

DESERT WINGS



THE FIRST CHAPTER

THE ABSENT AIRMAN.

THE sharp, whining cry of the water-carrier was the only sound that disturbed the hot, noonday siesta of the crowded bazaar district.

In Baghdad—as in all the desert towns of Mesopotamia—life seemed to cease during the hours that the brazen sun crept across the hot zenith of the sky.

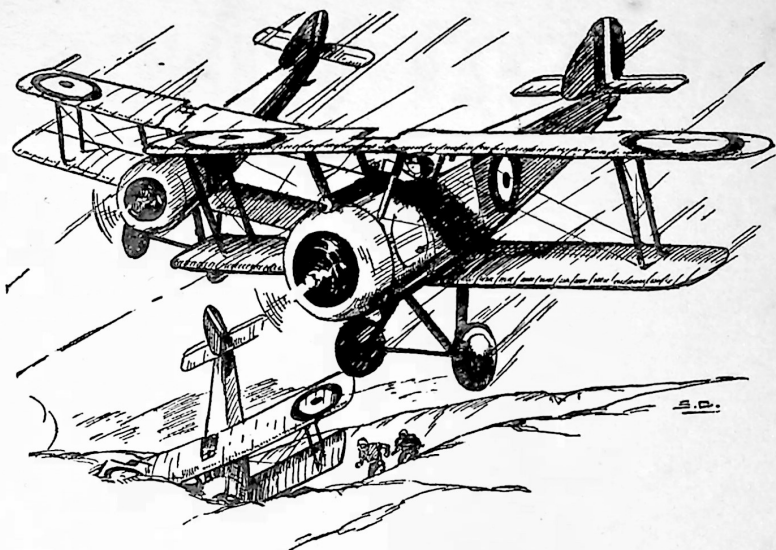
The crowded shops and stalls in the narrow bazaar streets were empty and deserted. Even the yellow pariah

dogs slept fitfully, waking to scratch lazily and snap at flies, in the deep purple shadows of the building walls.

The fact of war made little difference to the scattered city, clustering about the banks of the Tigris river. Men might be killed in their thousands, might die of the ravaging cholera that had already taken greater toll than the guns; but in the siesta, Baghdad slumbered.

All except the water-carrier.

With his drab-coloured burnous draped about his shadowed face, and with his distended goat-skin of



By
CAPTAIN ROBERT HAWKE

A grand long thrill-packed story of the Great War, featuring Baldy's "Angels," Britain's crack flying squadron, doing their "bit" in the East

liquid hitched across his shoulder, he shuffled swiftly through the hot dust.

Copper drinking pans, clustered at his girdle, clanked musically in time with his incessant, whining cry.

"Water—sweet water! Ai, ai! Water for the Faithful! The greatest blessing of Allah, in a copper cup! Water—sweet water!"

Few there were who paid heed to his call as he shuffled through the bazaar and made for the northern side of the town, where the Union Jack floated limply over a cluster of canvas hangars.

The British aerodrome planted there made, indeed, the only sign of civilisation—or of war—in the age-old city of the desert.

When the cool of the afternoon arrived, the strange, mixed population would wake to go about its normal business, and even the occasional far-away thunder of guns from the Turkish positions would get no more notice than a shrug of the shoulders—or a curse.

Hebrews there were in Baghdad—swarthy, black-headed men from the green lands of Palestine—Egyptians and Moors, a few trading Bedouins, with their squealing, bad-tempered camels; sharp-faced little Greeks, Persians, and the lean, brown men of Syria.

All the sweepings from the far-flung deserts of the near East; superstitious, devout in their strange worship of Allah, the All Pitiful.

Chattering, squabbling thieves to a man!

The war echoed around them, sprayed them fitfully with machine-gun bullets—burnt their homes—or brought them profit! The citizens of Baghdad shrugged their shoulders, anyway, and spat viciously into the sand at the mention of either British or Turk.

The foreign infidels made war! It was the will of Allah! What could a man say more than that?

Shuffling and whining out his incessant cry, the water-carrier passed through the town, finding not half a dozen customers to drink from his goat-skin and receive his flowery blessing in return for a tiny coin.

He approached the aerodrome, his almost-hidden face running with sweat. Arrived there he halted for a few minutes at the command of a peevish-looking British sentry in a stained, khaki sun-helmet.

Fifty yards away two British flying officers, looking worried, walked up and down in front of the creaking hangars. A third officer came out to join them, and they turned to him at once.

"Listen, Baldy," said the tallest of the three; "John Henry's been out four hours now, and I don't like the look of things at all. He said he was going straight down towards the Euphrates to take a look at the Turkish positions, according to orders. Both Bud and I have been out to look for him once, but we haven't found a sign."

Baldy Atlee, the famous little colonel who commanded the "Angels" Squadron of the Royal Flying Corps, wrinkled his brows. He was an American by birth, as was his nephew, Bud, who now stood beside the tall speaker. Both of them, however, had joined the British forces at the outbreak of war.

After a long and famous period of constant fighting upon the Western Front in France, they had arrived in Baghdad when the squadron was ordered East.

The battle here was against the Turk, who was allied with Germany. It was a scattered type of warfare, in a blazing, tropical country ridden by sandstorm and fever.

Lieutenant Langton Wagstaff, the tall, bronzed man who had spoken, spread his hands wide.

"I'm frightened to think of what that young ass has been up to," he went on, referring to the absent airman. "He wouldn't be John Henry Dent if he wasn't in some reckless scrape or another. In the ordinary way, I wouldn't mind. But the young idiot doesn't know this country. I'll bet he's been taking some potty risk and gone and crashed himself."

Bud Atlee grinned wryly.

"Well, if he's crashed, he sure must have buried himself in the sand," he said. "Visibility was good when I went out, but I didn't see or smell the slightest sign of a British machine anywhere. I spotted a Turk about thirty miles south and chased him for a bit—but he popped off home too quickly for me. Albatross, he was flyin'. Germany must be supplyin' 'em with new machines."

Baldy sighed.

"Well," he said, "we'll have to go out again, that's all. But if John Henry turns up here, safe an' sound, after havin' played some idiotic lark, I'll break his neck for him!"

Having made this seemingly purposeless statement, he turned and bawled for a mechanic to bring out his own machine.

"You two stay here," he said. "You've done enough for to-day, an' you don't want to go down with the heat. I'll have a nose round this time."

"Aw, rot, uncle!" said Bud. "We're okay—an' you know you've been ordered not to fly more than you can help after that last crash of yours."

Baldy placed his arms akimbo, and glared at his nephew.

"Say, listen!" he said. "Who's the chief squeeze of this outfit? I'll have you know I'm as fighting fit now as I ever was. I'm in as good a condition to go nosin' about amongst the Arabs as Lawrence himself."

"Oh, yeah?" said Bud. "Well, you can shoot me for mutiny if you like, but if you try an' get in that machine of yours, uncle, I'll grab you by the scruff of your pants an' sit on you. But who is this guy Lawrence, anyhow? I've heard folks talkin' of him."

"Lawrence!" echoed Wagstaff, and there was a note almost of awe in his voice. "You mean to say you haven't heard of Colonel Lawrence—the man they're already calling the Uncrowned King of Arabia? Why, he's the bravest and most brilliant British spy who's ever lived. He goes amongst the Arabs in such a marvellous disguise that they've never found him out once. He speaks half a dozen languages as perfectly as the beggars do themselves. Why, man, that fellow carries his life in his hands every day he's on the job. And, what's more, he never leaves the job alone. He's earned the V.C. a dozen times over."

"Zat so?" said Bud. "Well, he sure seems to be a tough guy, an' I wish he was here to do a bit of sniffin' round to tell us where that prize, glass-eyed, crazy idiot, John Henry is."

THE SECOND CHAPTER

BALDY'S GHASTLY POSITION.

THE words were hardly out of Bud's mouth when the sentry from the gate appeared close behind

the group, with the dusty water-carrier marching a foot or so ahead of his bayonet.

Baldy looked at the two in some surprise, answering with a brief movement of his hand when the sentry saluted.

"Beg pardon, sir," said the man, "but this 'ere Harab speaks English, an' says he wants to talk to you."

"Hold your nose," whispered Bud, grinning, for Arabs were in the habit of taking a ripe odour with them wherever they went. This one, however, certainly did not advertise his presence in that way.

He stepped forward and, pulling his burnous back slightly, smiled at Baldy.

"Good afternoon, Colonel Atlee," he said in perfect English. "I should be obliged if you would give me a few moments, as I have to make a report of some importance."

Baldy's eyes, in that second, nearly popped out of his head.

"Great jumpin' catsnakes!" he gasped. "Say, listen—I've seen your picture. You're—you're——"

"My name is Lawrence," smiled the newcomer quietly. "But now, as the matter is urgent, may we talk?"

Baldy breathed unevenly, but, turning about, he led the famous spy into the small squadron office, where he offered a chair with something of a flourish.

"Say, Colonel Lawrence," he said, "I ain't good at makin' double-jointed speeches, but I sure am honoured to meet you. Gosh, you're the toughest guy I ever heard of! Your work out here——"

The newcomer interrupted with a laugh.

"I'm afraid you exaggerate things, Colonel Atlee," he said. "And, in any case, you've found out the meaning of fame to some considerable extent yourself! But now, I must

hurry over what I have to tell you. A squad of engineers, under the leadership of a lieutenant, set out into the desert, south of the Euphrates, six days ago. They left under secret orders, which were entrusted only to the lieutenant in charge. He, unfortunately, was killed by an Arab bullet on the second day. He had not passed the instructions on to his sergeant, and he was the only one of the entire squad who had enough experience of the desert to know where they were."

"Gosh! What a jam!" said Baldy.

Lawrence nodded.

"Yes, a nasty position," he agreed. "The unfortunate sergeant tried to make his way back, but he must have simply walked in circles at the head of his men. For anyone who had no great experience of the desert, the situation must have been awful. The squad was completely lost, and their water was running out swiftly. At last they found a half-dry oasis and made camp. But there a roving band of Bedouins found them and surrounded them. Six have been killed already in withstanding that ghastly siege. They are surrounded by about two hundred well-mounted Bedouins, and most of them must be down with the thirst-fever by now."

"We'll get out after them at once," said Baldy quickly. "Give me the direction, Colonel Lawrence, and I'll take my chaps out and give those Bedouins a good dose of machine-gun medicine that they sure won't forget in a hurry."

"Thank you," said Lawrence. "Take some extra water-bottles, too, and drop them as near as you can. I've got a camel-corps caravan started out to their relief, but they'll take some time. And there's always the danger of a sandstorm, which would obliterate the trail so that the camel-

corps people couldn't find the way."

He rose from his chair.

"Curiously enough," he said, "I thought you must have already heard of it, for a machine has crashed close by where the little party are besieged. I got the news from some Arab traders I met about fifteen miles south of Baghdad, here."

"Great gallopin' gum-boots!" breathed Baldy. "John Henry! I'll bet it's John Henry!"

He laughed uncertainly and made a gesture of apology.

"Excuse me," he said. "That machine must be one of mine. One of my boys lit out early to-day to have a look at the Turkish positions, and he hasn't come back yet. He's just the plucky sort who'd try to land on bad ground so that he could help a tough little bunch like that. But don't worry, Colonel Lawrence; I'll get my boys off right away."

"Then this is the position," said his famous visitor, taking a pencil and making a swift, rough sketch of the district. "Take that bearing, and you'll be sure to find them. They'll be easy enough to see from the air, but from the level of the desert itself a party might look for a week without finding a trace of them, especially if any sandstorm covers the tracks."

Baldy examined the sketch carefully, and then, shaking hands with the strangely disguised colonel, he opened the door.

"Good-bye!" said Lawrence. "Don't walk down to the gate with me; as a matter of fact, I'd rather leave alone, just as I came. Baghdad's full of eyes and ears, you know, and if a poor water-carrier is seen hobnobbing with a full-blown British colonel—well, there may be a little trouble."

With a final nod he shuffled out across the aerodrome, and his whining, high-pitched cry rose again as he



The Arab stepped forward, and pulling back his burnous slightly, smiled at Baldy. "Good-afternoon, Colonel Atlee," he said in perfect English. ". . . I have to make a report of some importance"

clanked his way down into the wakening town.

As was only natural, Baldy lost no time in getting to work once the great Lawrence had gone. Machines were rushed out, and the whole squadron began roaring up engines and threading fresh cartridge belts into their machine-guns.

It was then, however, that the wireless operator came running up to Baldy and thrust a scribbled message-slip into his hand.

"Just come from Central Headquarters, sir," he said. "It's marked 'Urgent, and for Immediate Action.'"

Baldy read the message feverishly, but as he did so his face paled and he let out a mighty curse.

"Colonel Atlee, No. 1 Squadron, R.F.C., Baghdad," it ran. "Take full squadron and make immediate formation attack on Turkish position

at B.7. Pay special attention Turkish rear lines, and disorganise supplies. Keep going whilst petrol lasts, and return directly refilled. Continue concentrated operations until further orders.

"GENERAL OFFICER COMMANDING."

"Great gallopin' gum-boots!"

roared Baldy, shaking both fists wildly in the air. "Why in the name of thunder does Johnny Turk want to start playin' rough to-day for? To-day of all days! That position's fifty miles away in the opposite direction from John Henry and that stranded squad. For the love of Mike, what am I gonna do?"

He turned to Wagstaff, who had come running up and stared at the message over his shoulder. Both of them were pale, and there was a grim look in their eyes.

"We can't leave young J. H. and

that handful of men to an almost certain death out there in the desert!" breathed Baldy, almost pleadingly. "Say, Wagger, orders or no orders, we *can't* do that!"

"No," breathed Wagstaff. "But, Baldy, we can't have hundreds of English soldiers killed because we've failed to go over and prevent the Turk from getting his reserves up! If we don't go there and chase 'em to blazes, the opposing British force may get nearly wiped out in the attack!"

"I wish it were me there," he went on, "instead of young Johnny—he's such a kid. But we can't throw hundreds of lives away to save a dozen."

"Great snakes!" breathed Baldy in a soft, agonised voice. "Was ever a feller in such a ghastly position as this? I gotta murder my best an' bravest boy! An' if I don't, maybe I'll kill a thousand!"

THE THIRD CHAPTER

A SUDDEN ATTACK!

THE squadron roared away off the ground with a mighty thunder of exhausts. Behind it, a cloud of sand rose in the tremendous draught, half-choking the mechanics, who scattered and ran back towards the billowing hangars.

In the leading machine, Baldy sat white-faced and tense over his controls. He had received express orders—orders of the utmost importance and the greatest urgency.

As colonel of the squadron, he could not possibly disobey. The honour of the Flying Corps, as a whole, would be at stake if he did so. The lives of a host of fighting men hung in the balance, and he could not possibly let them down.

Flying to the left and right of him in the two key positions were his nephew Bud and Langton Wagstaff.

They kept perfect formation for about two miles after the squadron had left the aerodrome itself.

Then suddenly, Wagstaff's engine began to choke and sent back whiffs of whirling black smoke. He dropped down and out of the formation, as though he were trying to make his unwilling motor come back to life.

In that same minute, however, mysterious trouble seemed to afflict Bud's engine also. He, too, dropped down, his head bending forward in the cockpit as he apparently fiddled feverishly with his controls.

The squadron, according to usual orders, closed up in the places of the two missing men, and the formation roared on.

But Baldy was laughing wildly.

"The young skunks!" he muttered. "Engine trouble—my eye! I didn't dare give 'em the actual orders, an' they knew it. I'd have had to report 'em officially if they'd told me what they were goin' to do. But I guessed they'd do it! I *guessed* they'd do it!"

Still with laughter bubbling up in his throat, he roared on ahead, and did not even turn round to watch where the two absent machines had gone. If he didn't know anything, he couldn't report anything! His one feeling was that of wild gladness that Bud and Wagstaff had taken matters into their own hands in order to save John Henry's life.

Meanwhile, there was grim business ahead for himself, and he made up his mind to do extra good work to compensate his carefree disregard of this breaking of orders.

Within half an hour, the Turkish positions were in sight—a ragged, irregular line of trenches cutting like a scar across the hot brown face of the desert.

Already a bombardment had started, and it was clear that the Turks were preparing for a mass-

attack against the badly-battered British line.

Baldy set his teeth and led the remaining seven members of the squadron down in a screaming dive.

It was even as that dive started, however, that he had a vague impression of something moving against the sunlight above his head. The instinct of a born aerial fighter made him glance up—and it was that instinct which saved his life!

For a mixed squadron of German Halberstadts and Fokker triplanes were roaring down out of the "eye" of the sun—nine of them, howling down out of the yellow glare, where they had been hiding to await the arrival of a British squadron! Nine pairs of guns were dancing and flaring vividly, like eyes behind the spinning propellers of those machines!

Baldy rolled over in a magnificent Immelmann turn, which was, at the same time, the signal for break formation. Even in the second that he did so, his centre-section thudded and rattled—sunlight starred through it in a dozen places. His engine cowlings rang sharply, and something like a vicious hornet whined a few inches past his nose and crashed through the flimsy cockpit-fairing.

His turn brought him in the reverse direction, and he dived at once, taking, as his mark, a camouflaged Fokker triplane whose pilot seemed to have lost sight of him for a moment.

Baldy dropped like a stone. He got the triplane squarely behind the tail, and his two guns jerked thuddingly, their Aldis sights rimmed in livid fire.

Wafts of acrid, cordite fumes and smoke whipped back into his face as he saw the triplane pilot rear up convulsively, and then disappear entirely in a splashing cloud of black smoke which blossomed out of his shattered petrol-tank!

Colonel Atlee went into a spin directly he saw he had scored, and for a thousand feet he accompanied that blazing, whirling Fokker in its downward path. He was dodging any counter-attack.

Then he straightened up, climbed like a rising wasp, and rejoined the whirling, diving battle that had started above. One of his own machines was out of the fight, too, but as it blazed earthwards he had no chance of making out exactly which one it was.

Of the seven men with him, there was none who was not a first-class fighting pilot. But as Baldy watched that battle during the climb he gained a solid respect for the Turks who were flying those German machines.

Turkey, fighting on the side of the Germans, of course, relied on the Kaiser's Imperial Air Service to supply them with both machines and instructors. It was quite evident that the Eastern allies of the Germans had proved very apt pupils. For the British squadron was not by any means gaining a walk-over in the fight.

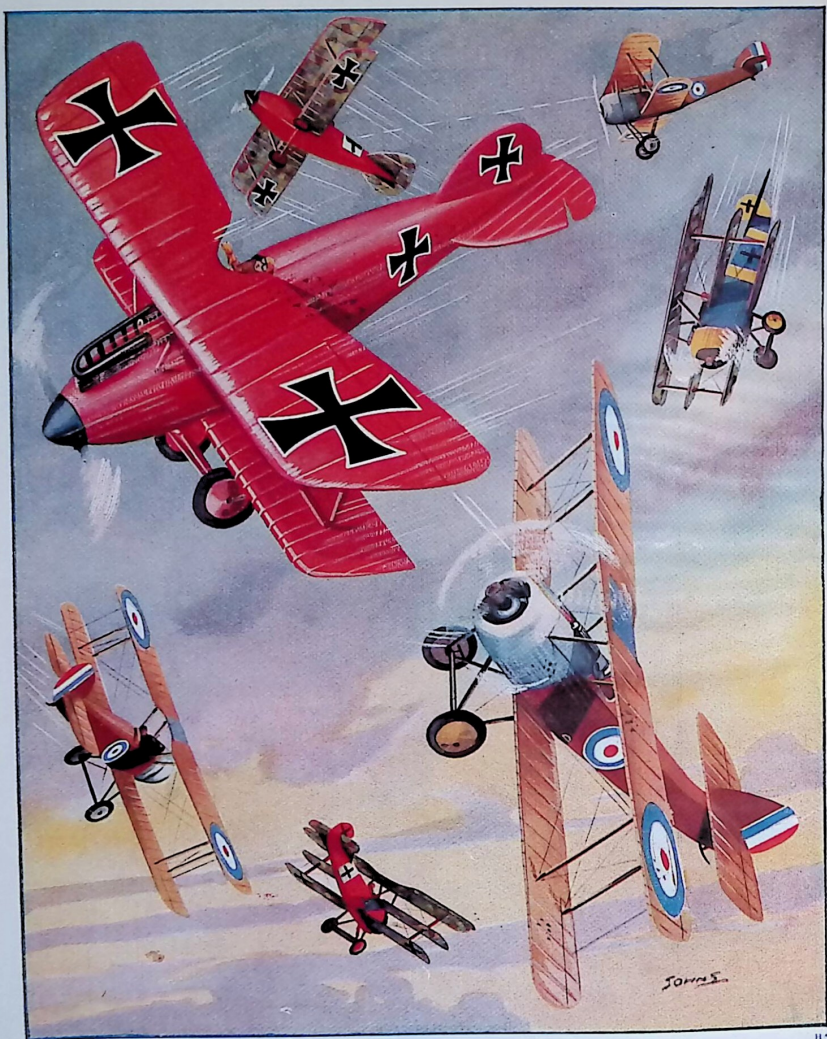
Two Halberstadts dived simultaneously on a British Sopwith "Pup," with their guns spitting. The Pup whirled over, spun out of control, and roared earthwards. With a howl, Baldy and three of his men went for the black-crossed machines.

The Halberstadts separated. One, camouflaged in a dozen different colours, howled away for the heights, trying to gain the protection of the sun, but it was headed off by a soaring Pup, which thundered after it in vicious pursuit.

Baldy shot after the other—a black-crossed machine, painted vivid red. He got it dead in his sights for an instant, but his bullet-burst merely ripped through the tail planes as the red pilot side-slipped frantically.

Baldy dived down beneath it and

THE DOG - FIGHT !



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Diving, rolling and banking furiously, British Sopwith "Pups" and German Halberstadts and Fokker Triplanes engage in a battle to the death!

Specially drawn for the "Holiday Annual" by W. E. Johns.

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then wrenched his machine up on to its tail, whipping a burst of tracer bullets out as he did so.

Above him, he had a fleeting glimpse of the second Halberstadt reeling over giddily as its attendant Pup planted fifty bullets clean through the back of the pilot's seat.

Baldy watched his own tracers streaking out in a faint, livid line, and saw them nailing into the side of the red Halberstadt fuselage just above.

He saw the goggled pilot grimace wildly and crumple up. Then his own dashboard shattered, and the control stick split off short where he was holding it in his right hand.

For an instant, his machine wavered uncertainly as those bullets whipped down into it from above. He gave the rudder-bar a frantic kick; was almost blinded as a bullet clipped his goggles away from his face in a shower of broken glass.

He rolled clean upside-down, the red Halberstadt passing him in a spread of flame at no more than half a dozen feet.

Then, and only then, did Colonel Baldy Atlee get a full view of the Fokker triplane which had dived on him and come within a hair's breadth of bringing him down.

It was roaring up again now, anticipating his move as he rolled back on to an even keel. Tracer bullets were flying in a white hail from its flaring guns. But Baldy jammed over his broken control stick and dropped sickeningly in the opposite direction.

For a moment the two machines were almost head-on, but Baldy had the advantage of an unexpected move. In the next instant the Fokker's propeller had smashed into a cloud of fragments, and its pilot, badly wounded, was fighting dazedly to regain control.

Baldy left him and swerved away to join a chase after a remaining Fokker

which was now running fast from a relentlessly pursuing Pup.

But the chase was useless. Only that Fokker and one disabled Halberstadt remained in the sky now, and both were diving fiercely for the protection of their own guns.

Of the British squadron of seven, four, including Baldy, remained on the wing. And so the little commander jerked a Verey pistol from its clip and fired a red flare, which was the signal for his men to form up at his tail.

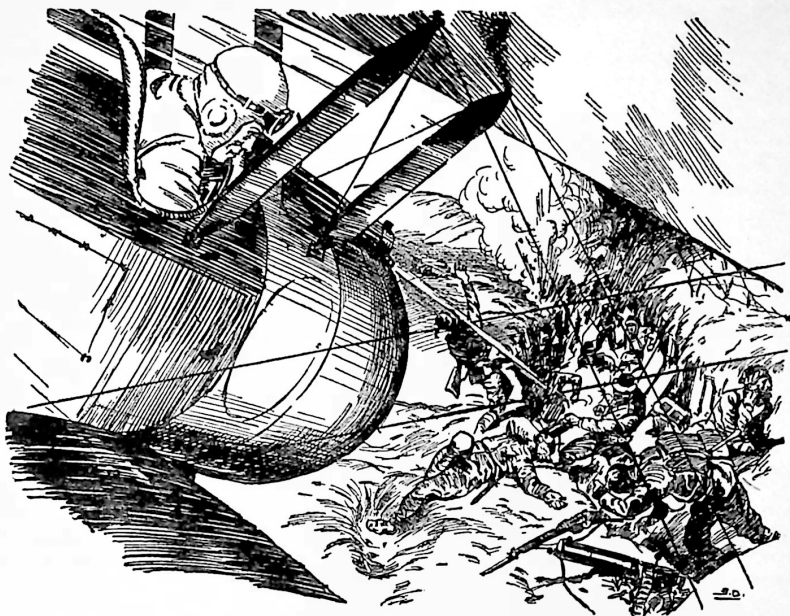
Then, leaving the vanquished enemy machines to seek safety unhindered, he dived away towards the trench-lines. He dived down below the danger of anti-aircraft gunfire and, followed by his squadron, roared up and down over the Turkish rear line, scattering reserves, firing ammunition wagons, and generally creating so much confusion that the coming attack was seriously hampered.

Indeed, by the time petrol had run so low that a return for refuelling was necessary, the Turkish forces had been very considerably disorganised. Moreover, they were fearful.

Their only available machines had been driven out of the sky, and they knew that this vicious force of British flyers would return to their work of confusion again and again.

In which they were perfectly right. During the next day and a half, Baldy and his men kept hard at work. One more machine was lost, but the disorganisation of the Turkish attack was so complete that it never really developed into the danger that it might have been.

Meanwhile, naturally enough, Baldy's thoughts were with Bud and Wagstaff. They had not yet returned, and he had seen or heard nothing of them since that moment when they dropped away from the formation.



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THE FOURTH CHAPTER

THE SANDSTORM.

AT the moment of dropping away, those two machines had lagged half-a-mile behind the roaring squadron and swung down to within five hundred feet of the earth, before their engines miraculously picked up again and hummed out upon the usual strong, healthy note.

Then Wagstaff swung round and set off southwards, whilst Bud picked up speed and gradually came level. The two pilots looked across at each other and grinned, but they exchanged no actual signal.

Both of them knew well enough that, by this movement, they were

liable to be court-martialled and shot. Indeed, if any wandering staff-officer had spotted what they were up to, he would certainly have put a report through—and then nothing that Colonel Baldy could do would save them from being stood up against a white wall opposite a firing-party.

But firing-party or no firing-party, they had both made up their minds to go and get John Henry back. The Three Musketeers of the Air they had been called on the Western Front—their watchword had been One for All, and All for One.

And now the two were going out to rescue the third without hesitation

and without counting the cost.

Wagstaff had seen that plan which Colonel Lawrence had drawn for Baldy, and he carried it clearly in his mind. Accordingly he set the right course and flew steadily for an hour in the hot sunlight, until at last a tiny blot upon the desert far below showed where the stranded party were entrenched about the water-hole.

As the two came closer, a crashed Flying Corps machine could be seen, standing up on its nose at the oasis side.

The tiny forms of men were clustered behind it for cover. Thin whiffs of smoke showed the rifle fire that was being carried on, whilst all around the spot the moving lines of Bedouin horsemen wavered back and forth among the sand-dunes.

Wagstaff and Bud both dived in the same moment, and their machine-guns rattled and danced viciously as they whined down upon those horsemen, scattering them and knocking a dozen from the backs of their plunging animals.

A thin, ragged cheer rose from the oasis as the two soared up again, and Bud waved cheerily. But Wagstaff was now looking grim.

The desert to the south was becoming misty, and the sky had toned down to a sickly yellow colour. Far away in the distance whirling ghosts seemed to be rising from that vast ocean of dry sand.

But Wagstaff knew that those whirling ghosts heralded the approach of a sandstorm coming up out of the south. That would prevent the camel-corps from finding their way to the little party, unless there was any means of guiding them to the spot.

The position was a grim one, and for a few minutes Wagstaff could not think of what to do. He and Bud dived again and yet again upon the Bedouins, but the wild men of the desert had

been attacked by aeroplanes before, and they knew how to act.

They broke up any kind of solid formation and scattered. They left their horses and ran for cover, shooting from the sandhills every time the two machines came thundering down.

And then, in one of these dives, Bud's face was suddenly deluged with oil, and only by something like a miracle did he avoid going straight down, head-on, into the sand.

As it was, he had to swing round and make a landing directly he had knuckled his eyes clear and straightened the machine up. He swore violently, for the trouble which afflicted his machine was only a mild one.

A Bedouin bullet had smashed one of the pipes from his oil tank, and he knew he could make a reasonable repair in about ten minutes. But he would have to land in order to do so—and landing on the uneven sand was a tricky business, as the fate of John Henry's machine showed.

Bud had better luck than his stranded friend, however. He made a wild "grasshopper" landing on the edge of the oasis, and his machine finished up without damage.

Then he coolly unclipped his belt and set about making the necessary repair without taking the slightest notice of the constant bullets which whined and zipped all about him.

John Henry Dent came staggering across, laughing and cheering. In his left eye was a somewhat sandy eyeglass, and a rough bandage was about his right wrist.

"What ho, what ho, what ho!" he chanted. "Dear old Rosebud! I guessed you and Wagger'd be along pretty soon. In fact, I've been cheering up these noble lads by telling them so. Dash it all, can I lend a hand?"

"You buzz off an' bury your head

in the sand, you telescopic-eyed, grinnin' sand-rabbit," advised Bud impolitely. "I've got an oil-leak, that's all. But you could make things a bit easier if you'd look for that darned Bedouin sniper who's takin' such an interest in me. Give him a bullet in the ear, there's a good chap."

"It's a pleasure!" grinned John Henry. "The goods shall be delivered at once, sir. But, pardon me, you didn't say which ear!"

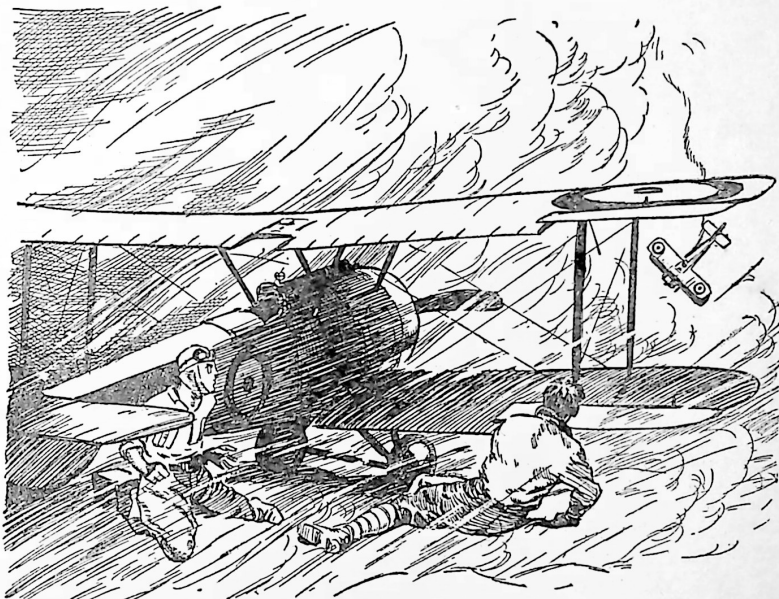
He ducked convulsively as a spanner whizzed from Bud's hand and missed him by inches. Then he scuttled off to the grimed and tattered group who were shooting from behind

the cover of his own machine. They paid the sniper all due attention—which eventually proved somewhat tragic for the sniper.

Meanwhile, Langton Wagstaff, surprisingly enough, brought his machine down, and landed it with brilliant skill close beside that of Bud.

With his engine still ticking over, he yelled out a message, and both the American and John Henry ran across.

"Quick!" bawled Wagstaff. "There's a sandstorm coming up, and I've got to get away and try to find the camel-corps, or otherwise they'll never reach you. I couldn't signal from the air, so I had to land to tell you. But don't take off in your



Crouched under the lee of the plane, Bud and John Henry watched Wagstaff's machine being tossed about like a leaf in the sandstorm. Then suddenly Bud let out a roar. "Jumpin' catsnakes, Johnny!" he gasped. "Wagger's done! Look, he's in a spin now."

machine unless you see the storm catch up with me and force me down. Stay here if I get away all right. You'll have a tough enough job fighting off the Bedouins when the blow's all over and they come out of cover."

Bud sized up the situation at once. "Okay!" he shouted. "Get goin', Wagger."

He staggered on his feet as the first blast of the approaching storm whined across the desert, kicking up a whirling cloud of sand in a writhing, choking mist.

Wagstaff opened out his engine and set the little machine rocking and thundering over the levellest patch of sand he could see. He wrenched it into the air and turned swiftly, trying to get the wind behind him so that he could be carried by it until he could manage to rise above the blast.

Fighting wildly, he went for about a quarter of a mile, tossed about like a leaf in the fitful force of those tremendous, eddying gusts.

Bud and John Henry, crouched under the lee of the repaired Pup, watched him, holding their breaths. They lost sight of him for a few minutes, saw him again, and then Bud let out a roar.

"Jumpin' catsnakes, Johnny!" he gasped. "Wagger's done! Look, there he goes! The heat strains these machines all out of rig, an' Wagger's right wing-bay has failed under the strain. Look, he's in a spin now!"

THE FIFTH CHAPTER

A PERILOUS FLIGHT.

JOHN HENRY DENT, as soon as he saw disaster overtake Wagstaff, scrambled up into the cockpit of the machine beside him.

"I'll take her, Bud," he breathed. "Dash it all, man, I don't want to be cocky. But if you grasp what I mean, I think I can manage to get through.

What I mean to say—d'you mind swinging the prop, dear old boy?"

Bud dashed round and swung the propeller without question. In spite of John Henry's present crash, in spite of his seemingly thick-headed ways, he was acknowledged to be far and away the finest pilot of the entire Royal Flying Corps.

People said, jokingly, that he had been born with wings on him. He had an absolute genius for control, and in this present circumstance—in such a matter of life and death—there could be no argument as to who ought to make the desperate attempt.

"Contact!" roared Bud, swinging mightily. "Good luck to you, Johnny—an' fly now as you've never flown before. Try an' spot where Wagger's fallen, if you've got a chance. Don't worry about us. Guide the camel-corps to him, an' pick him up before you come back here."

John Henry said nothing. It wouldn't have been much use, anyway, for his engine was now roaring all out, and the rising howl of the storm drowned any other sound.

Sand clattered and lashed against his machine, biting at his face and well-nigh blinding him, but he dared not put on his goggles. He ducked low in the cockpit, and sent the little craft swaying forward. Glass was useless in circumstances like these. In fact, it was useless to try to see anything much. He "felt" the controls, as an expert rider feels the reins of a sensitive, high-spirited horse.

Bud gave a sand-choked cheer as he saw that little machine swung up off the ground at the exact moment that it had gained sufficient flying speed.

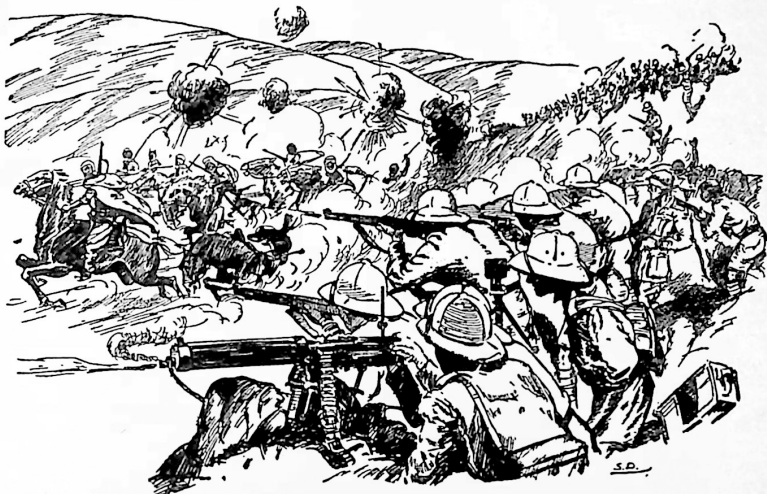
How John Henry had done it, he couldn't tell. It was a matter of instinct, of pure genius. But there was a lot of pure genius needed now.

John Henry flew completely blind for the next ten minutes. He couldn't see a single thing, and he seemed to be carried helplessly upon the crazy wings of that roaring, blasting storm. All the time his hands and feet were working upon the control-stick and rudder-bar with uncertain, jerky movements.

Why he made them, he could not himself have told. But the effect was that the machine kept a more or less

Then, at last, the worst fury of the storm seemed to abate, and he began to get a vague sight of his surroundings. What had actually happened was that he had got above the full fury of the blast, and he knew now that he would be safe, if he could only get more height and let the worst of the sand-storm thunder along below him.

Through the driving whirling sea of sand, he caught a momentary vision



Bud and the stranded men fought the Bedouins to the last. They had given up hope of help arriving when, suddenly, the relieving forces poured down out of the misty sandhills and raked the enemy with a fierce fire.

even keel and climbed at a fairly steady average.

Every strut and bracing wire creaked and protested violently. The gusts were so violent that, on one occasion, the rudder-bar was banged over and his feet knocked clear.

He had the control-stick wrenched out of his hand twice, and for some time the machine flew with one wing heavily down, and he feared that an aileron wire had parted.

of a wrecked machine far below him, and he marked his compass direction carefully. Then he climbed higher and higher, coughing and choking, but staring all about in the hopes of getting a glimpse of that rescuing column.

Actually, John Henry found the column—but he only found it when his petrol had run down to the last pint, and he knew he would have to make a landing, anyhow. To have

kept on so long was just another illustration of his cast-iron, inflexible courage.

Only the whining remains of that blasting storm were disturbing the desert when he finally saw the faint movement amongst the sand that showed where the camel-corps had taken cover.

John Henry gave a cracked cheer of relief and delight, and swung his machine down so that he could land beside them. The men who ran to meet him looked more dead than alive, covered as they were from head to foot with sand. Their eyes were mere slits, and their lips swollen and bruised. But had he only known it, young Mr. Dent was in a worse condition still. For the fierce draught of his propeller had flung the sand at his face with such force that he was scratched and bleeding in a hundred places.

The camel-column pushed straight on, however, not waiting for the storm to fully abate, and soon after dark had fallen they sighted Wagstaff's machine, and John Henry ran towards it with a yell.

Wagstaff, by good fortune, was not seriously hurt. He had a broken arm, and he was in considerable pain. But the disturbed sand of the storm had broken the worst of his fall.

He was hoisted straight away up on to a camel, and his injury given what first-aid was possible whilst they were still on the move.

And at dawn, the column came within the sound of rifle fire, and urged their bad-tempered beasts to full speed. The fight round the oasis was a sharp one, for the Bedouins had entrenched themselves against the storm, and had come out to finish off the helpless, besieged party directly it had finished.

Bud and the stranded men had decided to fight to the last, however,

even though, with the passage of the night, they had come to the conclusion that no help could be expected. When it did come, they could hardly believe it, but they fought on wildly.

The Bedouins gave up and galloped away on their horses about half an hour after the relieving force had poured down out of the misty sand-hills and raked them with a fierce fire.

So the little garrison was relieved, and the Three Musketeers, were once again reunited.

The results of that action have not passed into British official history, although the action of Baldy and the squadron has got its full chapter.

They finally got their orders to discontinue raids over the Turkish positions. But when Baldy climbed out of his machine on the aerodrome he received a note, which a sentry told him had been handed in by a shabby old Arab water-carrier from the town.

The note told Baldy that his three boys were safe—told him that they were being brought in, together with the stranded party they had so gallantly saved!

Baldy pranced in wild delight.

In his final report to headquarters, he tactfully made no mention of three machines lost far away in the desert in places where it was impossible to get them back. He merely notified headquarters that they had been amongst the battle casualties, from which the pilots had, by good fortune, survived.

Headquarters, in their brief reply, were kind enough to offer congratulations to the officers concerned.

Whilst down in the Arab town a water-carrier went on shuffling feet and cried his age-old call, to the musical jingling of his dusty copper pans!

THE END

COKER'S LAMENT!



(The Fifth Form have been learning "Omar Khayyam" lately, and Coker has evidently adopted Omar's verse to vent his wrongs.)

ALAS! The Smiles have faded from my Face,
And on my Cheeks the Tears have left
their trace,

For Lo! the hamper of my Aunt has gone
And Empty Atmosphere is in its Place.

Come, in the Fire all hopes of Pastries fling;
The thief has Gone, and hasn't left a thing.

A Bird named Bunter is the Culprit—yes,
And well I know the Bird is on the Wing.

The hopes and dreams of Many Hours are
dead—

Oh, how my Eyes have conjured up that
Spread;

Jam tarts and Doughnuts, Ginger Wine and
Cake—

They all with Bunter—in him, p'raps—have
Fled.

Here, with a Loaf of Bread upon the Floor,
A Book of Verse (old Virgil's) and a Score
Of Empty Jars and Bottles on the shelf—
This is our Tea—and what can man want
More?

Myself, when young, did Eagerly Frequent
The studies of this Great Establishment,

But if I laid a finger on a tart

I came through the same Door as in I went.

Shall Bunter, then, make Free with our
Preserves,

Pinch all our Pastries, shatter all our Nerves,
Defy the Fifth with impudence, and then
Escape the Record Kicking he deserves?

No, never! Yet too well I know the Snares
Of meddling in the Lower Fourth affairs;

At other times a Swarm of Fags have come
And Collared me, and Rolled me down the stairs

How long, how long, I've tried to Make them
See

That every Fag owes deference to Me,

That Greyfriars, prefects, seniors and all,
To Horace Coker ought to bow the Knee.

And this is the Result! It comes to pass
That Discipline is nothing but a Farce.

My hamper's gone, and Now the one word
"Rats!"

Is Scrawled in Ink upon my Looking-Glass.

The Moving Finger writes, and having Writ,
Moves on. There's no Variety or Wit

In such a Cheeky Message; but, My Hat!
Don't I just wish I knew who Scribbled It.

But I will cease. What boots it to repeat
My wrongs, when I have Nothing left to Eat?

But let me get that cricket stump, and then
You'll see some Fireworks Ah! Revenge is
Sweet.

