series the editor included a map of Brazil and adjacent countries, which the editor described as the sketch map Biggles drew to show his route. The next issue contained another editorial box with note:

Known all over the world as Biggles – short for Bigglesworth – this famous character, created by Flying-Officer W. E. Johns, first found fame as a fighting airman during the Great War.

Here you read about him as a peace-time flying man – though there’s very little peace for him and his comrades on this thrilling treasure-hunt!

One can sense in this a slight sense of trepidation, as if the editor was concerned that his readers simply wanted war stories and not peace-time flying. Sadly, we do not know if the story was a hit with readers of *The Modern Boy* or not, and our own judgements of the worth of the story are likely to be clouded. I consider the story one of the best Johns ever wrote, but a friend of mine can't stand it! What we do know is that the next Biggles stories to appear in the paper were First World War flying stories again, but that these ran for ten weeks only and very few other First World War stories appeared after that. Perhaps Johns gained his way, and was able to write peace-time adventures; or perhaps, at this time at least, sales of the paper were still high and the editor did not consider that Biggles' peace-time adventures were turning off fans.

The week after "Wings of Fortune" ended, the editor penned a little note in his column in No. 347. "Flying-Officer W. E. Johns is now writing another series of Biggles War Yarns, especially for you!" he informed readers. "I have read the first few, and they are the real goods! They will be starting in *Modern Boy* before long – look out for them!"

When Biggles did re-appear, in No. 356 on 1 December 1934, he was back on the front cover of *The Modern Boy*, standing in front of his Camel and waving at the readers. For ten issues readers were treated to stories that were later reprinted in *Biggles in France*, as well as three First World War stories that were uncollected until 1999 when *Biggles Air Ace* was released. Several of the stories were used, in updated form, in *Spitfire Parade* but not included in *Biggles of 266*, and were therefore a revelation to me when I first read photocopies of them as a youth. Three of the stories were Johns' only Biggles Christmas stories, and appeared in succession between 15 and 29 December. Christmas stories were something of a feature for other regular characters in the Companion Papers, and these three are all enjoyable examples of the genre. Only one was later published in *Biggles in France* and *Biggles of 266*, doubtless because the other two were published at the same time as *Biggles in France* at the backs of other issues of the *Boys' Friend Library* (see chapter four).

The final First World War story in this series was "Biggles and the Joker," another story that was uncollected until 1999. I consider this one of the finest Biggles War stories. It is very different from the other tales, and the only one to show Biggles on leave in Paris. I suspect the story was left out of *Biggles in France* because it did not fit the page limit. The plot hinges on gambling and playing cards, subjects which would not have been raised in school stories of the time without a strict moral "health warning," but airmen were expected to be more grown up and were permitted some vices by the Companion Papers!

With the publication of this story, the editor included a box headed "Stop Press News" along with a picture of both Biggles and Algy. The editor promised "the finest story of Air Adventure that Flying-Officer W. E. Johns has yet written." At the end of "Biggles and the Joker" was another note by Johns outlining the forthcoming tale. Again, I reproduce it in full as, to my knowledge, it has never been republished:

To officers of Biggles' type the Declaration of Peace – the end of the Great War – came as a curious shock. Their first reaction was a sense of emptiness and unreality. It seemed that everything – their own lives and the world in which they lived – had stopped suddenly.

For months, or even years, they had lived at high tension, every organ of their bodies working at full pressure. They lived entirely in the Present, with no thought of the Future – which was, of course, the only possible way to face the grim conditions of air warfare.

At 11 a.m. on November 11<sup>th</sup>, 1918, the only life they had known since they had left school (in many cases) ceased abruptly, and a new era opened before them. To expect them to settle down to the humdrum routine of a peace time existence was out of the question.

Their tired nerves craved for action, and they sought it anywhere and everywhere that it might be found.

Biggles was more fortunate than some. He was not rich; on the contrary he was poor, but certain circumstances had left him in possession of an aeroplane. In flying he found solace, and would, no doubt, in course of time, have settled down to a normal manner of living, had not chance ordained otherwise.

Perhaps it was not entirely chance. If an opportunity for Adventure presented itself he clutched at it with both hands, and that is what happened one day when he was forced down by weather conditions on the East Coast.

He was quite unprepared for what was to follow – although, knowing him, one can say without fear of contradiction that even if he had known, it would have made no difference to his course of action, in the amazing events described in “WINGED MENACE” starting in *Modern Boy* next Saturday!

“Winged Menace” started in No. 366 on 9 February 1935. It was the first appearance of the story that would be published later that year by Hamilton in book form as *The Black Peril*. This of course is a much-loved Biggles story, especially by those whose favourite character is Ginger. A scene from the story again graced the front cover of *The Modern Boy* – the fourth time in six series that the opening story of the series had been granted this honour, and sure evidence of the drawing power of Biggles with readers. In case the readers were in any doubt, a banner placed above the story on the first page (the inside cover again) advertised it as the “Greatest Biggles Story ever written!”

The series ran for ten episodes. After it ended, with No. 375 of 13 April 1935, Biggles was away for a week, and then re-appeared in No. 377 in a series of reprints of most of the stories from the book *Biggles Flies Again*. An inset portrait of Biggles appeared on the front cover, although the main cover was

devoted to another story. This issue, because of various public holidays, appeared on a Thursday.

*Biggles Flies Again* was serialised over eight issues of *The Modern Boy*, from Nos. 377 to 384. In several cases two chapters of the book were printed as a single *Modern Boy* episode. The series started with "Biggles' Treasure Hunt," which reprinted the first chapter of the book "The Gold Rush" This episode contained another map labelled as a sketch map drawn by Biggles. The next episode, "Biggles and the Blue Orchid," comprised "The Maid and the Mountains" and "The Blue Orchid"; "Fair Cargo," which appeared between these two stories in the book, was not printed in *The Modern Boy*. It would appear that some of the light sexual banter in that story was considered inappropriate, although one wonders why the story could not simply have been abridged.

In the editor's column in No. 384, the editor announced that next week *The Modern Boy* would publish "the most thrilling Biggles story ever written" and that "I cannot imagine any one writing a better one." To prove his point, the editor made the very same claims in a box with the story when it appeared in No. 385. The new story was the brilliantly-titled "The Mountain of Light," otherwise known as *Biggles Hits the Trail*. The first issue appeared with a box titled "Modern Boy Leads Again." Next to a portrait of Biggles, the editor wrote "when I say that this Thrilling BIGGLES story is absolutely the Greatest that FLYING-OFFICER W. E. JOHNS has ever written – and that I simply cannot imagine anyone ever writing a better one – you have my sincere assurance that HERE is a treat in a million!" The first episode was extra-long. The story ran for ten episodes, and with the final episode in No. 394 the editor informed his readers that next week he would offer them "one of the most exciting War flying stories that even Flying-Officer W. E. Johns has ever put on to paper." "It's a SPELLBINDING story," he added, "and it's going to make you gasp!"

The object of this hyperbole was "Biggles' Night Out," another story that was uncollected until 1999. Although I do not consider it one of the most exciting stories Johns wrote, I have to say I like it very much. Biggles is taken out of his comfort zone as a passenger in a Handley Page bomber, and anything that breaks new ground like this I find enjoyable.

After this story was published there was a brief three-week rest, and then the story I consider the finest Biggles yarn of all appeared in No. 399 on 28 September 1935 – "Biggles Flies East." Once again, the start of the story was timed for a "boomed" issue. No less than three different giveaways were offered with the issue – a quarto-sized, and rather thick, *Wings of Britain* booklet, four coloured cards and a small 20-page album of mechanical wonders of 1935. Two other new series started, a new Captain Justice series and a new series of motor-racing tales by Kaye Campson (who contributed several such series to the paper). Another novelty was a new series of articles by Johns himself on First World War aces, "Knights of the Air," which opened with a feature on Captain Albert Ball.

"Biggles Flies East" took up 14 issues, mainly because the episodes were kept fairly short. One wonders whether the editor was spinning out a good

thing! He may also have been waiting for Johns to complete his next book. In any event, the next story, "The Gold Flyers" (a.k.a. *Biggles & Co.*) appeared in No. 413, the week after "Biggles Flies East" finished. The story was given a box ad in the previous issue, stating that the story offered "very real danger – deep mystery – cunning plots to lay Biggles low – flying that will set you quivering with excitement" and "perils and adventures never surpassed even during his War days as a fighting pilot." When it appeared the editor declared that "once again Flying-Officer W. E. Johns has bettered his best." Another editorial box feature with the first episode stated:

For BIGGLES, peace-time flying has thrills as great as any he encountered as Air Ace of the Great War....there he fought in the open, against known and chivalrous enemies. Here he fights against hidden and crafty foes, conspiring in the dark to smash the newly founded firm of BIGGLES & CO., Air-Carriers of the Treasure of Big Banks!

The story ran for ten episodes, finishing with No. 422, and brought to an end a period of just over two years – and almost 100 issues – in which Biggles had been absent for only a few weeks from the pages of *The Modern Boy*. This run of issues marks, to my mind, the finest period of *The Modern Boy* and, like Norman Wright, if I were marooned on a desert island and could choose any period of the paper for company I would choose these numbers.<sup>38</sup>

Biggles was now away from *The Modern Boy* for five months, and it would seem that the editor fielded some requests for more Biggles. In No. 432 he mentioned that Johns had just delivered a new story. Then in No. 440 he declared in his column that Johns would be back in *The Modern Boy* in three weeks. "Biggles in Africa" duly appeared in No. 443, and a scene from the story appeared on the front cover. A further front cover illustration appeared on No. 445, featuring the comrades fleeing a rather unrealistic snake. In that same issue the editor published a feature on Johns, stating that he had received many requests from readers for the author's photograph.<sup>39</sup> The photograph appeared in the next issue, along with the claim from the editor that "his stories are known to hundreds of thousands of readers all over the world." The editor also stated that he knew his readers were enjoying the current Biggles story "because so many of you have written both to myself and the author to say so." He added that Johns was hard at work on another Biggles story.

"Biggles in Africa" ended in No. 451. The next week "Biggles Fights Alone" appeared – as *Biggles Air Commodore* was called on its first publication. No. 452 was, once again, a "boomed" issue. Four new stories commenced and the paper gave away the "Modern Boy's Album of Fighting Planes of the World," four coloured cards for the album, and a pocket atlas of the world. A new portrait of Biggles, in Air Commodore's uniform, was drawn for the story. It ran for 10 issues, and after that Biggles was once again absent from *The Modern Boy* for about six months.

One oddity that appeared in the paper during this interval was "Modern Boy's Christmas Party" by "The Old Boy," an editorial feature in No. 465 (the bumper Christmas number). This portrayed an imaginary party attended by

Captain Justice and his comrades, Biggles & Co and Hamilton's current creation in the paper, Len Lex the Schoolboy Detective. Biggles & Co climb down a rope ladder to the party, after leaving a model plane shaped like a silver hawk, perform party tricks such as tying a knot in a handkerchief without letting go of either end and tell jokes that are best left long forgotten. Needless to say, this was not by Johns.

The next story, when it appeared, received a significant editorial "push." The opening scenes appeared in No. 490 under the title "Haunted Treasure," along with no less than two editorial boxes. The first, entitled "Doubloons and Pieces of Eight," described how Johns had come to the editor's office and shown him some coins from the Spanish Main in connection with his new story. A photo of Johns appeared with the feature. At the end of "Haunted Treasure," another box ad warned readers to look out for the new Biggles story, "Biggles' Treasure Island."

This story was, of course, *Biggles Flies West*, and "Haunted Treasure" the historical prologue to the book. This first issue of "Biggles' Treasure Island" presented a startling front cover illustration showing Louis Dakeyne looming over Biggles and Co. The tale ended in No. 501, and a new story, "Biggles Goes to War," started in No. 503. Once again, this was a "boomed" issue in which the editor unleashed all his big guns – Biggles, a new Captain Justice story, and a new series of tales by Hamilton featuring the Rio Kid – and offered as a give-away a stamp album and a packet of stamps. Stamps also appeared in another Companion Paper, *The Gem*, which was suffering flagging sales at the time.

A scene from "Biggles Goes to War" appeared on the front cover of No. 509. The story ran for ten instalments. This story, like all but one of the Biggles books to have appeared in the paper since 1934 (the exception is *Biggles Flies Again*) was serialised prior to publication in book form. It is therefore worth noting that Biggles, Algy, Ginger and Smythe fought for "Grusse" in *The Modern Boy* and not for "Maltovia." As this is the name that appeared first I suspect it was the name Johns originally chose. He may have changed the name after the story appeared in *The Modern Boy* because readers may have confused "Grusse" with "Russia," which was then hardly a country four Britishers would have been helping.

At the end of 1937, the editor of *The Modern Boy* announced that the paper would be getting a brand new look next year. The new look was a major increase in size, with *The Modern Boy* now appearing as a tabloid, as large as issues of the old *Boys' Friend* or the *Eagle* from the 1950s. The new look also meant that no fewer than eight different serial stories would be carried in the paper, all in relatively short episodes. The paper's numbering started again with the new size, and it is therefore customary to distinguish between the "1<sup>st</sup> series" of *The Modern Boy* (523 issues) and the "2<sup>nd</sup> series" (87 issues).

The new Biggles story in No. 1 of the new series was "Biggles on the Treasure Trail" (a.k.a. *Biggles Flies South*). A scene from this story appeared on the cover of No. 2. The story ran for eight instalments. Biggles was then away from the paper for several weeks, but not Johns; he contributed articles

to every single issue of the new series, including a regular feature, "Let's Look Around," stories of lost treasures that were later reprinted in *The Biggles Book of Treasure Hunting* and articles on pirates that were later published in *The Modern Boy's Book of Pirates*. Johns also contributed a pirate novel, *Champion of the Main*.

In issue 22, the editor stated:

Two of your favourite authors walked into my office recently and found me wading through stacks of letters from you fellows. All those letters had one thing in common – all asked for the return of a favourite character. As a result, those authors went away with instructions to get busy right away. This they did and their new stories start next week.

The two authors were W. E. Johns and Geo Rochester. Little faith can be placed in the veracity of the editor's remarks, but it is unlikely he would have made them had Biggles not been a popular character with *The Modern Boy's* readers.

The new story was "Biggles Flies North," which began in No. 23. Scenes from the story appeared twice on the front cover (Nos. 24 and 30). Readers had been complaining that the new size of the paper made it unwieldy, so with No. 25 the editor reduced the paper to slightly larger than the 1<sup>st</sup> series had been (and, incidentally, the same size as *Triumph*). "Modern Boy in its new form," remarked the editor hopefully, "will entrench itself more strongly than ever as *the favourite boys' paper*."

"Biggles Flies North" came to an end with No. 31, and two issues later "Biggles' Rescue Flight" appeared. No fewer than three front covers illustrated the story (Nos. 33, 36 and 38). The story ran for ten issues. After it ended in No. 42, Biggles was absent for a few weeks and then an old story from *The New Book of the Air*, "The Fledglings," was reprinted as "Biggles' Fledgling" in No. 47. Once again, the story was illustrated on the front cover.

The next story, "Wings Over Spain" (a.k.a. *Biggles in Spain*) appeared in No. 49 and ran to No. 59. This story was advertised more than any other Biggles story – no fewer than five front covers illustrated it (Nos. 49, 52-53, 56, 59), and five of the other six issues carried banner ads for it. This is another of my favourite Biggles stories, but it was to be the last for a while. Nearly six months elapsed before Biggles was back, and when he returned the Second World War had begun and *The Modern Boy* was showing the impact of new paper restrictions. The paper had shrunk back to its original size, there were very few illustrations and the front covers were all in blue and white. The whole appearance was of a cheap production, and the paper's days, with hindsight, seemed very clearly numbered.

The new Biggles story was "Castle Sinister" (a.k.a. *Biggles Secret Agent*) and it ran for ten issues (Nos. 78-87) with two cover illustrations (Nos. 78 and 83). This story was the first not to be illustrated by Radcliffe Wilson; instead it was provided with some very atmospheric drawings by Geo W. Blow. By now, however, *The Modern Boy* clearly lacked readers. It carried very few

advertisements in comparison to its glory days of 1934-35. No. 87 was the last issue. The editor informed readers that the paper was being merged with *Boys' Cinema*, and noted that Biggles could be found "next Wednesday in "The GEM" in a great new story entitled Biggles' South Sea Adventure."

*The Modern Boy* is not a common paper. Copies do appear regularly on Ebay, but it would take several years to complete a full set of issues with Biggles stories. Some numbers are more scarce than others. The issues from 1933 all appear to be scarce, as do the issues with First World War stories from 1934-35. Similarly, Nos. 1-8 of the new series are quite scarce (tabloid-sized papers generally appear to survive in lower numbers than smaller papers, perhaps because their greater size made them more difficult to store), and the final issues with "Castle Sinister" can also take some finding. Numbers with Biggles on the cover tend to be highly prized, especially No. 324 with Johns' own portrait of the pilot. Prices vary; some sellers will charge £5-£10 per copy with a Biggles story, sometimes more for numbers with Biggles-related covers. Ebay can be completely unpredictable, with single issues going for only a pound or two or very high sums. As always with Ebay, if a number of collectors are looking for the same thing at the same time prices will rocket, but otherwise a single issue can stagnate for months.

### Editorial Changes and Plot Suggestions

The editors of the Companion Papers had a range of functions, from organising printing and distribution of various papers to sourcing stories. Our interest in them lies in two particular functions: the changes they made to stories and the ideas they may have given authors for stories. We can be certain that any differences between stories as published in *The Modern Boy* and as published in books were not introduced by Johns. In the first place, any textual differences in *The Modern Boy* are unique to that paper. Coupled with that, in some cases stories were published in *The Modern Boy* after being published as books, and later editions of those books retained the original book text. Consequently, it is unlikely that Johns made the changes in *The Modern Boy*. In the second place, we know from the researches of Bill Lofts and others that editors working for the Companion Papers regularly altered stories published in their papers. Johns had no role in the company; if a difference between versions of the same story is observed, it is simpler to presume it was introduced by an editor and not by Johns.

### *Editorial Changes*

A clear majority of Biggles stories were published in *The Modern Boy* with only minor changes. All stories from "Biggles Flies East" to "Castle Sinister" were very slightly abridged, largely it would seem to ensure that each episode would fit the allocated page limit. More significant changes were made to a very few stories, and it is worth considering these more closely.

In the first place, the earlier Biggles stories were toned down for juvenile consumption. All stories from *The Camels are Coming*, for example, had some changes made to remove swearing. This was the case with "Biggles and the White Fokker," while another minor change was made to remove the

reference to “wine or women” at the beginning. The editor also was concerned to explain technical terms to younger readers. As we saw above, boxes with definitions were printed with many stories. At the beginning of “The White Fokker” the words “aircraft mechanics” were inserted in brackets after “ack-emmas” to explain the term.

Interestingly enough, not all references to alcohol or smoking were removed at this stage, even though criticism of these was a stock plot device in the school stories published by the Amalgamated Press, especially those written by Charles Hamilton. When “The Balloonatics” was reprinted as “The Duneville Sausage,” a crate of whisky was retained as the prize in the competition between Biggles and Wilks. It was not until the 1950s that other editors thought it credible that grown men should risk their lives for a case of lemonade.<sup>40</sup> Some minor cuts were still made to the story, however; the editor clearly was not happy with Colonel Raymond telling Biggles he would be able to get marvellously drunk, and therefore changed his line at the end of the story to “You’ll be able to drink as much of it as you like tonight.”

Further changes were made to “Affaire de Coeur.” This was published as “Biggles Falls in Love” on 14 October 1933. Printing the story was quite a daring move; contemporary boys’ adventure papers simply did not publish stories with so much romance. The editor did feel that he needed to tone some of the romance down and consequently made several changes to the story. Biggles’ initial meeting with Marie Janis was abridged, so that the joke about looking at Marie as if he had lived in a monastery vanished, along with his comment that he had been looking for her all his life. Similarly, the editor removed Biggles’ embrace with Marie and the moment when “their lips met!” The song at the end of the story was also cut, although in this case I suspect the editor removed it to make sure the story would fit onto the page.

When “Biggles Last Fight” (a.k.a. “The Last Show”) appeared in No. 298, Biggles’ whisky drinking was removed from the beginning of the story. The story was otherwise unchanged.

The most significant changes were made to the stories from *Biggles Flies Again*. Early episodes were again changed to remove swearing and occasional over-the-top moments. For example, the aggressive comment in “The Gold Rush,” in which Biggles tells the agent at Georgetown that he will rip out his “dirty little gizzard and throw it to the dogs,” was deleted from “Biggles’ Treasure Hunt.” In the same story “Good God” became “My Hat” and a few other words were cut or altered. At the end of the story the editor gave Hollister some additional remarks. When Hollister pays Biggles he now comments “and you’re welcome to the plane for your cheek,” and a new final line was added: “And the company has *not* failed.” The lines add little to the story, and I suspect they were added simply to ensure that the story finished neatly at the end of the page.

Episode four, “Biggles and the Head Hunters” (a.k.a. “Savages and Wings”) was quite abridged. Dawne’s death scene in particular was cut back. One could consider that this was again done to make the story fit the page, except that the editor added a completely unnecessary “Biggles Says” box to this

episode – containing anthropological notes on the Papuans which were not from the book. The editor may have decided that the tragic scene would disturb young readers.

Later episodes in the series experienced even more significant changes, not all for the better. In episode five, “Biggles’ Castaway” (a.k.a. “The Oriental Touch”), the editor decided to re-write one of Johns’ jokes. Compare the following original:

“What do you think was in that chest we fetched from Penang?” asked Biggles, speaking with difficulty.

“I’ll give you two guesses,” grinned Algy.

with this version:

“What do you think was in that chest we fetched from Penang?” asked Biggles, speaking with difficulty.

“Gosh! You don’t mean it was full of opium?” gasped Algy.

This change was not necessary to fit the story to the page limit, and can only have been made because the editor did not like the original. I assume he did not think drug-running a humorous matter. I find this particular change especially painful as I like Johns’ cynical humour.

Episode six, “Marooned by Biggles,” experienced more changes than any other Biggles story published in *The Modern Boy*. To begin with, the editor carefully removed references to Russia, native agitators and Ghandism, perhaps to avoid commenting on contemporary events. At the beginning of the story, he also added two extra paragraphs in which Biggles explains his innocence in the Li Chi affair to Nielson:

That blessed pirate hoodwinked us properly! We picked him up at sea, and he told us he was a victim of Li Chi’s, and paid us to transport him and his men to an island where a chappie he told us was Li Chi was hanging out. It wasn’t until some days after, when it was too late to do anything, that we discovered our castaway was Li Chi himself!

However, enough of that! What are you doing here? You’re not looking too good if I may say so!

This somewhat clumsy interpolation was unnecessary to the plot. Another addition was worse than that, as it simply restated something that would be said a paragraph or two later. After marooning Nikitoff, Biggles and Algy hold a remarkable conversation:

“H’m!” grunted Algy. “And I suppose you were responsible for that “world flyers” tripe in the newspaper?”

“Quite!” grinned Biggles. “That was the bait for the trap, laddie. You see, we knew that when Master Ivan received the code message he’d

be in a mighty hurry to get to Teheran. And the quickest way of getting there was by plane. So we concocted that rot about ourselves, had it inserted in a very prominent position in the paper where Ivan was bound to see it, and arranged that the message reached him after he's looked at the paper.

'Got the idea? Ivan gets his message – realises that he's got to hop off to Teheran right away – remembers that we're due to leave for Teheran – comes along to see if he can book a passage with us – and walks right into the trap!'

"Great Work!" approved Algy.

The problem with this insertion is that the editor left in a passage from the original story in which Biggles explains the same thing, rather more tersely, only two paragraphs later:

I fixed the whole thing up with Pat. All we did was to shove that paragraph in the paper, send the message in his own code, and hoped he'd rise to the bait. Well he did.

Johns' readers would, I believe, have found the repetition strange. The longer explanation also states the obvious, thereby undermining the humour and pace of the story. Indeed, it is so clumsily executed that the editor did not notice that Johns spelled the capital of Iran "Tehran", and that this spelling appeared at the beginning of the story.

The editor's crowning glory, however, was a soliloquy which he placed in the mouth of Ivan Nikitoff when that man realised he had been marooned:

"So!" he exclaimed, in a voice harsh with rage. "Those men knew me – knew that the name I gave them was false! They have been playing with me! Fool that I was not to make inquiries about them before setting off with them in their aeroplane!

'I have been tricked – played with as if I was a simple child – Ivan Nikitoff, tricked by a pair of innocent-looking Englishmen! And to think that I suspected nothing when their engine gave trouble and they had to descend at this desolate spot! Bah! I must be growing old and feeble-witted! I shall be a laughing stock if this leaks out!

'Let me see what the cursed Englishmen have to say!' he ended, with a growl.

Tripe like this could occasionally be found in *The Modern Boy* or other Companion Papers, but it is unlike anything Johns ever wrote. All three new passages, in fact, stand out as clumsy additions. In the first place, all are unnecessary to the story and far too melodramatic. In the second place, they betray language and syntax that I cannot recall Johns ever using. For example, I don't think Biggles ever used the phrase "hanging out." I also do not recall Johns summarising the main points of an argument by separating

them with hyphens. As for Ivan's soliloquy, if Johns wrote that then I am a Dutchman.

The same hand had one more go in the next episode, "Tricksters of the Red Sea" (a.k.a. "The Sheikh and the Greek"). The editor removed Johns' original ending and substituted his own, in which he again felt obliged to state the obvious:

Biggles chuckled. The Sheikh and the Greek had attempted to rob him, and now he had his revenge. It was not by accident that the gunboat was there, or that the suitcases were filled with hashish.

The trap had been carefully prepared by himself and Captain Watkins!

Although the editor made a number of changes throughout this series, it is odd that he added so much more to "Marooned by Biggles" than to any other story. The reason may lie in a quarter-page advertisement that occupied part of the last page of the story. The advertisement cut into the bottom half of the second column of text (and occupied all the space that would have been occupied by the bottom half of the first column). Advertisements like this needed to be worked around, and often this meant that the text had to be changed to make it fit the altered page. The editor may not have been able to move this advertisement to another page in the issue. If the story had not contained the extra paragraphs it would have been about a column shorter, meaning it would have left a blank space. Such a space would have been too large to fill with a box or an editorial comment, and so some extra text was necessary.

Ivan's soliloquy occurred just where the top of the advertisement cut into the bottom half of the second column. Had the soliloquy not been placed where it was, Biggles' letter to Ivan would have had to be fitted into a very narrow column. This would not have been possible as there would not have been room for the signature. One can therefore understand why the editor added text at this point. Mind you, had the editor not added two paragraphs earlier in the story, and if he had cut the odd line here or there, he would not have been faced with this problem.

This leads one to conclude that this particular editor was something of a novice. It is worth repeating at this point that most Biggles stories received very little change when printed in *The Modern Boy*. As we have seen, stories published in the paper prior to this series usually had only minor changes. Furthermore, after this series no Biggles story received any more than minor cuts. One could understand that the somewhat adult tone of *Biggles Flies Again* would have necessitated some pruning, but its serialisation stands out as the only occasion in *The Modern Boy* in which Johns' stories were dramatically changed. Given this, and the rather ham-fisted approach to the job, I suspect that the usual editor, Charles Boff, may have had his holiday at this time and handed over to a sub-editor, if not from the beginning then perhaps after episode three. Sadly, we have no idea who this putative sub-editor might have been.

### *Editorial Plot Suggestions*

Editors in the Juvenile Department at the Amalgamated Press frequently made suggestions to authors for new plots or for ways to improve particular plots. The editor of the *Sexton Blake Library*, H. W. Twyman, told Bill Lofts that he had often worked out whole plots with one of his star authors, Gwyn Evans, and other former staff members recalled that they had been paid several guineas to supply plot ideas to Charles Hamilton.<sup>41</sup> Hedley O'Mant claimed to have devised the plot for the famous "Bunter Court" series, and C. M. Down is reputed to have suggested to Hamilton that he try to write a Greyfriars "thriller" in the manner of Edgar Wallace, which led Hamilton to write the Ravenspur Grange series – which, I must admit, is a Greyfriars series I cannot abide.<sup>42</sup>

Down may have suggested some plot ideas to Johns. Given his putative role, it is useful to summarise his background here. Charles Maurice Down had joined the Amalgamated Press in about 1906 as an office boy. After the outbreak of the First World War he joined the 1/1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Hertfordshire Regiment as a Second Lieutenant and transferred to the RFC in September 1916. After training he joined 24 Kite Balloon Section, part of No 2 Kite Balloon Company, in the First Balloon Wing in the RFC's I Brigade, which was associated with the First Army and based near Lille in northern France. He was wounded in December that year and spent two months in hospital. During an action-packed 1917 he was promoted to Captain in command of the Balloon Company, awarded the Croix de Guerre and mentioned in despatches by no less a person than the Commander in Chief, General Sir Douglas Haig.<sup>43</sup>

Demobilised in February 1919, Down returned to the Amalgamated Press and the Companion Papers. He worked as a sub-editor on *The Magnet* and wrote some "substitute" tales (i.e., stories published under one of Charles Hamilton's pseudonyms but not actually written by that great man) for that paper and *The Gem*. Two of his stories, published in *The Magnet* Nos. 601 and 602 in 1919, involved the chums of the Greyfriars Remove touring First World War battlefields in France, showing to grim effect his on-the-ground knowledge. In 1921 he became the new controlling editor of the Companion Papers.

Down and Johns would have had much in common. Both had been in the Territorial Army before the War and both had been in the RFC. Both were from Hertfordshire. For a short period in 1914, both of their Territorial Army Units were even in the same Brigade. I suspect that they probably chatted about their experiences. Like other Amalgamated Press editors, Down may also have discussed potential plots with Johns, or made suggestions to him to write a particular style of story. There is something of a change in tone from the earliest First World War Biggles stories, as published in *The Camels are Coming*, *Biggles of the Camel Squadron* and *Biggles Learns to Fly*, which can be observed in the next book, *Biggles in France*. *Biggles in France* has more stories based around japes and practical jokes. There are several stories about the rivalry between the officers of 266 and 287 squadrons, including stories in which they trick each other or make bets with each other. A similar

concentration on pranks can be found in several of the “Baldy’s Angels” stories that appeared in *The Ranger* from 1931. I suspect that Down believed that children wanted to read this kind of RFC story, and that he may have passed on to Johns the message to write more stories of this type.<sup>44</sup>

The best evidence that Down may have contributed to one of Johns’ plots, however, comes from the article that Down wrote for *Popular Flying* in April 1935. Down recalled that during a flight the stabilising fin of his balloon ripped under the pressure of the wind, and the balloon immediately plunged to 200 feet. The balloon then began to dive and rear up again while the fabric ripped further. The cable went and the balloon shot up in the air and sailed towards Germany. Down clipped on a parachute and jumped out:

I remember having an entirely detached feeling at that moment, rather as if I were a mere spectator of what was happening. After what seemed like a long drop, the chute opened with a tremendous jerk, which caused me to somersault in the air.

His account is similar to the first story in *Biggles in France*, which appeared in *The Modern Boy* No. 335 as “Biggles Goes Ballooning.” In this story Biggles also gets caught in a balloon – this time in occupied German territory – which breaks free from its cable but sails towards the English lines. Biggles parachutes and, like Down, experiences a sense of detachment – “as he somersaulted slowly through space, the scene around him seemed to take on the curious aspect of a slow motion film.” Like Down, Biggles experienced “a sudden terrific jerk” when the parachute opened.

I think that the similarity between the two stories is unlikely to be coincidental, especially as Down published his story in a magazine edited by Johns, and Johns published his in a paper controlled by Down. There is no real proof, of course, but I suspect that the two had a chat and Down offered Johns a plot idea. Johns used it and later returned the favour to Down by commissioning his story for his own magazine.

### Biggles and the circulation of *The Modern Boy*

On rare occasions when former readers of *The Modern Boy* have identified their favourite characters in the paper, only a few have identified Biggles as the main reason for reading it. The most famous such person, perhaps, was Kingsley Amis, who wrote with such recall about the stories in *The Modern Boy* that it is clear he must have lived, breathed and dreamed Biggles.<sup>45</sup> Other famous people have identified Captain Justice as their favourite character. Charles Hamilton fans usually claimed to read it for Ken King; and fans of Geo Rochester identified his stories as their reason for taking the paper.

The problem with a paper that has several key characters is that all readers cannot be pleased all the time. No one reader is likely to find all of Biggles, Ken King, Standish, Scotty and Captain Justice entertaining. It is usually one or another. I cannot stand Captain Justice and find Ken King a mild curiosity only. I like some of Rochester’s yarns, but have difficulty getting through a series of “Scotty” stories. Assuming that I am not abnormal, I consider it likely

that the circulation of *The Modern Boy* could have had peaks and troughs, with the peaks associated with periods when more popular characters were in the paper. Twopence pieces were not common during the 1930s and a reader is only likely to have bought the paper when it contained stories which were of interest. While in any year the paper may have sold enough copies to pay its way, there would have been a danger that long absences of favourite characters could lead to an irreparable decline in sales (and the resulting ability of the editorial staff to secure advertising in the paper, which was a key factor in bringing in bigger profits).

One of the problems in researching *The Modern Boy* is that we actually know very little about the paper. We have no real idea what its circulation was at any time, in absolute terms or relative to other Companion Papers. We know virtually nothing about its editors. Bill Lofts, who met virtually every surviving writer or staff member to have played any sort of role in the juvenile papers issued by the Amalgamated Press, met Charles Boff only once and then said very little about the meeting.<sup>46</sup> During the 1950s-70s, in addition, most story paper collectors favoured Sexton Blake or Charles Hamilton. Very few seem to have been interested in Biggles. As a result, even when these collectors met people who could probably have passed on a great deal of information about the Biggles stories – people like C. M. Down, who had several meetings with Lofts and even attended meetings of collectors – they never seem to have asked a question about Biggles.

The upshot is that we can only make half-guesses about the circulation of the paper, based on the evidence contained in the paper itself. Those guesses may offer some hints about when *The Modern Boy* was at its peak and when it began to decline and why, but they must always be hedged with a great deal of uncertainty.

One thing we can judge from the first series of Biggles stories is that Biggles must have proved popular with the readers. Not only did Biggles come back to *The Modern Boy* shortly afterwards, in series that seem to have been specially written for it (most of *Biggles of the Camel Squadron* and *Biggles Learns to Fly*), but Johns gave up writing Biggles stories for his own magazine, made him a juvenile hero, and dedicated Biggles stories to *The Modern Boy* until it folded. These things are unlikely to have happened if the character had not been popular, and indeed if he had not had quite an impact. We can therefore assume that Biggles arrived with a bang and developed a considerable following which was reflected in good sales of *The Modern Boy* during 1933.

The next series, *Biggles Learns to Fly*, seems to have increased that popularity. The extra editorial attention to Biggles, which included box ads, a front cover with a portrait of the pilot, a regular portrait of the pilot within the paper and articles on Johns himself, must reflect a character that was popular. No. 323 was “boomed,” being labelled a “Special Camping Exhibition Number.” Readers were offered the chance of winning bicycles and camping outfits. The number also featured another high-profile new story, ostensibly written by record-breaking racer Malcolm Campbell. Editors usually would not waste “boomed” issues like this, which were designed to give circulation a

boost, on unpopular characters. It was more likely that they would choose to start a new series of tales of a popular character in a “boomed” issue, in the hope that new readers would be tempted by the special offers, like what they read and stick with the paper.

It cannot be a coincidence that several of the next Biggles serials coincided with “boomed” issues or with special issues of some sort. As noted above, “Wings of Fortune” started in a “boomed” issue, as did “Biggles Flies East.” “Wings of Menace” started in No. 366, which was not “boomed,” but which nonetheless featured two new competitions – for a booklet on “Railway Wonders of the World” and for a Stanley Gibbons Stamp Catalogue. Similarly, “The Mountain of Light” started in No. 385 with a new competition to win a cricket bat autographed by the members of the touring South African cricket team. The only odd series out in this run was the second tranche of stories from *Biggles in France* which started in No. 356, and it is significant, in this context, that this number featured Biggles on the front cover –which may have been enough, in the editor’s opinion, to attract additional readers.

A few weeks into the serialisation of “Biggles Learns to Fly,” the editor noted “overseas fellows are joining the Modern Boy ranks like – well, like billy-ho. Their number is increasing week by week – rapidly.” Although few if any of the remarks made in editors’ columns can be trusted, this one is worth accepting as one can see no obvious reason why the editor would have made the point had it not been true. He was not trying to encourage readers to find other readers, or any of the other circulation-boosting tactics editors usually employed. It is of course impossible to judge the actual reason for the increase in overseas circulation, but it is possible that some of the overseas fascination with Biggles dates from this time.

Further evidence of Biggles’ popularity can be seen in No. 356. This included a feature “This uncle of mine” by Johns’ son Jack (possibly pretending to be Johns’ nephew because his parents were separated). The article may as well have been written by Johns, as many of the comments on Johns’ career are clearly fantasy – but the fact that such an article was thought to be of interest to readers speaks volumes for the popularity of Biggles with readers. As Jack Johns stated in the article, “there are very few fellows today who do not know Flying-Officer W. E. Johns by name.”

1934-35 appear to have seen *The Modern Boy* at its peak. The paper carried a lot of advertisements (usually between 10-15 every week), and advertisers did not bother with papers with low circulations. It is unlikely to be a coincidence that Biggles appeared in the paper nearly every week during these two years.

1936 would appear to have been the year in which *The Modern Boy* began to lose some support. Advertisements in the paper dropped below ten per issue. Not only was Biggles absent from the paper for long periods, but Hamilton had temporarily retired Ken King and was trying out a range of school stories in the paper. New characters, including Rochester’s Scotty of the Secret Squadron and John Templer’s Jaggars of the Air Police, appeared in response to readers’ thirst for flying stories, but these particular stories do not

seem to have been a great success. At this time Johns had other fish to fry – he had invented Steeley and was publishing “Aerial Enemy Number One” in *Air Stories*, and had also written *Blue Blood Runs Red*. He seems to have felt like writing adult fiction for a while.

Consequently, when a new Biggles story was available, this was a significant matter worth advertising. In No. 440 the editor told his readers that a new Biggles story was coming soon. Discussing the story, he claimed “it far surpasses any of his previous Biggles stories (though you may not think that possible!) and as lots of new readers are bound to be attracted by it, I suggest you do the thing I have many times asked you to do in the past – order it from your newsagent. Otherwise, when the extra rush comes for the new BIGGLES stories, he may sell out all his available copies of MODERN BOY before you can capture yours!”

Of course, it is difficult to place too much faith in this claim, as such claims were a regular tactic to try to lock in readers. What is significant is not the claim that there would be a rush, but rather the fact that the editor chose to advertise a forthcoming Biggles story as the chief cause of the “extra rush.” This might be taken as proof of Biggles’ popularity at the time.

Some further possible evidence for Biggles’ popularity with readers can be found in issue 496, when the editor remarked in his column about “Biggles’ Treasure Island,” “never before have I known a story prove such an instantaneous success as Air-Ace Biggles’ latest adventure. Letters praising it have been pouring in ever since it started, and still they come!” Of course, letters do not equate to extra sales, but they do show that a new Biggles story was a significant event for readers.

It is significant, as well, that after “Biggles in Africa” appeared several new Biggles stories commenced in a “boomed” issue. “Biggles Fights Alone” (No. 452), “Biggles Goes to War” (No. 503) and “Biggles on the Treasure Trail” (2<sup>nd</sup> ser. No. 1) were all “boomed.” This may indicate that the editor tried to make the biggest bang with issues that would attract more readers.

Front cover illustrations and banner ads may also reveal the growing attempts by the editor to use Biggles to sell the paper. For the first few years, when *The Modern Boy’s* circulation appears to have been strong, Biggles only featured rarely in front cover illustrations, or in banner ads at the top of the front cover. From 1937, however, his front cover appearances became more and more frequent, as the following figures show:

Biggles’ Treasure Island:	one illustration, four banner ads
Biggles Goes to War:	one illustration, one banner ad
Biggles on the Treasure Trail:	one illustration, three banner ads
Biggles Flies North:	two illustrations, four banner ads
Biggles’ Rescue Flight:	three illustrations, five banner ads

Wings Over Spain: five illustrations, five banner ads

The pattern is clear; as the years passed, the editor appreciated more and more that Biggles was a drawcard and went to greater lengths to let potential buyers know when a Biggles story was in the paper. In 1939 an editor recorded that Biggles stories had been voted by British boys as the most popular of any published (see chapter five), and this popularity is reflected in the front covers of *The Modern Boy*.

On the evidence above, it seems likely that, during 1936-37, the overall circulation of the paper declined. The decision to re-model the paper in 1938 was clearly designed to make it stand out more from its competitors and is likely to have been designed to boost circulation. The new first issue was stuffed with additional advertisements (59 in all, including several full-page). The content of the paper was also re-modelled so that it contained many (eight) short serial stories. This was possibly designed to make the paper more like the Amalgamated Press' main competitors, the D. C. Thomson papers and in particular its stalwarts such as *Adventure*. Other Amalgamated Press juvenile papers (but not Companion Papers) such as *Champion* and *Triumph* already followed this approach.

One suspects that *The Modern Boy* had been losing readers, like other Companion Papers, to D. C. Thomson papers and the editor was therefore trying to win back support. Radical re-imagining like this could often result in a bounce as people tried out the new paper. In issue 3 of the new series the editor reported that "the new Modern Boy is a terrific success. The expectations of my staff and myself were pretty high; results have more than justified them." Bounces, by definition, however, do not last, and the editor was to try further desperate tactics as 1938 and 1939 unfolded, including two further changes in the size of the paper, although the final change was probably forced by paper shortages associated with the outbreak of the Second World War.

We do not know what the circulation of *The Modern Boy* was by the time "Castle Sinister" appeared towards the end of 1939. By that time Biggles had already been absent for 18 weeks and war had been declared. *The Modern Boy* now carried very few advertisements, and when paper rationing reduced the available paper it was the first Companion Paper to be cut. This does not actually mean that it was selling fewer copies each week than all the other Companion Papers. The decision to cancel the paper would probably have reflected the amount of paper actually available for printing. A paper that required a lot of paper may have been easier to cancel than papers which required less paper.

We know that by late 1939 the circulation of other Companion Papers had declined; *The Magnet* was now selling only about 40,000 copies a week and *The Gem* only 15,400 copies. The most successful papers published by the juvenile department of the Amalgamated Press were *Champion* and *Thriller*. The former sold about 150,000 copies and the latter more than that. Yet *Thriller* was also cut in 1940, probably because the Amalgamated Press simply did not have enough paper to print both papers. I doubt whether *The*

*Modern Boy* was selling as much as *Champion*, but in 1939 it may have been cut simply because there was not enough paper to print it as well as *Champion*, *Thriller* and *The Magnet*. Other papers with lower circulations ironically survived because the paper remaining once *The Modern Boy* was cut could be used to print them.

One hint that *The Modern Boy* may not have been the least popular Companion paper during 1936-39 can be found in the large number of annuals associated with the title that came out in those years (see next chapter). It is unlikely, if the paper did not still have a fairly robust sale base, that the editors would have linked so many annuals to it.

*Table 2. List of Biggles Stories in The Modern Boy*

<i>Volume</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Original Title</i>
257	7 January 1933	Biggles and the White Fokker	The White Fokker (TCC)
258	14 January 1933	Peril Over the Line	The Packet (TCC)
25	21 January 1933	Fighting Mad	J-9982 (TCC)
260	28 January 1933	The Duneville Sausage	The Balloonatics (TCC)
261	4 February 1933	The Blue Demon	The Blue Devil (TCC)
262	11 February 1933	The Mystery Gun	Camouflage (TCC)
263	18 February 1933	Man Hunt in the Air	The Carrier (TCC)
264	25 February 1933	The Flying Circus	Spads and Spandaus (TCC)
265	4 March 1933	Secret Orders	The Zone Call (TCC)
266	11 March 1933	The Decoy	The Decoy (TCC)
267	18 March 1933	The Boob	The Boob (TCC)
268	25 March 1933	Battle of Flowers	The Battle of Flowers (TCC)
269	1 April 1933	The Flying Arsenal	The Bomber (TCC)
270	8 April 1933	White Feather	On Leave (TCC)
271	15 April 1933	Lost in the Sky	Fog (TCC)
284	15 July 1933	The Flying Professor	The Professor (BCS)
285	22 July 1933	Biggles' Joyride	The Joy-Ride (BCS)
286	29 July 1933	The Bridge They Couldn't Blow Up	The Bridge Party (BCS)
287	5 August 1933	The Bottle Bombers	The Bottle Party (BCS)
288	12 August 1933	Biggles Plays Tit for Tat	The Trap (BCS)
289	19 August 1933	The Funk	The Funk (BCS)
290	26 August 1933	The Wing Riders	The Professor Comes Back (BCS)
291	2 September 1933	Biggles On the Trail	The Thought Reader (BCS)
292	9 September 1933	Quits	The Great Arena (BCS)
293	16 September 1933	Biggles in the Trenches	Biggles Finds his Feet (BCS)
294	23 September 1933	The Dragon's Lair	The Dragon's Lair (BCS)
295	30 September 1933	Biggles' Day Off	Biggles' Day Off (BCS)
296	7 October 1933	Scotland Forever	Scotland Forever (BCS)
297	14 October 1933	Biggles Falls in Love	Affaire de Coeur (TCC)
298	21 October 1933	Biggles' Last Fight	The Last Show (TCC)
323	14 April 1934	Biggles Learns to Fly	First Time Up / Landed But Lost (BLF)
324	21 April 1934	Biggles' First Fight	The Boat for France / Battle (BLF)
325	28 April 1934	Biggles the Scout	Plots and Plans / Late for Dinner (BLF)
326	5 May 1934	Spy in the Sky	The Lost Airman / Snow and Bullets (BLF)
327	12 May 1934	Crashed Flyers	A Daring Stunt / A Line of Bayonets (BLF)
328	19 May 1934	Knights of the Sky	The Dawn Patrol / The Stranded Pup (BLF)

329	26 May 1934	The Laughing Spy	Biggles' Special Mission / The Decoy (BLF)
330	2 June 1934	Biggles' Bullseye	Eyes of the Guns / Neck or Nothing (BLF)
331	9 June 1934	Biggles Buys the Sky	A Perforated Wreck / The Black-Crossed Enemy (BLF)
332	16 June 1934	Biggles' Big Battle	Ready for the "Show" / "Share this Amongst You!" (BLF)
333	23 June 1934	Biggles' Surprise Packet	The Pup's First Fight / Caught Napping (BLF)
334	30 June 1934	Biggles' Revenge	The Yellow Hun / "I Got Him!" (BLF)
335	7 July 1934	Biggles Goes Ballooning	Down to Earth / A Desperate Chance (BIF)
336	14 July 1934	Biggles and the Runaway Tank	One Bomb and Two Pockets / "Stand Clear – I'm Coming!" (BIF)
337	21 July 1934	Flying Luck	Biggles Gets a Bull / Lost in the Sky (BIF)
338	28 July 1934	Biggles and the Mad Hatter	The Human Railway / Orange Fire (BIF)
339	4 August 1934	Biggles' Sky-High Hat Trick	Out for Records / Biggles' Bombshell (BIF)
340-46	11 August 1934 - 22 September 1934	Wings of Fortune	The Cruise of the Condor
356	1 December 1934	Biggles and the Flying Camera	The Camera / Thumbs to Noses / What a Bullet Did (BIF)
357	8 December 1934	Biggles' Sky-High Spy	Suspicious / Off and Away (BIF)
358	15 December 1934	Biggles' Xmas Box	Biggles' Xmas Box (BAA)
359	22 December 1934	Biggles' Christmas Tree	Biggles' Christmas Tree (BAA)
360	29 December 1934	Biggles Carves the Turkey	Turkey Hunting / Biggles Gets the Bird (BIF)
361	5 January 1935	Biggles' Paperchase	A Sporting Offer / Getting a Gramophone (BIF)
362	12 January 1935	Biggles and the Flying Wardrobe	Twelve Thousand Feet Up / Returned Unknown (BIF)
363	19 January 1935	Biggles' Borrowed Plumes	Under Open Arrest / "The Laugh's With Us" (BIF)
364	26 January 1935	Flying Crusaders	'He Shot Him to Bits!' / "Written Off" (BIF)
365	2 February 1935	Biggles and the Joker	Biggles and the Joker (BAA)
366-375	9 February 1935 - 13 April 1935	Winged Menace	The Black Peril
377	27 April 1935	Biggles' Treasure Hunt	The Gold Rush (BFA)
378	4 May 1935	Biggles and the Blue Orchid	The Maid and the Mountains/ The Blue Orchid (BFA)
379	11 May 1935	Sandy's Lagoon	Beauty and the Beast /

			Bob's Box (BFA)
380	18 May 1935	Biggles and the Head Hunters	Savages and Wings (BFA)
381	25 May 1935	Biggles' Castaway	The Oriental Touch / Down in the Forest (BFA)
382	1 June 1935	Marooned by Biggles	Three Weeks (BFA)
383	8 June 1935	Tricksters of the Red Sea	The Sheikh and the Greek (BFA)
384	15 June 1935	The Plane Wreckers	Yellow Freight / The Last Show (BFA)
385-394	22 June 1935 - 24 August 1935	The Mountain of Light	Biggles Hits the Trail
395	31 August 1935	Biggles' Night Out	Biggles' Night Out (BAA)
399-412	28 September 1935 - 28 December 1935	Biggles Flies East	Biggles Flies East
413-422	4 January 1936 - 7 March 1936	The Gold Flyers	Biggles & Co.
443-451	1 August 1936 - 26 September 1936	Biggles in Africa	Biggles in Africa
452-461	3 October 1936 - 5 December 1936	Biggles Fights Alone	Biggles Air Commodore
490	26 June 1937	Haunted Treasure	Biggles Flies West
491-501	3 July 1937 - 11 September 1937	Biggles' Treasure Island	Biggles Flies West
503-512	25 September 1937 - 27 November 1937	Biggles Goes to War	Biggles Goes to War
NS 1-8	19 February 1938 - 9 April 1938	Biggles on the Treasure Trail	Biggles Flies South
NS 23-31	23 July 1938 - 17 September 1938	Biggles Flies North	Biggles Flies North
NS 33-42	1 October 1938 - 3 December 1938	Biggles' Rescue Flight	The Rescue Flight
NS 47	7 January 1939	Biggles' Fledgling	The Fledglings (NBA)
NS 49-59	21 January 1939 - 1 April 1939	Wings Over Spain	Biggles in Spain
NS 78-87	12 August 1939 - 14 October 1939	Castle Sinister	Biggles Secret Agent

Key: TCC = *The Camels are Coming*; BCS = *Biggles of the Camel Squadron*; BLF = *Biggles Learns to Fly*; BIF = *Biggles in France*; BAA = *Biggles Air Ace*; BFA = *Biggles Flies Again*; NBA = *The New Book of the Air*.

## Chapter Three. The Modern Boy's Annual

W. E. Johns contributed five Biggles stories to *Modern Boy* annuals between 1935 and 1941. These five stories are relatively obscure in the Biggles canon. Until 1999, when three of them were published in *Biggles Air Ace*, they were only available in the original annuals. The two others were not included in that book, because they are nearly word-for-word copies of earlier Biggles stories with simply a few names changed. You are not missing much if you have not read them.

Many of the Companion Papers had an accompanying annual, which always came out at the end of the year before which it was dated. The annual for *The Magnet* and *The Gem* was *The Greyfriars Holiday Annual*. *The Popular* had *The Popular Book of Boy's Stories*, which continued under that name even when *The Popular* became *The Ranger*. *Chums* had *The British Boy's Annual*, which seems to have ended in 1934 when *Chums* ceased to be a monthly publication and itself became an annual.

*The Modern Boy* had several annuals associated with it. From 1930 there was a *Modern Boy's Annual*, but other annual-sized books were also released. For example, we know of the *Modern Boy's Book of Engineering Wonders of the World*, *Modern Boy's Book of True Adventure*, *Modern Boy's Book of Pirates*, *Modern Boy's Book of Aircraft*, *Modern Boy's Book of Racing Cars* and even the *Modern Boy's Book of Motors, Ships & Engines*. Johns himself wrote the *Modern Boy's Book of Pirates* in 1939 and edited the *Modern Boy's Book of Aircraft* and possibly also its successor, the *Modern Boy's New Book of Aircraft*. He also contributed to the common or garden *Modern Boy's Annuals*. For example, he contributed paintings to several annuals, including those published in 1932, 1933 and 1936, and is named as the author of articles in the 1936, 1937, 1938 and 1939 annuals, although he certainly contributed articles to earlier annuals.<sup>47</sup>

The five Biggles stories that appeared in the annuals were:

1935	Biggles "On the Spot"	<i>Modern Boy's Book of Adventure Stories</i>
1937	Biggles' Exciting Night	<i>Modern Boy's Annual 1937</i>
1938	Biggles Takes the Bait	<i>Modern Boy's Annual 1938</i>
1940	Bertie the Boob	<i>Modern Boy's Annual 1940</i>
1941	Biggles On the Trail	<i>Modern Boy's Annual 1941</i>

The first three stories are original First World War flying stories, classics of their kind. "Biggles' Exciting Night" was later re-used by Johns in *Spitfire Parade* for the story "Bertie Picks the Lock," and is one of the stories in which Biggles transports an agent into enemy territory – but, in a twist to the tale, is forced to blow up a lock himself after the agent gets cold feet! "Biggles On the Spot" is an exciting story about the attempts by the von Kleiner circus to kill Biggles after he strafed that unfortunate man's aerodrome and killed him in

his bed. "Biggles Takes the Bait" is my favourite, and recounts a German plot to entice Biggles into enemy territory by sending an officer posing as a British Major – the euphoniously named Erich von Scrat or, as Biggles remarks, Erich von Rat.

"Bertie the Boob" is simply "The Boob" from *The Camels are Coming* with a few minor changes. This of course was the story that introduced Algy and is rightly revered by Biggles enthusiasts everywhere. As a result it is somewhat disturbing to read this revised version in which Algy has been replaced as Biggles' cousin by "Bertie!" "Biggles on the Trail" is "The Thought Reader" from *Biggles of the Camel Squadron*, again with only minor changes to update it, rather clumsily, to the Second World War. Not even the title was original, as when "The Thought Reader" was first published in *The Modern Boy* No. 291 it was named "Biggles On the Trail."

The first four stories were illustrated by Radcliffe Wilson, who illustrated most of the Biggles stories in *The Modern Boy*. Geo W. Blow, who illustrated the final Biggles story in *The Modern Boy*, "Castle Sinister," contributed more fine atmospheric pictures to the 1941 annual.

The first three annuals are not especially rare, so readers unable to find either of the two editions of *Biggles Air Ace* can eventually discover the stories at a reasonable price. The 1940 and 1941 annuals are both rare and difficult to find, and the 1941 annual is sometimes offered at quite high prices. Readers unwilling to break the bank for a copy of this book should look for a copy of *Biggles & Co* No. 17, published in 1993, as that issue reprinted "Biggles On the Trail."

For completists, the *Modern Boy's Book of Adventure Stories* comes with green, blue and red spines. All of the annuals would have come with a dustjacket, with the same picture as the one pasted to the front board, but these are barely ever found these days.

#### Box 4. The Growth of British War Flying Fiction

It may have been Jules Verne who first popularised aviation fiction in Britain when his tale *Clipper of the Clouds* was translated and presented, to an appreciative audience, by the *Boy's Own Paper* in 1886-87. Similar tales crop up afterwards, such as Percy Collingwood's 1887 novel *The Log of the Flying Fish* which, like Verne's tale, featured a marvellous flying machine. Other books with aviation themes to appear at this time were written by William Moffat, George Griffiths, H. G. Wells and W. Holt-White. Even Rudyard Kipling wrote two short science-fiction stories set in future utopias where scientists had used flying machines to abolish warfare and establish benevolent dictatorships. Verne himself revisited the theme in his 1904 novel *The Master of the World*.

Such stories were fantastic in the extreme, and could only really be popular in an era when powered flight was not feasible. The invention of the aeroplane, and its relatively swift uptake in the next few years worldwide, changed all that. Readers now had different expectations and stories began to feature more realistic aircraft. One, Herbert Strang's 1906 *King of the Air*, emphasised the heroic nature of the pilot, thereby establishing another popular fictional motif.

At this stage aeroplanes and aviators were extremely rare and could cause a sensation whenever spotted. In the early days of the Royal Flying Corps before the First World War, a soldier with RFC wings on his breast would often be pointed out in the street with undisguised awe. Alfred Harmsworth, owner of the *Daily Mail*, realised that aviation could sell newspapers and therefore dreamed up a succession of schemes to drive popular interest. He offered a series of prizes for aerial feats and gave attempts to win these plenty of coverage. The first prize he offered was £1,000 for the first flight from Calais to Dover, and when Louis Blériot flew the Channel in 1909 Harmsworth covered the event. He then offered £10,000 for the first flight from London to Manchester (won by Frenchman Louis Paulhan in 1910), and in 1911 held the first air race, with another £10,000 prize.<sup>48</sup> Harmsworth's newspapers also helped turn the aviator Claude Grahame-White into a popular hero. "Hundreds turned out to watch his demonstration flights, and he was greeted with standing ovations when he entered theatres and restaurants."<sup>49</sup> In 1911 Grahame-White released a film with aerial views of London which helped raise the profile of aviation even further.

Given this publicity, it was perhaps natural that boys should be interested in aviation and want to read about it in story papers. In the early years of the twentieth century aeroplanes and airships became stock items in one of the popular genres of contemporary fiction, the invasion story. Such stories were a regular feature in boys' papers prior to the First World War, so much so that they were satirised in P. G. Wodehouse's tale *The Swoop*. The basic ingredients of the invasion tale were a foreign horde (generally German, but Russian, Chinese and other oriental invaders were not unknown), a series of battles in well-known British towns, and a young lad who had access to a fantastic invention which determined the outcome of the war in Britain's

favour. Soon the secret invention became a mighty airship or aeroplane. H. G. Wells' classic *The War in the Air*, which described German airships bombarding New York and aerial battles, provided a template for others to follow. Examples in boys' papers include "Britain's Revenge" by John Tregellis, published in the *Boys' Friend* in 1907 and featuring battles between German and British airships, the story "The Aerial War, a Tale of What Might Be," which appeared in the Aldine *Boys' Own Library* in 1907 and featured aerial battles and bombing raids by British and German aerial battleships, and Andrew Gray's "The World at War," which was serialised in the *Boys' Herald* in 1908 and featured a massive Japanese aerial armada attacking Britain.<sup>50</sup>

Such invasion tales fed off popular alarmism. When Blériot flew the Channel in 1909 newspapers asked what there was to stop aerial invaders from attacking Britain. In 1911, when the Italians invaded Libya and their pilots threw bombs on Turkish soldiers, newspapers again highlighted the dangers of attack from the air on an unprotected Britain. Finally, the build-up of the German Zeppelin fleet, coupled with sightings of an unidentified airship over Sheerness in October 1912 and the admission in the House of Commons by the then First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill, that Britain had no airships capable of intercepting the intruder, further stimulated fears of an invasion from the air.

These fears may have fuelled further invasion stories. In 1912 Tregellis published another story in *Boys' Friend*, "The Flying Armada," which featured aerial battles between very unrealistic aircraft. During 1912-13 the *Dreadnought* carried a serial by Colin Collins which had Claude Grahame-White fighting against German airships. From 1912 Captain Frank Shaw, himself a keen flyer, published several stories in *Chums* featuring German invasions and air battles. The sequence began with his short story "No Use for Britain," in which he described a British aeroplane bombing a German naval vessel. His 1913 serial "The Swoop of the Eagle" had more bombing, along with a German airship which anchored itself to St. Paul's Cathedral and bombarded the populace! Finally, the early 1914 "Lion's Tooth and Eagle's Claw" featured Britons downing German airships by flying over them and dropping bombs on them. This might appear unrealistic, but was actually the method employed by Flight Sub-Lieutenant "Rex" Warneford V.C. when he destroyed a German Zeppelin over Belgium in June 1915 – the first Englishman to bring down one of these craft.

Stories also continued to appear that were not about invasions, but about adventure in the air and the glamour of flight. Public interest was focussed by the formation of the Royal Flying Corps in 1912, and by the activities of Britain's military airmen, who entered air races and visited public schools. When the First World War broke out authors were quick to seize on the romantic exploits of the pilots of the RFC and RNAS. In 1915 Edward H Robinson published a series of six stories, "Martin of the Flying Corps," in *Chums*, including a story inspired by the then-famous RNAS raid on German Zeppelin sheds at Friedrichshafen. A similar series, "Heroes of the Flying Corps," was published in *The Captain*. In that same year No. 315 of the 1<sup>st</sup> series of the *Boys' Friend Library*, "War to the Death" by Jack Bobin, featured

the exploits of the RFC and had an exciting dogfight drawn on its front cover. Novels by authors such as Herbert Strang, Percy Westerman and F. S. Brereton also featured the exploits of the RFC and RNAS. By 1916 adult magazines got in on the act, and Edgar Wallace began his execrable "Tam O' the Scots" stories in *Everybody's Magazine*.

Pilots' exploits were a staple of the press during the war. Pilots were portrayed as new knights, "the Cavalry of the Clouds...the Chivalry of the air," as Lloyd George referred to them in the House of Commons in 1916.<sup>51</sup> Books appeared praising the pilots, and the propaganda film *With the Royal Flying Corps* appeared in 1917. The War Propaganda Bureau at Wellington House also issued pilots' memoirs. The first – and one of the best – of these was *An Airman's Outings* by "Contact" (Alan Bott), published in 1916, while in late 1918 James McCudden's *Five Years in the RFC* and "Billy" Bishop's *Winged Warfare. Hunting the Huns in the Air* were also issued.

War flying fiction continued to be popular after the war. Rowland Walker published the very successful *Dastral of the Flying Corps* in 1919, for example. For several years from the mid 1920s the undisputed king of aviation fiction was Geo Rochester, who published a short story about a bombing raid, "The Funk," in the *Boy's Own Paper* (BOP) in 1925 and then followed this up between 1926 and 1929 with four stirring tales of espionage and air piracy featuring Harry Davies, the Flying Beetle, all of which opened their respective volumes of the BOP. Rochester's success led him to the Amalgamated Press and D. C. Thomson, for whom he published many war flying stories. To my mind the best of these was the RFC story "The Bulldog Breed," which was serialised in *The Magnet* in 1928 and published in the *Boys' Friend Library* the following year.

During the late 1920s and 1930s Rochester wrote many more aviation tales for papers like *The Modern Boy* and *Chums*, and other authors also published aviation tales in these and other papers. By the 1930s war-flying fiction was established. In any week it might be found in a boys' story paper, and an examination of any catalogue at the back of a Hamilton book also reveals the number of authors in the Ace Library. Although *The Modern Boy* and *Chums* regularly carried aviation stories, it appears that another Companion Paper, *The Ranger*, was meant to be the Amalgamated Press' main aviation journal. From 1931 this carried several series about the RFC or aviation, as well as regular pictures of aircraft. Johns contributed both giveaway colour plates and rear cover pictures of aircraft, some of which were clearly synchronised with the start of *The Ranger's* popular series, "Baldy's Angels," which began in October 1931 and was a sequel to "Hell's Angels," which had appeared in the same paper from April 1931 and itself cashed in on the popularity of the Hollywood movie of the same name. Both series were reprinted in the *Boys' Friend Library*.

Despite *The Ranger's* demise in 1935, aviation stories continued to be popular and were major features of the Amalgamated Press' papers *The Modern Boy*, *Triumph* and *Champion*, all of which had their own popular flying heroes. The variety of aviation stories that appeared in *The Modern Boy* has been summarised in chapter two. During the 1920s and 1930s *Triumph*

published a wide range of aviation tales, but its best-known character, RFC pilot Mad Carew, did not appear until 1933. Stories about him appeared in *Triumph* until it was canned in 1940. Mad Carew was created by Rupert Hall (a pseudonym used by Edward Home-Gall), who also wrote a number of other stories of the RFC and the RAF for the paper. For example, in 1932 he wrote a tale about RFC pilot Wildcat Wayne, and in 1934 wrote a series about flying stuntmen. In 1938-39 he wrote one of his more interesting tales, "War Hawks of the Khyber Pass," about the RAF on the North West Frontier. *Champion* likewise carried a variety of aviation stories, including several by Herbert Macrae. An early series in the 1920s, for example, featured the exploits of the air police. In 1938 appeared its resident air hero, boxer and RAF ace Rockfist Rogan, whose exploits not only thrilled readers throughout the Second World War but ran until the late 1960s, having moved to the *Tiger* comic after *Champion's* demise in 1955. Rogan was created by veteran comic writer Frank S. Pepper under the pseudonym Hal Wilton, and some of his stories even appeared in hardcover books. Otherwise, remarkably few of the aviation stories in these two papers appeared in the *Champion Library*, and those that did tend to be rather poor.

Flying stories by Geo Rochester in the *Boys' Friend Library*:

167	The Flying Beetle	(BOP 49, 1926)
171	The Scarlet Squadron	(BOP 50, 1927)
207	Vultures of Desolate Island	(BOP 51, 1928)
216	The Bulldog Breed	( <i>The Magnet</i> 1039-49, 1928)
237	The Black Hawk	( <i>The Magnet</i> 1092-1103, 1929)
260	Porson's £10 Plane	( <i>The Modern Boy</i> 36-50, 1930)
278	The Despot of the World	(BOP 52, 1929)
282	The Air Patrol	( <i>Nelson Lee Library</i> 1NS 96-109, 1930)
291	The Black Raiders	( <i>Chums</i> 37, 1929)
307	Pirates of the Air	( <i>Chums</i> 38, 1930)
322	The Black Squadron	( <i>The Modern Boy</i> 81-92, 1929)
345	The Flying Spy	( <i>The Magnet</i> 1169-82, 1930)
368	Wings of Doom	( <i>Chums</i> 39, 1930-31)
409	The Skywayman	( <i>Chums</i> 40, 1932)
437	The Flying Cowboy	( <i>The Modern Boy</i> 272-81, 1933)
611	The Yellow Seven	( <i>Boy's Magazine</i> 594-603, 1933)
636	The Lost Squadron	( <i>The Magnet</i> 1461-72, 1936)
661	Spies of the Western Front	( <i>The Modern Boy</i> NS 23-33, 1938)
714	Lone Scout of the Skies	( <i>The Modern Boy</i> 170-76, 1931)

Baldy's Angels stories in the *Boys' Friend Library*:

369	Baldy's Angels	( <i>The Ranger</i> 34-38, 40, 1931)
377	The Death Squadron	( <i>The Ranger</i> 41, 43, 45-6, 50, 48, 1931)
385	The Air Musketeers	( <i>The Ranger</i> 47, 49, 51-3, 55, 57-8, 1931-32)
400	Behind Enemy Lines	( <i>The Ranger</i> 59-71, 1932)
433	War Birds	( <i>The Ranger</i> 56, 81, 72-80, 1932)

486	Flaming Wings	( <i>The Ranger</i> 101-7, 109-11, 1933)
509	Baldy of the Camel Corps	( <i>The Ranger</i> 112-14, 116-25, 122, 1933)
548	Fighting Furies	( <i>The Ranger</i> 39, 42, 44, 54, 82, 85, 83-4, 1931-32)

No. 377 was reprinted in 1938 as No. 651. Although most of the Baldy's Angels stories were reprinted in the *Boys' Friend Library*, two series featuring the post-war antics of the main characters were not (*The Ranger* 1<sup>st</sup> ser. Nos. 86-88, 90-93, "The Crew of the Flying Taxi," and Nos. 94-100, "Leaders of the Scarlet Squadron"), along with a wartime series about "The Crasher" written by Hedley Scott (*The Ranger* 1<sup>st</sup> ser. 126-30) and stories published in the 2<sup>nd</sup> series of *The Ranger* (Nos. 94-97, 99-102). Two stories also appeared in the *Greyfriars Holiday Annuals* for 1934 and 1935.

## Chapter Four. The Boys' Friend Library

The BFL, as the *Boys' Friend Library* is often abbreviated, first appeared in September 1906, published by the Amalgamated Press. Some 764 issues appeared between that date and May 1925, when the first series ended. The second series promptly commenced in June 1925, lasting 700 issues until December 1939, when the BFL was re-named as two separate libraries – the *Bullseye Library* and the *Knockout Library*. In all, 24 further issues of these two libraries appeared, before paper rationing saw them end in June 1940.<sup>52</sup>

At first two issues of the BFL were published each month, but by December 1907 demand was sufficient to justify three issues each month. From October 1916 four issues were published each month and, with some limited exceptions, this was the figure until the end of the line in June 1940. The BFL also underwent a number of changes in size. At first, the BFL had 120 pages and was priced at 3d. During the First World War it changed several times, shrinking to 72 pages and then being raised in price to 4d, then being reduced further to 60 pages. The page reductions were accompanied by a reduction in the size of the type, so that nearly the same amount of reading matter could be fitted into fewer pages. For a short period during the War the editor even experimented with printing the BFL in a landscape format, which it was felt could help squeeze in more text. In 1919 the BFL settled back to 64 pages at 4d. When the 2<sup>nd</sup> series commenced it remained at 64 pages and 4d, before being increased to 96 pages in March 1932, at which time the type was also increased in size. With the advent of the Second World War and paper rationing the new *Bullseye* and *Knockout* libraries shrank back to 68 pages and the price went up to 4½d.

The BFL has a special magic about it that has captivated many collectors over the years. It is a magic shared with other pocket libraries, such as the *Schoolboy's Own Library* and the *Sexton Blake Library*, and born in part of the small but compact size of the books and their flimsy, disposable nature – which makes it a wonder that any have survived to this day. Collectors have also relished the fabulous covers of these pocket libraries, which included some striking art, often in brilliant colour. The main fascination of the BFL, however, is the endless variety and excitement of the stories it carried. At first, the library concentrated on school and detective stories (the latter mainly featuring Sexton Blake and Nelson Lee), and also on S. Clarke Hook's tales of Jack, Sam and Pete, three characters who were once tremendously popular but whose adventures are nowadays virtually unread. Over the years, school stories became less frequent as the popularity of the BFL led to the creation of the *Schoolboy's Own Library*, and Sexton Blake was also given his own library. However, the range of adventure stories simply increased, covering historical adventure, Robin Hood, pirates, adventure in the colonies, the Wild West, racing, war, humour, thrillers and even science fiction. In 1915 the BFL printed its first story of the Royal Flying Corps, a genre that increased in popularity and publication in the 1920s (Box 4).

From the first, the Amalgamated Press used the BFL to reprint stories from its wide range of story papers. The first three numbers, for example, were reprints of Jack, Sam and Pete stories from the *Marvel*. No. 4 was a reprint of a famous Nelson Lee detective story, "Birds of Prey," from *Boys' Friend*. Other early numbers offered stories from these and other papers, primarily *Boys' Herald*, *Boys' Realm* and *Union Jack*. As new papers appeared the BFL would carry reprints of their stories; such papers included *The Gem*, *The Magnet*, *Dreadnought* and *Cheer*, *Boys Cheer* and, from the 1920s, *Triumph*, *Champion* and *Rocket* (before the *Champion Library* was created to reprint stories from these three papers). During the 1930s the BFL also carried many stories from *The Modern Boy*, *The Ranger* and *Pilot*.

Although the BFL primarily offered stories from the Amalgamated Press' own papers, the editor had 48 issues a year to fill and therefore anything that seemed likely to sell was grist to his mill. The Amalgamated Press would reprint stories in the BFL from papers it did not own if these had proved popular, notably stories from *Chums* and the *Boy's Own Paper*. The BFL would also reprint stories that had originally appeared overseas (such as the adventure stories written by William Murray Graydon, which had first been published in the U.S.A.) and also stories that had been published in book form. During the late 1920s a number of thrillers that had previously appeared as books were published in the BFL, including the first "Saint" novel, *Meet the Tiger*, which appeared as "Crooked Gold." This avenue becomes especially relevant when considering the Biggles stories in the BFL, as we shall see. Popular authors would also be asked to write original stories for the BFL, and Charles Hamilton contributed a number of these stories, including two of the finest school stories he wrote, "The Boy Without a Name" and "Rivals and Chums," published in 1916.

Biggles first appeared in BFL No. 469, "Biggles Learns to Fly," dated on the cover to 7 March 1935. This is a BFL that has acquired legendary status. Subtitled "a thrilling story of war in the air," the book has a glorious colour cover, showing a pilot diving an antiquated Maurice Farman biplane into a group of airmen and ground crew. A further black and white picture graced the front page of the story, but illustrations were rare in the BFL and this was the only one. "Biggles Learns to Fly" reprinted the stories from *The Modern Boy* Nos. 323-334, mostly with little change from the original publications, although one story, "The Dawn Patrol," which was based on "Knights of the Air" from *The Modern Boy* No. 328, had been clumsily amended to change the setting from 169 squadron – when Biggles was a two-seater pilot – to 266 squadron – when Biggles flew a single-seater Camel. The revised version omitted a humorous interplay between Biggles and Mark Way, which was unavailable outside *The Modern Boy* until 1992, when Red Fox published the original version in its new edition of *Biggles Learns to Fly*.<sup>53</sup>

It is not clear why this story was edited in this way. The editors of the BFL and the other Amalgamated Press pocket libraries frequently performed mysterious edits on stories they were publishing, and while mostly these were intended to make a story fit the page limits or to censor something, some, such as the treatment of "Knights of the Air," defy understanding.

The editor of the BFL at this stage was Percy A. Clarke, himself an author who published a BFL in the same month – No. 470, “That Tough Guy Hobbs,” under the pseudonym Vernon Nielson. We cannot be certain whether Clarke himself or a sub-editor edited “Biggles Learns to Fly.”

The next Biggles BFL was No. 501, “Biggles in France,” dated 7 November 1935, which has also achieved legendary status as a result of the great rarity of the original. The cover of this book showed a smiling Biggles, in flying cap and flying coat, standing in No-Man’s Land while a dogfight rages above and behind him. The inside illustration was taken from “Flying Luck,” from *The Modern Boy* No. 337. “Biggles in France” reprinted two sets of stories from *The Modern Boy*, Nos. 335-339 and Nos. 356-357 and 360-364, in the order in which they had appeared except for the final two stories which were reprinted in reverse order. The first set of stories had originally appeared in *The Modern Boy* after the stories that were published in “Biggles Learns to Fly,” and clearly form part of that group, but had probably not been published in BFL No. 469 because they would not fit into the page limit. The second set of stories had appeared after the serialisation of *The Cruise of the Condor* in Nos. 340-346.

The first set of stories deal with the further adventures of Second Lieutenant Bigglesworth. The second set were published as adventures of “Captain Bigglesworth” and consequently the editor added a phrase to the start of chapter 14 to explain that “his promotion dated from his meritorious work in bringing down the camera-plane.” This line had not been included in the original story, “Biggles’ Sky High Spy,” when it appeared in *The Modern Boy*. It contradicts Johns’ previous account of Biggles’ promotion to Acting Captain in “The Packet” after his affair with the White Fokker, and is therefore likely to have been added by Percy Clarke or a sub-editor.

Another line added to “Biggles in France” occurred at the end of chapter 13, at the end of the story that had been called “Biggles and the Flying Camera” when it appeared in *The Modern Boy* No. 356. The version in *The Modern Boy* ended with the line “Well, now, would you believe that?” However, in “Biggles in France” Biggles goes on to say “And they took five years to make it!” This punch line refers to the amount of time taken to grind the camera lens, and is typical of Johns’ somewhat black humour. Consequently, like Norman Wright I prefer to believe that this line had been in the original, but had been cut from *The Modern Boy*.<sup>54</sup>

“Biggles in France” received a lot of push from the Amalgamated Press. New issues of the BFL were regularly advertised in the Companion Papers. “Biggles in France” was given a box ad in *The Magnet* No. 1448, published on 16 November 1935. Under the heading “Welcome Biggles!” with a picture of the intrepid airman, readers were told that “if you have not met him, now’s the time! The latest book of his adventures is now out.” The next week the editor of *The Modern Boy* took the unusual step of advertising the book in his column. No. 407, dated 23 November 1935, has the following paragraph:

**BIGGLES IN BOOK FORM!**

You'll welcome this opportunity to acquire the adventures of Biggles in War-time France in book form! "Biggles in France" is the title, and it costs only 4d! Ask for No. 501 of the Boys' Friend Library, now on sale at all newsagents. If your local newsagent is sold out, he'll get you a copy at once gladly!

Such advertisements rarely appeared in the editor's column, and must indicate that the Amalgamated Press wanted to give this particular issue a little extra "push" to boost sales.

Another tactic used by the Amalgamated Press to boost interest in particular issues of the BFL was to publish a short story featuring the lead character of one BFL at the back of other issues of the Library that were published in the same month. For example, during December 1935 two Captain Justice stories were printed at the backs of Nos. 507 and 508, as "tempters" for the Captain Justice story "The World in Darkness" in No. 505. The previous month, two Biggles stories had been published at the backs of Nos. 502 and 504 to generate interest in "Biggles in France." BFL No. 502, "The Team Wreckers" by Steve Rogers, contained "Biggles' Christmas Tree" at the back, while No. 504, "In the Days of the Knights" by Alfred Armitage (a pseudonym used by William Murray Graydon) contained "Biggles' Goodwill Gifts" at the back. These two stories had first appeared in *The Modern Boy* Nos. 358-359, "Biggles' Goodwill Gifts" as "Biggles' Xmas Box," and the decision not to include them in "Biggles in France" is explained by their appearance in these other BFLs.<sup>55</sup>

Norman Wright has pointed out that "Biggles Learns to Fly" and "Biggles in France" "are the most desirable and difficult to find issues in the entire *Boys' Friend Library* series" and also observed that they are amongst the most difficult of all Biggles first editions to find.<sup>56</sup> When copies appear they tend to fetch very high prices.

Another Biggles book did not appear in the *Boy's Friend Library* until February 1938, a gap of more than two years after "Biggles in France." It is worth asking why there was such a long gap. By all appearances, the Amalgamated Press expected "Biggles in France" to be a big seller, advertising it in the Companion Papers and printing two stories in other copies of the BFL. As discussed in chapter two, Biggles also appears to have been a big drawcard for *The Modern Boy* at this time. It is surprising, therefore, that other Biggles stories that appeared at this time, such as "Winged Menace" (*The Black Peril*), which appeared in *The Modern Boy* in February 1935, were not reprinted in the Library as quickly as possible.

Norman Wright has observed that there was probably some legal reason for the gap. Johns had sold the copyrights to his earliest Biggles stories to John Hamilton, ending in 1935 with *The Black Peril*. From 1935 he sold the copyrights to the Oxford University Press; the first stories he sold were *Biggles Hits the Trail* and *Biggles Flies East*. Norman Wright deduced that the Oxford University Press would not have been keen on having potential sales undercut by the cheap BFL, and therefore books sold to that company could not be published in that paper.<sup>57</sup>

Given that *The Camels are Coming*, *The Cruise of the Condor* and *Biggles Flies Again* had been published in book form prior to being serialised in *The Modern Boy*, and that other Biggles stories were serialised in *The Modern Boy* prior to being published as books by the Oxford University Press, it seems likely that there were two forms of copyright – serial rights, which reverted to Johns quite quickly after publication,<sup>58</sup> and book rights, which could be retained for a much longer time. The BFL would have been viewed as a book, and because Johns had sold the book rights to other companies the Amalgamated Press could not legally reprint a book without paying a fee to the copyright holder.

Norman Wright also observed that, during the 1930s, many authors sold their stories outright to the Amalgamated Press, including copyright. Their stories would therefore have been able to be reprinted in the BFL, and the authors would not have been able to sell the stories to another publisher. Authors may have received a small honorarium for these reprints (Charles Hamilton is recorded as saying he received £5 when his stories were reprinted in an Amalgamated Press pocket library). Johns clearly did not sell all of his copyrights outright, as he sold book rights to other companies. However, he did lose the copyrights to five books, probably those that were published by John Hamilton and which he probably sold outright to them.<sup>59</sup> In addition, he may have sold outright to the Amalgamated Press the stories published in “Biggles Learns to Fly” and “Biggles in France,” as these were not picked up by any other publisher until after the Second World War. He probably received only a small honorarium for these, whereas he received a very large sum (at the time) of £250 per book from the Oxford University Press. Clearly, given this disparity there would have been no incentive for Johns, once he had negotiated this deal, to sell book rights to the Amalgamated Press.

It is interesting to compare Johns’ publication history in the *Boys’ Friend Library* with other popular aviation writers of the time. Geo Rochester, who was one of the most popular aviation writers of the 1920s and 1930s, had no fewer than 32 stories reprinted in the Library, 19 of them aviation tales (see Box 4). Twenty of his BFLs appeared before 1935 (the other 12 appeared between 1935 and 1939). Prior to 1935, however, Rochester did not publish any stories in hardcover, appearing instead in the BFL or similar pocket libraries. In 1935 and 1936 John Hamilton published new hardcover editions of most of the BFLs he had previously authored. It would seem that Rochester may have retained book rights to these stories, and was therefore able to negotiate a new deal for them with John Hamilton, although it is possible that Rochester negotiated the return of his copyright for these stories.

What is more interesting, however, is that after 1935 only one of the stories he published in the BFL was reprinted by John Hamilton (*The Black Mole*). Now, after serialisation his stories either appeared in the BFL or in a Hamilton book. For example, only one of his series of stories about Scotty of the Secret Squadron, from *The Modern Boy*, was reprinted in the *Boys’ Friend Library* (No. 661, “Spies of the Western Front” from 1939); this did not appear in hardcover, and other Scotty stories only appeared as Hamilton books published in 1937-38 (*Scotty of the Secret Squadron*, *The Secret Squadron in*

*Germany* and *The Squadron without a Number*). This may indicate that each publisher purchased book copyright on an exclusive basis, at least for some years.

Similarly, one of the most popular boys' authors of the 1930s was Percy Westerman, who published stories in a wide range of papers. He published no fewer than six stories in *The Modern Boy* featuring his pilot Standish of the Royal Air Constabulary. Not one of these appeared in the BFL, although all were published as books by Blackie. In fact, no story by Westerman in a Companion Paper ever appeared in an Amalgamated Press pocket library. The inference is that Westerman sold the serial rights to the Amalgamated Press but the book rights to other companies, which probably paid more. Other examples can be found; John Templer, for example, published three serials about Jaggars of the Air Police in *The Modern Boy*, but these were never reprinted in the BFL – appearing instead as books published by the Oxford University Press.

These examples do perhaps prove that book rights could be sold separately from serial rights, and that authors could negotiate a better deal with other publishers for their books which would prevent them from being published in the *Boys' Friend Library*. When Biggles did reappear in the BFL, it is significant that it was not in reprints of stories that had been published by the Oxford University Press, the company with which Johns had had a publication agreement since 1935. Instead, the Amalgamated Press reprinted the five Biggles books that had been sold to John Hamilton, and which are most probably books for which Johns had lost the copyright. The Amalgamated Press would appear to have negotiated the rights for these stories directly with Hamilton.

Five Biggles books were reprinted in the BFL between February and July 1938:

Biggles Goes to War	No. 610, 3 February 1938
The Camels are Coming	No. 614, 3 March 1938
The Cruise of the Condor	No. 617, 3 April 1938
Biggles Flies East	No. 621, 5 May 1938
Biggles Flies Again	No. 630, 7 July 1938.

For the record, the Amalgamated Press also published Johns' non-Biggles title, *The Spy-Flyers*, as BFL No. 625 on 2 June 1938. This had also been published by John Hamilton and is likely to be another book whose copyright Johns had lost.

Some of these titles are confusing; the BFL "Biggles Goes to War" was not the Oxford book of that name, but *Biggles of the Camel Squadron*, and similarly the BFL "Biggles Flies East" was actually *The Black Peril*. All these titles appeared in the "new style" issues of the Library; since No. 577 the BFL

had abandoned full colour covers and now featured a grey, black and white picture in a red field. The books also contained an interior black and white picture unique to the BFL, although "Biggles Flies Again" contained the standard illustration of Biggles used by *The Modern Boy*.

By and large, the BFLs reprinted the text of the Hamilton books. The BFLs attributed the stories to "Captain W. E. Johns" rather than "Flying-Officer Johns," as he continued to be described in *The Modern Boy* at the time and had been described in the earlier Biggles BFLs. By reprinting the text of the books the BFL did not replicate the text of the stories as they had appeared in *The Modern Boy*. Consequently, "Biggles Flies Again" contained "Fair Cargo" and the adult jokes, and Biggles and Marie kissed in "The Camels are Coming." There were some minor variations; the footnote in *The Black Peril* describing the various certificates a pilot must get to fly overseas was printed within the text of the story in the BFL "Biggles Flies East," and some oaths in "The Camels are Coming" were toned down. New chapter divisions and titles were incorporated in "Biggles Goes to War" and "The Camels are Coming," the most ridiculous of which was to replace "Affaire de Coeur" with "Biggles' Girl."

Some slight cuts were also made to "The Camels are Coming." Although Biggles' was allowed to kiss Marie, the editor cut Biggles' ensuing joke about his own "mag. shorting," and also replaced "took her in his arms impatiently" with "and in another moment or two left the house." The verses at the end of "Affaire de Coeur" were cut, and perhaps out of prudishness the editor replaced the line "I will be very kind to you, my Biggles," in Marie's first letter with "Good luck, my Biggles." Most of Marie's second letter to Biggles was excised, being replaced with:

There was a bit more, but the rest was of interest only to Biggles.

Biggles read through Marie's letter several times.

Finally, much of Major Mullen's discussion with Mac and Mahoney at the start of "The Last Show" was cut back, the Major simply stating "He's started to drink whisky."

A more notable change is the addition of about one thousand words to the end of "The Cruise of the Condor," doubtless to bring the story to the page limit (see Box 5). The syntax and style of the additional words make them unlikely to have been written by Johns.<sup>60</sup> As noted above, the editors of the BFL and other pocket libraries published by the Amalgamated Press have gained a reputation for incompetent editing in their desire to meet the page limits. Generally they cut chunks out of stories, including whole chapters, without caring too much if this left plot holes. They were also not above adding text of their own if they needed to fill up space. This practice goes back to the very early days of the Library. In August 1907 the Maxwell Scott story "The Great Unknown," published as No. 24 of the 1<sup>st</sup> series, had chapters clumsily added to the middle which ruined the story entirely, as the plot hinged on the identity of the criminal being unknown and only revealed at the end. Despite this, the editor added a scene in which the criminal is

cornered, unmasked, by Nelson Lee and some farmers, on a haystack and attacked with spades and pitchforks before escaping! At the end of the added section the criminal was simply unknown again, as if the haystack scene had never taken place – which, of course it had not in the original story.<sup>61</sup>

One would naturally suspect that Percy A. Clarke was the author of the extra thousand words in “The Cruise of the Condor,” but I must say that nothing I have read by Clarke is quite as turgid as the rot at the end of this particular BFL. His style in other stories he published in the BFL and *The Modern Boy* was actually quite vigorous. In addition, whereas Biggles is happy to quote Latin in the added verbiage, I have found no passage in one of Clarke’s stories containing a Latin tag. I therefore surmise that the author of the additional words was likely to be an unknown sub-editor.

In all, there were seven Biggles titles in the *Boys’ Friend Library* and another two with a Biggles story at the back. All of these are rare; one seldom finds any one of the titles easily, and then competition can be fierce and copies quite expensive. A bookseller in the United Kingdom recently advertised “Biggles Goes to War” and “The Camels are Coming” at £500 each, and in 2003 Norman Wright valued “Biggles Learns to Fly” and “Biggles in France” at about £1,000 each.<sup>62</sup> These prices are guidelines only, however; a few years ago another bookseller placed a copy of “Biggles in France” on sale at £5,000, whereas in early 2009 some volumes of Amalgamated Press file copies including Nos. 469, 501, 502 and 504 sold at a Compalcomics auction for £842 (plus commissions).

There are some interesting variations that must be noted. The BFL was published in Canada as well as Great Britain, and some issues sent to Canada were printed with the price button stating “10c” rather than “4d.” The BFLs were in all other respects identical to British versions.<sup>63</sup> I have a copy of “Biggles Learns to Fly” with the “10c” price, and have other copies of the Library from the 1930s that were also printed with this price. It is therefore possible that all of the Biggles issues of the *Boys’ Friend Library* could have been printed in Canadian and British versions. This is however uncertain. Sometimes the preference seems to have been to print only one version, and Canadian sellers would then place stickers over the British price button.

The Amalgamated Press also used to issue left-over issues of the BFL (and other pocket libraries) in groups of six or seven, bound as a single red volume with the cover of one of the issues pasted onto the front and all other front covers otherwise removed. These volumes would be sold for two shillings. I have never heard of a Biggles BFL being bound into one of these volumes, but it is something to keep an eye on. Sometimes all the pocket libraries in a single volume were copies of the BFL, but issues of the Library could also be bound with copies of the *Schoolboys’ Own Library*, *Sexton Blake Library*, *Champion Library* and *Sport and Adventure Library*.

Finally, there is one other oddity that must be recorded. The BFL “Biggles Flies Again” has a story at the back, “Sky Hawks.” Although anonymous, this was actually a reprint of several chapters of BFL No. 340, “Sky Raiders.” On the first page of the story the editor added in a few words to describe “Baldy,

the second in command, known almost as well as Biggles.” The insertion is a tad odd; if anything, it appears to have been a clumsy attempt by the editor to link the story to the main feature of the BFL. The line was not in BFL No. 340.

### **Box 5. The extra thousand words in *The Cruise of the Condor***

The first edition of *The Cruise of the Condor* ends with the well-known words:

“Then you’ll need a mechanic, sir,” murmured Smythe softly.

These words also ended the tale when it was serialised in *The Modern Boy*; and they have ended the tale in most editions of the book since, including those issued by Thames, Dean and Red Fox.

The exception is BFL No. 617. After these words we read an extra three and a half columns of text. There can be little doubt that the added text was not written by Johns. As Jim Mackenzie has shown, the style and syntax of the passage is different from Johns’ work, and had Johns really wanted to change the ending it is odd that he did it once only and for this edition. It is most likely that the text was added by the editor of the Library, Percy A. Clarke, or a sub-editor. The question must therefore be asked *why* the text was added. The answer lies in the need for all issues of the BFL to fill a page limit (96 pages at this time). If a story did not fill up the required number of pages, editors could, if the space was large enough, add a short story, or if the space was fairly small, add some features or advertisements. BFL No. 617 contains, in addition to a ‘Magazine Corner’ feature that occupies the last two pages, no fewer than three full-page advertisements at the rear for other Amalgamated Press story papers. It was very unusual for so many advertisements to be placed at the back of a BFL. It rather looks like the editor was struggling to fill up the pages. In the end, he was still short and therefore added some text himself to complete the volume.

It is worth reproducing the first few lines of the added text, as this will prove better than any analysis that Johns could not have been the author:

*Biggles looked thoughtfully at his old comrade. Dickpa’s rugged features reminded him in some ways of a rather amiable walnut.*

*“I am sure of one thing,” said Biggles, “and that is that we haven’t by any manner of means said the last word about Brazil and the Matey Grocer.”*

*“There’ll never be a last word said about Brazil,” murmured Dickpa, a faraway look in his eyes.*

*Biggles grinned.*

*“That friendly beggar at Mollendo said “Hasta la vista,” which might stand for “make haste back and see what’s in the wind,” or might not; but, speaking for myself, Dickpa, your fancy little trip to the Amazon country has interested me very greatly. It has tickled my curiosity, as it were. Of course, when you are back in London you will be slipping into a clean boiled shirt and getting on your feet at dinners to tell ‘em all about Brazil-”*

*“Not on your life!” growled Dickpa.*

The images that Biggles conjures up here are quite unlike anything in any other Biggles story, and the chap at Mollendo is otherwise unknown, which is a pretty reliable sign that the person who wrote about him did not write the rest of "The Cruise of the Condor." The following paragraph is also instructive:

*"Nothing of the poet about me," he said; "but there are some things about Brazil which fairly baffle the understanding and give the imagination a bit of overtime to do. I'm bitten by it, I admit, and I'm not thinking about the great ants and uncles. In fact, I feel ready to excuse fifty percent of the horrors up that river where it was touch and go with us. There was a chap who once said "Ex Africa, semper aliquid novi." But he had better had said it of Brazil."*

Once again, the passage as a whole is quite unlike anything Johns ever wrote. Biggles seldom waxed philosophical, and I cannot recall him quoting Latin. He once famously told his teacher he could not translate a phrase into Latin, but into Hindustani! Johns was also not a great fan of the pun, which makes it unlikely he penned something as weak as "ants and uncles." Finally, Johns usually had a fairly good grasp of grammar, which makes "he had better had said it" unlikely to be his.

In the end, the added thousand words are little more than a mild curiosity. They do not detract from the story too much, and we can be grateful that the editor did not decide to add any padding within the story. Readers in 1938 are likely to have felt that the ending meandered a bit, but that is all. Charles Hamilton, by contrast, suffered mightily at the hands of his editors, who not only hacked up many of his stories when they reprinted them in the *Schoolboys' Own Library*, but also employed a number of men to write stories using Hamilton's schools and characters which they then published under Hamilton's pen-names, even if the stuff was quite inferior to Hamilton's own. Johns escaped relatively lightly, with only these thousand words and some poor editing of *Biggles Flies Again* in *The Modern Boy* to complain about.

In conclusion, here are some more of the extra thousand words. They are tripe, but we can be thankful that the helping of this particular offal was a small one.

*"When you come to think of it," continued Biggles, "You can't help feeling sheer amazement. The Portuguese got in at the front door of the country, but they have never been further. The civilisation they brought is just a fringe along the coast, and these conquistadores who have been billed so tremendously, but who were not such great shakes as they made out, they merely nibbled from the other side. The point is that nobody has really touched Brazil – the immensities of the hinterland, the vivid colouring, the totally unexpected, the surprise-packet of sensations which meet you at every step. The old explorers scratched the coastline and-*

*"Don't talk about scratching – have a heart!" pleaded Algy. "I was bitten till there was practically nothing left."*

## Chapter Five. The Gem

The early days of the Second World War can seem like hectic ones to Biggles fans. W. E. Johns moved from story paper to story paper, seeking outlets for his air hero as one publication after another folded on him in those grim days of paper rationing and story paper rationalisation. In two years Biggles moved from *The Modern Boy* to *The Gem*, to the *War Thriller*, to the *Air Defence Cadet Corps Gazette* – which swiftly became the *Air Training Corps Gazette* – and finally to the *Boy's Own Paper*, where he found a home until the end of the war. One of his briefest sojourns was in *The Gem*.

*The Gem* was founded by the Amalgamated Press in 1907 as a halfpenny paper with green covers, “published in the first place,” as the editor informs us, “for boys and younger men. Parents should also read it.” The first issue featured an adventure story, but by the third issue the character with whom *The Gem* is now synonymous appeared – Tom Merry. Introduced in a story titled “Tom Merry’s Schooldays,” Tom was originally at a school called Clavering, but by No. 8 of *The Gem* the controlling editor of the Companion Papers had had the bright idea of combining the Tom Merry stories with another popular series of school stories, about St. Jim’s school, which had been running since 1906 in *Pluck*. This was not a difficult task as both series were written by the same man, Charles Hamilton, although Hamilton certainly resisted the idea.<sup>64</sup> Over the next thirty or so years, *The Gem* changed in a number of ways – doubling in size and price in 1908, changing cover colours from blue to red and blue to blue again – but its main feature was the stories of St. Jim’s, written under Hamilton’s pseudonym Martin Clifford.<sup>65</sup>

Usually, a serial appeared at the back of *The Gem*. These serials would commonly be adventure stories, although sometimes other school stories would appear. By the time W. E. Johns began writing for the Amalgamated Press, he was quickly able to sell a story to *The Gem*, which was a Companion Paper like *The Modern Boy*. This story was *The Spy-Flyers*, which ran for eleven issues from 18 March 1933 to 3 June 1933, or issues 1309-1320. A small scene from the story appeared on the front cover of No. 1309 and the story itself was marvellously illustrated by Serge Drigin and Johns himself. *The Gem* at this stage was produced with some care on surfaced paper with a bright red and blue cover. Incidentally, *The Spy-Flyers* is the only Johns story to have been reprinted – in part – in its original story paper form, as some episodes of the story were reprinted by Howard Baker in his series of reprints of St. Jim’s tales from *The Gem*.

Johns’ work did not reappear in *The Gem* for six years after *The Spy-Flyers* ended. It is worth asking why. His absence was probably due to the fact that, after *The Spy-Flyers* finished, another Companion Paper, *The Nelson Lee Library*, was cancelled and stories of St. Frank’s school written for that paper were moved to *The Gem*. After those stories finished, Johns had made his home at *The Modern Boy* and that paper was happy to have all the juvenile stories he could write.

Johns returned to *The Gem* after *The Modern Boy* was published for the last sad time. "Biggles' South Sea Adventure" was published in *The Gem* between 14 October and 9 December 1939, or issues 1652 and 1660. This of course appeared in book form in 1940 as *Biggles in the South Seas*. It is probable that when Johns submitted this story to the Amalgamated Press he expected it to go to *The Modern Boy*, but the cancellation of that paper meant that a new home had to be found. The serialisation of the story in *The Gem* has been suggested to have been a desperate attempt to boost that paper's flagging sales, which by 1939 had fallen to 15,400, a far cry from its heyday in the early 1920s when, prior to the arrival of the D. C. Thomson papers, it had sold over 200,000 a week. That being said, the only other Companion Paper remaining at this time was *The Magnet*, which in 1939 contained only one story a week, a long story of Greyfriars school by Charles Hamilton, so it may simply have been expedient for the controlling editor of the Companion Papers, C. M. Down, to publish Johns' story in *The Gem*.

No. 1652 of *The Gem* is an interesting issue in many ways. The paper at this stage was a cheap production, like *The Modern Boy* had been before its demise. It had shrunk to B5 size with covers in a single colour (blue), printed on coarse paper with very few illustrations inside. Shortages of ink had likewise reduced the cover of *The Modern Boy* to a single colour, blue. Paper was also scarce, and this issue of *The Gem* contained an "Important Notice" on page 35 advising readers that "in order to avoid any wastage of paper, we have had to tell newsagents to order only the exact number of GEMS that they want from us every week, and no more." Readers would have to place an order with their newsagent or they would not be able to receive the paper. This restriction, incidentally, would probably have meant that copies of these issues of *The Gem* would rarely have been on display in a newsagent's, which would have made it very unlikely that the Biggles story in the paper would make any difference to *The Gem's* sales.

St. Jim's still occupied pride of place in *The Gem*, and was given the front cover. Above a picture of a monocled schoolboy kneeling next to a fireplace with the headline "Gussy Puts His Foot In It!" was a small banner advertising "Biggles' South Sea Adventure," and a box ad was strategically placed on page 5 informing readers about the "gripping new serial starring every boy's flying hero – Biggles." The story itself had a single black and white illustration, which would later be used every week as a sort of frontispiece to the tale, showing Biggles and Castanelli on either side of a seaplane. This Biggles tale was credited to *Captain W. E. Johns*, the second time that the Amalgamated Press had used this rank (see chapter four).

*The Gem* was edited by R. C. "Jim" Hewitt. The editor's column provides us with some significant information, which, as far as I know, has not been repeated elsewhere:

In this number of the old paper most of you are meeting for the first time new pals – Biggles & Co. To a very large number of boys, Major James Bigglesworth is as popular as Tom Merry & Co. are with GEM readers, so I am sure you will all welcome the famous Air Force ace and his companions.

Captain W. E. Johns, creator of Biggles, was himself an Air Force officer, and so he is an expert not only as a writer, but also in the telling of flying experiences. Incidentally, a little while back Captain Johns' flying stories of Biggles were voted by British boys to be the most popular of any published.

This is the only place I have seen this particular vote recorded. It does indicate that Biggles had become a very popular character by the end of the 1930s, and perhaps explains why the Amalgamated Press was keen to keep publishing his stories, whereas other characters from *The Modern Boy* like Captain Justice – who also appeared until the end of that paper – were allowed to die.

A scene from the Biggles story appeared on the front cover of No. 1657, showing Ginger and Shell Breaker fleeing a shark. Otherwise, there was only one other illustration (other than the frontispiece) for the whole story. This appeared in No. 1653 and showed Biggles' seaplane landing at Rutuona. It is not known who drew these pictures.

*The Gem* lasted only three more issues after the Biggles serial ended. It seems that it was a mixture of poor sales and paper rationing which ultimately led to its demise. Early in 1940 it was merged with *Triumph*. Reprints of old St. Jim's stories appeared in *Triumph and Gem* for a short while, but Biggles did not appear in that paper, which had its own intrepid air hero – Rupert Hall's Mad Carew. By the end of May 1940 *Triumph and Gem* was also cancelled. It was merged with *Champion* and the long series of St. Jim's tales finally ended; none of the *Triumph and Gem's* characters survived the merger.

The situation at the Amalgamated Press' juvenile department in June 1940 must have been rather grim. At one stage in the 1930s it had produced more than 30 story papers as well as other publications. By June 1940 only a few publications remained – the story papers *Champion* and *Girl's Crystal*, the *Sexton Blake Library*, comics like *Knockout*, *Illustrated Chips*, *Comic Cuts* and *Radio Fun* and some of the more juvenile papers like *Rainbow* and *Tiny Tots*. It is interesting that the Amalgamated Press did not move Biggles to *Champion*, which was published throughout the Second World War. In early 1940 Biggles must still have been seen as useful property, given the vote of popularity recorded above and the decision to print the next Biggles story in the *War Thriller*. After that paper folded in mid-1940, however, Biggles ceased to appear in Amalgamated Press story papers. It would seem that the editorial staff noted that *Champion* had a very robust circulation (over 150,000) and also had its own Air Force man, Rockfist Rogan; they must have felt that the presence of Biggles in the paper would be unlikely to improve its sales.

## Chapter Six. War Thriller

Biggles stories appeared in many comics, story papers and magazines. Some of these are relatively easy to find. Copies of *The Modern Boy*, *Popular Flying* (at least from 1933-34), *Eagle*, the *Boy's Own Paper* and *Look and Learn* appear regularly on Ebay and in bookshops, although it still can take a number of years to complete a set of Biggles stories in these papers. Other magazines are much, much more difficult to find, and there would probably be little real debate over the identity of the rarest Biggles magazines. *Popular Flying* number one would be one of them, of course, along with all issues of the *Boys' Friend Library*, and copies of *Junior Mirror* appear to be incredibly difficult to find. The rarest would probably be the *Air Defence Cadet Corps Gazette* with "Biggles Flies Alone" (see chapter seven). Shortly behind that serial, however, would be "Storm Troop of the Baltic Skies" in the *War Thriller*.

"Storm Troop of the Baltic Skies" was the exciting title given to *Biggles in the Baltic* when it was serialised, between 9 March and 18 May 1940, in issues 579-89 of the *War Thriller*. This is an elusive series indeed. It is next to impossible to find as a complete set, although odd issues of the paper with episodes of the series do turn up on rare occasions.

*War Thriller* was one of the many Amalgamated Press story papers. It was originally titled *Thriller* but changed its name with the onset of the Second World War. *Thriller* was founded in 1929 and was the brainchild of Percy Montague ("Monty") Haydon, Editorial Director of the juvenile department of the Amalgamated Press. Haydon was looking for a paper for older boys and young adults, realising that there was a gap in the market for these readers. Of all the papers published by the juvenile department, those that had older readers on average were the ones that specialised in detective stories, notably *Union Jack* and the *Sexton Blake Library*. Haydon formed the reasonable assumption that these readers, as they grew older, would continue to read thrillers and so *Thriller* was born. The paper does seem to have been largely read by older readers (although it was advertised in the Amalgamated Press' juvenile papers when it first appeared). In 1940, for example, the editor noted that he had been receiving a lot of letters from readers in the armed forces.

Over the years *Thriller* carried some of the more famous mystery writers of the era. It started with a bang, with a story by Edgar Wallace which cost Haydon a huge amount of money to buy. Wallace died shortly afterwards, and other writers made the paper their home. *Thriller* carried the early "Saint" stories by Leslie Charteris, and a number of other thriller writers who are less well known today, such as Berkeley Gray (who contributed "Norman Conquest" stories), Barry Perowne (who wrote modern-day "Raffles" stories) and Richard Essex (whose "Inspector Slade" yarns were reprinted in the *Boys' Friend Library*). "Berkeley Gray" in fact was Edwy Searles Brookes, whose stories of Nelson Lee and St. Franks carried the *Nelson Lee Library* for nearly 15 years. A number of other authors who contributed to the more juvenile papers of the Amalgamated Press also contributed to *Thriller*, including Geo Rochester and W. E. Johns, who serialised some of his

“Steeley” stories in the paper. Johns’ final Steeley story, in fact, appeared in *War Thriller* during the serialisation of “Storm Troop of the Baltic Skies.”

For seven years beforehand, a new Biggles story had always been published in one of the Companion Papers. By early 1940, however, the only Companion Paper remaining was *The Magnet*, and this was now a paper which contained only one story in each issue – and that story was always about Greyfriars School and written by Frank Richards. Johns therefore needed to find a new home for his latest Biggles story. As Johns had previously published stories in *Thriller*, it was probably logical to send the next Biggles story to that paper.

“Storm Troop of the Baltic Skies” was an abridged version of *Biggles in the Baltic*. The first chapter of the book was not published, and the story instead begins this way:

Biggles, otherwise Major James Bigglesworth, DSO, and the rest of the small party that comprised Squadron Z, RAF, stood at the mouth of the cave and waved good-bye to the submarine that had brought them to the island of Bergen Ait.

You have never heard of Bergen Ait. Neither had Biggles nor his friends a week before. But now they were here, and this craggy chunk of black granite, about the size of St. Paul’s Cathedral, might be their home for the duration of the war.

For Bergen Ait was hollow – like a cathedral of rock set in the middle of the cold grey Baltic sea – and Bergen Ait was one of the most valued secret bases of the RAF. Four sleek, swift seaplanes lay hidden inside its hollow bulk.

We do not know if Johns wrote this, or if the story had been abridged and these words penned by *War Thriller*’s editor, Leonard Pratt. It is perhaps more likely that Pratt was the man responsible, given the general propensity of Amalgamated Press editors to cut and rewrite stories in their papers. This is perhaps confirmed by some other textual oddities in the story. Ginger, when first introduced to the reader, is surnamed Hebbelthwaite, although this was corrected to Hebblethwaite in later issues. Moreover, throughout the story the arch villain is referred to as Erich von *Stalheim*. Taking these changes into consideration, it becomes likely that all the editing was the work of Leonard Pratt. It is unlikely that Johns would consistently have forgotten the name of his favourite villain.

“Storm Troop” was illustrated by Derek Eyles, who was much in demand in the 1930s as a cover artist for several book publishers, and had also illustrated stories for *Scout*, *Chums* and the Amalgamated Press’ short-lived *Wild West Weekly*. He was most famous for his scenes of the Wild West and was to gain some fame after the war for his comics on western and historical themes, including “The Phantom Sheriff” and his masterpiece, “Dick Turpin’s Ride to York,” in *Knockout*. He also contributed comics and covers to *Comet*, the *Western Library* and *Cowboy Comics Library*.<sup>66</sup> Eyles drew one or two

black and white illustrations for each episode of “Storm Troop.” One of his illustrations was used in several issues and showed a seaplane taking off from a cave mouth, along with an inset portrait of Biggles in flying cap and goggles and, somewhat strangely, smoking a pipe! Eyles also drew a thrilling colour cover for No. 583, showing Biggles being surprised by von Stalhein’s collier.

Anyone flicking through copies of *War Thriller* will be struck by how much it had changed from its previous diet of detective and mystery stories. All the stories in each number were about the war, although in a link to the past most were spy stories. Exciting illustrations of warplanes were also printed, including some by Roland Davies who would later illustrate other Biggles stories. *War Thriller* evokes the early days of the war, when the “Phoney War” was still in place and before the grim days of Dunkirk and the Blitz. Sadly, No. 589 of the *War Thriller* was the last, even though an advertisement in that issue promised a new Berkeley Gray story the next week. The paper was one of 16 Amalgamated Press titles (including the *Boys’ Friend Library*) to be cut after a German U-Boat sank a freighter carrying paper.

It is difficult to suggest what a reasonable price for an issue of *War Thriller* might be. The paper seems to occur on Ebay more often than it occurs anywhere else, and consequently prices reflect the degree of competition. Norman Wright, in an article on Biggles stories in story papers and magazines, priced individual issues at £15-20 pounds each and No. 583 with the Biggles cover at £20-25.<sup>67</sup> Although I do not observe Ebay all the time, I cannot recall an issue selling for under £20 on that site. With these story papers, however, price is not the issue; finding them is the problem.

## Chapter Seven. The Air Training Corps Gazette

Readers of *By Jove Biggles!* will be familiar with the tales, recounted in that book, of young Second World War pilots who had been inspired by Biggles. The authors of that excellent volume cite Alan Morris' comment, in his 1968 work *The First of Many*, that the Biggles books "encouraged thousands to join the Auxiliary Air Force and the RAF Volunteer Reserve or to acquire an A licence in time for September 1939." Johns would have been aware of the popularity of his books, and began to lecture to aspiring pilots during the early days of the war. He published articles for those young hopefuls on aviation and, in a case of art imitating life, added Biggles stories.

The journal chosen by Johns for those articles and stories was the *Air Training Corps Gazette*. This had started life in 1939 as the *Air Defence Cadet Corps Gazette*, but when the Air Defence Cadet Corps (ADCC) was reorganised in 1941 as the Air Training Corps (ATC) the journal changed its name.

The roots of the ADCC go back to the early 1930s. The father of the organisation was Air Commodore John Chamier, who had commanded No. 34 Squadron, RFC, during the First World War. After his retirement from the RAF, he became Secretary-General of the Air League of the British Empire in 1933, an organisation that aimed to make the British public aware of the potential of aviation. Chamier knew W. E. Johns; the two discussed the formation of the ADCC together, according to Johns' "Skyways" column in the *Boy's Own Paper* for November 1941. Johns devoted an editorial to the new Air League in the September 1933 issue of *Popular Flying*, and after that Chamier was allowed a page each issue to provide news and views on the Air League. Johns was a strident advocate of the League and the need to build up the RAF.

Chamier knew that, in the First World War, young men had been sent to the Front with only a few hours training and all too often killed because of their lack of training and skill. He would also have been aware that, once more organised instruction under the Smith-Barry training system was adopted at the end of 1916, British aerial casualties declined. He wanted to ensure that British pilots would not be caught unprepared in the next war, and decided that a professionally-run training organisation was needed. There were already several air cadet organisations, but these were generally small, localised concerns without the scale to train more than a handful of pilots. Accordingly, in 1938 Chamier formed the ADCC.

Thousands of youths joined the ADCC and were formed into squadrons in several parts of the United Kingdom. The primary objective of the ADCC was to instruct cadets in the principles of flight, aircraft construction, navigation and the like, but it also offered them an insight into life in the Service, including Service discipline and drill instruction and physical training.

With the advent of the Second World War Johns, it seems, wished to contribute to the war effort. It is likely that he called on his acquaintance with

Chamier to get involved with the ADCC. In the December 1957 issue of *Books and Bookmen*, Jack Cox (who was, at that time, W. E. Johns' editor at the *Boy's Own Paper*) noted that Johns became a lecturer for the ADCC and gave talks all over Britain on every possible aviation topic. These talks were well received; the "air cadets liked his breezy manner and the countless personal anecdotes which livened his talks." In August 1940 Johns began to contribute articles to the new *ADCC Gazette*, commencing with a discussion on "What Makes the "Ace"."

The Second World War had other impacts on the ADCC. Many of its instructors and squadron officers were called up, buildings were commandeered and cadets went to work on RAF stations. At the same time, the Air Ministry observed that RAF recruits who had been ADCC members had a high level of proficiency and decided that it should make the ADCC the basis of a national training effort. As a result, the new Air Training Corps was established on 5 February 1941, with King George VI as the Commodore-in-Chief. In the first issue of the new *ATC Gazette* Air Commodore Chamier noted that the ATC stood "on the threshold of a great new adventure." The new organisation now enjoyed official cachet and far greater facilities, and was therefore "the veritable training-ground of the RAF of tomorrow."

Shortly after his first article in the *ADCC Gazette*, Johns submitted the opening episode of a new Biggles story to the journal. This appeared in the September 1940 issue and was titled "Biggles Flies Alone," but was the beginning of *Biggles Defies the Swastika*. Five episodes of the story appeared in the *ADCC Gazette* between September 1940 and January 1941, or in volume II, Nos. 2-6 (Table 3). The first episode took up three pages of the journal, finishing about half-way through chapter two of the book. Subsequent episodes usually occupied two pages. None of the episodes were illustrated.

All of the episodes were abridged, and it is interesting to note that the editor chose to omit some of Johns' more anti-Nazi comments. For example, he omitted the incident in chapter 2 where the German corporal slaps Biggles' face (page 20 of the Oxford first edition) and also the description of the hotel manager "slumped in his desk" and "as white as death" (page 17). It is not clear why these few phrases were omitted; perhaps the editor did not want to be accused of carrying propaganda. He also omitted early references to Algy and Ginger and to Biggles' Squadron being based in France, perhaps because he was concerned that these assumed reader knowledge of earlier Biggles stories.

Other changes were perhaps made simply to fit page limits. The second episode, for example, moves swiftly from Biggles' arrival at the airport and entry into the Luftwaffe to his trip to Sweden; the entire scene in which Biggles meets the Gestapo officer whose motorcycle he had stolen was not printed. This meant that the further reference to the officer at the beginning of chapter four was also excised. Oddly, the editor added one sentence in Johns' explanation of Biggles' earlier role in Arctic Airways. Where Johns wrote "But it had all been under his own name, so he could understand why the German agents in Canada had failed to find any particulars of a pilot named Hendrik" (page 53), the editor added "The reason was, of course, no pilot of that name

had served with the company.” He may have felt the need to state the obvious.

The decision to disband the ADCC and make it the basis of the ATC meant that the *ADCC Gazette* ceased publication for a month. In March 1941 the journal reappeared with a new name. It was now the *ATC Gazette* and the numbering started again at volume 1, No. 1. The first two numbers of the new journal contained further episodes of “Biggles Flies Alone.” Less than half of the story in the book was actually serialised; the story ends in the *ATC Gazette* quite early in the book, when Biggles has escaped from Stavanger and meets Ginger at the fjord.

Three more Biggles stories appeared after “Biggles Flies Alone.” These were very short versions of stories that were later used for *Spitfire Parade*. The final story, “Two Good Turns,” is barely recognisable as “The Record Breakers” from that book. It ends quite early with Biggles having shot down Wilks’ intended victim for the second time. The story was culled from a First World War story in “Biggles in France.” The full updated version was later published in *Spitfire Parade*. It is therefore possible that Johns submitted the whole (updated) story, but the editor, Leonard Taylor, cut the story to fit on one page (which it does exactly) and dreamt up a title to suit. Given the stringent restrictions on paper (see below) it is quite likely that Taylor would have cut back Johns’ stories to allow him to fit more factual material in an issue.

Only one of the stories had any illustration – there are two very small black and white drawings for “The Coming of Carrington.” At the same time, Johns contributed factual articles on a number of issues – such as when to bale out, making parachute jumps, night flying and passing RAF medicals. He continued to contribute similar articles for some time after the Biggles stories ceased.

There is no great mystery about why the Biggles stories stopped appearing in the *ATC Gazette*. The reason was paper rationing. Every issue of the *ATC Gazette* included requests from the editor to readers to share their copies of the journal, explaining that because of paper rationing he could not print enough to meet demand. The first issue of the *Gazette* had 58 pages; the next two 48, and the two after that 42. As the accent of the journal was on technical instruction, short stories had to be sacrificed once the number of pages had to be reduced. Other less “critical” features, such as letters to the editor, were similarly abandoned.

The *ATC Gazette* is a very interesting journal. As well as Johns’ articles and stories, there are a variety of features including aircraft recognition charts, articles on aeroplane construction and the workings of various parts of aircraft, discussions of navigation and using compasses, pieces on specific aeroplanes, Morse code, etc. The journal also contained a large number of photographs of aeroplanes and RAF personnel. As such, it makes a nice addition to any Biggles fan’s collection!

It is worth pointing out that, in writing for the *ATC Gazette*, Johns was effectively working for the Air Ministry. He would later claim that during the

war he wrote “specialised books” for the Air Ministry and the Ministry of Information, and that he was asked to create Worrals and Gimlet to boost recruitment.<sup>68</sup> It has recently come to light that in 1942-43 he produced propaganda booklets (including the Biggles story “Thunder Over Germany”) for the Ministry of Information.<sup>69</sup> It is not clear whether this was Johns’ first job for the Ministry, or whether he wrote for it before this. Given restrictions on paper and the Government’s policy of devoting scarce paper and ink to support the publication of suitable books, one has to wonder whether it was the Ministry of Information that asked Johns to invent Worrals and Gimlet, and whether Johns’ Biggles, Worrals and Gimlet books had been subsidised by the Ministry since his time lecturing for the ADCC. “Worrals of the W.A.A.F.S” commenced in the *Girl’s Own Paper* in September 1940 – when “Biggles Flies Alone” commenced in the *ADCC Gazette*.

Copies of volume one of the *ATC Gazette* are not common, but do occur on Ebay and in bookshops every now and then. They are not hugely expensive, but as I have not seen them on sale very often I could not suggest what a reasonable price might be. The circulation of the *ATC Gazette* hit 120,000 shortly after it was launched, so later issues without Biggles stories crop up regularly. The issues of the *ADCC Gazette* with episodes of “Biggles Flies Alone” are probably the rarest of all Biggles magazines. Only 10,000 were printed and the journal was not on sale to the public but was issued to cadets through their squadrons. By contrast, the *ATC Gazette* was available at newsagents. A single issue of the *ADCC Gazette* with an episode of “Biggles Flies Alone” sold for over £80 on Ebay in November 2009, and a bound volume with all of “Biggles Flies Alone” in the *ADCC Gazette* sold on Ebay for over £300 in 2008.

*Table 3. Biggles Stories in the ADCC / ATC Gazette*

<i>Journal / Volume</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Title</i>
ADCC Gazette Vol. II, Nos. 2 - 6	September 1940 – January 1941	Biggles Flies Alone
ATC Gazette Vol. I, Nos. 1 - 2	March – April 1941	Biggles Flies Alone
ATC Gazette Vol. I, No. 3	May 1941	The Coming of Carrington
ATC Gazette Vol. I, No. 4	June 1941	The Arrival of Angus
ATC Gazette Vol. I, No. 5	July 1941	Two Good Turns

### Box 6. The origins of those Spitfire Parade stories

“Ferocity” Ferris, of Umpty squadron, R.A.F., sat on an empty oil drum and regarded the rain-soaked expanse of turf that stretched away in front of him with moody disfavour. He was irritated; irritated for several reasons, any one of which would have been sufficient to irritate him.

But chiefly he was annoyed because an aching tooth had necessitated a visit to the dentist, with the result that the squadron had gone on a show and left him behind.

He felt that his flight commander, the Hon. Bertie Lissie, D.F.C., even if he said nothing, might think he was scrimshanking. Worse still, Tex O’Hara, his half-section, would, on his return, no doubt take advantage of the opportunity to exercise his cutting Western wit at his expense.

Anyone with a reasonable knowledge of Biggles stories will find these words – the opening words of a story by W. E. Johns – familiar. The three characters named are all from the Biggles stories written during the Second World War, and the opening itself is surely from a Biggles story. At the same time, however, something seems wrong. Surely there is no *Second World War* Biggles story that starts in this way?

In fact, in this case the words do not come from a Biggles story, although they are much the same words with which Johns opened his *First World War* tale “Biggles Takes the Bait.” The words are the first three paragraphs of a short story, “Spitfire Parade,” set in the Second World War and published in the March 1940 issue of *Air Stories* magazine. The hero of this is Ferocity Ferris, and Biggles is nowhere to be seen. When this story was written, Ferris, Lissie and O’Hara had yet to become characters in the Biggles stories. The story is almost entirely unoriginal, as Johns re-used “Biggles Takes the Bait” and another Biggles story, “J-9982,” to create it. Johns rather clumsily updated the First World War scenarios for the story. Ferocity Ferris appeared to be unaware of radio and therefore flew right next to another Spitfire to attract the pilot’s attention. His Spitfire also appeared to have no cockpit canopy!

Johns published five pieces in *Air Stories* between August 1939 and March 1940, when the magazine succumbed to paper rationing.<sup>70</sup> The five pieces are either entirely derivative, or would themselves be re-used for Biggles stories. The derivative products are “Prisoner of War” (August 1939), based on an article Johns had previously written for *The Modern Boy*, “Spitfire Parade” and “Sausages and Mash” (March 1940), written under the pseudonym “Old Timer” and a reworking of the Biggles story “The Trap.” The pieces that would later be re-used are “Hard Case Carrington” (November 1939) and “So This Is War” (February 1940). Both would be integrated into *Spitfire Parade*. Johns clearly borrowed the title of this book from his short story in “Air Stories” but chose not to include a version of the story in the book, probably because he included another version of “J-9982.”

“Hard Case Carrington” introduces us to Tug Carrington, but in this story Tug was a pilot in the First World War and there was no sign of Biggles. Johns obviously liked the character, and later used the story in *Spitfire Parade* under the title “The Coming of Carrington.” Some paragraphs from “Hard Case Carrington” were also used in the first Biggles story in *Spitfire Parade*, “Biggles Takes Over.” “So This Is War” introduced Ferocity Ferris, Lord Bertie Lissie and Tex O’Hara, and was used almost in its entirety for “Biggles Takes Over” in *Spitfire Parade*. For the book Johns simply added the first few pages showing Biggles arriving at 666 Squadron and changed a few names.

These were not the only tales in *Spitfire Parade* that were simply reworked versions of Johns’ old stories. As noted in chapter seven, *Spitfire Parade* included longer versions of three very short stories that had originally been published in the *Air Training Corps Gazette*. The first of these was “The Coming of Carrington,” clearly based on “Hard Case Carrington,” and the next two were tales which had originally been published in *Biggles in France* and which were updated to the Second World War. In addition, *Spitfire Parade* included several other stories from *Biggles in France*, *The Camels are Coming* and *Biggles of the Camel Squadron* rewritten for a Second World War context. It also included “The Fortune of War,” a new version of “Reunion” which had been published in *Popular Flying* in 1934, but was itself a revised version of one of Johns’ first short stories, “Fortune of War” from the *National Graphic*. The only story that appears to have been original is “The Love Song,” and I should not be surprised if an earlier version of this tale turned up in a magazine some day.

*Table 4. Sources of the stories in Spitfire Parade*

<b>Story</b>	<b>Source</b>
Biggles Takes Over	Hard Case Carrington / So This Is War ( <i>Air Stories</i> )
The Coming of Carrington	Hard Case Carrington ( <i>Air Stories</i> / <i>ATC Gazette</i> )
The Arrival of Angus	Biggles Gets a Bull ( <i>Biggles in France</i> / <i>ATC Gazette</i> )
Taffy Trundles In	One Bomb and Two Pockets ( <i>Biggles in France</i> )
One Good Turn	Under Open Arrest ( <i>Biggles in France</i> )
So This Is War	J-9982 ( <i>The Camels are Coming</i> )
Cuthbert Comes – and Goes	The Human Railway ( <i>Biggles in France</i> )
The Love Song	<i>Original?</i>
The Coward	The Funk ( <i>Biggles of the Camel Squadron</i> )
The Flying Spy	Suspicious ( <i>Biggles in France</i> )
The Record Breakers	Out for Records ( <i>Biggles in France</i> / <i>ATC Gazette</i> )
The Fortune of War	Fortune of War ( <i>National Graphic</i> July 1932) / Reunion ( <i>Popular Flying</i> December 1934)
Bertie Picks the Lock	Biggles’ Exciting Night ( <i>Modern Boy’s Annual</i> 1937)

## Chapter Eight. The Boy's Own Paper

In chapter five I observed that the early years of the Second World War were hectic ones for the Biggles stories. Paper rationing led to the collapse of several story papers, including all three of the papers from which Biggles hopped during the brief period between September 1939 and April 1940 – *The Modern Boy*, *The Gem* and *War Thriller*. Initial cuts in paper allocations in 1939 had been followed by a steep cut in April 1940 when publishers were limited to 60% of their previous year's supplies of paper. This blow, along with the torpedoing of steamers carrying paper from Canada to England, proved too much for the Amalgamated Press and in May 1940 it cut 16 titles, including such long-running stalwarts as the *Boys' Friend Library*, *Champion Library*, *Schoolboys' Own Library*, *Detective Weekly*, *Triumph* and *The Magnet*. Other papers also folded at this time, including Newnes' *Air Stories*, in which Johns had recently published several stories (Box 6). In September 1939, *Pearson's Magazine*, which Johns had briefly edited for about six months, had also ended, just after Johns began publishing Doctor Vane stories in it.<sup>71</sup>

Johns was a very flexible writer. He quickly adjusted to this change in the market and began to write stories for adult magazines. In May 1940, for example, his agents sold some of his Dr. Vane stories to *20 Story Magazine*. Between 1941 and 1946 Johns was able to publish a few stories in other journals like *Britannia and Eve*, *Illustrated*, *Woman's Magazine*, *Woman's Own*, *Woman's Journal* (which, incidentally, was published by the Amalgamated Press) and *Tit-Bits*, as well as overseas magazines such as the *Canadian Home Journal*, *Maclean's Magazine*, *Colliers* and *Extension*. However, this does not appear to have been a sinecure for him; in September 1941 his agent sent 19 stories to another agent in the U.S.A. "on spec," with the note that only four of them had hitherto been published in England.<sup>72</sup>

Johns was better off than some of his contemporaries. Charles Hamilton, it has been claimed, had signed away the rights to all of his creations except Billy Bunter in about 1921, and the near-elimination of the Amalgamated Press' boys' story papers in 1940 meant that he was effectively forced into retirement until the end of the war, when he was able to gain approval to bring back Greyfriars and St. Jim's. Johns, by contrast, retained the rights to Biggles and was therefore able to continue to publish Biggles books, perhaps with support from the British Government which might have observed their value in boosting recruitment. This was certainly the motive for the creation of Worrals. The first Worrals story began serialisation in the *Girl's Own Paper* in September 1940 (Gimlet did not appear until October 1943).<sup>73</sup> Johns also continued to publish articles in journals like *My Garden*, *Men Only* and *Strand*, and in September 1941 began a "Skyways" column in the *Boy's Own Paper* and a similar column in the *Girl's Own Paper*.<sup>74</sup> With the money he gained from his various articles, short stories and books Johns would not have been too uncomfortable.

His chief character, however, was Biggles, and 1940 and 1941 mark a definite slowing in pace after the regular serialisation of every new Biggles book during the previous years. *Biggles Defies the Swastika* was the last of a long consecutive run of Biggles stories to be serialised; the next Biggles book, *Biggles Sees it Through*, as far as we know was not serialised, and nor were most of the Biggles books published during the war. Clearly, with so few boys' story papers being published during the war opportunities were no longer available. Biggles was not entirely absent from such papers during this time, however. In October 1941 stories began to appear in the longest-running boys' paper of them all, the *Boy's Own Paper* (BOP). The first Biggles story in it was "The Enchanted Island," the opening story in *Biggles Charter Pilot*, and more stories from that book appeared irregularly until April 1944, by which time the entire book had been printed in the BOP. This was the start of an association that was to carry Johns through the war, and that continued even after the end of Government restrictions allowed new journals to appear and carry Biggles stories. The final Biggles story published in the BOP appeared in June 1962, marking the longest period of time Johns published Biggles in a single journal, although stories did not appear every year and there were long gaps between them.

It is not clear how Johns came to write for the BOP. In a BBC interview in 1967 Johns observed that he had read the BOP as a boy, so it is likely that he was happy to write for it. It is also possible that the BOP's editor, Robert Harding, saw a golden opportunity to snare a popular author and raise the circulation of the BOP, which would appear to have declined since the golden days of the 1880s-90s when it had sold 190,000 copies a week. There is little evidence of this in the BOP, however; Harding never referred to the Biggles stories in his columns, and there was no fanfare when they began. Harding left the paper shortly after Biggles arrived, to be replaced in 1942 by Leonard Halls. Halls was similarly taciturn about the Biggles stories.

The BOP had begun in 1879 as a weekly paper, published by the old Religious Tract Society. In the early days a month's worth of weekly issues would be bound together with new covers and also issued, and a year's worth of monthlies would be issued as the *BOP Annual* at the end of a year (without the bright covers that graced the monthly). In 1913 the weekly was dropped and the BOP simply became a monthly, which it remained to the end. When first released it was intended to be an antidote to the penny dreadfuls of the day by offering good stories with more appropriate morals, as well as interesting yet educational articles. These remained, by and large, its twin aims to the end. In the early days it carried stories by some of the most famous children's authors of the late nineteenth century, including W. H. G. Kingston, R. M. Ballantyne, Talbot Baines Reed, Jules Verne and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Famous authors to write for it in the twentieth century included C. S. Forester, Geo Rochester, Percy Westerman and Major Charles Gilson, while authors who are less well known today but were once favourites of boys the world over included Gunby Hadath, Sercombe Griffin, Major J. T. Gorman, Arthur Catherall and Michael Poole. The articles covered a wide range of topics. During any year, for example, there could be articles on sailing, cycling, scouting, woodworking, painting, natural history, magic or astronomy.

The most popular topics, however, were sport and philately, and the editors' answers to correspondents. One of the early editors, G. A. Hutchison, has gone down in history for his pithy and often acerbic responses, including his regular prescription for any mental or physical ill: "Take a Cold Tub, Sir!"<sup>75</sup>

During the First World War the BOP had, like many other boys' story papers, concentrated on patriotic stories of war and British pluck. The Second World War was no different, and the covers would often depict British soldiers, war scenes or the uniforms of various Empire and Commonwealth regiments. A number of new features appeared, including Johns' "Skyways" column which was very popular with readers. The paper did suffer; the *BOP Annual* had to cease publication due to paper rationing, and the BOP's London headquarters were hit in the Blitz, but the paper simply moved to new quarters in Surrey, nicknamed "Fort BOP," and carried on.

### **Box 7. "How I wrote Biggles at School"**

In the 1950s the Christmas issue of the BOP was usually a bumper number, with extra pages and features. One such feature would be an insert, on different-coloured paper, with numerous book reviews, articles on books and advertisements for new books. In December 1950 the BOP was serialising "Biggles at School," and Johns therefore wrote a short piece for the Christmas insert titled "How I wrote Biggles at School." It is rare to gain insights from Johns into his aims in writing a story, and short though it is the piece does provide us with some knowledge of what Johns was trying to achieve. As the piece has never, to my knowledge, been republished it is worth reproducing it here.

Of course Biggles went to school. But where? When? And what happened to him there? What sort of fellow was he – studious or careless, a good scholar or a duffer? Was he favoured, or did he go through the trials and tribulations that most boys suffer at boarding school?

These and similar questions have been cropping up in my letters for years. They were not the sort that could be answered in a few words. The only possible way to deal with them was to tell the whole story – or, at any rate, that part of it likely to be of interest. The reader could then judge for himself just what sort of a chap Biggles was at school age, and to what extent the events of that period developed his character. Hence, *Biggles at School*.

Some of the names and places have been changed for obvious reasons; others have not, and these will almost certainly be recognized by some people should the story fall into their hands. Many of the events described are true to the last detail. The monkey-nut episode (*Oct. BOP*), for instance. Among my old faded snapshots are pictures of some of the places. The cave, for instance. Oh, yes, it really existed, and no doubt still exists. I could show it to you, for I was one of the first people to explore it.

Alas! The lovely old school, with its mellow red brick and twisted Elizabethan chimneys no longer exists as such. During the last war I was in London when I heard it had been struck by a landmine. On the impulse of the moment I went to see it, and I confess that a lump came into my throat when I looked at the splintered desks in the Fourth Form classroom. That was the tragic end of the old school. Luckily it happened in the holidays, so no one was hurt. I believe one of the old boys saved the cracked bell that had clanged boys into class for hundreds of years.

Colonel Chase, the Head, has long since died; but even to-day, when I see fellows slouching along, I can hear that crisp voice of his rap out: "Stand up, boy. Speak out. If you mumble, people can't hear what you say." That was sound advice. Make a note of it. I realize now how much I, and the other boys – which includes Biggles – owe to the Head. He was tough, but he always gave a fellow a square deal.

And that, after all, is the important thing. Don't you agree?

In an article in *Books and Bookmen* published in December 1957 Jack Cox claimed that "Biggles at School" "is based very frankly on [Johns'] own experiences at Hertford Grammar School." The school was clearly not completely destroyed during the War, as boys from his school could write to papers such as *Eagle* during the 1950s (see chapter eleven). It is instructive that Johns wanted to show how Biggles' schooldays shaped his character. In this regard, he could be said to have succeeded, as Biggles' experiences with the school cadet corps, his courage and initiative are all demonstrated in the story. One of the most memorable incidents in the book is the scene in which an old boy who has joined the RFC flies over and lands on the school cricket field. Biggles says "it must be wonderful to be able to do that." And in that moment the Biggles we all know is born!

Table 5 lists the Biggles stories in the BOP. The *Charter Pilot* stories came out irregularly between 1941 and 1944, followed by a Gimlet story in 1945. Stories from *Charter Pilot* were not printed in the order in which they appeared in the book. About half appeared before the book was published in 1943. In 1946 Biggles reappeared with "Biggles' Second Case." After a gap of some years he was back in 1950 in "Biggles at School," for which Johns published a special piece in December 1950 titled "How I wrote Biggles at School" (Box 7). This story was swiftly followed in 1951 by "Biggles Works it Out" and "Biggles Follows On." Four short stories appeared in 1954 and another in 1955, and then in 1958 "Biggles Buries a Hatchet" was serialised. After that there was another gap before three short stories appeared in 1961-62. These were the last Biggles stories to be published in the paper; the BOP itself was sold to new owners in 1963, and it was closed down in 1967. However, three Biggles short stories that had been published in the BOP also appeared in the first three volumes of the *Boy's Own Companion* between 1959 and 1961. The *Companion* was, in effect, similar to the old *BOP Annual* but in a smaller and more affordable format as only selected material was reprinted. In 1964

the annual was in fact revived, as a thin book with predominantly new material, and lasted until 1979.

In each issue of the BOP the Biggles story was accompanied by one, and sometimes two, illustrations. It is not known who illustrated the *Charter Pilot* stories, or “Biggles’ Second Case.” All the Biggles stories published between 1950 and 1955 were illustrated by Bowe, while “Biggles Buries a Hatchet” was illustrated by Dear. Roland Davies illustrated two of the final three short stories, “Biggles Learns Something” and “Dangerous Freight.” The final story was apparently illustrated by “Donald Avies” – one wonders whether this is a copy-editor’s mistake for Roland Davies! I know nothing else about Bowe and Dear, but Roland Davies was a prolific illustrator and comic artist, famous for his “Come On, Steve” strip in the *Daily Express* prior to the war, and after it for a variety of work for *Eagle*, *TV Comic*, *Swift* and *Girl*. He also drew a number of Sexton Blake comics in *Knockout*.<sup>76</sup> During the Second World War he illustrated some propaganda booklets containing Johns’ stories – including the Biggles story “Thunder Over Germany.”

The illustrations that accompanied the Biggles stories in the *Boy’s Own Companion* were the same as those in the paper itself, with the exception of those accompanying “Biggles’ Chinese Puzzle.” This story had an extra illustration and a redrawn version of a picture originally published in the BOP. Biggles was often advertised on the front cover of the BOP, but only appeared twice in front cover art. His first appearance was in an exciting scene from “Mystery of the Golden Shirts” in May 1942, and his second was a portrait, specially drawn by Tilden Reeves, on the cover of the February 1946 number.

Generally, most of the stories were abridged when published in the BOP. The editing is usually very professional. For example, “Biggles Follows On” was substantially reduced, but the BOP offers a taut, crisp version which does not omit a single important detail (and leaves out much of the endless discussion with which Johns fleshed out his books!). Even the short stories were abridged, with the exception of the *Charter Pilot* stories. There was one interesting change to a *Charter Pilot* story, however. In the book story “The Adventure of the Golden Shirts” Johns wrote “Ginger tossed the mutilated newspaper into the waste-paper basket.” In the BOP “Mystery of the Golden Shirts” the line reads “Ginger carefully folded the newspaper for the salvage basket.”

The wartime BOP carried regular requests for readers to take their old paper for recycling, and to share their copies with their friends as there was not enough paper to print any extra copies. Indeed, during the Second World War the BOP had to adjust several times to paper rationing. At first it was cut to about half the number of pages prior to the war, then in April 1942 slightly reduced in height and printed in a smaller typescript, and then in September 1942 shrunk to little more than a large booklet size. “Mystery of the Golden Shirts” appeared in the second BOP which had been slightly reduced in height. Consequently, I imagine that Johns’ profligacy with newspaper was too much for the editor to bear!

Biggles was at the height of his popularity in the 1940s and 1950s, and it would be interesting to know the impact he had on the circulation of the BOP. We do know that in the 1960s the circulation of the BOP was about 33,000, although this figure is perhaps not all that instructive. In 1960 the BOP was distributed in 55 countries, and the editor claimed in April 1958 that the BOP's circulation was "increasing steadily month by month." The fall in circulation appears, then, to have been a feature of the 1960s, when Biggles stopped appearing in the paper, although to be fair the BOP carried fewer stories in its last decade and would have been facing significant competition on factual topics from Fleetway's high-quality paper *Look and Learn*.

One problem that the BOP faced was that it had many more readers than sales, something that it had itself sponsored during the Second World War by promoting readers' clubs, and that was exacerbated after the war by school magazine clubs. The editorial staff carried out research in 1958 that showed that the gap between sales and readership could be as high as 41 readers for a single number. The BOP's accessibility was both its strength and its weakness, and declining sales undoubtedly led to its downfall.

During the 1940s and 1950s Biggles was one of the main drawcards of the BOP. In August 1943 the editor, Leonard Halls, asked his readers to name their most popular features in the paper, and Johns' "Skyways" column finished second, although the first three features virtually dead-heated. As the next editor, Jack Cox, noted, Halls had not asked readers to name their most popular stories, "but there can be no doubt that Captain W. E. Johns and his "Biggles" stories were supreme favourites in the blacked-out wartime houses and air-raid shelters."<sup>77</sup> Cox knew Johns quite well. He recorded that Johns would "call at Bouverie Street in the afternoons for tea and conversation." He also related that Johns would send the staff at the BOP presents of game from Scotland.<sup>78</sup>

Jack Cox became editor of the BOP in June 1946 and ensured that several Biggles stories were published in the BOP. Cox noted "cascades of readers' letters were produced by every serial featuring the intrepid flying ace." He stated that when he became editor he was delighted to find that "Biggles' Second Case" was "running along splendidly and producing shoals of readers' letters. Biggles was a leading favourite with readers, and we snapped up serial rights whenever a new adventure was on the stocks."<sup>79</sup>

In his editor's columns Cox also commented on the stories. In January 1951 he stated "our series Biggles at School has been a great success. Frankly, neither Captain Johns nor myself could be sure whether you were going to like it...Your enthusiastic letters have proved that you did want to know the story. We have, in fact, had very few adverse criticisms." To give Cox his credit, he did publish these critics. One R. D. Bissell expressed his disappointment that "it is only a school story – and a pretty poor one at that," while Ian Gunn sarcastically suggested that the BOP should next carry "*Gimlet in Arms*, a story of Gimlet's harassing experiences as a baby." This last letter did motivate the editor to note that, judging from other readers' letters, "Reader Gunn is very sadly outnumbered." The critics seem to have been reacting to the opening chapters of the tale, which are admittedly less

interesting than the later ones. The last word on this topic went to Donald B. Rix, whose letter in the February 1951 issue commented that “the idea of having Biggles as a schoolboy in a story of his early life was terrific.”

Cox also published readers’ comments on other stories. One reader claimed that “Biggles Works It Out” “was a perfect serial” and Cox noted that “Biggles Follows On” was also proving a great success. Given the evidence provided by Jack Cox, we can probably be satisfied that Johns was a key factor in the BOP’s popularity in the 1940s and 1950s.

Most of the Biggles stories in the BOP are not rare, and I managed to put together a complete collection in about two years. The *Charter Pilot* issues are probably the most difficult to find (many readers at the time appear to have succumbed to the appeals of the editors and sent their copies off for salvage!). The December 1955 issue containing “Simple Arithmetic,” which was uncollected until published in *Biggles Air Ace* in 1999, can also prove elusive. Other issues turn up fairly regularly and are not overly expensive. *Charter Pilot* issues can sometimes fetch higher prices, and I have seen single issues go for as much as £28 when several bidders got involved. The two issues with Biggles on the cover can also fetch higher prices, especially the May 1942 issue with a scene from “Mystery of the Golden Shirts.”

Table 5. *Biggles* stories in the *Boy's Own Paper*.

<b>Story</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Book</b>
The Enchanted Island	October 1941	<i>Biggles Charter Pilot</i>
The Horticultural Hermits	November 1941	<i>Biggles Charter Pilot</i>
The Crocodile of Conga Wonga	December 1941	<i>Biggles Charter Pilot</i>
Bishimbi the Caveman	January 1942	<i>Biggles Charter Pilot</i>
Grotto of Death	February 1942	<i>Biggles Charter Pilot</i>
The Purple Plague	March 1942	<i>Biggles Charter Pilot</i>
Mystery of the Golden Shirts	May 1942	<i>Biggles Charter Pilot</i>
Haunted!	June 1942	<i>Biggles Charter Pilot</i>
Mexican Man-Hunt	July 1942	<i>Biggles Charter Pilot</i>
Samson of Patagonia	August 1942	<i>Biggles Charter Pilot</i>
Adventure with a Mammoth	September 1942	<i>Biggles Charter Pilot</i>
The Luminous Lily	August 1943	<i>Biggles Charter Pilot</i>
Secret Weapon	January 1944	<i>Biggles Charter Pilot</i>
Lost Crusaders	February 1944	<i>Biggles Charter Pilot</i>
"Biggles" and the Dodos	March 1944	<i>Biggles Charter Pilot</i>
Desert Spectre	April 1944	<i>Biggles Charter Pilot</i>
Biggles' Second Case	Feb. 1946 – Sept. 1946	<i>Biggles' Second Case</i>
Biggles at School	Oct. 1950 – Mar. 1951	<i>Biggles Goes to School</i>
Biggles Works it Out	Apr. 1951 – Sept. 1951	<i>Biggles Works it Out</i>
Biggles Follows On	Apr. 1952 – Sept. 1952	<i>Biggles Follows On</i>
The Case of the Phone Box Murder	February 1954	<i>Biggles and the Pirate Treasure</i>
The Case of the Flying Clown	March 1954	<i>Biggles and the Pirate Treasure</i>
The Mystery of the Torn Parachute	September 1954	<i>Biggles' Chinese Puzzle</i>
Biggles' Chinese Puzzle	October 1954	<i>Biggles' Chinese Puzzle</i>
Simple Arithmetic	December 1955	<i>Biggles Air Ace</i>
Biggles Buries a Hatchet	Mar. 1958 – Sept. 1958	<i>Biggles Buries a Hatchet</i>
Biggles Learns Something	May 1961	<i>Biggles Flies to Work</i>
Routine Job	December 1961	<i>Biggles Flies to Work</i>
Dangerous Freight	June 1962	<i>Biggles Flies to Work</i>

## Chapter Nine. The Daily Mail

For many years, the only information available to me on the magazines and papers in which Biggles stories had been serialised was the bibliography of Johns' works at the back of *By Jove, Biggles!* This lists a number of series in British newspapers. *Biggles Breaks the Silence*, *Biggles Takes the Case* and *Biggles Cuts it Fine* apparently appeared in the *Liverpool Daily Post*, and *Biggles of the Interpol* in the *Evening News* between 12-17 June 1954.

Sadly, these newspapers are not available in Australian libraries, and I have not attempted to procure microfilm copies from overseas. I have, however, managed to obtain copies of three other Biggles stories that appeared in another newspaper in 1950 – the *Daily Mail*.

The *Daily Mail* first appeared in May 1896. It was the brainchild of Alfred Harmsworth, later Lord Northcliffe, and stood out from its contemporaries with its modern typeface, bold headlines, photos, and its content – news being presented in short but sharp bite-sized bulletins, along with a women's page, articles on matters of common interest and the first magazine page ever to appear in a British newspaper, advertised as “a page for leisure moments”. Under Harmsworth's influence the paper promoted modernisation and new inventions, but the editor, Glaswegian Kennedy Jones, realising that readers wanted scandal, sport and sensation, prioritised crime, mystery, football, racing and cricket. This led the Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury, in a paraphrase of Thackeray's *Pendennis* who founded a newspaper by gentlemen for gentlemen, to dismiss the *Daily Mail* as “a newspaper produced by office boys for office boys”.<sup>80</sup>

Jones knew his psychology, however, and the paper was an overnight success. The first issue sold 397,215 copies at a time when nearly all of the seven major daily papers were in the red. Circulation settled back to 222,405 copies in September 1896, but soared near one million during the Boer War as the *Daily Mail* flew the flag. One of its leaders at this time, an article by Edgar Wallace alleging the Boers had shot British prisoners, caused a furore.

The paper was a bastion of conservative opinion, as revealed by its priorities over time. In the early years of the twentieth century the *Daily Mail* stood for rearmament and modernisation and regularly warned of Germany's imperial ambitions. In the 1930s the paper stood for the expansion of the armed services and the RAF, but ran a pro-German line. The owner, Harmsworth's nephew Viscount Rothermere, was one of those Britons who, disliking Bolshevism, made the mistake of embracing fascism. The low point for the paper came in July 1938 when, as Germany threatened to annex the Sudetenland, the *Daily Mail* accused the Czechs of imperilling peace and labelled them “the petty bullies of Central Europe”.<sup>81</sup> With the advent of the Second World War Rothermere toed a more patriotic line and severed his links to German agents.

From the earliest days the *Daily Mail* included serial stories. Harmsworth demanded that the story contain plenty of excitement and vigorous writing. During the 1950s the paper carried stories by well-known authors, including Hornblower stories by C. S. Forester. Three Biggles stories were serialised in the *Daily Mail* as follows:

Thunder over Germany	18 March – 13 May 1950
African Assignment	27 May – 5 August 1950
The Renegade	19 August – 28 October 1950

These stories appeared each Saturday in the “Junior Mail” section of the paper. Each episode was accompanied by a small black and white illustration by Eric R. Parker, one of the most famous British comic and magazine artists of the twentieth century. Parker had been a child prodigy whose artistic talent was rewarded with a special scholarship (recorded in the *Boy’s Own Paper* in 1913!), and in 1922 he became a staff artist at the Amalgamated Press, where he stayed until his death in 1974. He provided illustrations for story papers like *Chums*, *The Scout* and *Wild West Weekly* as well as for adult papers like *Strand* and *Pearson’s Magazine*. Prior to the war, however, he was most famous for his illustrations of Sexton Blake stories in *Union Jack* and *Detective Weekly*, and for drawing something like 900 covers for the *Sexton Blake Library*. During the Second World War he began drawing comics for *Knockout* and produced these for a wide range of Amalgamated Press papers after the War, including *Comet*, *Sun* and the *Thriller Comics Library*. I first became a fan of his work when as a boy I was captivated by his “Scrapbook of the British Soldier” which appeared in *Ranger* and *Look and Learn* in the 1960s.<sup>82</sup>

The *Daily Mail* remained a conservative paper, and tinges of Rothermere’s racial views can be observed in the brief editorial introductions to each week’s Biggles episode. The villain of “The Renegade,” for example, Vander, is continually identified by the editor as “of Eurasian extraction” or “by blood, Eurasian.”

As far as I can see, the stories as published in the *Daily Mail* were identical to the versions in *Comrades in Arms* and *Biggles Takes the Case*. The two stories from *Takes the Case* appeared before that book was published. “Thunder over Germany” appeared three years after *Comrades in Arms*. As far as I know it was the first Biggles story to be published in the *Daily Mail*, but I have not checked copies of the paper published before 1950.

There do not appear to have been any Biggles stories in the *Daily Mail* after 1950. The *Daily Mail* lost circulation to its rivals in the 1950s and many changes were tried out to find a formula that would appeal to readers. The “Junior Mail” section shrank to a very small corner of one page and there may simply not have been enough space for stories in later issues. Johns’ association with the title did not end there, however. At the end of 1952 his Biggles story “Night Flight” was published in the *Daily Mail Annual for Boys and Girls*, and over the next few years he published a further six Biggles

stories in the *Daily Mail Boy's Annual* (as the title became). All of these stories were illustrated in two-tone technique by Eric Parker, with the exception of the last story, "The Case of the Somerset Farmer" from the 1963 annual (the artist is not named but from the style of drawing is clearly not Parker).

The *Daily Mail* annuals were originally edited by Susan French, but later by "John Bellamy" which was actually a pseudonym used by the story paper collector George Beal, who later stated that he wrote most of the annuals himself under other pseudonyms. Table 6 presents a brief catalogue of the annuals. Details of these are not widely available outside the IBA catalogue, and even that offers only brief notes. As it can be very difficult to work out which particular annual is being listed in some online booksellers' descriptions, it is hoped that Table 6 will provide assistance.

*Daily Mail* annuals are not especially rare. "The Case of the Somerset Farmer" in the 1963 annual was uncollected until 1999, but the annual does not appear to be uncommon, although it is not always available. That being said, I must make one proviso. The 1963 annual is usually found with the spine fraying at the top and bottom, or removed entirely, and I have seen only one copy with its spine intact and in good condition.

The 1963 annual also has an illustration on the front cover of the Biggles story inside, showing Biggles with a handlebar moustache and tweeds and Ginger in a fetching pink suit and matching flat cap. It is worth collecting for this reason alone, although it perhaps wins hands down the prize for the least attractive Biggles front cover of all time!

The other six *Daily Mail* annuals are not difficult to find in good condition, although it can be hard to locate examples with good dustjackets. The 1952 and 1963 annuals did not come with dustjackets, but with illustrated boards; all the other annuals had dustjackets with the same picture as on the printed boards. The 1952 annual came with a wrap-around band advertising the stories inside, which is virtually impossible to find these days.

Table 6. *Biggles* stories in *Daily Mail* annuals.

Year	Story	Description
1952	Night Flight ( <i>Biggles and the Pirate Treasure</i> )	<i>Daily Mail Annual for Boys and Girls</i> , ed. Susan French. 184 pp. Printed Morrison and Gibb Ltd. No dustjacket but a yellow wrap-around band with printed advertisements for the stories inside. Pictorial boards show dancing harlequins on a blue-black background. First story "Here we are again" by W. Macqueen-Pope.
1955	The Man Who Came by Night ( <i>Biggles of the Interpol</i> )	<i>Daily Mail Boy's Annual</i> , ed. John Bellamy. 201 pp. Printed Waterlow & Sons. Dustjacket and boards show smiling boy wearing a striped cap on a red background. Price 7/6. First story "Operation Outback" by Eric Leyland.
1956	Biggles Lays a Ghost ( <i>Biggles Presses On</i> )	<i>Daily Mail Boy's Annual</i> , ed. John Bellamy. 201 pp. Printed Waterlow & Sons. Dustjacket and boards show smiling boy with no cap on a red background. Price 8/6. First story "Biggles Lays a Ghost."
1957	The Case of the Two Bright Boys ( <i>Biggles Flies to Work</i> )	<i>Daily Mail Boy's Annual</i> , ed. John Bellamy. 201 pp. Printed Waterlow & Sons. Dustjacket and boards show boy scuba diving on a green background. No price on dustjacket. First story "Into Unknown Space" by A. M. Dutton.
1958	Dawn Patrol ( <i>Biggles Flies to Work</i> )	<i>Daily Mail Boy's Annual</i> , ed. John Bellamy. 201 pp. Printed Waterlow & Sons. Dustjacket and boards show smiling boy holding red model aeroplane on a blue background. Price not known. First story "Dawn Patrol."
1959	Horace Takes a Hand ( <i>Biggles Flies to Work</i> )	<i>Daily Mail Boy's Annual</i> , ed. John Bellamy. 205 pp. Printed Waterlow & Sons. Dustjacket and boards show two men in a helicopter on a blue background. Price 9/6. First story "Green for Danger" by Geoffrey Morgan.
1963	The Case of the Somerset Farmer ( <i>Biggles Air Ace</i> )	<i>Daily Mail Boy's Annual</i> , ed. John Bellamy. 145 pp. Printed Morrison & Gibb Ltd. No dustjacket. Pictorial boards show Biggles and Ginger watching a plane land. Price 8/6. First story "The Case of the Somerset Farmer."

## Box 8. The Mystery of the Missing Annuals

Biggles stories have been published in a large number of annuals since 1934, when “The Ace of Spades” appeared in the John Hamilton book *The Cockpit*, edited by Major C. H. Daniels. This was a handsome A4-sized volume. Both Johns and Daniels (who edited the Hamilton journal *Wings*) were regular contributors to Hamilton’s publications at the time. A second edition of *The Cockpit* appeared in 1936 with new illustrations by one of John Hamilton’s most respected aviation artists, Stanley Orton Bradshaw. Bradshaw drew a black and white illustration for the story and also drew an exciting colour cover which does not fit any of the stories in the book except “The Ace of Spades.” Consequently, it is likely that this was the first short story collection, not edited by Johns, that nevertheless featured Biggles on the front cover.

“The Ace of Spades” was published in another annual in 1935. In April that year a collection of Johns’ short stories, *The Raid*, was published by John Hamilton. All of the stories in this book except “The Ace of Spades” had originally been published in *Wings*.<sup>83</sup> The volume is a slim B5-sized book which can be found with several different board colours which are likely to reflect a number of different printings. No-one knows for sure what colour boards graced the first edition, although there is some agreement that the first edition may have had red boards. Given that all the stories in the book had been published elsewhere it would seem that John Hamilton were trying to earn some extra money from the stories by collecting them in the book.

In 1935 another Biggles story, “The Fledglings,” featured in *The New Book of the Air*, edited by Howard Leigh and published by Oxford University Press. This book was also A4-sized, and is a magnificent production, known in two separate editions which both had different dustjackets painted by Howard Leigh. The first edition shows two Hawker Harts over the sea near an aircraft carrier, whereas the second edition from 1937 depicts a flying boat taking off from a futuristic sea platform. The interior is stuffed with Leigh’s black and white ink drawings (including several accompanying “The Fledglings”) and also a dozen of his beautiful colour paintings.

From 1936-38 Biggles stories appeared in five annuals, edited by “Flight-Lieutenant.” Four of these were released by “The Ace Publishing Co,” a Hamilton subsidiary, while a fifth, *Flying Adventures*, was issued by John Hamilton under its own name. The annuals all reprinted stories and artwork from Hamilton’s books and magazines. Even dustjackets from some books appeared as colour plates! The Biggles stories were published as follows:

<i>Flying Adventures</i>	The Ace of Spades
<i>Air Adventures</i>	Beauty and the Beast, Fair Cargo, Savages and Wings
<i>Ace High</i>	The Oriental Touch, The Gold Rush
<i>Out of the Blue</i>	Three Weeks, the Blue Orchid, Bob’s Box
<i>Air Stories</i>	The Sheikh and the Greek, Yellow Freight, The Maid and the Mountains, The Last Laugh

The books are not dated; according to the British Library catalogue, *Flying Adventures* was published in 1936, and the other four books in 1938. These

four albums reprinted stories from *Biggles Flies Again*. The stories were not printed in the same order as the book, probably because they were distributed across four annuals. Some minor changes were made to remove linking passages which would otherwise have been confusing to readers. For example, in "The Maid and the Mountains" in *Air Stories* a reference to Cyrus Hollinger was removed, while in "Fair Cargo" in *Air Adventures* a joke about Consuela was deleted. Moreover, the story "The Last Show" was renamed "The Last Laugh," perhaps because the original title would not have made sense when the stories were published out of sequence. Generally the stories were not illustrated, with the exception of "The Ace of Spades," which was given a brand new set of black and white ink drawings by Howard Leigh – meaning that the story was not only published three times by John Hamilton, but was given different illustrations each time.

Biggles stories also appeared in *The Modern Boy's Annual* for 1937-38 and 1940-41, and *The Modern Boy's Book of Adventure Stories* (chapter three). The heyday of Biggles in annuals was the late 1940s and the 1950s. Biggles stories appeared in quite a range and variety of annuals or short story collections. Three such collections were designed to tempt readers to buy more books, and therefore published only a chapter of a longer novel. These were *Best Adventure Stories* (1947), edited by Eric Leyland, containing a chapter of *Biggles' Second Case* as "Against the Odds," *Story Trove* (1950), edited by Leonard Gribble and containing a chapter of *Biggles Breaks the Silence* as "Frozen Gold," and *Stories for Boys* (1957), chosen by Anthony Buckeridge and containing "First Time Up!" from *Biggles Learns to Fly*. All three of these books are rather difficult to find in dustjackets, especially *Story Trove*, and *Stories for Boys* offers added difficulty as collectors of Buckeridge's work also pursue the book.

Other Biggles stories were published in annuals as follows:

*Every Boy's Annual* (1949) "The Maid and the Mountains"  
*Every Boy's Annual* (1950) "The Hare and the Tortoise"  
*The Children's Jolly Book* (n.d.) "All in the Day's Work"  
*The Wonder Book of Comics* (n.d.) "Biggles Bait the Trap"  
*The Golden Book of Comics* (1950) "The Case of the Mysterious Gunshots"  
*Collins Magazine Annual for Boys and Girls 4* (1951) "Biggles in Arabia"  
*The Ace Book of Comics* (1951) "The New Aerofoil"  
*The Treasure Book of Comics* (1952) "The Case of the Secret Inquisitors"  
*The Boy's Book of Adventure* (1950) "Skyway Robbery"  
*Daily Mail Annual for Boys and Girls* (1952) "Night Flight"  
*Eagle Annual 2* (1952) "Biggles Buys a Watch"  
*Eagle Annual 3* (1953) "The Flying Crusaders"  
*Eagle Annual 2* (1954) "The Adventure of the Luminous Clay"  
*News Chronicle I-Spy Annual* (1955) "Fishy Business"  
*Daily Mail Boy's Annual* (1955) "The Man Who Came by Night"  
*Daily Mail Boy's Annual* (1956) "Biggles Lays a Ghost"  
*Express Annual* (1956) "Biggles and the Crash that Wasn't"  
*BBC Children's Annual* (1956) "The Flying Crusaders"  
*Boys' Book of Scouting and the Open Air* (1956) "Mischiefs by Moonlight"

*Adventure Stories for Boys* (1956) "The Case of the Unknown Aircraft"  
*Daily Mail Boy's Annual* (1957) "The Case of the Two Bright Boys"  
*Daily Mail Boy's Annual* (1958) "Dawn Patrol"  
*Daily Mail Boy's Annual* (1959) "Horace Takes a Hand"  
*Boy's Own Companion 1* (1959) "The Case of the Phone Box Murder"  
*Boy's Own Companion 2* (1960) "The Case of the Flying Clown"  
*Boy's Own Companion 3* (1961) "Biggles' Chinese Puzzle"  
*Daily Mail Boy's Annual* (1963) "The Case of the Somerset Farmer"  
*Stirring Stories for Boys* (1960) "Dawn Patrol"  
*Open-Air Adventure Stories for Boys* (1965) "The Case of the Submerged Aircraft"

A number of these annuals are not dated; where possible I have dated them using the British Library catalogue. Some of these annuals are discussed under chapters 8-12 and therefore will not be discussed here. Two stories appeared twice, "Dawn Patrol" and "The Flying Crusaders." Most stories appeared in an annual before they appeared in a Biggles short story collection; the exception was "The Case of the Submerged Aircraft" which appeared in Odhams' *Open-Air Adventure Stories for Boys* in 1965 after it was published in *Biggles Presses On* in 1958.

A few marginalia should be recorded. All the annuals carry illustrations by a variety of artists, which of course are only available in the annuals. *The Boy's Book of Adventure* is quite desirable in dustjacket as this jacket has a fabulous full colour illustration by Stead of the Biggles story, "Skyway Robbery." The story itself was abridged and accompanied by unique black and white illustrations, also by Stead.

The *Boy's Book of Scouting and the Open Air* can be found with either red or blue boards. In my experience, it is difficult to find in dustjacket. Copies of the three *Eagle Annuals* are also rare in dustjackets and keenly sought in this state, often attracting fierce competition on Ebay. The two editions of *Every Boy's Annual* also appear to be uncommon in dustjackets, as do the *Express Annual* and the four books of comics. These appeared in two different formats. The first version had a dustjacket and plain coloured boards, sometimes with embossed designs on the front board (*The Ace Book of Comics*) or with small black pictures within a segmented diamond (*The Wonder Book of Comics*). The second version had the same full colour dustjacket illustration pasted onto the front board but no jacket; examples of these versions have been found with a plain coloured slip case, indicating that they were probably sold like this.

Most other annuals had dustjackets, with the exception of two of the *Daily Mail* annuals (chapter nine), *The Children's Jolly Book* (as far as I know; I have never seen a copy offered with jacket) and the *News Chronicle I-Spy Annual*.

The sources of some of the Biggles short story collections can be worked out with some certainty. For example, we know that the stories in *Biggles Takes the Case* (1952) originally appeared in several locations:

Skyway Robbery	<i>The Boy's Book of Adventure</i> 1950
The Case of the Unknown Aircraft	BBC <i>Hello Children</i> 1949
The Renegade	<i>Daily Mail</i> 1950
Biggles Bait the Trap	<i>The Wonder Book of Comics</i>
African Assignment	<i>Daily Mail</i> 1950
All in the Day's Work	<i>The Children's Jolly Book</i>
The Case of the Secret Aerofoil	<i>The Ace Book of Comics</i> 1951
The Case of the Mysterious Gunshots	<i>The Golden Book of Comics</i> 1950
The Hare and the Tortoise	<i>Every Boy's Annual</i> 1950

We can also work out that several of the stories in *Biggles and the Pirate Treasure* and *Biggles' Chinese Puzzle* originally appeared in some annuals and the *Boy's Own Paper*. Three of the stories in *Biggles Presses On* had appeared in different annuals prior to their publication in that book, and six of the stories in *Biggles Flies to Work* originally appeared in the *Boy's Own Paper* or the *Daily Mail* annuals.

What must be said, however, is that quite a number of stories cannot be shown to have appeared first in an annual or a boys' paper. We do not know if any of the stories in *Biggles Air Detective* or *Biggles Investigates*, or the Special Air Police stories in *Biggles of the Special Air Police*, were published elsewhere beforehand. The majority of stories in *Biggles and the Pirate Treasure*, *Biggles' Chinese Puzzle*, *Biggles of the Interpol* and *Biggles Presses On* also cannot be shown to have appeared elsewhere prior to appearing in those books. Consequently, we are faced with a large number – 52, to be precise – of “missing” stories.

It is often assumed that all of the short stories would have appeared in annuals. If some of the stories did, it seems likely that the others would have as well. This is the position adopted in *By Jove, Biggles!*<sup>84</sup> In the 29 years since that book was published, however, no new annuals have been found containing Biggles stories. It is likely that there were *some* annuals which have not yet been located by Biggles collectors; we know from correspondence between A. P. Watt and Ward Lock & Co. that those publishers paid for “Thunder Over Germany” with the intention of including it in a volume which, unfortunately, I cannot trace. It is highly unlikely, however, that all the stories appeared in annuals. In these days of Internet bookselling, Ebay and email, information on new Biggles discoveries spreads within days if not hours. If a large number of previously unrecorded annuals contained Biggles stories we should know about them by now.

So where else could the stories have appeared? Three of the stories were originally presented as BBC radio plays. “The Case of the Stolen Aircraft” from *Biggles Air Detective* and “The Case of the Mysterious Gunshots” from *Biggles Takes the Case* were presented as plays on the BBC's *Hello Children* programme in 1949,<sup>85</sup> as well as “The Case of the Lump of Metal,” which was most probably the original name of “The Case of the Unknown Aircraft” in *Biggles Takes the Case* (the story features a lump of metal, and the phrase actually occurs in the story). Yet these are only a few stories. The other missing stories cannot have been originally written for radio. We know which

other Biggles stories were dramatised on BBC Radio, and they are few in number and all appeared on the radio after the respective short story collections in which they were published.<sup>86</sup>

Some of the stories may never have been published beforehand – either because they were rejected, or because Johns wrote them especially for the Biggles short story collections in which they appeared. It is also possible that some or all of the missing stories appeared in newspapers. As noted in chapter nine, *Biggles of the Interpol* has been said to have appeared in *The Evening News* in 1954. New discoveries of Biggles stories in newspapers have been made recently. “Thunder Over Germany” has been traced to the *Daily Mail*, and John Tipper has located some stories from *Biggles Air Detective* in the Australian newspaper *Daily Sun*. It is possible that other discoveries will be made in the future. I should love to be able to check agents’ files to see what they might reveal about newspaper or annual appearances!

For the moment, however, we are left with a large batch of mystery stories, and the knowledge that the future might bring further exciting discoveries of stories in annuals or newspapers.

## Chapter Ten. Collins Magazine

One of my favourite Biggles stories has always been *Another Job for Biggles*. Ever since I borrowed it from a friend of my mother's when I was eleven I have been thrilled by this tale of deserts, drugs and danger. The early scenes in Aden seemed to me to epitomise the mysterious Orient, and who could forget Ginger's nauseating "trip?"

A few years ago I found out that *Another Job* had been serialised in *Collins Magazine for Boys and Girls*. It appeared in that magazine under the rather more romantic title "Biggles in Arabia" between February and August 1950, or in the last two issues of volume two and the first five of volume three. The story not only crossed volumes, but also journal names as after two issues the name was changed to *Collins Magazine*.

*Collins* lasted 25 years and, in fact, underwent a number of name changes during that period. It started in January 1948 and became *Collins Magazine* in April 1950. In April 1953 it became *Collins Young Elizabethan*, and then in January 1955 *Young Elizabethan*. In May 1958 it became *Elizabethan*, which it remained until its demise in June 1973.

The first editor of *Collins Magazine* was Pamela Whitlock, who had become famous for writing a horse story, *The Far Distant Oxus*, with her friend Katharine Hull, which was published while they were both still at school. *Collins* was a magazine of some quality, printed on stout surfaced paper with numerous photos and drawings. It contained a mix of stories and factual articles, rather in the manner of the *Boy's Own Paper*, but was clearly aimed at both boys and girls and of a rather younger general age (about 8-14, judging by the illustrations and the tone). The journal attracted some of the top-quality children's authors of the time, including Roland Pertwee, John Newton Chance, Monica Edwards, Geoffrey Trease and Noel Streatfield. It was the original home of Nigel Molesworth by Geoffrey Willans and Ronald Searle, and also included an early serial by Ralph Hammond (who later became famous as the adult thriller writer Hammond Innes).

I have a bound volume of *Collins* from 1950, and note that a number of readers mentioned Biggles in their letters. These letters seem to have motivated Pamela Whitlock to purchase a Biggles serial. Like most serialisations the story appeared prior to publication in book form. Ms Whitlock provided the following brief introduction to "Biggles in Arabia":

There have been repeated requests from readers for a story about Sgt. Bigglesworth, Air Ace and hero of many adventures. Here at last is the first instalment of a new exciting one in which Biggles, Ginger and Bertie become involved in some dangerous trafficking on the shores of the Dead Sea.

"Dead," I presume, was a slip for "Red!" The story was abridged, although the editors – first Ms Whitlock and then, from May 1950, Laura Grenfell – cut out

nothing essential and if anything helped the story move even faster. It was illustrated in black and white by William Stobbs, who did a lot of drawings for *Collins* and would later become better known as the illustrator of several of Ronald Welch's novels. His gaunt, angular figures are quite unusual and take some getting used to, and were criticized in a letter from at least one reader.

"Biggles in Arabia" is unusual in that it was published in two slightly different formats. At the end of each year the publishers used to collect together that year's magazines, add some colour plates, cut out some factual articles and publish the new collection as an annual. "Biggles in Arabia" thus appeared in the magazine in 1950, and was then reprinted in the *Collins Magazine Annual for Boys and Girls*, volume four, in 1951. The version printed in the annual has the same text and pictures as the magazine version, but the layout was slightly different. The brief introductions to each episode (and Ms Whitlock's introductory note) were not reprinted in the annual.

The annual is fairly common and inexpensive and worth adding to your collection, although copies in dustjackets are more difficult to find. Copies of the magazine can be rare, but again are not expensive. In my experience bound volumes tend to turn up more often than loose copies.

## Chapter Eleven. Eagle

Eagle's own big headline news this week is, of course, the new serial starting today, *Biggles in the Blue*, by your favourite author, Captain W. E. Johns. This is the latest of the Biggles adventures and makes its first appearance in EAGLE – in fact, to borrow a newspaper phrase, we consider it our 'scoop of the year'! Biggles' assignment takes him to the West Indies and the story is told in Captain Johns' own exciting style. Many of you have asked for a Biggles story for a long time – well, here it is. Enjoy it.

With these words Marcus Morris, the editor of *Eagle*, introduced a new Biggles serial on 20 March 1953. *Eagle* is one of the most famous British comics ever published. It ran from 1950 to 1969, and was the brainchild of Morris, a Southport pastor who went from editing his local parish magazine to founding a comic phenomenon. *Eagle* was conceived as an antidote to American horror comics, which came flooding into Britain after the Second World War. "Many American comics were most skilfully and vividly drawn," recalled Morris, "but often their content was deplorable, nastily over-violent and obscene, often with undue emphasis on the supernatural and magical as a way of solving problems."<sup>87</sup> A considerable public reaction set in, and questions were asked in the House, which eventually passed legislation on the matter. Before that, however, *Eagle* appeared.

Morris realised that it was not comics *per se* which were problematic, but the content of those comics. He saw comics as an exciting potential medium for educating children. He believed that if they were offered attractive, colourful comics which nonetheless carried a wholesome message children would lap them up. Events proved him right.

Morris found a supporter for his views in Hulton Press, and with the assistance of Frank Hampson, one of the greatest comic artists in British history, created the signature character of the paper, Dan Dare, Pilot of the Future. Dan's exciting science fiction adventures were brilliantly illustrated in glorious colour on the front cover of *Eagle* and proved instantly attractive to readers. The first issue in 1950 sold nearly a million copies, and the paper was a bestseller throughout the decade. *Eagle*'s mix of bright colour comics, quality printing and easily digestible information (much of it presented in pictures or comics) was light years ahead of its contemporaries, which in 1950 offered clumsy strips like those of the 1930s – pictures with captions underneath.

*Eagle* had a number of other strips – John Worsley's "P.C. 49," Jack Daniel's "Riders of the Range" and John Ryan's "Harris Tweed" and "Captain Pugwash" (which is perhaps as well known as Dan Dare to modern audiences). The paper also published a wide range of beautifully drawn, colourful historical strips – Frank Bellamy's "The Happy Warrior" (the life of Churchill), Hampson's "The Road of Courage" (the life of Christ) and Norman Williams' strips about Alfred the Great, Nelson and Baden-Powell. All mixed breathtaking artwork, high adventure and a strong moral tone.

Biggles would never become a regular character in *Eagle*, but during 1953, when it was at its height, he appeared in every issue for ten months, and three short stories also appeared in the *Eagle Annual* between 1952 and 1954.

“Biggles in the Blue” appeared in 19 consecutive issues from Vol. 3 No. 50 (20 March 1953) to Vol. 4 No. 16 (24 July 1953). The story appeared regularly on pages 4-5, with two black and white illustrations by Edwin Phillips – a standard picture of Biggles (in flying helmet!) with the heading, and a further picture of that week’s action. “Biggles in the Blue” appeared in *Eagle* before it was published in book form, and was slightly abbreviated. For example, at the very beginning of the book Biggles tells the Air Commodore to tell him the worst: “Nothing would surprise me.” This line was cut from the comic, so Biggles’ next comment, when he hears that von Stalhein is in Jamaica, “I was wrong... That does surprise me,” does not make much sense.

With the last episode of the story, Morris informed his readers that since so many of them had enjoyed “Biggles in the Blue,” he had asked Johns “to let us have his latest, and as yet unpublished, adventure to serialise in EAGLE.” “Biggles in the Gobi” appeared in the next issue, Vol. 4 No. 17, on 31 July 1953 and ran for 17 issues until Vol. 4 No. 33 (20 November 1953). The first episode appeared with “A special word for EAGLE readers from Captain Johns,” which was in fact a much-abbreviated version of the foreword to the book.

“Biggles in the Gobi” was more severely abridged than “Biggles in the Blue” had been. Large parts of some chapters are missing. Interestingly, a sentence was added at the end of the first episode, which would fit at the end of the first paragraph on page 16 of the book:

About their only hope, so far as I can see, is a very special helping hand from outside, and the only four people capable of providing it that I know are – Biggles & Co.

At the beginning of the second episode, another sentence was added:

Biggles looked thoughtful as he reached for another cigarette.

The serialisation of the books was hampered by space restrictions. Each week, the text and two illustrations had to fit exactly into a page and a quarter, with one quarter of page 4 usually taken up by an advertisement. Consequently, the episodes often ended in the middle of a chapter, and in this case Morris may have added the extra words to create a more natural transition.

*Eagle*’s mission to promote sound morals was always evident. The paper did not hide the pill in the jam; messages were not left to the readers’ imaginations. The paper had a rather evangelical tone, with its regular strips and articles on saints and missionaries. Consequently, it is interesting that *Biggles in the Gobi* is one Biggles book in which clergymen feature prominently. It is tempting to think that Johns may even have been asked by

Morris to write a story featuring missionaries, or that Johns wrote a story he thought would please Morris. There is no evidence for this, of course, although it is worth mentioning that in a somewhat similar context during the Second World War Johns had written two stories, "International Settlement" and "Intermezzo," for the American Catholic journal *Extension*. Both of these stories feature Catholic priests as major characters, and it seems likely that Johns was writing for his audience.<sup>88</sup>

Three Biggles stories were published in the *Eagle Annual*, Nos. 2-4: "Biggles Buys a Watch" (from *Biggles and the Pirate Treasure*), and "The Flying Crusaders" and "The Adventure of the Luminous Clay" (from *Biggles' Chinese Puzzle*). These were illustrated in black and white by Harold Hailstone, who for many years contributed cartoons and illustrations to dozens of periodicals and newspapers, and also served in the R.A.F. during the war and as an official war artist. Although he was a very fine artist, his conception of Biggles was somewhat unfortunate as he depicted him as a lantern-jawed giant permanently dressed in overcoat and hat, looking more like a representative of the "Old Bill" than at any other time.

The last word should probably go to one K. Botham, who wrote to *Eagle* stating "I am very glad that EAGLE is now featuring a "Biggles" story" – and then noted that he was currently attending Johns' own school, and had been shown the door in which Johns had placed the firework – an incident that Johns had himself attributed to Biggles in *Biggles Goes to School*.

## Chapter Twelve. Junior Mirror

*Junior Mirror* first appeared on 1 September 1954 as a newspaper for children. It was launched on the same day as *Junior Express* (later the *Express Weekly*; see chapter thirteen), and the *Daily Sketch* began to carry a children's supplement at about the same time. All these papers were trying to carve out a place in a market which had long been dominated by a single publication – the Amalgamated Press' *Children's Newspaper*. This first appeared in March 1919 and was the archetype for many later children's papers. It mimicked adult newspapers with front-page photos, headlines and numerous informative articles, but as it was aimed at children the articles were written in a pacy and exciting style. The paper covered current affairs, history and popular science and even incorporated movie reviews and weather bulletins. Like adult newspapers the *Children's Newspaper* included serial stories and cartoons. It was a huge success, and in the 1930s it outstripped the circulation of all the Amalgamated Press' other juvenile publications with regular sales of 500,000 copies a week.

In 1950 a new style of juvenile publication appeared in Britain – *Eagle*, which like the *Children's Newspaper* carried serial stories, informative articles and action photos, but in a new departure emphasised the comic strip, publishing several brightly coloured and brilliantly-drawn strips. Readers flocked to the new comics, and by 1953 the circulation of the *Children's Newspaper* had declined to about 200,000. To reverse this trend the editor revised the look of the paper. Although it still carried only a few cartoons, it adopted a more contemporary appearance and began to offer serial stories by major popular authors such as Geoffrey Trease, Malcolm Saville and Anthony Buckeridge (who published eight Jennings novels in the paper during the 1950s). Sales recovered and as a result rivals appeared. The *Daily Mirror* attempted to gain a slice of the market with its own juvenile newspaper, *Junior Mirror*. This was clearly modelled on the *Children's Newspaper*, with plenty of photos, informative articles, short cartoons, readers' letters and a serial by a major author. This author was W. E. Johns, and Biggles was the centrepiece of the new paper's efforts to win readers.<sup>89</sup>

The front page of the new paper carried a box advertising the “smashing new ‘Biggles’ story” and the editor wrote a front page column advising readers not to take their paper into class on Wednesday mornings (“teacher may bag it”) but to take their copy to a friend who was ill. “What would he or she love more than to hear you reading “Biggles” aloud?”

The Biggles story was “Biggles Joins the Legion,” a much-abridged version of *Biggles Foreign Legionnaire*. The opening chapters of the story were dramatically cut down, and the editor summarised some of the conversation between Biggles and the Air Commodore with his own prose. For example, compare the following brief exchange with the several pages (pp.10-13) of the book from which it was distilled:

“What's all this about?” asked the Air-Commodore.

Biggles lit a cigarette. "I had a talk with Marcel the other day. I believe he's on to the biggest racket ever organised – a scheme to keep frontier disputes on the boil all over the world."

"Fantastic! For what possible purpose?" exclaimed the Air-Commodore.

"Money. Every time a frontier dispute looks like being settled peacefully, the prices of war materials – oil, rubber, steel, and so on – go down. One bang and up go the prices again."

"Biggles Joins the Legion" ran for the first ten issues of the *Junior Mirror*, from 1 September 1954 to 3 November 1954. On 2 February 1955 a new tale, "Biggles – Spycatcher," (*Biggles in Australia*) appeared with issue 23, running until 4 May 1955 (issue 32). The story itself was delayed for some time by a printer's strike, which meant that there was a four-week gap between issue 30 (23 March 1955) and issue 31 (27 April 1955). This story was also much abridged, with the opening conversation between Biggles and the Air Commodore being cut out and replaced by a brief introduction which explained how the Air Police had arrived in Australia.

These two stories had been illustrated in black and white by several artists. In his 1990 article on Biggles in the *Junior Mirror*, Philip Swales notes that Jack Dunkley illustrated the first four episodes of "Biggles Joins the Legion" and "Scott" the next four, with the final two episodes having no artwork. An anonymous artist illustrated "Biggles – Spycatcher" and two of these illustrations appeared on the front cover of the paper (issues 28 and 30).

The new publication was extremely successful. Steve Holland informs me that the publishers' noted in *The Times* on 1 June 1955 that the initial sales far exceeded expectation and then settled down to "the present circulation of well over half a million, which is substantially greater than that of *Junior Express*." There can be little doubt that Biggles was an important part of the paper's success. Biggles' popularity was at its peak at this time, and when new Biggles stories appeared in the paper special posters were printed to advertise this fact and were displayed prominently outside newsagents!

On 5 October 1955 a new Biggles story appeared with issue 54, "No Rest for Biggles." This ran until issue 60 on 16 November 1955 and was even more abridged than the previous serialisations. The story was illustrated by Gino D'Antonio, one of Europe's major comic artists. He had gained fame in Europe for his *Pecos Bill* strips, and did a range of work for British publications including illustrations for *Junior Express*, comics for *War Picture Library* and covers for *Eagle* and *Boy's World*. D'Antonio also illustrated the final Biggles tale to appear in *Junior Mirror*, "Biggles Takes Charge," which appeared between 8 and 29 February 1956 (issues 72-75). This was drastically shortened from the original.

Issue 75 was *Junior Mirror's* last. The editor wrote "We have all loved working for you, but it takes more than half-a-million threepences to pay for all the tings that made a paper of your own such fun." A special "Junior Mirror" was

incorporated into *Woman's Sunday Mirror* and carried two of the cartoons that had appeared in *Junior Mirror*.

Copies of *Junior Mirror* are rare. Strangely enough, I have seen the first issue on Ebay on no fewer than five separate occasions over the past few years (generally selling for between £25 and £30), and have also seen the final few issues on Ebay a few times, but have rarely seen any other issues come up for sale. Approaches to my favourite comic shops have met with no success, and I can only conclude that most copies of *Junior Mirror* were treated like other newspapers and tossed out. This is a pity, as the four Biggles serials were all memorable stories, and their serial versions with their illustrations are worthwhile additions to any collection.

## Chapter Thirteen. Express Weekly / TV Express

During the 1950s Great Britain experienced an explosion in children's comics. *Eagle* had redefined the market by emphasising beautifully-rendered, full colour strips, such as the Dan Dare strip on the front cover and other colour strips inside. As a result other papers, such as *Comet* and *Knockout*, adopted this formula, while other innovations also appeared, such as the Amalgamated Press' much-loved series of pocket libraries.

One of *Eagle*'s competitors was *Express Weekly*. This started life in 1954 as a children's newspaper entitled *Junior Express* and published by Beaverbrook Newspapers. As noted in the previous chapter, it originally sought to poach some of the readership of the *Children's Newspaper*. In 1955 the editors re-imaged the paper to make it look much more like *Eagle*. The new paper was known at first as *Junior Express Weekly* and then *Express Weekly*. Like *Eagle* it carried a full-colour comic strip on the front page. At first a number of characters were tried out on the front page, including "Jet Morgan," a character who bore more than a passing resemblance to Dan Dare. By 1957, however, when *Express Weekly* gained the services of Ron Embleton as its main comic artist, the signature strip for the paper – and the holder of the front page until 1960 – was his magnificent "Wulf the Briton."

Biggles was not a regular character in the comic at this time, which, like *Eagle*, included at least one serial story each week as well as comic strips. The first *Express Annual* appeared in 1956 and included "Biggles – and the crash that wasn't," which was an abridged version of the story that would later appear in *Biggles of the Interpol* titled "A Matter of Deduction." It was not until 30 January 1960, however, that a Biggles story appeared in the paper. *Biggles Forms a Syndicate* was serialised in Nos. 274-283 (30 January 1960 – 2 April 1960). A brief advertisement ("And Now – A Biggles Story") appeared on the front cover. The story itself usually occupied a page or half a page of the paper and came with unattributed black and white illustrations. The story was considerably shortened. For example, in the second instalment Biggles' learned disquisition on Ophir and Dizzy's description of RAF service in Iraq were omitted, along with much general discussion.

No. 283 saw *Express Weekly* change hands from Beaverbrook Newspapers to TV Publications Ltd. With issue 286 the paper changed its name to *TV Express Weekly* (to link it more clearly to its new stable mates, *TV Comic* and *TV World*), but for the moment the content of the comic was unchanged. Another Biggles story, *Biggles Goes Home*, appeared in No. 290 (21 May 1960) and continued until No. 299 (23 July 1960). This story was also much abridged; the entire first, third and fourth chapters were not reprinted. Instead, the story opened with a brief section of the discussion between Biggles and the Air Commodore in chapter two, and then moved swiftly to the tiger hunt in chapter five. Other chapters were not removed, but were all greatly shortened.

Incidentally, this story was illustrated (as had been the single Biggles story in the 1956 *Express Annual*) by one of my favourite British comic artists, Bill Lacey. Lacey is remembered today mainly for the "Blackshirt" stories he drew

for the Amalgamated Press' *Super Detective Library* series in the 1950s, and for a number of black and white strips in *Look and Learn* in the late 1960s and early 1970s, most notably "Eagles Over the Western Front," about the exploits of an RFC pilot, Harry Hawkes. Lacey's strips are generally less violent than those of his contemporaries, and hark back to the story papers of the 1930s in their mix of humour and action. As a result, I have often wondered whether he read Biggles as a boy during the 1930s. Harry Hawkes did fly a Sopwith Camel, and characters appear in the strip named "Algy" and "Biggleswade," but there is no clear evidence otherwise.

Shortly after *Biggles Goes Home* appeared, the new owners of *TV Express Weekly* implemented a change in editorial policy. The long-running Wulf the Briton strip ceased, along with another older strip "Gun Law." The paper would now concentrate on stories and strips based on popular television series. In later issues, Ron Embleton would contribute a strip based on the Second World War "Col. Pinto" show, and stories would also appear based on the TV show "Danger Man." Prior to that, two new comic strips were introduced with No. 306 on 10 September 1960 – "Huckleberry Hound and His Friends," and "Biggles."

The Biggles strip was based on the Granada TV series about Biggles which was appearing at the same time. The new strip was advertised in No. 305, which informed readers that it would be a "terrific full-colour picture strip" and invited them to meet "Dr. Zanchu and his strange invention." The strip duly appeared in the next issue, and initially covered only the front page, but from No. 307 until No. 331 it covered both the front and rear covers. As was the case with the TV series, in these strips Biggles had two associates only – Ginger and Bertie. The TV series ran for only a few months in Great Britain and was outlasted by the strip, which appeared in *TV Express Weekly* (and *TV Express* as it became during 1961) for about sixteen months, appearing in every issue from No. 306 until the publication was incorporated into *TV Comic* in 1962 after No. 376. This was 71 issues in all, during which time the paper printed no fewer than nine stories in comic strip form (and a tenth appeared in the 1962 *TV Express Annual*) drawn by two different artists.

It is not known who wrote the strips. The first artist to work on the Biggles strips was Ron Embleton. Embleton is one of the most famous of British comic strip artists from the 1950s and 1960s. He had drawn a variety of comic strips (including "Lucky Lannigan" stories for *Cowboy Comics Library*) before settling down to a long stint with "Wulf the Briton" on *Express Weekly*. He later drew the "Col. Pinto" strip for the paper, before moving to *Look and Learn*, to which he contributed hundreds of beautifully-drawn illustrations. He drew only a few comic strips for that paper, including two stories for the "Trigan Empire" series and a series about one of his own great interests, "Rogers' Rangers," but drew strips for other papers such as *TV Century 21* ("Stingray" and "Captain Scarlet"). Prior to his death, he achieved belated fame for the saucy "Wicked Wanda" and "Sweet Chastity" strips in *Penthouse*.<sup>90</sup>

Embleton hand-painted his strips and is known for his graceful lines, beautiful colours and use of exciting perspectives and angles. The illustrations should provide some idea of his style. Sadly, he did not draw the "Biggles" strip for

very long and therefore never quite reached the heights that he had reached with "Wulf the Briton." He produced three stories between Nos. 306 and 331. With No.332 the strip was cut back to one page and moved inside the magazine. Embleton's "Col. Pinto" now occupied the front cover.

All the Biggles strips in the paper between Nos. 332 and 376 were drawn by Mike Western. Western is another very well known British comic artist. He began working in the early 1950s and contributed the "Johnny Wingco" strip to *Knockout*, "No Hiding Place" to *TV Express* and "The Wild Wonders" to *Valiant* (which he drew for five years from 1964). He also drew "Billy's Boots" for *Roy of the Rovers*. He is perhaps best remembered today for "Darkie's Mob" in *Battle*. Western died only in 2008, and in an interview shortly before his death remembered his time on the "Biggles" strip fondly. "I greatly enjoyed doing some weeks of "Biggles" for *TV Express*. This was full colour printing – and the use of colour was exhilarating."<sup>91</sup> The decision by the editor of *TV Express* to restrict the "Biggles" strip to a single page did not do Western any favours, as the somewhat wordy text had to be crammed into that page, meaning that the panels had to be drawn on a much smaller scale than hitherto. This gave Western much less room to try out innovative layouts or angles. The *TV Express* was also reduced in size from No. 347, which made Western's strips even more cramped. Nevertheless, he drew some very fine pages. He also drew a front cover for the final Biggles strip, "Biggles Joins the Battle of the Giants," in No. 375.

The following stories appeared between Nos. 306 and 376. The stories did not have titles, with the exception of the final story. Titles were, however, given to the stories when they were reprinted in France and I have used those titles:

- 306-316            10 September 1960 – 19 November 1960. *Dr Zanchu and his Machine*. Dr Zanchu has invented a ray that makes people homicidal. He starts a war between two British protectorates in the Indian Ocean, and then between two small states on the North-West Frontier. Biggles & Co pursue him to the Middle East, where they kidnap the local Emir after he has been affected by Zanchu's ray. The Emir's guards imprison Zanchu and Biggles, but when the ray's effects wear off the Emir returns with Bertie and Ginger and Biggles is released. Zanchu steals Biggles' aeroplane but there is no petrol remaining in the tank and he crashes to his doom.
- 317-326            26 November 1960 – 28 January 1961. *Johnny Forbes in San Felipe*. On holiday in Paris, Biggles & Co find that the son of a British diplomat has been kidnapped. The diplomat tells them that he is to be posted to the South American republic of San Felipe, and the kidnapers have told him to pass on all secret information or never see his son again. Biggles & Co chase the kidnapers from the San Felipean Embassy to the airport, where the kidnapers board a light plane. This lands on an aircraft carrier, and Biggles and Ginger are shot down and imprisoned on the carrier by von Stalhein. Bertie spots von Stalhein at Las Palmas airport and follows him. He sneaks on board the carrier and escapes with Biggles and Ginger. They crash in San Felipe and help the rebels defeat a Government army. Breaking into the President's palace, they free Johnny Forbes and then join with the rebels in the final charge to overthrow the Government.
- 327-331            4 February 1961 – 4 March 1961. *Moon Rocket X7V*. Saboteurs are destroying British test rockets at the Bigger Boomer range in Australia. Flying to Australia, Biggles & Co realise that one of the staff at the range is using a

false name – he was actually RAF Pilot “Jumbo” Jackson. Jackson escapes from the base and Biggles & Co give chase in a jeep, while at the same time other saboteurs try to kill them. Jackson crashes and dies, but a card in his car leads Biggles to a bar in Brisbane. A nest of spies is uncovered and the spy ring is broken.

- 332-337 11 March 1961 – 15 April 1961. *Angelo and the Galilean Chalice*. A British businessman has been murdered shortly after paying £500,000 for the Galilean Chalice, a famous Roman relic which was looted by the Nazis but recovered at the end of the Second World War by the British only to be stolen. Both the Chalice and the money have disappeared. Biggles & Co head to Berlin, where the British Army staff dealing with stolen Nazi artefacts is based, to find out more about the Chalice. Attempts are made on their lives by an Italian named Angelo, and Biggles finds that a German General connected to the Chalice was married to the sister of an Italian count named Angelo. The action moves to Italy where with the help of the Carabinieri Angelo is captured and the Chalice recovered.
- 338-344 22 April 1961 – 3 June 1961. *The North African Gang*. A bullion van is hijacked on the road, and Biggles & Co spot the hijacking on their way to watch a match at Highbury. The gang escapes in a Dakota aeroplane, but Biggles works out from the direction in which it was heading that it could have landed in North Africa. The comrades begin surveying likely landing spots in North Africa. News comes through that a gang has stolen some diamonds in Paris and escaped to a Dakota, and is heading for North Africa. They fail to intercept the plane, but a man staggers to the base telling them that when he tried to enter an abandoned airfield recently he was shot at. Biggles sets off for the airfield and shoots the Dakota down.
- 345-357 10 June 1961 – 2 September 1961. *On the Cornish Coast*. Biggles & Co discover von Stalhein has a secret submarine base on the Cornish Coast. Entering the base, they are quickly captured and taken on board a U-Boat. They manage to escape and lock themselves in the torpedo hold. Von Stalhein orders the room to be sealed and tells the crew to leave Biggles & Co to die from asphyxiation. Biggles fires the torpedoes, which destroy much of the base; the ensuing backwash sends them out of the base to crash on the coast. Troops find them among the wreckage, but von Stalhein has escaped in Biggles' car. Biggles hijacks a Spitfire from a RAF base, and follows von Stalhein to another submarine base, but is intercepted by RAF fighters and forced to bail out. He joins an Army group which storms the base. Von Stalhein escapes but Biggles finds the locations to all the other submarine bases.
- 358-365 9 September 1961 – 28 October 1961. *The Missing Atom Man*. A British scientist, Sir Alan Fathing, is kidnapped by foreign spies. Biggles traces the spies to a house but is captured and driven away with Sir Alan. Escaping again, Biggles & Co use a heavily armed jet hovercraft to follow the spies to a foreign aircraft carrier. Fighters from the carrier attack them, but just as all seems lost the carrier strikes an old WWII mine and begins to sink. Biggles flies the hovercraft to the bridge and seizes Sir Alan.
- 366-374 4 November 1961 – 30 December 1961. *The Film Wrecker*. Biggles & Co go to Egypt to investigate incidents on the set of a new epic film about ancient Rome. They find that the star of the movie has hired a gang of toughs and is attempting to set himself up as a second Caesar. In reality, he has discovered King Solomon's Mines, but an earthquake destroys the mine and frees Biggles, while Ginger and Bertie manage to overpower the toughs with the aid of the film crew.
- 375-376 6 January 1962 – 13 January 1962. *Biggles Joins the Battle of the Giants*. Watching a boxing match, Biggles & Co become aware that crooks have tried to fix the fight. The champion has refused to throw the fight and the crooks try

to kill him in a fire. Biggles & Co escape the fire with the boxer, but the crooks perish.

The final story bears all the marks of having been quickly truncated once it became apparent that *TV Express* would cease. In addition to these stories, an additional eight-page story, *Biggles in the Bahamas*, drawn by Ron Embleton, appeared in the 1962 *TV Express Annual* and featured some action in the Caribbean (including an underwater sequence involving sharks that anticipates *Thunderball*).

Biggles in these comic strips is only vaguely similar to the Biggles of W. E. Johns' books. In the strips he is quick to resolve situations with his fists, and has no compunction about shooting down an unarmed Dakota containing a gang of crooks. The plots are also skimpy and rely far too much on coincidence. The one "fact" which appeals to me is a comment by Bertie in *The North African Gang* that Biggles & Co are regular attendees at Highbury. As an Arsenal fan I warmly approve!

*TV Express Weekly / TV Express* also featured, in addition to the Biggles strip, a small message from "Biggles" each week for members of the Biggles Air Police. This club was established by Quaker Oats in 1961 and appears to have been aimed at fans of the TV series, but – like the Biggles strips – outlasted the series. Towards the end of the *TV Express* "Biggles" even recorded that the club had recently signed its 200,000<sup>th</sup> member, which indicates that it was extremely popular. Advertisements for the club appeared in several comics, including *Eagle* and *Knockout*. Members could join for the cost of a Quaker Oats box top and a stamped self-addressed envelope. They received a membership badge and identity card, and later were able to get artefacts such as decoders and maps. The "Air Police" boxes usually featured brief facts on aeroplanes, but late issues of the *TV Express* also included coded locations for members to decipher and highlight on their maps.

Copies of *Express Weekly / TV Express* turn up fairly regularly, but it will take time to complete a set of issues with Biggles stories or comics. Issues with *Biggles Forms a Syndicate* and *Biggles Goes Home* are especially difficult, because there are still a lot of fans of Wulf the Briton and as a result one seldom finds copies of these numbers going cheap. I paid £8 each for many of mine and have seen some sell for £10-12, although at times they can be obtained for only a few pounds each on Ebay. Issues with Biggles strips are generally less in demand and slightly less expensive, but can nonetheless be difficult to discover. As a result, it can take a long time to complete a story and find out what happens. Unofficial reprints of some of the stories have been advertised on Ebay occasionally, but these also are not easily available.

W. E. Johns was the fourth-best-selling author in France at one time during the 1950s, and Embleton's and Western's strips were reprinted in France in *Rin Tin Tin* magazine in 1962-63. More recently, they have been reprinted in two of the "Biggles Héritage" books produced in France by Claude Lefrancq, *Biggles contre le docteur Zanchu* (2002) and *Sabotage à Canberra* (2003). Consequently, one option for anyone who can read French, and does not want to wait years to complete a set of *TV Express*, is to look for these books.

## Chapter Fourteen. Look and Learn

It is difficult for me to discuss *Look and Learn* with any real detachment. For about eight years it was my favourite magazine, ever since my mother bought me a copy on a trip up-country in Sierra Leone and I devoured it, several times, over the next few days. Like most boys of the time, I suspect, the main attraction for me was Don Lawrence's magnificent artwork in the comic strip "The Trigan Empire," but I also loved the mix of articles on history, science, geography and sport and the various other features like crosswords and comic versions of famous works of literature. I took it nearly every week after that until it ended, sadly, in 1982.

*Look and Learn* commenced in 1962 and ran for 1,049 issues. It was published by Fleetway, as the Amalgamated Press had become. Originally priced at one shilling, it was quite an expensive paper, but still sold very well. In the early days its circulation went over one million, and throughout the editorship of John Sanders (1962-65) never went below 300,000 copies. Many people remember *Look and Learn* as being bought by parents for its educational value. Its accent was, especially in its first few years, on factual information, which was always presented in a crisp and exciting style. From the outset, however, the paper carried serialisations of novels, including stories by authors as diverse as Henry Treece, Leon Garfield, Jerome K Jerome, Frank Richards, Willard Price, Jules Verne, H. G. Wells and Charles Dickens. After the mid-1960s serial stories were gradually phased out, and comic strip versions of famous novels or poems became a feature of the magazine. Famous serialisations included Pat Nicolle's brilliant version of Conan Doyle's *Sir Nigel*, a marvellous version of *The Three Musketeers*, *King Solomon's Mines*, works by Dickens such as *Great Expectations* and *Oliver Twist* and versions of *Moby Dick* and *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*. After *Look and Learn* was merged with *Ranger* in 1966, it also gained several other wonderful comic strips, including the Trigan Empire.

Steve Holland has noted that "the premise of *Look and Learn* was to delight and inspire the imaginations of its young readers,"<sup>92</sup> and in many ways it did this through carrying some of the most magnificent artwork – and artists – ever to appear in British juvenile magazines. In addition to Don Lawrence and Pat Nicolle, a host of European artists drew comic strips for the paper, as did British stalwarts such as Geoff Campion and Bill Lacey. Nicolle also drew hundreds of marvellous illustrations for the magazine, notably for historical series, as did Ron Embleton. In addition, early numbers of the magazine often featured artwork by Fortunato Matania, one of the most famous contributors to British papers over the years, whose artwork can be found in the *Illustrated London News* and *Strand* as far back as the 1920s.

In March 1963 *Look and Learn* published a short feature on Johns in issue 59. The story of how Biggles was born as a reaction to American flying stories re-appeared, but the article is very interesting for the insight it gives into the popularity of Biggles worldwide. As it notes, Johns could receive letters from Chinese boys, Pakistani girls or Swedish pilots, and during the Second World

War two Norwegian boys even smuggled themselves over the border into Sweden to buy the latest Biggles books!

Given this article, *Look and Learn* must have expected its readers to enjoy Biggles. As a result, it was inevitable that it would carry a Biggles story when it had the chance. I remember the day I first discovered the story. As a young boy in Australia I stumbled upon a stack of old *Look and Learns* in a junk shop going for the princely sum of one cent each, and I was able to buy about 200 of them and take them home (slowly!). In going through these, I found, much to my surprise, an episode of *Biggles and the Lost Sovereigns* inside one of them. I had only recently read that book, as it had just been released in paperback (as *Biggles and the Lost Treasure*).

*Biggles and the Lost Sovereigns* was serialised over eight issues of *Look and Learn*, issues 82 (10 August 1963) to 88 (21 September 1963). Each episode was accompanied by a small black and white illustration and usually occupied a page. At least two artists appear to have drawn the pictures, but I do not know who they were. The story was greatly abridged. The opening chapter, for example, was drastically shortened, and much of Biggles' discussion with Captain Macdonald was also edited out. Incidentally, when I first read the book I had noticed with some surprise that Johns had felt able to put a swear word ("bloody") into Macdonald's mouth. Macdonald did not swear in the *Look and Learn* version of the story! I thought for a long time that this was the only time anyone swore in a Biggles story. It was only much later that I discovered that people swore in *Popular Flying*.

The editor also removed the brief references to *Biggles Air Commodore* from chapter one, perhaps because these might have been confusing for readers who had not read the book. Another interesting feature of the editor's work was that he would often insert a few summary sentences to replace a large swathe of conversation. When Captain Yomas arrives on the island in the Mergui Archipelago, for example, most of the discussion is replaced with a terse "more questions followed." Similarly, much of the conversation in the early chapters with the Air Commodore was replaced by the lines "Biggles agreed to go, planning to distract attention from the search for the sovereigns by pretending to make a travel film for British television." Overall, the serialisation did present the main features of the book, but probably more than half of it was cut out.

This was the only Biggles story to be serialised in *Look and Learn*, and the last Biggles story to be serialised in a magazine during Johns' lifetime.<sup>93</sup> It was not the last time that Biggles appeared in *Look and Learn*; I can remember, as a boy, seeing box ads in issues from 1965 for *Biggles Scores a Bull*. I had never heard of that book before I saw these ads, and would not read it until I turned 18, but for a long time I carried the image of the dustjacket, in black and white, in my head from those issues

The last word on Biggles in British story papers and magazines can rightly go to *Look and Learn*. In a nice piece of symmetry, the anonymous author of the article on Johns in issue 59 wrote concerning Johns' creation, "the American

fiction air heroes who began it all have faded into oblivion. But Biggles flies on.”

## Chapter Fifteen. Biggles in European comics

It is not clear precisely when the first Biggles comic appeared. The honour of being the first country to come up with the idea appears to go to Australia. In about 1953 a new line of comics appeared in Sydney entitled *Adventures of Biggles*, and were clearly designed to accompany the radio show the 'Air Adventures of Biggles,' which was a regular feature in Australia at the time. The comics were published by Action Comics, a company founded in 1946 by Henry John Edwards. Action Comics first gained some popularity through the cowboy character the Lone Avenger, and followed this up in the late 1940s with further successful titles including *Tim Valour* and *The Crimson Comet*. These were all Australian-developed titles, although Edwards also published American series such as *Archie*.

A type-written note on an issue in Monash University shows that Edwards' Biggles comics were produced under an arrangement with Johns, and that scripts were sent to England for approval prior to publication.<sup>94</sup> It would appear that Edwards gained the agreement of Hodder and Stoughton to produce the comics, as he was able to produce the "Biggles" title in the same standard font used by Hodder.

The early strips were drawn by Albert DeVine, who also drew other titles for Edwards, but is otherwise a rather mysterious figure. All but one (issue No. 8) of the first eleven issues featured comic strip versions of Johns' short stories from books like *Biggles Air Detective*, *Biggles Takes the Case* or *Biggles of the Special Air Police*, including such titles as "The Case of the Visiting Sultan," "Skyway Robbery," "The Case of the Mandarin's Treasure Chest" and "African Assignment." Quite soon, however, DeVine began to draw new stories that were not based on Johns' work. In a reflection of Australian interests at the time, these stories regularly featured Biggles in contemporary action in Asia, for example fighting Communist rebels in Malaysia, the Communist Chinese or saboteurs in Ceylon. These tales featured only Biggles, Ginger and Air Commodore Raymond. The stories were, like most comics of the time, far-fetched and simplistic. Biggles and Ginger regularly got into, and out of, incredible scrapes through strokes of luck or, more often, old-fashioned biff. They are able to pass for Chinese or Malaysians with ease, and appear to speak all the local languages – or everybody speaks English!

It is not known who wrote these comic strips. The comics were all attributed to Johns, but this may have been one of the conditions on which Johns' agents gave permission for the publications of the comics. DeVine was always credited as the artist only, but if for contractual reasons Johns' name had to be retained as the author, it is possible that DeVine wrote his own stories. DeVine produced some nice opening panels and could draw some good aircraft, but his figures are ungainly and unnatural.

According to Mick Stone's checklist of Australian comics, these Biggles comics first appeared in about 1953, although it should be noted that the date is uncertain.<sup>95</sup> It is also very unclear when they finished; Stone estimates 1957

and notes that at least 75 numbers may have appeared, but also comments that there was an apparent publishing hiatus between issues 30-50 as no copies of these are known. Our knowledge of these Australian comics is not helped by the fact that very few copies are contained in libraries, and the comics are very rarely found on sale.

One thing that is known is that after issue 57 a new artist, John Dixon, drew most of the Biggles comics. Dixon also drew *Gimlet* comics for Action during 1953, and also created Crimson Comet and Tim Valour.<sup>96</sup> He was a much more accomplished artist than DeVine, and in 1959 would create an Australian classic, *Air Hawk and the Flying Doctors*, which ran until 1986. I can remember reading it in newspapers as a boy and being impressed by Dixon's ability to draw faces and clothing, and his clever use of shading in his black and white strips.

Dixon would later recall reading Biggles as a boy. "There was a six-week waiting list to get Biggles books out of the town library when I was a kid, they were that popular. I read every one of them too!" Like DeVine, Dixon set his Biggles strips in the modern day, and as a result regularly drew him flying jet aeroplanes. "I do remember Captain Johns commenting in a letter to Edwards that Biggles did not fly jets!" he recalled.<sup>97</sup>

Issues 70 and 75 of the *Adventures of Biggles* are credited to the otherwise unknown Jeff Wilkinson. Dixon is credited as the artist of issue 72. No records are available for issues 73 and 74. I have not seen any of these issues, so cannot comment on Wilkinson's work.

Not content with the Australian market, Edwards attempted to enter the British market as well. The *Adventures of Biggles* was released in the United Kingdom by Strato Publications. None of the issues were dated, but an advertisement for stamps on the inside rear cover of some issues refers to seals produced for the 1956 Melbourne Olympics, so it would appear that the comics appeared at about this time.

The British version of the title was different from the Australian in a number of respects. Strato chose to issue several stories on a monthly basis in one jumbo-sized 68-page comic, priced at one shilling in comparison to the Australian 6d. Each comic usually included at least two Biggles stories (one of which would be a long one which had been serialised over two Australian issues), as well as reprints of stories featuring other characters such as Tim Valour and the Crimson Comet. Two of the British issues also offered Gimlet comics. All of the British comics I have seen contained original Biggles stories drawn by DeVine. In addition, in Australia each comic had a brightly coloured cover picture printed on a single background colour, and this colour could change each week. In the United Kingdom, by contrast, most of the cover pictures were printed on a yellow background.

The *Adventures of Biggles* did not last long in the United Kingdom; only nine issues are known. In fact, as we shall see a curse appears to be attached to Biggles comics published in their home country, as no series ever lasts long and publishing plans often seem to be prematurely cancelled.

Another British Biggles comic had appeared at this time. In May 1955 a slim hardcover volume appeared with a full-colour comic strip version of *The Cruise of the Condor* by Pat Williams. This is not a rare or expensive book and is worth adding to your collection for its curiosity value, although it is fair to say that this is also a somewhat undistinguished production with uninspired artwork and scripting. In a recent online review Jeremy Briggs commented: "The text in the speech balloons is all too often perfunctory and many panels are silent. Indeed the script has an annoying habit of describing almost an entire page's plotline in one long text panel and then leaving the next half dozen panels of artwork virtually silent as the visual story struggles to catch up with the text."<sup>98</sup>

In 1955 two Biggles comics also appeared in another European country, Sweden. They were drawn by Göte Göransson, who had illustrated some of the Swedish editions of the Biggles books, and were both based on actual books written by Johns. "Biggles på Borneo" was published in *Teknikens Värld* during 1955-56, and "Biggles i Afrika" was published in *Stjärnmagasinet* in 1955. Both were later republished in Swedish magazines in the 1960s and 1970s, but they are quite rare and their origins are obscure. It is not known, for example, why or how they were published, although the fact that Göransson illustrated Biggles books may indicate that the Swedish publishers of the books reached a deal with Johns' agents to produce comic versions.

Ron Embleton's and Mike Western's comics from *TV Express* were syndicated and appeared in several European countries. In Sweden they were printed in the journal *Pilot*. They also appeared in France between June 1962 and September 1963 in numbers 28-35 and 39-43 of *Rin Tin Tin*, with pages printed alternately in colour and black and white. At the time Biggles was very popular in France.

It has been said that coming events cast their shadows before. Certainly, this initial translation of Biggles comics in France proved to be but the first of a long line of comics in French. In August 1963 a new Biggles series appeared in the pocket libraries published by Artima, a subsidiary of the French publishers of the Biggles books, Les Presses de la Cité. The series began with *Biggles au Cap Horn*, or *Biggles at World's End*. Interestingly, the cover of the Artima *Biggles au Cap Horn* reproduced the cover of the French translation of the book.

The new comic was drawn by Guicha, about whom little is known. He drew 13 comics in the series every month between August 1963 and August 1964.<sup>99</sup> The comics were black and white with colour covers, and usually included a separate war story at the back. The comics were 100 pages long and priced at 60 centimes, and were also on sale on Belgium, Switzerland and Morocco (one wonders whether there remain any Moroccan Biggles fans!). Guicha's artwork was fairly crude. The characters look angular and emaciated, and some panels appear to have been drawn in a hurry. Stories turned into comics included *Biggles and the Leopards of Zinn*, *Biggles Flies West*, *Biggles in the South Seas* and *Biggles Flies North*.

Guicha took some liberties with the stories. The entire ending of *Biggles Flies West*, for example, was omitted, and replaced with a scene where Deutch, under a flag of truce, demands Biggles' surrender, but is then arrested by the soldiers he has brought with him. They take off in their plane, which crashes into the sea. So much for the thrilling siege of the islet!

Guicha's untimely death brought an end to the Biggles series, but only for a short while. After a break of a little over a year, during which time Artima became Aredit, the Biggles pocket library series reappeared. The comic was now longer, 132 pages, and priced at 1 Franc, and was on sale in Canada as well as Belgium, Switzerland and Morocco. The Biggles stories were now drawn, in black and white as before with colour covers, by Roger Melliès (a name which cannot help but bring a smile to the face of anybody who has read *Viz*). Melliès drew nine comics, released on a roughly quarterly basis between January 1966 and January 1968. The stories he drew included *Biggles in Africa*, *Biggles Hits the Trail*, *Another Job for Biggles*, *Biggles Gets His Men* and *Biggles Breaks the Silence*. Generally, his renditions were much more faithful to the original, although he updated the stories to contemporary times. He also drew Gimlet comics, which appeared in France under the name *King* between November 1967 and November 1970.<sup>100</sup>

Melliès was quite a famous artist. Born at Béziers in 1901, he died in 1969. His first comic was the aviation strip "Pilote des Sables" in 1939. He was imprisoned during the Second World War, and after it drew numerous comics including several aviation strips such as "Aéroport Z," "Jérôme Gaillard," "Pancho Villa" and "Les Aventuriers en image." For Artima he drew some popular series such as "Escale 7," "Le Fantôme bleu du Hoggar," "Tex Bill," "Tony Cyclone" and "Luc Hardy." His Biggles strips are very well drawn, with clean lines and clever use of shading, although they lack the innovative use of varying perspectives and angles that made Ron Embleton's strips so visually exciting.

Seven Artima/Aredit comics were reissued in "special reprint" editions during the later 1960s, including issue No. 1, so one has to be careful that one is paying for the correct first issue. These "reprints" appear to be remainders of the original comics; sometimes they were bound together with their original covers inside the reprint cover, but at other times the original covers were removed before the reprint cover was added. All of the reprint covers have the words "Spécial Relié" on the front. The remainders of the Artima comics were priced at one Franc, whereas the reprints of the Aredit comics were priced at two Francs. Furthermore, the volumes are slightly shorter in height than the originals, indicating that they had been trimmed prior to re-issue.

Another form of "reprint" is also known. At times remaindered issues of two comics could be bound together, with covers still attached, inside a new cardboard cover that was a new printing of one of the internal covers and bore the words "Recueil de Biggles".

During 1966 and 1967 individual stories from *Biggles Charter Pilot* or *Biggles Air Detective* also appeared, in strips drawn by Melliès, at the backs of other Aredit comics (*Téméraire*, *Olympic*, *Jacques Rogy*, *Tex Bill* and *Thierry*).

With the end of this series of pocket libraries Biggles disappeared from French comics for a little while. At the same time, however, another series of Biggles comics had been appearing in Dutch. On 12 April 1965 the story "Biggles in het Verre Oosten" appeared in the Belgian paper *De Standaard*, where it ran until 26 June 1965. On 29 June a new Biggles story, "Biggles in de Jungle," commenced in *De Standaard*, running until 13 September 1965. These stories were reprinted in albums in October and November 1965. Altogether, 21 stories were serialised in *De Standaard* between 1965 and 1970, 20 of which were reprinted in albums during this same period. The final story, "Biggles het laatste konvooi," was finally reprinted in an album in 1998.

These comics were the product of the Studio Vandersteen, founded by Willy Vandersteen, a famous Belgian comic artist. Born in Antwerp in 1913, he died in 1990 following a long career. He drew his first comic for *De Dag* in 1941, and was famous for the "Suske en Wiske" strip, which was serialised for quite some time in *Tintin* magazine. Vandersteen did not actually draw any of the Biggles comics; the first twelve were drawn by Karel Verschuere, one of the studio artists, and the remainder by Karel Biddeloo, who joined the studio in 1967. The albums had green covers with a dramatic colour picture on the front. Inside the pages were alternately printed in blue and white and red and white. The first two stories were loosely based on the books *Biggles Air Commodore* and *Biggles in the Jungle*, but after that the authors made up their own stories. These generally featured Biggles only, along with new characters. Algy or Ginger appeared in some comics, the latter drawn as a brawny, rock-jawed ox of a man – a portrait which I simply cannot come to terms with in glancing at these comics! I have little Dutch so cannot comment too much on the stories, but they appear to be fairly exciting.

In 1995 the Belgian company Lefrancq (which at that time was printing another series of Biggles comics) released the first two Studio Vandersteen stories, in French, as volume one of its "Biggles Archives." The stories were printed in full colour, with a new cover drawn by Francis Bergèse. At the time Lefrancq intended to publish the whole series, but the company ceased publishing Biggles comics shortly afterwards, and so the remainder remain available only in Dutch.

In 1977 a new series of Biggles comics appeared in Sweden, issued by Semic Press. These comics are generally fairly well known to English-speaking Biggles fans as most of them were translated into English and published by Hodder & Stoughton. I bought these comics as a boy and can remember seeing the first one, *Biggles and the Saragasso Triangle*, at my local newsagent and rushing home to ask my mother for an advance on my pocket money so that I could buy it! My parents were not very keen on Biggles, considering the books too militaristic, and it took some persuading to get them to cough up. My stepfather then insisted on checking the comic himself when I got home, which caused a bit of a problem as the comic has some decidedly non-PC moments.

In January 1993 the late Roger Davies published an excellent article on "The Swedish Biggles Strip Comics" in No. 14 of *Biggles & Co*. He pointed out that seven albums were published between 1977 and 1984, the first four drawn by

Bjorn Karlstrom and the last three (which followed the first four after a gap of four years) by Stig Stjernvik (which may be a pseudonym, as Stjernvik signed one of his pictures, in the same handwriting, as “Stig Bramsen”). The albums were translated into a number of languages, except for the last one, which was only published in Swedish and in a very low print run. Some 104,000 copies of the first album were printed in six languages, but the print runs were consecutively lower for each of the following books. The comics fell foul of a new era of censorship in Sweden that determined that Biggles was unsound and which led to the books being pulled from library shelves and falling out of print.

As a boy I found *Biggles and the Saragasso Triangle* quite exciting, but found the later albums rather insipid (which may have reflected the fact that I was a teenager by the time the last few came out). In reading them I was distracted by the characterisation of Biggles, which was quite unlike the character in the books. Biggles is more of a James Bond type in these comics, knocking out villains right and left and flying everything from an autogyro to a space shuttle. I was also disappointed by the artwork of the first book, which I considered a poor imitation of Tintin. In fact, it was worse than that as several panels in the book were simply copied from Tintin books like *Flight 714* or *The Crab with the Golden Claws*. Apparently legal action was taken and this may explain why the books stopped for four years and, when they reappeared, were drawn by a new artist. Stjernvik was certainly more accomplished than Karlstrom and some of his illustrations are quite good, but if anything as a boy I liked his stories less. The stories are even more outlandish and Biggles is Johns’ character now only in name. Karlstrom’s stories at least had some charm and plenty of action which compensated for the occasional mindless violence and sexism. The Biggles of his stories could at least be vaguely linked back to Johns’ character. In Stjernvik’s stories Biggles drinks, fornicates and – the crowning indignity – slaps Marie Janis and calls her a “bitch.”

The most recent series of Biggles comics has proved to have the greatest longevity. The first album in the series, *Le cygnet jaune*, appeared in 1990 and the final album, *Chappal Wadi*, was published in 2006. The publication history of the comics is quite complex, with three different publishers over the years and several sub-series and reprints. Albums have been translated from the original French into Dutch, German, Czech and English, although sadly only a few have as yet been widely released in English (the albums have all been published, in idiosyncratic English, by Eurobooks in India, but are not freely available outside that country).

These Biggles albums were first issued by Claude Lefrancq, a Belgian publisher and Biggles fan who has also published some of W. E. Johns’ original works translated into French. He issued eight albums between 1990 and 1995. Four of these were based on original books by W. E. Johns – *Le cygnet jaune* (Sergeant Bigglesworth C.I.D.), *Les pirates du pole sud* (Biggles’ Second Case), *Le bal des Spitfires* and *Squadron Biggles* (both Spitfire Parade). Two other books were historical documentaries about the Second World War in the air, with Biggles providing a brief introduction but otherwise not featuring in the comic. These were *La bataille d’Angleterre* (The Battle of

Britain) and *La bataille de France* (The Battle of France). The final two books Lefrancq published were new Biggles stories, *Le vol du Wallenstein* (The Flight of Wallenstein) and *Le dernier Zeppelin* (The Last Zeppelin).

The first four albums based on original books by Johns, along with *La bataille de Angleterre*, were drawn by Francis Bergèse, one of the premier aviation artists drawing comics today. Born in 1941 in Crest in south-west France, Bergèse has been interested in aviation all his life. He gained his pilot's licence at 17 and joined the Aviation Légère de l'Armée de Terre at the age of 20. He began drawing comics in 1964 but soon accepted work as an aviation journalist for magazines like *Pilote Privé* and *Aviation Magazine International*. After five years of journalism he returned to comics and for a while drew the "Buck Danny" strip, about an American jet fighter pilot and very popular in France and western Europe.

Bergèse later recounted that he came to draw Biggles by accident. The writer of the "Buck Danny" strip, Jean-Michel Charlier, died suddenly and it was unclear if the title would continue. Claude Lefrancq appreciated that Bergèse needed something to work on, and asked him if he had any interest in drawing Biggles. Bergèse had never read any Biggles stories and only knew the name. He asked to read one of Johns' novels first. Lefrancq gave him a copy of his favourite book, *Sergeant Bigglesworth C.I.D.*, and Bergèse liked it. He agreed to draw some Biggles titles, and Lefrancq asked him to draw his two favourites, *Sergeant Bigglesworth C.I.D.* and *Biggles' Second Case*, as he wanted to publish these first! Lefrancq issued these and then the English publisher of Biggles books, Red Fox publications, asked Lefrancq if he could produce comics of stories that were popular in England. As a result the next book to be drawn was *Spitfire Parade*.

Bergèse drew Biggles in "ligne claire" style, a style that goes back to such famous Belgian artists as Hergé (who created Tintin) and Edgar Jacobs (who also worked on Tintin comics and created Blake and Mortimer). He did not base his portraits of Biggles, Algy, Ginger and Bertie on Johns' descriptions, but on his own imagination. As a result, in his versions Algy has redder hair than Ginger! That being said, his artwork is excellent and his illustrations of aeroplanes are always magnificent. He draws action scenes well, and brings a realism to *Spitfire Parade* that is quite lacking in the original. Otherwise, however, his renditions of the four Biggles books are very faithful to the originals. Bergèse noted that it was important that the comic albums did not alienate Biggles fans.

*Le vol du Wallenstein* and *Le dernier Zeppelin* were the first in a quite long series of original Biggles comics. These albums were the work of writer Michel Oleffe and artist Eric Loutte. Oleffe has a background in publicity and editing, but has also written television serials and comics. His Biggles stories were his first venture into aviation fiction. His decision not to prepare scripts based on Johns' original works was simply the result of a desire to write his own stories. Loutte later commented that this was a good thing for him, as he enjoys drawing different types of aeroplanes and Oleffe always gave him a couple of good machines to draw per album.

Loutte himself was born in Charleroi in Belgium in 1961 and began drawing comics in 1987. He was working on a series of adaptations of works by Asimov when that celebrity died and the series was cancelled. Fortunately, at this time Bergèse had decided to stop drawing Biggles and return to “Buck Danny,” and so Loutte took over the reins.

Oleffe’s version of Biggles is reasonably close to Johns’ original, although the same cannot be said of his treatment of Biggles’ companions. In his stories Algy and Ginger are basically supporting roles. Ginger gets some opportunities for action, and Algy usually has some common sense to impart, but they are fairly one-dimensional. Oleffe is much fonder of Bertie and uses him as a comic foil for the other three. His treatment of Bertie may cause hardened Biggles fans to raise their eyebrows, although I admit I quite enjoy it. On the opening page of *Le vol du Wallenstein* we learn that Bertie was expelled from Eton and has cousins in Scotland. In later books we see him enjoying a drink and wearing a dress in a revue!

Lefrancq issued only these eight albums, plus the album of Vandersteen strips in colour mentioned above. In 1995 the Belgian publisher Miklo took over the Biggles comics. Miklo reprinted most of Lefrancq’s titles and also issued a string of new titles. These include original stories by Oleffe and Loutte as well as historical comics in which Biggles simply presents an introduction. These were written and drawn by a wide range of people, including Marcel Uderzo, the brother of the famous Astérix artist Albert Uderzo. Miklo also began a series of “Biggles Heritage” comics, reprinting (in French) the strips by Embleton and Western from *TV Express*, along with two comics that had appeared in the 1980 *Biggles Annual* and Pat Williams’ version of *The Cruise of the Condor*.

Another innovation by Miklo was a centenary album, *Alias W E Johns*, which appeared in 2000. The album contains articles on W. E. Johns and Biggles (by Jennifer Schofield), articles on Biggles comics, interviews with artists and three short comics:

- “Le Pilote Clandestin,” by Roger Melliès, previously published in *Téméraire* No. 109 and based on “The case of the unregistered operator” from *Biggles Air Detective*;
- “Le Meurtre d’Edmund Teale,” by Oleffe and Loutte and based on “The case of the murdered apprentice from *Biggles Air Detective*; and
- “Tonnerre sur la Forêt Noire,” drawn by Belgian artist Frank Leclercq and adapted by Bergèse from “Thunder over Germany” from *Comrades in Arms*.

Frank Leclercq was born in 1967 at Liège in Belgium. His other comic work includes adaptations of Agatha Christie stories for albums published by Claude Lefrancq. He went on to draw two more Biggles albums for Miklo, the two-part *L’oasis perdue* (“The Lost Oasis”). This was written by Oleffe and is set in the Libyan Desert prior to the Second World War and features von Stalhein and hordes of zombie mummies. The artwork is stunning at times,

but the story is a bit too surreal and reminiscent of the Hollywood film *The Mummy*. That being said, the only thing that really annoys me about these albums is the presence of Bertie in a story set before the War.

This fairly complex series of Belgian publications became even more tortuous in 2003, when the publisher Lombard took over some of the titles, but not all. Miklo kept the rights to some of the historical titles, and added several new titles. These were issued under the banner “Biggles présente,” and Miklo kept issuing these until May 2005 when it published *Normandie – Niemen 1*, the ninth historical volume in the series (although confusingly there was no number eight). This marked quite a departure from earlier historical titles. Biggles’ customary introduction was dispensed with, and the book was less a comic than a series of paintings with subtitles. Clearly Miklo was adjusting its presentation, and titles since then have dropped the “Biggles présente” rider and the series is now known as “Airfiles.” These include the missing volume eight!

Two volumes in the “Biggles présente” series were published in a larger size, with dustjackets. These were *Le Grande Cirque* by Pierre Clostermann and Manuel Peralès and *Les Ailes du Cinéma* by Philippe Durant.

Miklo also issued a final volume in the “Biggles Heritage” series in April 2006, *Biggles en danger* featuring a reprint of Melliès’ Aredit comic of that name as well as a reprint of one of the Aredit Gimlet comics.

Lombard re-issued all the stories by Bergèse, Oleffe and Loutte and Oleffe and Leclercq, and also added some new titles by Oleffe and Loutte. Its last title in the series was *Chappal Wadi*, which appeared in December 2006. To complicate matters, however, Lombard re-issued all the titles with its own numbering scheme. As a result, *L’oasis perdue*, which was Miklo albums 15 and 16, became Lombard albums 1 and 2. The Lombard versions are easily distinguished, however, as Lombard redesigned the Biggles logo (making it somewhat similar to the famous Hodder logo from the 1950s).

Lombard also had its own series of historical strips presented by Biggles and written and drawn by a variety of people. These were issued under the banner “Biggles raconte” and included albums originally published by Lefrancq and Miklo as well as new titles. The final title, volume 7, was *La légende du général Leclerc* by Bertrand Guillou, published in December 2007. These new titles retained Biggles’ brief introductions.

The publishing history of these French comics in English is also somewhat complicated. A few titles were issued, in quite good translations, by Red Fox in the early 1990s. *Le cygnet jaune* was published as *Biggles Flying Detective*, *Le bal des Spitfire* as *Spitfire Parade* and *La bataille d’Angleterre* as *Biggles and the Battle of Britain*. Plans were in place in December 1997 to issue *Les pirates du pôle sud* as *Biggles and the Pirates of the South Pole*, but the venture was cancelled and never came out, even though the book continued to be listed by online booksellers such as Amazon for quite some time. Red Fox’s decision not to issue any more titles was a pity as only half of the original *Spitfire Parade* book was in the comic of that name.

These Red Fox issues have long been out of print, but crop up fairly regularly on Ebay. Recently, the British firm Cinebook, which specialises in English translations of the numerous French and Belgian *bandes dessinées*, issued translations of three titles – two historical titles, *Biggles Recounts the Falklands War* (issued in 2007, the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Falklands War) and *Biggles Recounts the Battle of Britain* (2008), and Bergèse's *Spitfire Parade* (2008).

Cinebook's translation of *Spitfire Parade*, by Luke Spear, is different from Adam Robson's translation for Red Fox. Jeremy Briggs pointed out that Spear's translation shows less knowledge of RAF terminology and included a few anachronisms, such as a reference to a pilot "ejecting" from a Spitfire rather than bailing out.<sup>101</sup> Cinebook's translations of French comics do sometimes adopt slightly odd English, but the firm is to be congratulated for trying to bring so many wonderful comics to English readers.

Plans were in place to issue *Biggles Recounts the Wright Brothers* and *Squadron Biggles* in 2009, but the curse of English publications of Biggles comics struck again. As Olivier Cadic, the boss of Cinebook, told an online interviewer, "The lawyers managing the rights to Biggles could not come to an agreement with the French publisher Le Lombard. Therefore, we can no longer publish the adaptations of Biggles."<sup>102</sup> In December 2009 Cinebook announced in its online newsletter that it had cancelled the Biggles series for this reason. However, Cinebook also announced that it would re-issue the Battle of Britain comic, this time titled *Cinebook Recounts the Battle of Britain*, to coincide with the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle, and the Wright Brothers title was listed for similar treatment, so we may well get all the historical titles in English – *sans* Biggles.

Outside the United Kingdom, 14 of these Biggles stories (but not the historical comics) have been published in India by Eurokids International. These comics are in English, but are only available in India. I have been reluctant to buy copies of these as booksellers, when approached, do not offer Visa but ask for money to be sent by Western Union! From what little I have seen of these comics online, the translations are cumbersome to say the least, especially when we can compare them with Johns' original in titles like *Spitfire Parade*. For example, this is Johns' introduction to "Cuthbert Comes – And Goes":

One of the strangest but most characteristic features of war flying is the manner in which comedy and tragedy so often go hand in hand. Overnight, a practical joke may set a pilot's mess rocking with mirth; by dawn, the perpetrator of it may have gone for a long spell in hospital – if not for ever.

In the Eurokids version from *Squadron Biggles*, this becomes:

One of the strangest and at the same time most typical peculiarities of aviation combat in times of war is the manner in which tragedy and comedy mingle with each other. This evening, a big joke will shake the officer's mess right to its very foundation. Tomorrow, the fellow who

perpetrated it may find himself for a long time in hospital, if not in the cemetery.<sup>103</sup>

One wonders why the publishers did not simply use Johns' original words.

Finally, a word should be said about the relative rarity of these comics. Australian Biggles comics are quite rare and frequently sell for high sums. The British Strato comics are not as rare or expensive, but can take some years to complete. It will also take some time to complete a collection of the Artima/Aredit comics, although most are not expensive. They do crop up on Ebay, but some issues may appear only every few years, particularly the earlier issues. Issue No. 1, *Biggles au Cap Horn*, seems to be quite rare and I have seen it on sale at 50 Euros. The Vandersteen comics are a little easier to complete, and again most are not too expensive, selling for up to about 25 Euros each with the exception of No. 21, *Het laatste kooonvoi*, which can sell for over 70 Euros. This book was released as a limited edition in a very low print run and is quite hard to find. Incidentally, there are a number of unofficial versions of this title, including various photocopies with colour covers, so if you are paying a higher price be careful that you are getting the correct edition. The Semic Press books in the original Swedish can also be rare, especially the last one which was only published in Swedish. The English versions do appear on Ebay regularly, but again a complete collection will take time to put together.

The recent series of French comics is all readily available, at least in the Lombard editions; the earlier Lefrancq editions can be hard to find. These comics sold quite well; it was reported that Miklo sold more than 100,000 copies of its editions of the first 15 albums, and that each new album was being issued in a print run of 30,000. That being said, for some reason it took me quite a while to find copies of *L'oasis perdue* and the first of Miklo's "Biggles Heritage" series. This may have been because I was buying these some five or six years after they were first published, and therefore the Miklo editions were less readily available. In the end, I found my copies of *L'oasis perdue* in a bookshop in Quebec, proof again of the variety of countries and cultures that have enjoyed Biggles.

*Table 7. Adventures of Biggles comics published by Strato Publications*

No.	Stories	Artists
1	The kidnapped scientist Middle East hazard	Albert DeVine
2	Indo China intrigue Rescue mission	Albert DeVine
3	The submarine spies The pirate sub	Albert deVine
4	The saboteur The missing cameraman	Albert DeVine

5	China Mission Sabotage in Ceylon	Albert DeVine
6	The roof of the world Biggles in Brazil	Albert DeVine
7	Pyrenean manhunt	Albert DeVine
8	Oil search	Albert DeVine
9	International smugglers Murder in plastic	Albert DeVine

*Table 8. French Biggles Pocket Libraries issued by Artima/Aredit*

<b>No.</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Date</b>
1	Biggles au Cap Horn 1	August 1963
2	Biggles au Cap Horn 2	September 1963
3	Biggles et les hommes leopards 1	October 1963
4	Biggles et les hommes leopards 2	November 1963
5	Les tresor des flibustiers 1	December 1963
6	Les tresor des flibustiers 2	January 1964
7	Biggles au pole Sud 1	February 1964
8	Biggles au pole Sud 2	March 1964
9	Biggles dans les mers du Sud 1	April 1964
10	Biggles dans les mers du Sud 2	May 1964
11	Biggles in Bornéo 1	June 1964
12	Biggles in Bornéo 2	July 1964
13	Biggles au grand Nord	August 1964
14	Biggles en afrique	January 1966
15	Biggles cherche de l'or en barre	April 1966
16	Biggles en danger	July 1966
17	Biggles en Arabie	October 1966
18	Biggles dans le desert Le crocodile parlant Contrebande	January 1967

19	Biggles au pays de la soif	April 1967
20	Biggles au Tibet	July 1967
21	Biggles porté manquant	October 1967
22	Le nuage pourpre	January 1968
	L'île enchantée (story in <i>Tex Bill</i> 39)	January 1966
	Le terrible troglodyte (story in <i>Thierry</i> 23)	February 1966
	Les ermites horticulteurs (story in <i>Jacques Rogy</i> 3)	April 1966
	Les géants de Patagonie (story in <i>Olympic</i> 18)	May 1967
	Le mammoth pétrifié (story in <i>Téméraire</i> 104)	May 1967
	La mort silencieuse (story in <i>Thierry</i> 28)	May 1967
	La visite du sultan (story in <i>Téméraire</i> 106)	July 1967
	La disparition du pilote (story in <i>Téméraire</i> 108)	September 1967
	Le pilote clandestin (story in <i>Téméraire</i> 109)	October 1967

*Table 9. Biggles Albums issued by Studio Vandersteen*

<b>No.</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Date</b>
1	Biggles in het verre oosten	1965
2	Biggles in de jungle	1965
3	Biggles in India	1966
4	De onbekende pilot	1966
5	Biggles in de Oriënt	1966
6	Biggles in Arabië	1966
7	Ontvoering in Thailand	1966
8	Operatie Spacefighter	1967
9	Biggles in Tibet	1967
10	Basis op Kwan-Tia	1967
11	De Valschermspringers	1967
12	De Samourai	1967

13	Objectief Boomerang	1968
14	Alarm in Gadougou	1968
15	Barracuda Schaakmat	1968
16	Hawk slaat toe	1968
17	Mato Grosso	1968
18	Afrekening in Cairo	1969
19	Oriënt Express	1969
20	De terugkeer van Hawk	1969
21	Het laatste konvooi	1998

*Table 10. Swedish Biggles Albums issued by Semic Press*

No.	Title	Date
1	Sargasso Mysteriet (Biggles and the Saragasso Triangle)	1977
2	Operation Guldfisken (Biggles and the Golden Bird)	1978
3	Mote Med Tigern (Biggles and the Tiger)	1978
4	Hotet Fran Rymden (Biggles and the Menace from Space)	1979
5	Slutspel i Kalahari (Biggles in the Kalahari)	1983
6	Drama i Gibraltar (Biggles and the Gibraltar Bomb)	1983
7	Den Hemliga Eskadern	1984

*Table 11. French Biggles Albums issued by Lefrancq, Miklo and Lombard (stories only)*

Title	Date	Authors	Publisher
<i>Le cygne jaune</i>	1990	Bergèse/Johns	Lefrancq
Re-issued by Miklo 1998, Lombard 2003			
<i>Les pirates de pole Sud</i>	1991	Bergèse/Johns	Lefrancq
Re-issued by Miklo 1998, Lombard 2003			
<i>Le bal des Spitfire</i>	1992	Bergèse/Johns	Lefrancq
Re-issued by Miklo 1998, Lombard 2004			

<i>Squadron Biggles</i>	1994	Bergèse/Johns	Lefrancq
Re-issued by Miklo 1998, Lombard 2004			
<i>Le vol du Wallenstein</i>	1994	Oleffe/Loutte	Lefrancq
Re-issued by Miklo 1998, Lombard 2004			
<i>Le dernier Zeppelin</i>	1995	Oleffe/Loutte	Lefrancq
Re-issued by Miklo 1998, Lombard 2003			
<i>La 13ème dent du diable</i>	1997	Oleffe/Loutte	Miklo
Re-issued by Lombard 2003			
<i>L'épée de Wotan</i>	1998	Oleffe/Loutte	Miklo
Re-issued by Lombard 2004			
<i>Neiges mortelles</i>	1999	Oleffe/Loutte	Miklo
Re-issued by Lombard 2003			
<i>Alias W E Johns – l'album du centenaire</i>	2000	Melliès/Oleffe/Loutte/ Bergèse/Leclercq	Miklo
<i>L'oasis perdue 1</i>	2000	Oleffe/Leclercq	Miklo
Re-issued by Lombard 2004			
<i>Pilote de RAF</i>	2001	Bergèse/Johns (omnibus edition of the two <i>Spitfire Parade</i> books and <i>La bataille d'Angleterre</i> )	Miklo
<i>L'oasis perdue 2</i>	2001	Oleffe/Leclercq	Miklo
Re-issued by Lombard 2004			
<i>Feu sur la province 1</i>	2003	Oleffe/Loutte	Lombard
<i>Feu sur la province 2</i>	2004	Oleffe/Loutte	Lombard
<i>Chappal Wadi</i>	2006	Oleffe/Loutte	Lombard

Table 12. French historical albums issued by Lefrancq, Miklo and Lombard

Title	Date	Authors	Publisher
<i>La bataille d'Angleterre</i>	1993	Bergèse/Asso	Lefrancq
Re-issued by Miklo 1998, Lombard 2003			

<i>La bataille de France</i>	1995	Chauvin/Uderzo/Asso/Rideau	Lefrancq
Re-issued by Miklo 1998, Lombard 2003			
<i>La bataille des Malouines</i>	1997	Chauvin/Uderzo/Asso/Rideau	Miklo
Re-issued by Lombard 2003			
<i>Roland Garros</i>	1998	Lefèvre-Garros/Uderzo	Miklo
Re-issued by Lombard 2003			

*Table 13. Miklo's 'Biggles presente' series*

<b>Title</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Date</b>
<i>16 avions de chasse de la 2<sup>e</sup> guerre mondiale</i>	Bergèse	2000
<i>18 illustrations aéronautiques</i>	Loutte	2000
<i>Le Grand Cirque – 1</i>	Clostermann/Peralès	2001
<i>Le Grand Cirque – 2</i>	Clostermann/Peralès	2002
<i>Le Grand Cirque – 3</i>	Clostermann/Peralès	2003
<i>Mes avions de papier</i>	Bergèse	2004
<i>Titans du pacifique</i>	Mathelot	2004
<i>Normandie-Niemen – 1</i>	Peralès	2005
<i>HS1 – Le Grand Cirque</i>	Clostermann/Peralès	2003
<i>HS2 – Les Ailes du Cinéma</i>	Durant	2004

*Table 14. Lombard's 'Biggles raconte' series*

<b>Title</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Date</b>
<i>La bataille d'Angleterre</i>	Bergèse/Asso	2003
<i>La bataille de France</i>	Chauvin/Uderzo/Asso/Rideau	2003
<i>La bataille des Malouines</i>	Chauvin/Uderzo/Asso/Rideau	2003
<i>Roland Garros</i>	Lefèvre-Garros/Uderzo	2003
<i>Saint-Exupery</i>	Durant/Laverdure	2003
<i>Les frères Wright</i>	Lefèvre-Garros/Uderzo	2005

<i>Charles Lindbergh</i>	Laverdure/Bergèse	2005
<i>La légende du général Leclerc</i>	Guillou	2007

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Johns' military history, available at [www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk) in the online database *British Army WWI Service Records, 1914-1920*, is unequivocal on this point. It clearly states that he served at "home" from the outbreak of the War until 15 September 1916, when he joined the M.E.F. (Middle East Force) in Salonika. The popular view that Johns served in Gallipoli and Egypt, derived from P.B. Ellis and J. Schofield, *By Jove Biggles!*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Watford 2003) pp.24-27, is incorrect. Johns himself never claimed that he served in those theatres.

<sup>2</sup> H. Collinson Owen, *Salonica and After* (London 1919) p.69; W. E. Johns, "Night Patrol," *Men Only* March 1940, pp.113-15.

<sup>3</sup> Collinson Owen (as n.2 above) pp.184-86; A. Palmer, *The Gardeners of Salonika* (London 1965) p.142.

<sup>4</sup> The casualty form is available with what little remains of Johns' army records at [www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk) (as n.1 above). These records are among the famous "burnt documents," so named because they were damaged during the Blitz. Luckily, although some of the documents are fragmentary, we can reconstruct his Army career reasonably well from the records. For Johns' own comments, see Ellis and Schofield (as n.1 above) p.33.

<sup>5</sup> Johns' application for a commission is on WO 339/106499, titled "W<sup>m</sup> Earl Johns. Apl<sup>cn</sup> for Comm<sup>n</sup> in MGC." The file was registered on 14 May 1917, but Johns commenced the process on 18 April 1917 with the required medical check (in which, incidentally, he recorded that he had been operated on for appendicitis in April 1915). He did not get all the required signatures and approvals until 31 May 1917.

<sup>6</sup> As Johns' RFC and RAF records are not available to the public (with the exception of the record of his time on the RAF Reserve list – see n.12 below) it is difficult to give details of his postings. Johns later claimed that he posted himself to 55 Squadron by catching lifts around France, but this appears to be a romance. Johns' discharge papers from the Machine Gun Corps, dated 2 September 1918, were drafted after his commission was confirmed and were posted to him at 55 Squadron; by the time they arrived, however, Johns was a prisoner and the papers remain on his service records today. The envelope is marked "unable to trace" and "next of kin officially informed." Although Johns would later claim ("Between Ourselves," *Flying* Vol. 1, No. 7, 14 May 1938, p.3) that he made 23 raids on Germany, 55 Squadron records show only five such raids, although it is possible some flights at least may not have been recorded. See M. C. Armstrong, "55 Squadron RAF. The Johns Connection," *Cross and Cockade* Vol. 24, No. 1 (1993) pp.186-94. For details of the raids, based on official records, see the excellent book by K. Rennles, *Independent Force* (London 2002) pp.110-12, 131-32, 135-36, 140-41.

<sup>7</sup> Johns was originally reported as "last seen going down out of control near Hagenau" in a report from the field from 8<sup>th</sup> Brigade, RAF (see AIR 1/1973/204/273/2(1)) dated 16 September 1918, and in an Independent Force Battle Casualty Report dated 17 September 1918 (see AIR 1/1973/204/273/2(2)). Amey was recorded as dead in a list on file AIR 1/1973/204/273/3; Johns' fate was still unknown then. According to 55 Squadron's records (see file AIR 1/153/15/121/3), the mission on which Johns and Amey were engaged was to bomb the Lanz works at Mannheim. Johns was reported a prisoner of war in *Flight* on 21 November 1918.

<sup>8</sup> See Ellis and Schofield (as n.1 above) p.215.

<sup>9</sup> J. Adrian, "In Search of William Earle," *Biggles & Co* 3 (1990) pp.10-12.

<sup>10</sup> D. Tangri, "W. E. Johns' Paintings in the Illustrated London News," *Biggles' Friend Magazine* 10 (2005) pp.22-28.

<sup>11</sup> B. Weier, "W. E. Johns and the Royal Air Force Display Programmes," *Biggles' Friend Magazine* 5 (2004) pp.18-21.

<sup>12</sup> Johns' record on the RAF Reserve list is available at the National Archives of the United Kingdom at AIR 76/260.

<sup>13</sup> See the brief note in the 28 November 1928 issue; an advertisement for these had appeared in the 23 November 1927 issue, p.720. The cards were reviewed on p.104 of the December 1929 issue of *Airways*, and were also regularly advertised in that magazine.

<sup>14</sup> The earliest signed advertisement by Johns appeared on page 901 of the 28 November 1928 issue of *The Aeroplane* (a picture of a Vickers Valiant), although it is possible earlier unsigned pictures were also by Johns (a picture on page 785 of the 7 November issue looks

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to me to be clearly by Johns, given the characteristic hedge-rowed fields and the lines of the aeroplanes). One of Johns' advertisements appeared on the front cover of *The Aeroplane* on 9 July 1930 and a double-page advertisement for Vickers appeared on pages 36-7 of the 2 July 1930 issue. Johns' drawing of a Vickers Valiant also appeared in the 20 September 1928 issue of *Flight* (p.xi) and other advertisements by him can be found in *Flight* for 17 April 1928 (Blackburn Aircraft), 26 April 1928 (Vickers Valiant – p.vii), 31 May 1928 ("The Right Spirit" for British Petrol, Anglo-Persian Oil Co Ltd – p.xiii), 17 January 1929 (Vickers Vellore – p.xii), 2 November 1929 (a Westland Wapiti – p.xvii), 22 November 1929 (Blackburn Ripon – p.xxii), 6 December 1929 (Blackburn Ripon – p.xxii), 3 January 1930 (a flight of Westland Wapitis – pp.xxvi-xxvii, unsigned but clearly by Johns as similar aeroplanes can be found in a signed painting by Johns which appeared in *The Graphic* on 30 August 1930 pp.346-7), 4 July 1930 (double-page spread of Vickers planes on pp.xii-xiii), 11 July 1930 (KLG plugs – p.xxv), 21 November 1930 (Vickers Aircraft – pp.x-xi), 20 March 1931 (Vickers Aviation Limited – p.vii, unsigned but clearly by Johns as explained by B. Weier, "New Illustrations Identified?" *Biggles' Friend Magazine* 5 (2004) pp.22-23) and 26 June 1931 (the same, along with a picture of the Supermarine S6 – pp.xii-xiii). Again, there are some unsigned pictures that could be by Johns. I lean towards attributing a Blackburn Aircraft advertisement printed in the 17 April 1928 issue to Johns, as he drew other Blackburn advertisements at the time and the picture shows a horseman flinging up his arm – Johns loved to draw people flinging up an arm! I also suspect a picture published on page xii of the 1 August 1930 issue is by Johns; it is signed "Aircraft & General" and is stylistically like his work.

<sup>15</sup> See the advertisement in the 18 January 1928 issue of *The Aeroplane*. Johns' postcards were also reviewed on p.384 of the July 1930 issue of *Airways*.

<sup>16</sup> Reviewed in the March 1929 issue of *Airways*. I have seen one copy of this appear on Ebay in recent years (although I must admit I do not check the site consistently). It seems to be a great rarity.

<sup>17</sup> R. Whittle, "Out of the Blue," *Biggles & Co* 24 (1995) p.37, noted that Johns' covers appeared for a whole year. I am grateful to Malcolm Kite for correcting the dates using the copies in his collection.

<sup>18</sup> N. Wright, *W. E. Johns and the Modern Boy – An Index* (Watford 1995). His first cover appeared with *Modern Boy* 98, dated 21 December 1929.

<sup>19</sup> Three appeared, for example, as plates in volume 11, No. 1, in 1931.

<sup>20</sup> Johns contributed front covers to at least five, and probably six issues – 16 January 1931, 22 May 1931, 26 June 1931, 28 August 1931 and 24 June 1932. Another cover, on the 20 March 1931 issue, is unsigned but has Johns' style (and the hedge-rowed fields).

<sup>21</sup> Paintings appeared in the 9 July 1930 (pp.74-5), 15 April 1931 (pp.126-7) and 24 June 1931 (p.606) issues.

<sup>22</sup> D. Tangri, "Some New Discoveries in *Chums*," *Biggles Flies Again* 2.11 (2008) pp.26-29.

<sup>23</sup> D. Tangri, "The Ranger's Air Expert," *Biggles' Friend Magazine* 13 (2006) pp.14-23.

<sup>24</sup> Although Johns later claimed that he served in the RAF in India and Iraq, official records do not confirm these postings. See Ellis and Schofield (as n.1 above) pp.99-100.

<sup>25</sup> D. Tangri, "W. E. Johns in the *Graphic*," *Biggles' Friend Magazine* 13 (2006) pp.24-37. I unaccountably missed the article on Aces in the *National Graphic* when researching Johns' contributions. I am grateful to Malcolm Kite for telling me about it! His discovery made me go back to the journal and I found three more contributions to "Air Notes and News" in early 1932 which I had also missed. I can only conclude that my eyesight had gone by the time I reached the last of the seven or eight massive volumes I was studying.

<sup>26</sup> W. E. Johns, "How 'Biggles' Was Born," *Radio Times* 104, No. 1350 (1949) p.17.

<sup>27</sup> W. E. Johns, 'Foreword', *The First Biggles Omnibus* (Hodder & Stoughton 1953) p.6. This point is also made in the publisher's blurb on "The Author" which appeared with the 1941 Penguin edition of *Biggles Flies Again*. This quotes Johns as saying "I found boys here reading thrilling stories about American airmen and thought they should hear a bit about some of the very fine British pilots I knew during the war."

<sup>28</sup> American pulps published prior to 1932 were nonetheless relatively mundane when compared to one of the most popular, which first appeared in January 1933. Entitled *G8 and his Battle Aces*, this ran for eleven years and featured fantastic, bizarre stories about G8, a flying spy, and his battles against the evil schemes of the Kaiser's mad scientists. The covers were lurid and macabre, the stories a mixture of horror and science fiction set to the backdrop of war flying.

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<sup>29</sup> Given Johns' comments, it is odd that *Popular Flying* contained, from its first issue, a long serial, "Falcons of France," about an American in the French Flying Corps and written by two citizens of the U.S.A., Charles Nordoff and J. N. Hall. As this book was also published by John Hamilton in the "Ace" series, perhaps Johns had no choice about including it – or perhaps he only disliked some American literature.

<sup>30</sup> Ellis and Schofield, (as n.1 above) pp.126-33, 146.

<sup>31</sup> W. E. Johns, *"Biggles" of the Camel Squadron* (London 1934) p.xiii.

<sup>32</sup> See, for example, pp.xv and 52 of the Kingston Library edition and pp.10 and 43 of the Dean edition.

<sup>33</sup> Jim Caudwell, "From an "Old Timer", not dated but published in the 1970s in an Old Boys' Book Club Souvenir Menu. "I remember when the famous "Biggles" was born in our room and also "The Saint," for W. E. Johns and Charteris were frequent visitors." I should like to thank Naveed Haque for informing me of this rare memoir.

<sup>34</sup> C. Lowther, "Behind the Mask," *Collector's Digest Annual 1982*, pp.98-106.

<sup>35</sup> Although one might assume that the editor's column was written by the editor of the paper, this need not have been the case. The Amalgamated Press employed writers whose main task was to prepare the editors' columns for the Companion Papers, such as Ernest McKeag, who contributed the "Come Into the Office Boys" editorial feature to *The Magnet*. Accordingly, when I refer to the editor's columns, I describe the writer as "the editor" for convenience, and not because I believe in the attribution.

<sup>36</sup> Incidentally, this is an iconographic image that has stayed with Biggles to this day. A somewhat middle-aged and puffy-looking Biggles appears in flying helmet on the covers of the recent Crows Nest Publications omnibuses. My favourite of the genre was drawn by Stead on the spine of the dustjacket of *Biggles in the Blue*.

<sup>37</sup> A similar difficulty arises when attempting to identify the artists who produced aviation illustrations in *The Ranger* in 1931. A few of the pictures are signed by Johns and a few by Leigh. Similarities to other pictures, and certain stylistic traits, lead me to attribute most of the pictures to Johns rather than Leigh, but I have to confess that I am not certain and any unsigned picture could easily be by either man.

<sup>38</sup> N. Wright, "W. E. Johns and the Modern Boy III. Halcyon Days, 1934 – 1935," *Biggles & Co* 17 (1993) p. 11.

<sup>39</sup> As *The Modern Boy* had published Johns' photo about four times before this, the editor was either fibbing – or a large number of new readers had appeared!

<sup>40</sup> There is an amusing coda to this tale. In "Biggles: Anatomy of a hero," *Children's Literature in Education* 5 (1974) pp.19-28, A. E. Day thought that Johns had made lemonade the object of Biggles' attention as an act of self-censorship. "Even allowing for Biggles' tender years it is stretching the imagination too far to accept an RFC Squadron Mess Night living it up on lemonade. If we substitute a case of scotch or champagne for the lemonade then the whole episode of course becomes more credible and Capt Johns' motives for this harmless deception may be easily understood if we remember that in the early thirties it was not thought necessary or desirable that boys' yarns should be absolutely authentic in every detail" (pp.21-22). The roaring 30s were clearly a tad less fastidious than he thought.

<sup>41</sup> See W. O. G. Lofts, "Please Don't Forget the Chef!" *Collector's Digest* 136 (1958) p.115; H. W. Twyman, "Hedley Percival Angelo O'Mant," *The Golden Hours Magazine* 5 (1962) pp.35-43; W. O. G. Lofts, "The Downfall of St. Frank's," *Story Paper Collector's Digest* 370 (1977) p.9.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Down's RFC service record can be found at the National Archives of the United Kingdom at AIR 76/139. Also worth reading are his Territorial Army record, on the [www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk) online database *British Army WWI Service Records, 1914-1920* and his medal cards, in the series *British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914-1920*.

<sup>44</sup> This is not to say that such stories lacked verisimilitude. Many of the members of the RFC were fresh out of school and still very much boys rather than men. They took opportunities to "rag." My favourite such prank took place in 1917, when "Squibs" Sibley and "Puggy" Shone of No. 48 Squadron, having observed that German officers would sit on the promenade at Ostend with their girlfriends, flew low over the town and pelted them with rotten oranges.

<sup>45</sup> K. Amis, "Biggles," *The Observer Magazine* 27 June 1965.

<sup>46</sup> W. O. G. Lofts, "The Modern Girl," *Story Paper Collector's Digest* 458 (1985) p.28.

- <sup>47</sup> M. Kite, "What's in the 1933 *Modern Boy's Annual*?" *Biggles' Friend Magazine* 15 (2007) pp.50-51.
- <sup>48</sup> S. J. Taylor, *The Great Outsiders. Northcliffe, Rothermere and the Daily Mail* (London 1996) pp.123-27.
- <sup>49</sup> M. Paris, "The Rise of the Airmen: The Origins of Air Force Elitism, c. 1890-1918," *Journal of Contemporary History* 28 (1993) p.130.
- <sup>50</sup> H. Leckenby, "Britain Invaded – Often!" *Collector's Digest Annual* (1954) p.120; E. S. Turner, *Boys Will Be Boys*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., (Harmondsworth 1976) pp.191-202.
- <sup>51</sup> Paris (as n.49 above) p.137.
- <sup>52</sup> For essential background on the BFL, see N. Wright, "The Boy's Friend Library," *Book and Magazine Collector* 235 (2003) pp.70-80. I am very grateful to Dr Nandu Thalange for providing me with his unpublished catalogue of the BFL, from which I have drawn the statistics printed here.
- <sup>53</sup> Although Red Fox published the original version of "The Dawn Patrol," "Knights of the Air," it otherwise reprinted the version of *Biggles Learns to Fly* from 1955. As a result, it left out chapters 7 and 8 of the BFL edition, "The Lost Airman" and "Snow and Bullets," which had been omitted from the 1955 edition and printed in *Biggles of 266* as "The Pilot Who Lost His Way." Norman Wright is therefore to be congratulated on his 2009 edition of *Biggles Learns to Fly*, which includes these two chapters as well as "Knights of the Air."
- <sup>54</sup> N. Wright, "Landmarks and Milestones in the Biggles Books. No. 8, "Biggles in France"," *Biggles Flies Again* 2.7 (2006).
- <sup>55</sup> In order that collectors do not embark on a wild goose chase, I should state that I have all the BFLs issued in the same month as "Biggles Learns to Fly" and there are no Biggles tales at the back of the other three BFLs. I also have not heard of any Biggles tales at the back of BFLs published at the same time as other Biggles BFLs from 1938 (or indeed, any other BFLs in general).
- <sup>56</sup> N. Wright, "Biggles and the *Boys' Friend Library*," *Biggles' Friend Magazine* 3 (2003) p.25.
- <sup>57</sup> N. Wright, "A Change of Direction," *Biggles' Friend Magazine* 7 (2004) pp.26-29.
- <sup>58</sup> This is an inference from correspondence between A P Watt and various editors from the early years of the Second World War. Agreements to publish Johns' stories in magazines usually contained limitations on the time periods during which Johns' stories could be serialised. See, in general, D. Tangri, "Men, Women and Wings: the origins of Sky Fever and Short Sorties," *Biggles' Friend Magazine* 15 (2007) pp.28-36.
- <sup>59</sup> N. Wright (as n.57 above) p.27.
- <sup>60</sup> J. Mackenzie, "Those extra thousand words, an analysis," *Biggles' Friend Magazine* 2 (2003) pp.27-31. The thousand words appear to have been noticed first by Norman Wright, in his "Biggles Minds his Ps and Qs," *Story Paper Collectors' Digest* 557 (1993) p.13; he also considered, from the style of the added words, that they were the work of the editor and not Johns.
- <sup>61</sup> I owe this information to the redoubtable Michael Bailey. Other BFLs which contain material added by the editorial staff include No. 351 (the Ken King story "Galleon's Gold" by Charles Hamilton), No. 405 ("Captain Justice" by Murray Roberts), No. 417 ("Grey Shadow" by Geo Rochester [the final page of the story was added]) and No. 494 ("Master Spy" by Geo Rochester [the final two chapters were added]). There may be others; these are simply examples of which I am aware.
- <sup>62</sup> See N. Wright (as n.52 above) p.80.
- <sup>63</sup> Copies of *The Modern Boy* and the *Sexton Blake Library* have also been discovered with printed Canadian price buttons, and after the Second World War it was quite a common practice for issues of comics like the *Thriller Comics Library* and *Super Detective Library* to have printed price buttons quoting the price in Australia, New Zealand or generally "overseas."
- <sup>64</sup> There is an amusing discussion in F. Richards, *The Autobiography of Frank Richards* (London 1962) p.28.
- <sup>65</sup> For background information on St. Jim's, see E. Fayne and R. Jenkins, *A History of the Gem and Magnet* (Maidstone 1972).
- <sup>66</sup> For an excellent survey of Eyles' career, with reproductions of some of his comics, see N. Wright and D. Ashford, *Masters of Fun and Thrills. The British Comic Artists Vol. I* (Swanage 2008) pp.56-66.

- <sup>67</sup> N. Wright, "‘Biggles’ in Magazines and Comics," *Book and Magazine Collector* 208 (2001) p.20.
- <sup>68</sup> Ellis and Schofield (as n.1 above) p.151.
- <sup>69</sup> D. Tangri, "Biggles and the Ministry of Information," *Biggles’ Friend Magazine* 15 (2007) pp.4-18.
- <sup>70</sup> Johns had published a few stories in *Air Stories* prior to 1939. He serialised "Aerial Enemy Number One" in the magazine between January and March 1936, and also published "Customary Cargo" in September 1936 and "The Story Teller" in November 1936. "Aerial Enemy Number One" was the Steeley story *Sky High*. "Customary Cargo" had appeared in *The New Book of the Air* in 1935 under the rather more appropriate title "Questionable Cargo." "The Story Teller" had also appeared in *The New Book of the Air*.
- <sup>71</sup> M. Ashley, "Pearson’s Magazine," *Book and Magazine Collector* 317 (2010) p.47. After *Pearson’s Magazine* folded the rest of the Doctor Vane stories appeared in *20 Story Magazine* and *Britannia and Eve*. Paper rationing had much broader effects than breaking the hearts of some readers of once-loved journals. Book publishing in general declined. For example, in 1939 a total of 4,222 fiction books were published in Britain; in 1944 the figure was 1,255, a decline of nearly three quarters. Similarly, in 1939 1,303 children’s books were published in Britain; by 1944 the figure was 785. See O. Dudley Edwards, *British Children’s Fiction in the Second World War* (Edinburgh 2009) p.649. Paper was scarce and some publishers were allocated stocks by the Ministry of Information for books that had propaganda value. It is therefore worth remembering that, during the Second World War, Johns published no fewer than 20 children’s books (21 if we count *Worrals of the Islands*, which appeared in October 1945 but must have been in preparation while the War was still underway).
- <sup>72</sup> Tangri (as n.58 above) pp.28-36.
- <sup>73</sup> A short piece by Johns on how a woman could become a pilot, "Looking Up for a Living," had been published in the *Girl’s Own Paper* in April 1934, but there do not appear to have been any further contributions by Johns to this paper until 1940.
- <sup>74</sup> Johns did not contribute the "Skyways" column for very long; by 1943 it was attributed to "Pilot," a pseudonym used by the editor.
- <sup>75</sup> The best history of the BOP was written by its last editor, Jack Cox, *Take a Cold Tub, Sir!* (Guildford 1982).
- <sup>76</sup> On Roland Davies see Wright and Ashford (as n.66 above) pp.23-36.
- <sup>77</sup> Cox (as n.75 above) p.110.
- <sup>78</sup> *Ibid.* Johns was generous with his game; I have seen a letter he sent to his agent, Peter Watt, on 13 August 1946 offering him some grouse.
- <sup>79</sup> *Ibid.* p. 115.
- <sup>80</sup> Taylor (as n.48 above) pp.31-37.
- <sup>81</sup> W. Stead, *The Fifth Arm* (London 1940), p.94.
- <sup>82</sup> On Eric Parker see Wright and Ashford (as n.66 above) pp.133-144, and also W.O. G. Lofts, "Eric Parker and the Sexton Blake Library," *Story Paper Collectors Digest* 376 (1978) pp.10-11, and W.O.G. Lofts, "The Eric Parker Story," *Story Paper Collectors Digest* 437 (1983) pp.10-12, 438 (1983) pp.11-13, 439 (1983) pp.10-13 and 440 (1983) pp.11-13.
- <sup>83</sup> See R. Davies, "Wings," *Biggles & Co.* 8 (1991) pp.2-5.
- <sup>84</sup> Ellis and Schofield (as n.1 above) pp.254-55.
- <sup>85</sup> Ellis and Schofield (as n.1 above) p.266.
- <sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>87</sup> M. Morris, "Foreword," in M. Joseph (ed.) *The Best of Eagle* (London 1977), p.2.
- <sup>88</sup> Alternatively, Johns could have been using clergymen for their propaganda value. Nothing points up the morality of a cause more than having God on one’s side. Johns liked to depict friendly clergymen in occupied countries in his other wartime stories, notably *Worrals Carries On*. After the War, when there was no need to point this particular moral, the clergymen vanished, except for *Biggles in the Gobi*, and as this story criticizes a brutal regime Johns may have been drawing on plotting that he had found useful before in similar circumstances.
- <sup>89</sup> Philip Swales published an article on "The Junior Mirror and Biggles" in *Biggles & Co* 4 (1990) , pp.14-15. Of necessity I must go over the same ground as this excellent article.
- <sup>90</sup> On Embleton see Wright and Ashford (as n.66 above) pp.37-54.
- <sup>91</sup> See [http://fanboy.frothersunite.com/DarkiesMob\\_western.html](http://fanboy.frothersunite.com/DarkiesMob_western.html).
- <sup>92</sup> S. Holland, *Look and Learn. A History of the Classic Children’s Magazine* (London 2006) p.6.

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<sup>93</sup> It was not the last of Johns' novels to be serialised in his lifetime. In 1965 *Champion of the Main* was serialised (as "Champion of the Spanish Main") in *Ranger*, another Fleetway publication, along with some of Johns' articles on treasures that had appeared in *The Modern Boy* in 1938.

<sup>94</sup> K. Patrick, "Who wrote 'The Adventures of Biggles'?" Article dated 30 September 2009 at <http://comicsdownunder.blogspot.com/2009/09/who-wrote-adventures-of-biggles.html>.

<sup>95</sup> M. Stone, "Checklist of Australian Comics," in A. Shiell (ed.), *Bonzer. Australian Comics 1900s – 1990s* (Melbourne 1998) p.208.

<sup>96</sup> In an echo of the Biggles comics, the Gimlet comics sometimes featured only Gimlet and Copper.

<sup>97</sup> K. Patrick, "Flying High With Biggles," *Good Reading Magazine* November 2005 ([www.goodreadingmagazine.com.au/articles.cfm?ArticleID=310](http://www.goodreadingmagazine.com.au/articles.cfm?ArticleID=310)).

<sup>98</sup> J. Briggs, "Biggles in the Cruise of the Condor," review dated 27 June 2009 at <http://bearalley.blogspot.com/2009/06/biggles-in-cruise-of-condor.html>.

<sup>99</sup> Guicha often signed panels in his comics. He also appears to have drawn most of the covers of his Biggles comics, although three were the same as the covers of books brought out by Presses de la Cité.

<sup>100</sup> Worrals comics also appeared in France, in the journal *Tina* between 1969 and 1979, drawn, it appears, by the Spanish artists Pinto Rosado and Belloto.

<sup>101</sup> <http://downthetubescomics.blogspot.com/2009/06/in-review-biggles-spitfire-parade.html>.

Review by J. Briggs.

<sup>102</sup> <http://www.comicbitsonline.com/2009/06/25/the-olivier-cadic-interview-2009/>.

<sup>103</sup> See the page at [http://www.comicology.in/2007/08/euro-books-biggles-2007\\_20.html](http://www.comicology.in/2007/08/euro-books-biggles-2007_20.html).