

THE PURSUIT PATROL



**Ted Scott
Flying Stories**

FRANKLIN W. DIXON

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THE TED SCOTT FLYING STORIES

THE
PURSUIT PATROL

Or

Chasing the Platinum Pirates

By

FRANKLIN W. DIXON

AUTHOR OF

OVER THE OCEAN TO PARIS
LOST AT THE SOUTH POLE
THROUGH THE AIR TO ALASKA
THE HARDY BOYS SERIES, ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY

I. B. HAZLETON

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The Pursuit Patrol

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TO THE HEROES OF THE AIR

WILBUR WRIGHT—ORVILLE WRIGHT
The first men to fly in a heavier-than-air machine

LOUIS BLERIOT
The first to fly the English Channel

CAPTAIN JOHN ALCOCK
The first to fly from Newfoundland to Ireland

COMMANDER RICHARD E. BYRD
In command flying over the North Pole

COLONEL CHARLES E. LINDBERGH
First to fly alone from New York to Paris

CLARENCE D. CHAMBERLIN
First to fly from New York to Germany

LIEUTENANTS LESTER J. MAITLAND
—ALBERT F. HEGENBERGER
First to fly from California to Hawaii

CAPTAIN HERMANN KOEHL—
COMMANDANT JAMES C. FITZMAURICE
First to fly Westward across the North Atlantic—Ireland
to Greenely Island

CAPTAIN GEORGE H. WILKINS—CARL B. EIELSON
First to fly over the Polar Sea from Alaska to Spitzbergen,

And a host of other gallant airmen of the Past and
Present who, by their daring exploits, have made aviation
the wonderful achievement it is today

THIS SERIES OF BOOKS
IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED

CONTENTS

- I [THE TAKE-OFF](#)
- II [TO THE RESCUE](#)
- III [A SUSPECT](#)
- IV [UNPLEASANT NEWS](#)
- V [A GREAT MISSION](#)
- VI [IN WILD CHASE](#)
- VII [THE STRANGE PLANE](#)
- VIII [A SECRET CODE](#)
- IX [AN EXPLOSION](#)
- X [A DISGUISED PILOT](#)
- XI [MIDNIGHT MARAUDERS](#)
- XII [THE FATEFUL THURSDAY](#)
- XIII [PRISONERS](#)
- XIV [INSIDE INFORMATION](#)
- XV [COMBING THE SKIES](#)
- XVI [TELLTALE INSIGNIA](#)
- XVII [VOLCANIC DUST](#)
- XVIII [BATTLE IN THE CLOUDS](#)
- XIX [A STRANGE BELIEF](#)
- XX [THE TREE TALKS](#)
- XXI [THE MISSING *Patriot*](#)
- XXII [A SINISTER FACE](#)
- XXIII [THE PURSUIT PATROL](#)
- XXIV [A BITTER STRUGGLE](#)
- XXV [VICTORY](#)

The Pursuit Patrol, or Chasing the Platinum Pirates

CHAPTER I

The Take-Off

“He’s calling your name, Ted. Hear him? Scott! Something urgent.”

The young man being paged had just stepped into the lobby of a hotel in Honolulu. Now he hurried to where his friend Joe Scarlet sat.

“Please, not so loud, Joe,” he said with a frown. “You know that I’m here on a secret mission for our government.”

“Sorry,” said Joe. “I forgot. Better stop that boy. He’s calling out a cablegram for you.”

Ted Scott walked quickly after the bellhop and took the envelope. He tore it open as he returned to Joe.

“Whew!” he exclaimed.

He re-read the cable.

“What’s up?” asked Joe, as Ted threw himself into the chair opposite. “No bad news from home, I hope.”

“Nothing like that,” replied his chum. “But the message is a mystery. It’s from Hapworth.”

“Walter Hapworth, the airplane manufacturer?” asked Joe with quickening interest.

“Read it,” said Ted, and tossed the message to his friend.

Joe seized upon it eagerly. A whistle of surprise broke from his lips, for the cable read:

“CAN YOU COME AT ONCE TO MY CALIFORNIA PLANT? WANT TO CONSULT YOU ABOUT SOMETHING

VERY IMPORTANT. LET ME KNOW IF YOU COULD START TONIGHT.

HAPWORTH.”

Joe put down the cablegram, and the two young men stared at each other with puzzled looks in their eyes.

“Well, I’ll agree it’s mysterious!” exclaimed Joe. “What do you suppose it means?”

“Search me. Walter Hapworth must have something special on his mind or he wouldn’t send for me,” replied Ted.

“How about your secret mission here?” asked Joe. “After all, government business comes first.”

“I’ve nearly finished it. There are a few things I must attend to today, then I’ll be through. If I have luck, we can start for San Francisco at dawn.”

Joe sighed regretfully. “I was hoping for a few days’ vacation with you in Honolulu after you got through!” he said. “Here we are in this garden spot of the world, and off we have to go again, before we’ve fairly had a look at it.”

Ted grinned. “I’ll not need you and your knowledge of Chinese dialects this morning. Suppose you skip down to Waikiki Beach and watch the surfboard riders and the swimmers. I’ll join you there as soon as I can.”

Joe’s eyes brightened at the thought of a few hours at Honolulu’s famous watering resort. Ted meanwhile hurried off. His thoughts were many as he made his way through the bright sunshine and fragrant air of the city. What could Hapworth want of him? The matter must be urgent, for he knew that the shrewd and capable man, who had built up one of the most gigantic businesses in the United States, would not have called him home for anything trifling.

Not for a moment did Ted hesitate about answering that call, for he felt that he owed more to Hapworth than he ever could repay. It was he who had started the youth on his career as a flyer.

“I’d better let him know I’m coming,” he decided. Ted went to the cable office and wrote a message to Hapworth that he would be in San Francisco the following evening.

He walked on. His next stop was at a bank. There a government official was to give him some important papers from a safety deposit box. While

Ted waited, he watched with interest the many people going in and out of the vault.

His gaze lighted upon a man who stood waiting for the guard to open the gate to let him out. There was something about him that struck Ted unpleasantly. The individual had a hard face, and his eyes roved in a slinking way.

He looked about him furtively, and then peeked at a package in his inner coat pocket. Ordinarily Ted would have thought nothing of the matter, but since working on his secret mission, he had become alert to all people acting in an unusual manner.

Instinct prompted the flyer to speak to the attendant who stood near him. “Do you know that man who just went out?” he asked.

The guard looked after the retreating figure. “Yes,” he responded, “that’s Mr. Sam Togoty. He’s an importer.”

“Thank you,” said Ted, and turned to meet the government official who now was bringing the papers from the vault.

The flyer receipted for the documents and left. Outside he again caught sight of Togoty. He was standing in a hallway in whispered conversation with another fellow, who listened attentively. Once more Ted had that curious feeling of suspicion about the older man.

The flyer spent a few hours attending to various matters connected with his secret mission in Hawaii. Then, his mind at ease, he set out to locate Joe.

At Waikiki Beach he found throngs of pleasure-seekers under the sapphire-blue sky. Before them stretched the vast expanse of the Pacific. Out of it came the rolling surges that broke in great waves upon the beach. On these surges rode young men and women, balancing themselves on their surfboards with hands as skilled as those of charioteers.

Ted threaded his way among the groups on the sand until he caught sight of Joe, who wore a satisfied smile upon his face. He was stretched out at full length, enjoying the gorgeous spectacle around him.

“Got here at last, eh?” he chuckled as Ted seated himself. “Say, did you ever see anything more wonderful?”

“It can’t be surpassed in any part of the world,” assented Ted as he looked appreciatively upon the scene.

“And to think that we have to leave it so soon!” sighed Joe. “Hello!” he exclaimed with a sudden start of interest. “There’s your friend Captain Nimbusser.”

He nodded toward a fine-looking man of military appearance, a member of the Naval Intelligence, who was sauntering upon the beach.

“Sure enough,” said Ted. He hailed the figure. “Hello, Captain! Captain Nimbusser!”

The officer’s face lighted up as he saw the two flyers. Rapidly he made his way toward them.

“This is an unexpected pleasure,” he said as he shook hands with the other two.

“Sit down here and we’ll talk.”

“Good idea,” replied Nimbusser. “This is the last chance I’ll have to look at Waikiki Beach for some time.”

“How’s that?”

“Called to Washington,” was the reply. “Official business. No telling when I’ll return to Honolulu.”

“When are you going?” asked Ted.

“Soon as I can,” was the reply. “Have to wait for transportation.”

“What’s the matter with flying back with Joe and me in my plane?”

“What?” asked the man in surprise. “Are you leaving, too?”

“Sure as shooting,” replied Ted. “I’ve finished my work in Honolulu, and I’m starting off at dawn tomorrow. There’s plenty of room in the plane for you. How about it?”

“How about it?” echoed the Captain jubilantly. “Why, I’m tickled to death. Thanks. I must hurry off and attend to several things if I’m to leave so soon.”

They shook hands and parted. The boys lingered on, enjoying a swim, and having their evening meal at a near-by restaurant.

“Guess we’d better be shoving off,” suggested Ted as dusk came on.

“Just one little stroll along the beach,” pleaded Joe.

They walked farther than they had intended, lured on by the charm of the perfect evening. At a sudden curve in the shore line, where trees had been

planted, Ted halted and touched Joe on the arm.

“See those two fellows over there?” he whispered. “Looks as though they might be up to something irregular.”

In the shadows of the trees two men were talking in whispers. One of them took a package from his pocket. He passed it to the other, who wore only bathing trunks and had what looked like an oilskin bag hanging on a cord about his neck. Into this he crammed the package, and without a word plunged into the sea.

“That’s a funny thing to do,” whispered Joe.

“Sure is,” agreed Ted. “Shady business, if you ask me.”

The other man watched the swimmer until he was out of sight. Then he turned and came toward the spot where the chums were standing. He started violently as he saw them.

“What are you doing here?” he asked belligerently.

“Just enjoying the scenery,” replied Ted serenely. “Any objection?”

“No—no,” came the quick reply. “I—I thought you were someone else.”

As the man passed by Ted startled his chum by saying he knew who the person was.

“His name is Sam Togoty. He’s an importer. I don’t like his looks.”

“Certainly has a sly way of delivering packages,” commented Joe.

“He was pointed out to me in the bank vault,” explained Ted. “Looked a lot like a crook then. Tonight’s funny business has deepened my first impression. But come along now. Let’s pack and get some sleep.”

The boys slept well that night. At dawn they summoned a taxi, and were driven to the cove where their flying boat floated lazily on the water. Captain Nimbusser was waiting for them.

Ted and Joe looked over the plane to be sure it was in perfect shape. They could take no chances in the long hop over the Pacific.

“Everything seems to be in order. Let’s go!” said Ted a few minutes later.

He found it necessary to race back and forth over the glassy water to churn up waves before he was able to make a take-off. But presently the pilot had his flying boat in the air, and headed it toward San Francisco.

The good weather in which they started soon gave way to that of an entirely different kind. Heavy rain clouds surrounded them. From long experience Ted knew that it would not be wise to climb very high in the old model flying boat, so he flew low. Wind whistled through the struts.

“Wish we were in your *Morning Star II*,” murmured Joe, referring to Ted’s latest plane, “instead of this old borrowed crate.”

“This old crate is all right,” replied Ted. “And just now I’m glad to be in a flying boat instead of an airplane.”

Through his binoculars he had detected someone in a tiny boat being tossed about in the tumbling waters below.

“Looks to me as though a rescue were in order,” he said with set jaw. “I’m going down to see!”

CHAPTER II

To The Rescue

As Ted's plane shot down toward the storm-tossed ocean, Joe and Captain Nimbusser scarcely breathed.

"A rescue in these waves is going to be difficult," said the officer. "Maybe it will spell the end for all of us, but of course the try must be made."

He and Joe now could see what Ted's sharp eyes already had detected. Below them an airplane, evidently unable to batter the storm, was gradually sinking. Only part of one light blue wing showed above water, its name or number hidden, except for one indistinct mark.

"There's the pilot!" cried Joe as he spied the body of a flyer lying in a rubber boat a short distance away. "Doesn't act as if he were alive."

"Probably only unconscious," replied Ted as he let the pontoons of his flying boat touch the water.

The three friends knew the danger that confronted them. One giant wave could capsize their plane. Would Ted be able to accomplish the rescue of the unknown aviator and safely get into the air again?

"I'd count on Ted Scott any time," thought Joe, for his friend, who very early in life had decided on a career in the air, had come through many a hair-raising adventure.

From the time when Walter Hapworth had observed the youth's accurate knowledge of planes and paid his way through flying school, Ted Scott had demonstrated his ability. His long-distance flight alone from New York to Paris, told in "Over the Ocean to Paris," had proved that.

After that had come other stirring adventures. He had braved the tornadoes of the West Indies and later outwitted Mexican bandits who had sworn his death. He had rounded Cape Horn in the teeth of wild gales, and was the first man to fly over Mount Everest, the highest peak on earth. The dangers he incurred with international enemies were related recently in "Hunting the Sky Spies."

At this moment it was taking all of Ted's superb skill as an airman to effect the rescue of the flyer in the rubber boat. Time and again he would

jockey for position, only to find it necessary to escape the force of a giant comber by taking to the air.

Finally, during a few minutes of comparative calm, he taxied alongside the stranger. Joe and Captain Nimbusser, using a rope ladder, quickly lifted the man into the cabin, and Ted gave his plane the gun.

“He’s alive!” announced the officer, starting at once to remove the stranger’s wet clothing.

Ted was relieved to hear this, as well as to be in the air again. His troubles as a pilot were not over, for the storm began to grow worse. Try as he might, he could not climb above the fury of the gale, and his skill as an airman was put to the highest test. Finally, however, he came out the victor, having outridden one of the worst storms he had ever encountered in the sky.

Only then was Ted able to relax and turn to his companions. Over the set face of Captain Nimbusser had come an expression of relief. Joe was calm as usual. He knew Ted Scott!

“Some little blow, wasn’t it?” asked the pilot with a grin as he leaned back in his seat.

“Some little blow!” snorted the Captain. “Hear the man talk. Just a toss-up between life and death for us. Now I know why people call you the greatest aviator in the world.”

“Nonsense,” disclaimed Ted.

“Good sense,” chimed in Joe.

“Quit your kidding,” said Ted. “How about the fellow we picked up?”

“He hasn’t recovered consciousness,” replied Captain Nimbusser. “Can’t tell how badly he’s hurt. No bones broken, though.”

“Let’s see if there’s anything on him that will reveal his identity,” suggested Ted.

They went through the sodden clothes of the rescued man, but their search gave them no clue. There were matches, cigarettes, and a bunch of keys. In a waterproof container were several messages in code, and a small, unmarked package, securely sealed.

There were no revealing marks on the clothes themselves. Whatever tailor’s tags they might have held originally had been removed. The helmet, also, was devoid of clues, as were the shoes.

“Mr. Nobody of Nowhere,” murmured Ted, when they finally abandoned the search. “We’ll have to wait till the fellow recovers and tells us who he is and where he comes from.”

They rubbed him again vigorously and administered another stimulant from the first-aid kit. At last he opened his eyes and looked about him with a dazed expression. Ted and his friends exchanged glances of satisfaction. The man’s wandering gaze finally focused on his rescuers and he tried to speak.

“There, there,” said Ted soothingly. “Don’t exert yourself. You’re all right.”

The fellow lay quiet for a while, evidently gathering his thoughts together.

“Where am I?” he asked finally. “How did I get here?”

“Your plane was wrecked,” replied Ted. “We found you tossing about on the ocean in a rubber boat.”

“Wish you had left me there,” was the startling reply.

“What do you mean?” asked Ted, scarcely believing he had heard right.

“Just what I said,” was the answer. “A friend would have picked me up, all right. And he wouldn’t have gone through my pockets, either, the way you fellows have,” he added as he caught sight of his property laid out on the floor.

“Why, you worthless pup,” cried Joe. “Go ahead and bail out if you don’t like our company. That’s a pretty return we get for saving your life!”

“Easy, easy, Joe,” pleaded Ted. “Perhaps the man’s delirious and doesn’t know what he’s saying.”

“Yes, I do,” replied the fellow sullenly.

He reached out, grabbed the sealed package and oilskin bag, and quickly checked to see if the code messages were still there. The action reminded Ted of something he had seen very recently on the beach at Waikiki. A similar package had been given to a swimmer by the importer Sam Togoty. The person who had dived into the waves there was not this stranger, but he might have delivered the oilskin bag to him.

“But I guess I’m just letting my imagination run riot,” Ted thought, and tried to forget the matter.

Yet suspicions of the ungrateful passenger and of Sam Togoty kept recurring to his mind, until finally pangs of hunger took his thoughts in another direction.

“Who’s holding out on the grub?” he grinned.

Joe sprang at once into action, and before long lunch was ready.

“How about his nibs here?” he asked. “That is,” he added with elaborate sarcasm, “if our guest isn’t afraid we’ll poison him.”

“I’m hungry,” declared the young man. “I haven’t had anything to eat since last night.”

The way he wolfed his food showed that his mishap had not impaired his appetite.

“Where are you fellows going?” he asked.

“To the United States,” replied Ted.

“I don’t want to go to the United States,” objected the passenger.

“Now isn’t that just too bad,” grinned Joe. “But since you have only the choice of going there or jumping into the Pacific Ocean, I don’t see what you can do about it. So Mr.—by the way, what is your name?”

“My name is no business of yours,” was the reply, “but Charlie will do as well as anything else, if you’ve got to call me something.”

He made no response to further inquiries, and the others left him alone for the rest of the afternoon.

“What do you make of our passenger?” asked Ted of Nimbusser when the Captain was seated beside him at the controls.

“I certainly don’t like his attitude,” the officer replied. “He’ll have to report to the authorities when we land, and I’m going along to learn more about him.”

“Naturally they will want to find out whether he comes under the immigration laws,” agreed Ted.

“By the way, when do you expect to reach San Francisco?” asked Nimbusser.

“Just on the edge of dusk, I imagine,” returned Ted. “We’d have made better time if the storm hadn’t driven us somewhat off our course.”

“That storm!” murmured the Captain. “The fiercest I ever encountered. And how you mastered it! Must be wonderful to handle a plane like that. I always wanted to fly, but I never took it up. Fellows at my college used to call me ‘Captain of the Clouds.’ Nimbus, you know, means rain cloud.”

“You’ve missed a lot,” smiled Ted.

As he had figured, dusk was just approaching when they came in sight of the Golden Gate. Nimbusser went back to speak to Charlie.

“You’ll have to report your arrival to the authorities in San Francisco,” he said. “I’ll go along with you.”

A sullen mutter was his only answer, but Charlie was watching the harbor intently. He looked frightened. Meanwhile, all Ted’s energies were concentrated on bringing his flying boat into port safely. The water was crowded with vessels moving in every direction, so his task was not an easy one. But he accomplished it at last, making a perfect landing on the waters of the bay. Suddenly Joe cried out.

“Stop him!”

He made a grab at Charlie’s shirt. But he was too late. The young man had opened the door and plunged into the water. It all had happened in an instant, yet that instant was enough. Charlie sank from sight, and did not reappear. Evidently he was a good swimmer, and could stay under water for some time. In the gathering darkness he made his escape easily.

“Quick, Joe, get the radio going,” commanded Ted. “Notify the police to be on the lookout for Charlie. He wouldn’t have done that without a good reason!”

Joe did as directed, and received an answer from the harbor police that they would do all they could.

“This confirms my suspicion that the fellow needs watching,” declared Ted. “I’ll bet he and Togoty are up to some shady business together.”

“I ought to have guessed what he had in mind,” Joe blamed himself. “Yet he seemed to be half asleep.”

“He had us all fooled,” said Nimbusser. “Let’s hope the police catch him. Then if he’s been up to any funny business, he’ll pay the penalty.”

At the dock they found Hapworth who greeted them heartily. Captain Nimbusser was introduced and the two men shook hands cordially. Then the

officer, after warm thanks to Ted and Joe, excused himself, and the boys were left with their old-time friend.

“Good of you to come so promptly, both of you,” said Hapworth, beaming with satisfaction. “But I knew you would. You’ve never let me down yet. Now pile into my car, and I’ll give you the finest dinner that San Francisco can boast. Not a word from me about why I sent for you until we’ve eaten.”

Ted and Joe were only too glad to fall in with the suggestion, for they had had a light lunch. They did full justice to the splendid meal set before them. While they ate, the friends talked of many things, but particularly of airplanes and flying boats.

“And now,” said Hapworth after dessert, “I’ll tell you why I called you home. Out at my factory is the newest and finest amphibian ever built.” After a pause he added, “In it you’ll go halfway round the world, Ted Scott, on a special mission for your country!”

CHAPTER III

A Suspect

Ted was thrilled. He was to go halfway round the world on a mission for his country!

“The finest plane ever built, you say?” he repeated Hapworth’s words. “Aren’t you forgetting my *Morning Star II*? That has always seemed to me to be the highest point ever reached in aircraft.”

“No, sir, I’m not forgetting the *Morning Star II*,” declared Hapworth. “That’s a beauty, I admit, but the one I have to show you tops even that. We’ll go to the plant tomorrow morning and you can try it out yourself. I shan’t be fully satisfied with it until I’ve had it tested by the finest flyer in the world.”

“Cut out the blarney,” grinned Ted. “My fingers are itching to get at the controls. But what was that you said about my going halfway round the world?”

“That’s a government secret,” replied Hapworth with a mysterious smile. “Something big is brewing, and I was asked to construct an amphibian to be used for a special mission. The rest of it you must hear yourself from officials in Washington. As soon as you approve of my new flying boat, you’re to go to see a Mr. Farmer of the F.B.I.”

“It sounds exciting,” said Ted, his eyes alight. “Can’t you give me a hint?”

“No,” smiled Hapworth, “but I see you’ll be glad to accept the job.”

“You bet I will!” exclaimed Ted.

“I was sure of it,” said Hapworth gleefully. “You’ve never yet shirked anything Uncle Sam has asked you to do.”

“When do I start?” asked Ted.

“Champing at the bit already,” laughed his friend. “That question I can’t answer, but it won’t be until the amphibian is up to your standards, and the F.B.I. has told you the things you’ll need to know for the trip. You fellows have had a long and trying day and need a good night’s sleep, so let’s turn in.”

Ted and Joe gladly assented, and after a few more words with Hapworth went off to get a well-deserved night's rest at a hotel. They rose early and started out in the brilliant California sunshine for the airplane factory.

Hapworth had achieved a fine reputation as a manufacturer of aircraft. He had gigantic plants, both in California and Detroit. He employed thousands of the most skilled mechanics, paid them good wages, and turned out planes of the highest type. Consequently his services were in great demand by the government.

Naturally, he had acquired a fortune. But money was not what he sought chiefly. He was an enthusiast, always trying to outdo what he already had accomplished, always striving for perfection. Between him and Ted Scott there existed the warmest esteem and affection.

Ted and Joe reached the factory in record time and immediately went with Hapworth to the inlet where the flying boats were tested. Floating on the water was a plane of new and distinctive construction. Its lines were grace itself, yet at the same time they spelled speed and endurance.

"Well, there she is, boys," announced the factory owner proudly.

A cry of admiration broke from Ted and Joe. "Wonderful, wonderful," they said together.

Ted was thrilled by this splendid product of American inventive genius. "You seem to have struck twelve this time, Walter. How about it, Joe?"

"I should say he has," replied his chum.

"Tell me all about it, Walter," said Ted excitedly.

"I've built three of them and am testing each for various things. That one in the air," he said, pointing, "has been up for a hundred and twenty hours of the hundred and fifty that are required by the military experts. After you've put this one here through its paces, Ted, we'll know still more. But before you go up, let me show you some of the things that place this amphibian in a class by itself."

They went over the plane together. Scarcely a minute passed without a cry of pleasure and admiration from Ted and Joe.

"The motors have well over twelve hundred horsepower," remarked Hapworth.

"I see there are both pontoons for water and retractible wheels for coming down on land," remarked Ted.

“Yes, and notice these large tail control surfaces,” said Hapworth. “They help to make up for the increased twisting motion brought about by the rear blades. You see this rear pusher propeller? Combined with the glider-shaped design, it gives the plane enormous speed.”

“Having the engines in the center is interesting,” Ted observed. “I could turn this thing on a penny.”

“I see you’ve provided for a cannon,” observed Joe.

“Yes,” replied Hapworth, “the cannon protrudes through the hollowed-out tube of the plane’s propeller. And by the way, that’s part of the secret.”

“How is the motor cooled?” asked Joe.

“By Ethylene Glycol, a motor liquid that has a very high boiling point,” was the reply. “It is thinner than water and flows considerably faster. As a matter of fact, one-third of a gallon of this liquid will do more than a gallon of ordinary water!”

“Thought of everything, haven’t you, Walter?” declared Ted. “How about me taking the plane up now?”

“That’s why I brought you all the way from Honolulu,” smiled Hapworth. “Go to it.”

Ted hurried into flying clothes, took a parachute, and climbed into the pilot’s seat. He taxied across the water, and lifted the flying boat easily into the air.

For over an hour the young man put the plane through every conceivable stunt with which long practice had made him familiar. He banked, side-slipped, looped the loop, dived, shot upward.

Meanwhile the two on the ground were thrilled by the magnificent performance of the plane and the superb skill of the airman. Then——

“Oh! Something’s happened!” cried Joe suddenly, watching on the shore.

To the consternation of himself and Hapworth, the amphibian began to fall. What had happened? Down it came at great speed. The men on the ground closed their eyes.

Within two hundred feet of the water Ted apparently gained control of the plane again, for it righted itself, rose into the air, and then made a perfect landing on the water. Joe and Hapworth breathed sighs of relief.

“What was the matter?” they demanded as the flyer came to the dock.

“Nothing at all,” replied Ted. “Just wanted to see how fast I could pull out of a dive. Walter, this plane is all you’ve claimed it to be, and more. It’s absolutely the high point in aircraft construction.”

“Worked to a charm, did it?” asked Hapworth, delighted. “Then I guess it deserves the name I’ve given it—the *Patriot*.”

“There’s just one thing that I think can be improved,” said Ted. “I noticed more vibration than there should be. I’ve traced it down to the rear of the engine. What it needs there is a little hydraulic damper. Let’s go into the shop and I’ll show you what I mean.”

They spent several hours in delicate experiments, and devised a gadget that Ted felt would put an end to the trouble.

“And now for some fun before you take off for Washington,” said Hapworth. “I’m going to take you to a dance at the Wildwood Club tonight. The Aeronautical Society is entertaining Army and Navy men.”

Joe begged off, but Ted and Hapworth went to the affair, arriving to the music of a good dance orchestra. Girls and women in gay-colored evening dresses and men in uniform greeted the newcomers warmly. Ted, because of his world-wide reputation, instantly became the center of attraction.

He had a very pleasant time until late in the evening when he overheard a remark that hurt him very much. A young woman, apparently with more good looks than brains, was talking to an officer. They sat screened from the flyer by a great cluster of palms with which the clubhouse was decorated.

“I’m surprised Ted Scott isn’t in uniform,” she sniffed. “Look at all these officers, giving their services to their country.”

Ted heard no more. But this was enough. Was this what people really thought of him? He could not defend himself. He could not tell anyone that the kind of service he was giving his country forbade the donning of a uniform or the holding of a commission.

Ted walked outside and breathed in the fresh air to get a grip on himself. The beauty of the California night lured him a fair distance away from the clubhouse. Presently he approached a secluded spot and came upon two men engaged in a low-pitched conversation. He stopped short as the familiar voice of one of them drifted to him.

“Ought to deliver the stuff—” his companion was saying.

“—can’t get there in time.”

Charlie the pilot!

Instinctively Ted took a step forward. Like a flash Charlie jumped to his feet, for he had recognized his would-be captor.

“You can’t spy on me!” he cried suddenly, and gave Ted a stinging blow with his fist.

CHAPTER IV

Unpleasant News

The blow was so fierce and so unexpected that it caught Ted unawares and sent him to the ground. He was up again in a moment, and it would have gone badly with his opponent if he could have laid his hands on him.

But the fellow had taken to his heels the instant the punch was delivered, as had also his companion. Although Ted searched for them high and low in the surrounding shrubbery, he could not find them.

“I wonder who the other man was,” mused Ted. “At any rate he wasn’t Togoty. Charlie’s certainly quick. If I ever expect to capture him, I’ll have to move faster than I did tonight.”

Ted brushed himself off and slowly made his way back to the clubhouse, intending to get in touch with the police and report the fellow’s presence in the vicinity.

He had nearly reached the building when he heard a commotion inside. A woman was crying out hysterically that she had been robbed. Ted hurried in to find most of the guests gathered about the victim, trying to calm her.

“My diamond necklace!” she sobbed. “It’s gone! It’s gone!”

“There, there,” said one of the men soothingly. “Perhaps it became unclasped and fell off.”

“No, no,” she protested. “I felt it about my neck only a few moments ago. Some thief has taken it!”

It was unbelievable that any of the guests, all of whom were well-known people, could have been guilty. The victim of the theft, a woman of great wealth, gave a description of the platinum and diamond necklace, and the clubhouse was thoroughly searched. The jewelry was not found.

The party went on, but only half-heartedly, for the incident had cast an unpleasant shadow over the festivity. It came to an end much earlier than it would have otherwise.

“Too bad, that matter of the woman and her necklace, wasn’t it?” remarked Ted to Joe, after he had returned to the hotel and told of the incident.

“Surely was,” agreed his friend. “I hope she has only mislaid it somewhere.”

“I wonder—” Ted went on.

“Wonder what?” asked Joe, as the young man paused.

“Wonder whether the theft could be tied up with another thing that happened at the party,” replied Ted. “I saw Charlie the pilot tonight.”

Joe’s eyes widened.

“Holy smoke!” he exclaimed. “That rat! So he turned up again?”

“He was so glad to see me that he knocked me down. Then he skipped, pronto,” responded Ted with a grin, and went on to relate the episode in detail.

“Wouldn’t I like to get my hands on him!” Joe declared vengefully, clenching his fists.

“Same here,” agreed Ted. “I owe him one for the sock he gave me. But what I’m wondering is whether Charlie could have had anything to do with the disappearance of the diamond and platinum necklace.”

“Say,” asked Joe as a thought struck him, “who was the fellow with him? Could it by any chance have been Togoty?”

“I think not,” replied Ted. “But the man’s hat was pulled down over his forehead, and the light was none too good. Of course we don’t really know whether there is any connection between Charlie and Togoty.”

“The waterproof bag and the mysterious package convince me that they are working together,” declared Joe.

“Well, we’ll do our Sherlock Holmesing some other time. I’m going to hit the hay, and I guess a little shut-eye won’t hurt you, either,” said Ted.

The advice was good, and Joe complied. The following morning the boys went to find out about the new flying boat, which had been in the air one hundred and twenty hours when first they had seen it.

“The one hundred and forty-fifth now,” said Hapworth. “Only five more hours to go before the pilot will have completed the test required by the military authorities.”

“Looks as if it were going to make it,” said Ted. “Motors sound steady. Oh——”

The admiration of the onlookers swiftly changed to consternation when it became apparent that something was wrong. Suddenly the pilot cut the motors and immediately started downward. He made a landing on the water close to where the men were standing.

“What’s the matter, Barclay?” asked Hapworth anxiously as the pilot stepped ashore.

“A cracked cylinder head in one of the motors,” was the troubled reply. “Everything was working beautifully up to then.”

Gloom descended on the party. Gone was the hope which they had had for meeting the military standard. Hapworth was the first to recover.

“Well, that’s that,” he sighed, “but we’ll get busy at once in the laboratory. Do you have any suggestions, Ted?”

“Probably a little difference in the mixing of alloys would correct the trouble,” observed the flyer. “Needs perhaps a slightly larger amount of that duralium of yours. It’s just a suggestion, and your chemists can see if there’s anything in it. Sorry the thing had to happen, Walter. I know how disappointed you must be.”

“Oh, that’s part of the game,” replied Hapworth. “I’ll keep after the trouble until I’ve corrected it. Hope to have everything in perfect shape by the time you get back from Washington. I suppose you’re just about ready to start.”

“Yes, my *Morning Star II* is being tuned up now,” replied Ted. “I’m going to stop on the way to see my folks. So long, Walter, and the best of luck. I’ll keep in touch with you every day to see how things are going.”

“Do so,” said Hapworth, and with a hearty handclasp for each of the young men, he hurried away to his laboratory.

Ted said good-bye to Joe, and went out to the airfield adjoining the plant. He stepped into the *Morning Star II* and started on his journey.

He was somewhat sobered by the unfortunate ending of the experiment with the *Patriot*. It was not long, however, before he threw off the mood. The day was beautiful, the sky was clear, and, above all, Ted was going home.

The boys’ parents had died when he was very young. There had been no relatives to take care of him, and the lad would have been thrown on the mercy of the world, if his plight had not touched the kind hearts of Eben and

Charity Browning. They had brought him up as tenderly as though he were their own son.

They themselves had been of limited means. Eben had kept a small hotel, chiefly for hunters and fishermen. Later, when Ted had helped them in an effort to repay what they had done for him, they had enlarged the establishment, and it eventually became the leading hotel of Bromville.

“I’m going home,” Ted thought happily. “I won’t dare tell the folks yet that I’m going off again halfway round the world!”

He had been away a long time on his recent secret mission and was eager to see his folks. He hopped across the Rockies in record time, put the *Morning Star II* to its best speed, and in a few hours was hovering over Bromville.

He made a perfect three-point landing, and was greeted delightedly by the mechanics and pilots of the field. Then he jumped into a taxi and was whizzed to the Bromville House.

The Brownings were seated on the front porch, for Ted had wired that he was coming, and they were on edge with excitement. Scarcely had the car stopped than Ted was out of the door and springing up the steps three at a time. He clasped Charity in his arms. She clung to him tremulously.

“My dear boy! My dear boy!” she murmured, holding him close. “It’s good to have you here again!”

“And I’m happy to be here,” Ted smiled.

He reached out to clasp the extended hand of Eben.

“How are you, Dad?” he asked.

“Fine and dandy,” returned the elderly man in a voice that trembled, “and glad to see you safe and sound at home once more.”

“And how has everything been here?” asked their flying son.

The couple looked at each other, then at the floor. Finally Charity spoke up.

“Something pretty bad happened here not long ago,” she replied.

CHAPTER V

A Great Mission

Ted looked startled. "Something pretty bad happened here, you say?"

"Yes," replied Eben. "Bad—and embarrassing, too. We had a robbery. A thief or thieves got in here and took a lot of jewelry from the guests."

"Hmph, that is bad," agreed Ted. "Anything of yours taken?"

Again Charity looked at the floor, and failed to answer at once. Ted noticed that she was not wearing a platinum wrist watch he had given her.

"Your watch?" he asked.

"Yes, the thief stole that beautiful gift you sent me on my birthday. I feel so bad about it, I hated to tell you."

"Do you suspect anyone? A servant, perhaps?"

"No," replied Charity. "Not one of them would do a thing like that. They've been with us a long time and we trust them all. Must have been some thief from the outside."

"Have you reported it to the police?" asked the flyer.

"Yes," replied Eben. "We asked them to keep their eyes open for strangers around town and anyone suspicious-looking."

"Here's hoping they catch the rascals," said Ted. "But, Mother, don't you worry about the watch. I'll buy you another—something fit for a queen to wear!"

"Oh, that's mighty good of you, dear boy," said Charity, "but I'm not going to let you spend your money."

"Let's see you stop me," said Ted with a grin, leaning over to give the woman an affectionate hug.

"Well, now, my boy," said Eben, "I hope you're going to stay at home for a long time."

"Oh, you must," broke in Charity. "It's been dreadful having you away. Why, there isn't a night while you're gone that I don't worry about you and pray you'll be kept safe."

“I know you do, Mother,” said Ted tenderly. “And don’t stop!” he smiled. “But flying is my vocation, and just now it’s the best way I can serve my country and, in fact, humanity. I may as well tell you. I have another trip in view.”

“I knew it,” mourned Charity. “Just got home and has another trip in view. But at that, dear boy, I wouldn’t try to stop you.”

The next morning Ted went downtown to a jeweler’s. It took him a long time to get there, for at almost every step he was halted by some one of the townspeople, who held him in great admiration. He was by all odds the most famous man in the little city.

He selected a beautiful watch for Charity, and ordered it initialed and delivered to her at the Bromville House. A little personal shopping followed, and then he returned to the hotel.

“Somebody to see you, Ted,” announced Eben.

“Haven’t much time to see anybody,” replied Ted. “Who is he, and what does he want?”

“Name is Morton,” replied Eben. “Didn’t say what his business is. You’ll find him waiting in the lounge.”

Ted went in. A lanky, middle-aged man, carelessly dressed, but with a kindly face, wrinkled by years of smiling, rose at his entrance.

“Good morning,” said the flyer. “I’m Ted Scott. I was told you want to see me.”

“I’m glad to meet you, Mr. Scott,” drawled the caller. “My name is Silas Morton. Heard you were in town and hurried over to see you. As to what you can do for me—well, I don’t know as you can do so much for me, but you can certainly do a good deal for your country.”

Ted liked the man at once, and was intrigued by his mysterious introduction.

“Suppose you tell me very briefly what you have in mind, Mr. Morton,” he said. “I’m greatly pressed for time.”

“I have an invention,” replied Morton, an eager look on his face, “that will make air travel safer than it ever has been before.”

“Indeed?” said Ted, deciding here was a fine person but one of many who had some unworkable theory about an invention.

But as the man went on to explain his idea, Ted found himself listening attentively. The five minutes he had mentally decided to give the caller stretched into an hour. From time to time he would offer a question or an objection, but Morton had an answer to every one.

“Here,” thought Ted, “is no crack-brained inventor, but a clever man with a well-thought-out idea that may have an important bearing on air travel.”

Morton’s idea was to put on every plane a tank containing compressed helium, the lighter-than-air gas. In case the engine should stall or go dead and a crash threaten, the gas, by an automatic contrivance, would be released into bags on the wings. This would give the necessary buoyancy to the craft to keep it indefinitely in the air, or, at the very least, make its downward progress slow and safe.

“Well, there you have it, Mr. Scott,” said Morton as he folded up his papers and leaned back in his chair. “What do you think of it?”

“I think a great deal of it,” replied Ted. “Look here, Mr. Morton, I’m going to Washington today on a mission of my own. What do you say to coming along with me and showing your plans to the experts there?”

“It might be done,” replied Morton. “What train do you plan to take?”

“Oh, I’m traveling by plane,” replied Ted. “I rarely go any other way. Come with me.”

“No, no,” replied Morton rather hurriedly. “I never do any flying. It would be the death of me.”

Ted stared at the man in amazement.

“You know all about planes and never travel in them?” he exclaimed.

Morton smiled rather sheepishly.

“I guess it sounds queer,” he admitted. “But that’s the way it is. Great heights terrify me. I understand all about planes in theory, but in practice—well, that’s something else.”

“Too bad,” said Ted. “I’ll tell you what I can do. A friend of mine is one of the greatest manufacturers of airplanes in the United States. Let me show him your plans and find out what he thinks of them. He is in California now, but I’ll see him in a few days.”

Morton agreed, delighted at Ted’s interest.

“It’s been a great privilege to talk to you, Mr. Scott,” he said as he rose to go. “When a person such as you approves my plan, then I know I’m getting somewhere,” he added with a warm smile.

Ted waved the compliment aside, shook hands, and Morton departed. Ted affectionately took leave of Eben and Charity, promised to return as soon as he could, and hopped off in the *Morning Star II*. After a pleasant and uneventful journey, he arrived in the national capital.

“And now to learn the secret from Mr. Farmer,” he thought excitedly.

It was after the man’s office hours when Ted reached the airport, and he had to postpone his call until morning. In the meantime he went to report to a Mr. Smith on his Hawaiian mission.

“Delighted to see you,” exclaimed the secret agent. “I have been waiting to congratulate you on the splendid way you handled the job in Honolulu. It required great discretion, and superb courage as well, to bring it off successfully. But you came through with flying colors, and Uncle Sam won’t have to worry any more about those forged papers you recovered.”

“I had a lot of luck,” said Ted modestly.

“Luck!” snorted the man. “I call it pluck. I got the main points of what you did by your code message, but now I want to hear the details. Start from the beginning.”

Thus pressed, Ted handed over the documents he had brought from Hawaii. Then he embarked upon a story of daring criminal plans and their successful thwarting that would have thrilled the people of the United States if they had been allowed to know the story. But, for the time being, discretion demanded that it be kept secret.

“Great work, great work!” declared Mr. Smith when Ted had finished. “You pulled the showdown off in great shape. The President shall hear of this.”

Blushing in embarrassment, Ted left the man and went to a hotel. Shortly after nine o’clock the next morning, he presented himself at the offices of the F.B.I. and was greeted most enthusiastically by Mr. Farmer.

“Mr. Hapworth wired me you were coming,” smiled the man. “Sit down, and I’ll tell you what your government has in mind for you to undertake. You realize, of course, that this must be kept strictly confidential.”

Ted nodded.

“Certain nations,” began Mr. Farmer, “are planning an international air police force. The United States has been asked to join them and to produce suitable planes for the work. The idea is to have you test the new flying boats, show them to certain foreign officials in various places, and give me your views on the workability of the scheme.”

“Would I go alone?” asked Ted.

“No, there would be at least three of you.”

“Mr. Hapworth’s three new flying boats, if they pass all the tests, would be used?” inquired Ted, his eyes aglow with the thought of adventure.

“That’s right. You and your mates would fly in formation to various islands of the Pacific as though you were after an actual enemy.”

“In other words,” said Ted, “it would be a pursuit patrol.”

“That’s it exactly,” agreed Mr. Farmer. “And you will lead that pursuit patrol!”

CHAPTER VI

In Wild Chase

“It’s a great idea!” declared Ted. “And I am eager to put it to the test. How many planes, do you think, should be in the patrol?”

“I believe that three would do at the start,” said Farmer. “Too large a squadron might arouse suspicion and lead to inquiries that would be awkward to answer.”

“May I select my own companions?” asked Ted.

“Of course,” was the reply. “You have a far wider acquaintance among airmen than I have, and I trust your judgment.”

“Then I’ll choose the two best men I know—Joe Scarlet and Jed Nothby,” replied Ted. “They are excellent pilots and can be depended upon to hold their tongues. Either one of them would die sooner than betray a trust.”

“That’s the kind we want,” declared Farmer. “Suppose you get in touch with them at once. If they consent, I’ll see that they get their appointments as international policemen. You three can be sworn in together.”

“I’ll get busy right away,” promised Ted, and the man handed him a telephone.

He made a long distance call to San Francisco, and by good luck caught Joe at the hotel where he had left him.

“Hi, Joe,” he hailed his friend. “You’ve been basking long enough in the California sunshine. I have a new job for you. Can’t tell you what it is over the phone, but I will be in Frisco in a few days and give you the details. Are you willing to pilot a plane on a long trip?”

“Sure thing,” said Joe without any hesitation.

Ted grinned. Good old Joe!

“One more thing before you hang up,” he said. “Where is Jed Nothby?”

“Probably sitting on some high hill looking at the stars,” chuckled Joe, referring to Jed’s hobby of the study of heavenly bodies.

“Stop your kidding,” demanded Ted. “Where is he?”

“Last I heard of him he was in Butte, Montana,” Joe replied.

“Thanks,” said Ted, and rang off.

After several attempts, he managed to get in touch with Jed who accepted his friend’s veiled proposal enthusiastically, and promised to go to San Francisco at once to learn the details.

“There’s just one difficulty in regard to the trip,” said Ted to Mr. Farmer. “The new motor didn’t stand the hundred and fifty hour test. We’ll just have to wait to see how a new one turns out.”

“I have every confidence in Mr. Hapworth,” said the F.B.I. man. “And now I’ll give you the international air police plan in detail.”

He went on to say that the patrol was to start from the West Coast, because the Pacific was to be the main theater of operations for the tryout. Ted was to search out the shortest and the best routes for reaching any point that might require the services of such a force.

“Up to now the fact has been overlooked that in the future the air will be used more than ever before by criminals,” said Farmer.

“It already is,” decided Ted, his thoughts jumping at once to the suspicious actions of Charlie the pilot.

“A constant watch above borders between countries, and over the water from island to island, will become a necessity,” explained the F.B.I. man. “The police pilot who can outwit an enemy will be a hero in days to come.”

He gave Ted further instructions, saying he was to be in command of the three flying boats.

“All communications with Washington are to be sent in code,” stated Mr. Farmer. “Incidentally, I believe you three boys had better learn some code language to use in the air from plane to plane. We don’t want any information to get into the hands of persons not in sympathy with the international air police idea.”

“How about Captain Nimbusser teaching us one?” asked Ted. “He’s an expert on codes, isn’t he?”

“None better,” agreed Farmer. “He’ll be in Frisco by tomorrow. Look him up.”

Ted left Washington the next day and set his course back to Bromville. His heart was beating a little faster than usual. He had been asked to map out a new and daring scheme for the protection of honest men, not only by his

own country, but by foreign powers as well! A scheme to trap by air those who sought to steal from others and escape in speedy planes.

“It’s a challenge!” the flyer thought excitedly.

Ted’s first question upon meeting his parents again was to ask if anything had been learned about the thief who had taken Charity’s platinum wrist watch and other jewelry.

“Not one clue,” replied Eben sadly. “And such a theft doesn’t help the reputation of our hotel any. Whoever the thief is, he’s pretty clever to be able to open doors with the kind of locks we have.”

Ted, thinking that perhaps it might be a long time before he would get back to Bromville, spent the rest of the day attending to personal matters. Then early the next morning he set out for San Francisco.

As he neared St. Louis, he suddenly became aware of a strange sound in the engines of the *Morning Star II*. Quickly he looked at the gauges. He was nearly out of gas!

“Hmph, that fellow at the airport didn’t fill the tanks as I told him to,” he said in disgust. “Well, down I go.”

While he was waiting for an attendant to refuel his plane, Ted strolled into the waiting room of the administration building to buy a newspaper. A headline startled him.

DARING ROBBERY NETS BIG HAUL

“Sounds like the one at the Bromville House,” he thought, noticing that the theft had taken place at a hotel.

As he read further, this idea became a conviction. Another item caught his attention, also. The haul of the thieves had been large, and among the pieces listed were many made of platinum.

“They know what’s particularly valuable, all right,” thought Ted. “I must look into this robbery as soon as I have time,” he decided. “It may have some bearing on the Bromville House case.”

He folded the paper and walked toward the *Morning Star II*. As he did so, he caught a glimpse of a pilot jumping into a plane some distance down the flying field.

There was something about him that held Ted’s attention. Where had he seen the man before? He searched his memory. Then, after the fellow had taken off, it came to him.

He was Charlie the pilot!

It was up to Ted to chase the fellow. Instantly he ran to where his plane was being refueled.

“Ready?” he said to the mechanic: “I’m in a hurry. Quick!”

“All right, sir,” responded the man. “Go ahead.”

Ted jumped in, and taxied down the field. Charlie already was in the air, his plane fast becoming a speck in the clouds. Then the *Morning Star II* got the gun and zoomed into the sky like a rocket.

“I’m getting a bit of police pursuit sooner than I expected,” Ted murmured to himself.

The other plane was now far in the distance. But the *Morning Star II* was swift, and every moment lessened the distance between pursuer and pursued.

It soon became apparent that Charlie had detected the *Morning Star II* and suspected that he was being followed. He put additional speed into his plane. He rose to a higher altitude. Ted did likewise. He banked sharply to the right. So did Ted. Then he swerved to the left. Ted followed suit.

Inch by inch, foot by foot, Scott edged up on his quarry. Then the weather intervened. A mist that had been gathering for some time gradually surrounded them.

As visibility became poor, Ted ground his teeth in vexation. His view of Charlie’s plane grew dim, then disappeared altogether.

Still Ted kept on doggedly. His only hope now was that the mist would lighten before the man got away entirely.

It did lift as suddenly as it had settled. Ted’s heart gave an exultant bound as his eyes caught sight of Charlie’s plane.

Now the chase resolved itself into a matter of speed. And to this there could be only one answer, for nothing in America could equal the swiftness of the *Morning Star II* when pushed to its utmost.

The Rockies loomed up before them, and both planes had to climb to a high altitude to clear the peaks. Soon they were flying above the mountains.

Then something happened that almost took Ted’s breath away. Charlie suddenly shot down toward the earth between two of the peaks.

Was Ted again to lose the mysterious fellow who had escaped so easily in the bay at San Francisco?

CHAPTER VII

The Strange Plane

Had Charlie, seeing that the game was up, decided upon this dangerous method to make a getaway?

A few seconds later Ted was over the spot where the fugitive had vanished from sight. It was a wild wooded section, but a glance below showed an open space with fairly level ground. Either Charlie had caught sight of this and taken instant advantage of it, or he already knew about it.

Far beneath Ted the other plane was just making a landing. The *Morning Star II* hovered over the spot, preparing to go down. If Charlie had hoped that Ted would not notice the open glade immediately, and that he could hide his plane in the surrounding shrubbery before Scott might return, he was mistaken.

“He’s going to run away!” thought Ted, as the fellow jumped out, looked up, and plunged into the bushes.

Scott made a perfect landing and leaped out. But by that time the other pilot had vanished.

“It would be pretty hard to find him in that forest,” decided Ted. “And he might double back and take off.”

He went over to the man’s machine and examined it. It was an old plane marked with an indistinct insignia—an orange X in a black circle on blue wings. A thorough inspection yielded no clue to Charlie or to his mission.

“I believe I’ll cripple this ship so the fellow can’t take off,” Ted decided. “And I’ll notify the authorities.”

At this moment a forest ranger emerged into the clearing.

“Hello, stranger,” he hailed. “What’s up?”

“I don’t wonder that you ask,” smiled Ted. “It isn’t often, I guess, that planes make landings in this spot.”

“I should say not,” was the reply, “unless the pilots want to risk breaking their necks.”

“Well, you see that my head is still on my shoulders,” laughed Ted. “The fact is I was chasing a man, and he came down here to shake me off. Now he

has disappeared in the forest.”

He went on to explain his suspicions of Charlie, and the ranger listened attentively.

“I think,” went on Ted, “that the fellow is up to something. I’d like to find out what it is. Can you get in touch with the police from here?”

“Sure thing,” replied the ranger. “I have a radiotelephone in my cabin near by.”

“Good,” said Ted. “I’ll cripple this plane, so Charlie can’t get away in it. Then will you have some of your men search the woods for the man? If you find him, hold him, and telephone this office.” He wrote out a number on a slip of paper.

The forester promised to do so. Ted thanked him, disconnected several wires on the X plane, then went to the *Morning Star II*. It was with a great deal of difficulty that he took off in the small space, but finally he rose into the sky and set out for San Francisco. He put on all speed to make up for the time he had lost, and arrived at his destination that evening. Just as he had finished a shower at his hotel, Joe and Jed walked in.

“Well, if the old kid isn’t here himself!” exclaimed the latter, pounding Ted on the back and wringing his hand.

“Let up, you roughneck,” protested his chum. “You’ll have me black and blue. My delicate constitution can’t stand such treatment!”

For several minutes there was joking and horseplay; then the conversation grew serious.

“You can’t guess whom I saw today,” Ted remarked to Joe.

“Who?”

“Charlie the pilot.”

“That rat again?” exclaimed Joe. “Where did he turn up?”

“‘Up’ is right,” was the reply. “He was up in the air. When he saw me chasing him, he landed and disappeared.”

Ted told the details of the chase, and the others listened excitedly.

“You have to give the fellow credit for having nerve, anyway,” observed Jed, when he had heard the complete story. “I’d like to meet him some time.”

“Suppose you tell us about the trip we’re to make, Ted,” suggested Joe whose curiosity was getting the better of him.

Ted could not resist teasing his friends a bit. “How would you like to be policemen?” he asked.

“Be *what*?” the amazed listeners asked together.

“I mean air policemen,” laughed Ted, enjoying the look of surprise on their faces. “If you want the job, I’ll see to it that you’re sworn in as international air police.”

“What would the work be?” asked Jed, mystified.

Ted now became serious, and explained how the F.B.I. was cooperating with certain foreign powers to be ready for the time when crooks might take to the air and travel from country to country, carrying out their schemes.

“The only way to thwart their plans would be for a patrol to be on watch in the skies at all times,” concluded Ted. “A police pursuit patrol is what it actually will be. Well, what say, are you with me?”

“You bet I’m with you!”

“Count me in!”

“Then we’ll regard the matter settled,” said Ted. “I knew you boys would come along. But there’s one thing we all want to remember. This matter must be kept strictly confidential.”

“The next question is when do we start?” asked Joe. “I’m ready to go at five minutes’ notice.”

Jed said he was, too.

“There’s no such hurry as that,” replied Ted. “There’s the formality of our being officially sworn in as international police. Then there’s the very serious matter of planes. The new amphibians aren’t ready, but we hope the next hundred and fifty hour test will prove successful.”

The friends spent the rest of the evening together, ending it with a midnight snack. Seldom could there be found anywhere in the world three young men so thoroughly in sympathy with one another. They had shared adventures in many parts of the world. They had faced terrible dangers from pirates, bandits and savages. Again and again they had been near death. Not one of them would have hesitated a moment in laying down his life for the others.

“On this trip we may run into danger,” said Ted. “Mr. Farmer thinks we should learn a new secret code to use in speaking from plane to plane, so we’ll have to go to a class for study.”

“Well, let me know when you’re ready for me,” said Jed when the boys finally separated at a late hour.

The next morning Ted went out early to the Hapworth plant and sought the owner at once.

“Glad to see you,” said Hapworth. “Well, how did things go? Did you accept the new job?” he grinned.

“You knew I would,” replied Ted. “And Joe and Jed will go along on the pursuit patrol.”

Hapworth wrung his young friend’s hand. “I’m delighted beyond words. You’ll be doing your country a great service. By the way, while in Australia, try to find time to look up a relative of mine and his family.”

“I will. Who is he?”

“Angus MacDonald. No finer person in the world. He owns a ranch near Cunnamulla. Incidentally, he’s an officer of the law, and if you should need any help out there, he’d certainly give it to you.”

“I’ll remember that,” replied Ted. “Mr. Farmer says I may run into danger. And now tell me, how are the motors on the new flying boat behaving?”

“All right, so far. You were right about the alloy needing duralium. One *Patriot* is on its one hundred and fifty hour test now,” answered Hapworth.

“Let’s hope it’s successful this time! A lot depends on it,” said Ted. “And now I want to show you something.”

He brought out Morton’s plans and explained the idea of carrying a tank of compressed helium in airplanes as a safety measure.

“It would add little to the weight of a plane,” he said, “and would be forced into the bags on the wings only in an emergency.”

“It’s certainly a great idea,” pronounced Hapworth, “and the man seems to have gone into it very thoroughly. If it works, it may revolutionize the aircraft industry. I wish I had Mr. Morton here to discuss it with us. How about wiring him to fly out at my expense?”

Ted laughed. “You wouldn’t believe it, Walter,” he said, “but Silas Morton has never been in a plane in his life; that is, he has never traveled in one. I suggested taking him in the *Morning Star II* to Washington, and he almost had a fit. Queer, isn’t it?”

“Sure is,” laughed Hapworth, “but his fear of air travel is probably the reason for his invention. Well, then, let’s get him out here by train. Will you telephone him?”

Ted promised to do so, and put in a long distance call for the inventor. The man replied promptly.

“Good morning, Mr. Morton,” said the flyer. “This is Ted Scott calling from San Francisco. You remember the airplane manufacturer I spoke to you about? Well, I’ve shown him your plans and he is very interested in them. But there are a lot of details that he’d like to talk to you about in person. He will pay all your traveling expenses and hotel bills. Will you come on here?”

“Why, that’s—that’s very kind,” replied the man eagerly. “Of course, I’ll be glad to. And thank you a thousand times, Mr. Scott.”

“Oh, that’s all right,” replied Ted. “Don’t suppose you’d come by plane?” he asked, with a tinge of mischief in his tone.

“Oh, no,” replied Morton quickly. “I’ll take the train.”

“Very well,” said Ted. “Please arrange to leave at once.” He was about to replace the receiver when a thought struck him. “Oh, Mr. Morton, I’m going to ask my folks to come, too. They will be company for you.”

On the instant he had decided to urge Eben and Charity Browning to spend a little vacation in California. They had a reliable assistant who could take care of the hotel until their return.

With Ted, to think was to act. At once he telephoned to the Bromville House. His mother was out, but he spoke to his father and laid the plan before him. Eben, delighted at the prospect, promised that he would coax Charity to make the trip.

Later that day Ted received a telegram from Eben, stating that he and Charity had decided to accompany Morton, and had arranged to take a sleeper that evening with him. Highly pleased, Ted reserved rooms in the hotel where he was staying. He would see that this vacation would be a highlight in the lives of his foster parents.

He went to bed happy and thrilled over the many interesting things that had happened during the past two days. He was awakened early the next

morning by the insistent ringing of the telephone.

“Hello! Hello!” he said. “Ted Scott speaking.”

“This is the forest ranger you talked with when you came down in the mountains,” replied the distant voice. “I’m sorry to have to give you such a report, but that fellow Charlie got away in his plane.”

“He did!” cried Ted, unable to believe what he heard.

“All of us here are very sorry,” apologized the man. “We thought we were watching carefully. When he didn’t show up at first, I guess we relaxed too much. He sneaked up, fixed the wires on the plane and took off. Guess he’s a pretty clever fellow.”

Ted had to agree on this point, and also that Charlie was an uncommonly good flyer.

“Well, thanks for your trouble,” he said to the forest ranger. “I’ll keep watch for him in the air,” he added, hanging up.

Ted dressed hurriedly, all the while thinking of the strange man he knew only as Charlie and wondering what he was up to. Not until he had eaten breakfast did his mind turn to other things.

“I believe I’ll go out to Hapworth’s factory and fly one of the new amphibians,” he decided. He went at once to the airplane plant and found the owner. “How about my taking up one of the *Patriots* for a little tryout, Walter?” he asked.

“There’s nothing I’d like better,” was the reply. “I want you to see for yourself that the vibration is gone. We’ve put the hydraulic damper on, as you suggested.”

“Good,” said Ted, and drove out to where the amphibian was standing in a hangar.

Ted had the mechanics roll it out to the field. He had not taken off from that particular place before, and thought it a good chance to try out the lifting power of the plane from land. He could find no fault with it; as a matter of fact, he felt a pang of jealousy, for here was a craft even better than his own *Morning Star II*.

“Smooth, smooth,” he thought to himself as he flew out over the ocean. “And the vibration certainly is gone. Now, if the hundred and fifty hour test is only a success—Hello, what’s that?”

His attention had been attracted to an airplane some distance away that was acting in a strange manner. It had come down over the water, and seemed to be hovering above a small fishing boat.

As Ted watched, he saw the plane swoop even lower, then dangle a rope to which was attached a net basket. A fisherman quickly threw a package into this, and the pilot pulled up the rope. Then he zoomed into the air and flew off to sea at high speed.

“That’s funny,” said Ted to himself, and grabbed his binoculars.

There was an orange X in a black circle on the blue wings of the plane!

Ted was tempted to follow it, but remembered that he had little fuel in his tanks. He was vexed, for he felt that the pilot might well be Charlie.

Ted recalled that the wings of Charlie’s plane, wrecked in the vicinity of Hawaii, were also blue in color. The craft he had just seen had the same insignia as the one the fellow had come down in at the clearing in the forest.

All thoughts of Charlie were banished from the flyer’s mind when he caught sight of Joe waiting for him at the airfield. His friend’s manner was solemn, and Ted read in his face that he was the bearer of bad news.

“What is it?” he cried.

“Sorry, Ted. Brace up, old man, for what I’m going to tell you isn’t pleasant. The train carrying your parents has been wrecked!”

CHAPTER VIII

A Secret Code

“Wrecked?” cried Ted wildly, a terrible sensation tearing at his heart. “Where? When? Was anyone—was anyone—killed?”

“No, I’m glad to report,” said Joe. “But a number of passengers were seriously hurt. They’ve been taken to hospitals.”

“Where did it happen?” asked Ted.

“Just the other side of the Rockies,” replied Joe. “With the *Morning Star II* we could get there in a hurry.”

“You’re right,” said Ted. “Come on!”

The two boys ran out to the adjoining flying field where Ted’s plane was. They jumped in, gave it the gun, and went at a lightning rate toward the scene of the accident. Every minute of the trip seemed an age to Ted, yet he was going at a speed never before reached by him. Soon they caught sight of the overturned locomotive and shattered cars. Doctors and willing helpers were attending the injured passengers who had not been removed yet.

The country in the vicinity of the wreck was heavily wooded, and it took a long while for Ted to find a field on which to land. It was maddening to have to spend time doing this, when he was so eager to get to the Brownings. At last he saw a fairly level stretch of ground that offered the possibility of a safe landing.

“I don’t want to leave the plane alone,” said Ted. “Suppose you stay here, Joe, and guard it. You don’t mind?”

“Go right ahead,” came the quick reply.

Ted hurried on foot to the scene of the wreck, nearly a mile away. He ran the entire distance, looked quickly at everyone, but did not see either the Brownings or Silas Morton.

A conductor of the train was busy directing the activities of the helpers. He was the first man Ted reached.

“Beg pardon,” he said breathlessly. “Can you tell me anything about an elderly couple who were aboard your train? They must have got on at Bromville and were bound for San Francisco.”

The conductor reflected for a moment. "I'm sorry that I don't remember," the man answered. "Most of those who needed attention have been taken to a hospital about three miles from here. Probably you will find your folks there."

Ted asked no further questions, but sped off in the direction indicated. He thumbed a ride from a car going that way, and in a few minutes was at the hospital.

There was a good deal of bustle and excitement, for the accident had upset the usual orderly calm of the institution. Doctors and nurses were hurrying to and fro, and it took some time before Ted could be directed to Charity.

"Mother, dear Mother," was all he could say, when he reached her bedside.

"Ted, my darling boy," murmured Charity. "How wonderful it is to see you. Now don't you worry. Eben and I are all right. Got some bruises, and it was a bad shock to us. We're not as young as we used to be to stand such things. But a couple of days' rest, and we'll be fine as fiddles again."

Ted felt greatly relieved. He talked happily for a few moments, then a nurse told him with a smile that he had been there long enough. The flyer now looked up Eben, whose delight at seeing the boy was as great as that of Charity. He had escaped serious injury, but had a number of cuts that required attention, although he insisted stoutly that they amounted to nothing at all.

"What bothers me most is that nobody seems to know anything about Silas Morton," he said sadly. "He disappeared after the accident."

"That's strange," murmured Ted. "I'll see what I can find out."

Before leaving the hospital, he learned that his parents would be able to continue their journey in a few days. Feeling that a great weight had been lifted from his mind, he went back to the *Morning Star II*. One glance at Ted's jubilant face told Joe he had good news.

"Nothing serious the matter," shouted Ted, "at least not with the Brownings. Shaken up a bit, but that's about all. But nobody knows anything about Morton. Several people say he wandered off into the woods in a dazed condition. I'm going to hunt him up."

"I'll go with you," insisted Joe. "Those are deep woods, and we don't want two disappearances!"

“All right,” Ted agreed. “I thought that’s what you’d say, so I arranged for one of the local policemen to guard the plane.”

He went off and brought back the man. Then the two boys started up a mountain trail.

“I do hope Silas Morton has come to no harm,” worried Ted. “He’s a fine man, Joe. And a clever inventor. Somehow he never was able to make much money, but this new idea of his is a winner.”

“Hapworth thinks well of it, doesn’t he?” asked Joe.

“Yes, but there are many points the inventor must clear up before the idea can be put into practical form. Oh, I hope nothing serious has happened to Mr. Morton!”

It was a long time before they found him—the next day, in fact. He was in a remote cabin far up the mountainside. It was a small, ramshackle building, used apparently for hunting parties from time to time.

The inventor lay on a rude cot. He was so still and white that Ted feared he might not be alive. However, as the flyer walked across the creaking floor, Morton opened his eyes.

“Ted Scott, by all that’s wonderful!” he cried. “How on earth did you get here?”

“I’ve been hunting for you ever since that train wreck yesterday,” replied the flyer. “Feared you might be hurt.”

“That was good of you,” declared Morton with an appreciative smile. “Luckily I escaped injury. Actually, my being up here has nothing to do with the wreck.”

Ted introduced Joe, then asked, “Can we help you with whatever brought you up here?”

Silas Morton asked the boys to sit down, and gazed affectionately upon Ted. “Son,” he said, “you have no idea how grateful I am for what you’re doing for me. When I saw a chance to do something for you, well, I followed up the opportunity.”

“You’re very mysterious,” said Ted. “I can’t see what could have brought you out into this wilderness.”

“It’s strange, I agree,” replied Morton. “This is how it happened. On the train Eben and Charity were telling me of some of your adventures, and incidentally how you occasionally make enemies.”

“He has helped to nab many a crook,” put in Joe.

“Maybe you can nab the two men I was after,” Morton began his story. “They may or may not be crooks, but I’m inclined to think they’re up to some underhanded business.”

“You went after them alone!” cried Ted, astonished.

“Oh, I didn’t try to capture them,” smiled Morton. “But I did get something from them that may be useful.”

“Tell me about it,” said Ted, sitting on the edge of his chair.

“Not long before the wreck, I left the Brownings and walked back into the observation car. I passed two men who were talking about you,” explained Morton. “One of them said that Ted Scott certainly was making it uncomfortable for the gang. Then his companion chuckled and said his friend worried too much. ‘Just the same, I’d hate to have him get hold of the code in my pocket,’ said the other. Then the crash came.”

As Morton paused for breath, Ted wondered who the strangers might be. “What did the men look like?” he asked.

“Both were tall and dark, and about my age,” the inventor replied. “They called each other Will and Harry.”

“I don’t know of any enemies of mine who fit the description,” said Ted. “Please go on.”

“After the crash I found that I had nothing but a few bruises,” continued the inventor. “Suddenly I saw those two men moving off. Remembering what I had overheard on the train, I followed them—at a safe distance, you may be sure.

“They went to a cabin a few miles from here and bunked there for the night. I waited outside till I heard them snoring, then I crept in, managed to get the code out of the fellow’s pocket, and left. I found this shack and stretched out for a much-needed sleep. Here’s the paper I told you about,” he concluded, and produced the valuable item from his pocket.

It was a curious jumble of signs and letters, and Ted could make nothing of it. There was something about it, however, that reminded him of the paper that had been found on Charlie the pilot the day he had rescued him. Was it possible that he and the two men were part of the group to which the strangers on the train had referred?

“This may prove to be mighty important,” Ted said, tucking the code in his pocket, “and I’m immensely obliged to you for getting it, Mr. Morton. I’ll send it to an expert in San Francisco and see what he makes of it. But look here, I was so intent on your story I forgot to ask you to have something to eat. You must be hungry.”

“I guess I am!” declared Morton.

Ted produced some sandwiches and a thermos bottle of hot coffee which he and Joe had left over from their provisions. Morton needed no invitation to eat.

“Now, let’s get out of here, pronto,” advised Ted, when the man had finished. “Those strangers may miss the code and start a search for it!” As they neared the spot where the *Morning Star II* stood, he said, “How about your flying to San Francisco with me, Mr. Morton? But I forgot,” he added with a grin, “you don’t travel by plane.”

“I haven’t, but I will,” smiled the inventor. “That railroad wreck has shaken my confidence in trains.”

Thus it was that Silas Morton had his first trip in a craft about which he knew everything, but whose advantages and delights he had never experienced. He grew more enthusiastic as they neared the West Coast.

“Splendid, splendid,” he said, as Ted made a perfect landing at Hapworth’s airfield. “I’ll never travel any other way again!”

Ted and Joe grinned. The former now took Morton to meet Hapworth, and presently left the two men deep in a discussion of compressed helium.

“I must run over to see Captain Nimbusser,” Ted explained as he went out the door.

He found the Naval Intelligence officer working out a code language which he and his friends would use in the pursuit patrol.

“I happened to be talking to Mr. Farmer,” the Captain explained when greetings were over, “and he suggested I get something ready for you.”

“Good!” replied Ted, “and it’s high time we start learning it. I have a surprise for you. I’ve brought a code for you to decipher,” he said, producing the paper and relating how it had been obtained.

Nimbusser was extremely interested, and promised to start work on the strange symbols at once.

“Have you any idea who the men are who had this code?” he asked.

“Not exactly,” responded the flyer. “From their description they aren’t Charlie or Sam Togoty, though I’m suspicious they may be buddies of theirs.”

“I believe you’re right,” said Nimbusser. “From the casual glance I had of the code message in the waterproof bag on Charlie, I believe the symbols are the same.”

Ted was excited by this information. “Maybe we’re on the trail of something big!” he exclaimed.

He left soon afterward, promising to return the next day with Joe and Jed for their first lesson in their own code.

“By that time I hope to have some word on this paper you’ve brought me,” said the Captain.

The following morning he had to admit he had made no headway. The symbols were clever and intricate.

“But I’ll solve it!” he declared.

Ted and his companions took up the study of their code in earnest. They were familiar, of course, with the one commonly used by airmen, but for the pursuit patrol they were to have a secret set of words.

Numbers were to be used to designate men and places. Thus Ted, as leader of the patrol squadron, was Number One; Joe at left rear would be Two; and Jed at right rear, Three. In the matter of place, Australia would be referred to as Seven; Java as Thirteen, Sumatra as Twenty-three, and so on for a host of countries in the Pacific and Indian Sea region.

Figures of more than one hundred were to be employed in place of whole sentences—orders and suggestions that would be used almost every day in actual flying. Thus, “I am running short of gas and must descend to refuel” might be indicated by the number 139. “Looks as though we’d better climb out of the storm ahead” would be number 218. “Going to descend at next airport we come to” would have the figure 419, and so on through the whole category of phrases involving action in the air.

“Whew, this is a brain teaser,” sighed Jed, when the first lesson was over.

It was a severe memory test. They had a lot of fun learning it, but that was incidental. Ted and his mates settled down to the work with a vim, reviewing the phrases again and again until they knew them perfectly.

“How’s Charlie’s code coming?” Ted asked Nimbusser a few days later.

“I believe I’ll be able to tell you something surprising tomorrow,” the officer answered.

He was still working on the code, but already he had gathered enough of the meaning of it to give Ted a solemn warning the following day. The two were standing side by side watching one of the *Patriots* at its one hundredth hour of steady performance in the air.

“The new amphibians had better be all right,” he said solemnly, as he looked into the sky, “for I believe from the code found in the woods that something sinister is going on. Unless I miss my guess, you’ll be leading your police pursuit patrol after a real enemy, Ted!”

CHAPTER IX

An Explosion

Ted was amazed. "What do you mean? Can you tell me a little more?"

"I'd rather not, until I've conferred with the F.B.I.," replied Captain Nimbusser. "But I can say this: one word which occurs frequently is 'platinum.' Have you any idea what it could mean?"

Ted's mind immediately flew to the recent thefts he knew about. In each case, platinum jewelry had been stolen. Could there possibly be any connection? And Charlie *had* been near the Country Club at the time of the robbery of the diamond and platinum necklace.

"Platinum is mighty scarce and extremely valuable," said Ted to Nimbusser.

"Right you are," agreed the Captain. "And the sooner we learn all the details of this code, the better. It's a clever, puzzling one, and I need a little help on it, so I'm going to Washington."

"I'll give you a ride," offered Ted. "Had a message asking me to come to my flying school, and I can just as well take you to the capital first."

"Thanks a lot. I'll accept your offer. When do we start?"

"I expect my folks soon," replied Ted. "Joe went to get them in my plane. Suppose we go tomorrow."

"All right," said Nimbusser. "And remember, Ted, take good care of yourself. I'm afraid you have some dangerous enemies. So watch your step."

"Thanks for the warning," smiled Ted. "I'll be careful, you can be sure, for I want to lead the pursuit patrol across the Pacific. That's a great honor, and I'd hate to have anything happen to keep me from doing it."

He gazed into the air, and Nimbusser divined his thoughts. "You're hoping the *Patriot* will come through this time in the hundred and fifty hour test, so you can get started, aren't you?"

"You've guessed right," replied Ted. "Well, so long. I must go over to see Hapworth, then meet my folks."

It was a pleasure to welcome Eben and Charity Browning to San Francisco. The elderly couple had recovered fully from their unpleasant

experience in the train wreck, and were ready to enjoy their stay in California.

“We mustn’t interfere with your work, though,” Ted’s mother insisted. “We can look around ourselves.”

Of course the flyer would not hear of this. Instead, he spent every moment of the day with them. He showed them the various places of interest in the beautiful city, and tried hard to make them comfortable and happy. He wanted this trip to be a high spot in their lives, and in this he succeeded.

“I’m glad Silas Morton is making out so well,” remarked Eben after Ted had told him how interested Hapworth was in the inventor’s plans. “Silas has had a great deal of hard luck in his life, and deserves a break.”

“I admire him a lot,” said Ted, “because the money his invention may bring doesn’t count with him at all. What he wants to do is serve his fellow men.”

“He has done that a good bit already,” reported Eben, “but he let his inventions get into the hands of people who cheated him. This time that won’t happen. There’s no finer man in the country than Mr. Hapworth.”

“He’ll do all he can for Mr. Morton,” added Ted.

The next morning he turned over the future entertainment of his parents to Joe and Jed, and left for Washington with Nimbusser. The Captain put Ted through an examination on the pursuit patrol’s code, and the flyer passed it without an error.

“Joe and Jed are almost letter perfect, too, or I should say number perfect,” smiled the officer, “so all that remains to be taken care of for your trip are three good Hapworth amphibians.”

“I can hardly wait to start,” said Ted, “especially now that you see a possibility of my chasing a real, and not an imaginary, enemy.”

The youthful flyer spent the night in Washington, then headed the *Morning Star II* northwest in the direction of the Ted Scott Flying School. Upon his arrival there, he was received with great enthusiasm.

“So glad to see you,” were the words on many lips, and warm handclasps followed from men in the offices and on the field.

The students knew Ted’s reputation as an aviator, and in their hearts set him up as a model to emulate. Admirers crowded around to speak to him. It

was some time before he could get away from them and find out how things had been going.

“Haven’t had any trouble with the students since that one fellow,” remarked Captain Husted, Ted’s able assistant, referring to an unpleasant and dangerous experience his employer had had with a young pilot a short time before.

“I’m certainly glad to hear that,” said Ted. “And now suppose we look around, and you tell me in detail what’s been happening. Everything looks shipshape.”

Husted smiled at the compliment. He went with Ted about the field, showing him a new building that had been put up because of the needs of the rapidly expanding school. He spoke also about the qualities of some of the new students.

“One of the brightest is a fellow named Bill Samson,” he said. “He’s as good as they come in some lines of aviation, but he doesn’t seem to be able to pilot a plane in the dark. Dislikes going up at night. I’ve tried to break him of it, but the feeling persists.”

“Suppose I take him in hand,” suggested Ted.

“That would be fine,” replied Husted. “Just what he needs—and it’ll give him a thrill, too.”

He sought out Samson and introduced him to Ted, who received the student with a cordiality that put him at ease at once.

“Captain Husted has been telling me some nice things about your flying,” said Ted. “Says, though, that you have some difficulty piloting at night. I know about that, for I had it when I first started out. I’m sure a little experience will soon fix up the trouble. Would you like to go up with me this evening?”

“With you?” gasped the student, overwhelmed by the honor of sharing the sky with Ted Scott. “You bet I would!”

That night Ted took Samson up in one of the dual-control planes.

“Usually you have some light from the stars or moon to help you,” he said. “You want to learn the names and locations of the different constellations; the Great Dipper, the Great Bear, and others. Then, too, it’s a good thing to know in what part of the sky the moon will rise on a particular night, and where it will set.

“However, as you know, you will find some nights so dark you can’t see a hand before your face,” he went on. “At such times you will have to depend on your compass to get direction and your altimeter to tell the height.”

Many questions came up in the course of the two hours Ted devoted to the lesson. He was an excellent teacher, and Bill Samson was an apt pupil. He caught on readily, doubly so because Ted’s friendly and non-patronizing manner put him at his ease. It was for him a thrilling experience, and he thanked his teacher enthusiastically when at last they came to the ground.

“That’s the most wonderful two hours I ever had in my life,” he cried. “And I hope some time I can do you a favor, Mr. Scott,” he added excitedly.

“Glad if I’ve helped you,” replied Ted, and with a smile left the boy.

The next day, while Ted was busy in his office at the flying school, he received a telephone call from a Major Carleton. The officer stated that he would like to see the flyer at nine o’clock that evening on official business.

“I have a special government matter to talk over with you, and I’m sorry I can’t make it any other time,” said the man.

“Oh, that’s all right,” responded Ted. “I’ll be here.”

The officer’s name was unfamiliar to the flyer, but apparently his message was important. Ted was early for his appointment. While he was waiting, he picked up a copy of the evening paper.

“Hello, what’s this?” he cried, noticing a startling headline.

There was an account of several recent thefts of jewelry in various parts of the country. Some were of the usual type, but in several of them Ted noted what had struck him upon other occasions—the fact that many pieces of jewelry taken were made of platinum.

“I wonder if by any chance—” he mused.

On an impulse, Ted called up the chief of police, a friend of long standing. After a few moments of general conversation, the flyer asked:

“Chief Wilson, have you noticed anything peculiar about the recent robberies reported by the papers?”

“Well, yes, now that you speak of it,” was the reply. “The thieves are getting away with a lot of platinum. It’s so valuable now they can get a good price for it.”

“Do you think the same group of thieves is committing all the robberies?” asked Ted.

“I shouldn’t doubt it,” replied the chief. “They’re very daring. None of the stuff has been traced yet, so it looks as if it’s being held for a high price, or smuggled out of the country, or being melted for some mysterious reason.”

“Let me know if you hear anything, will you?” asked Ted.

The chief promised he would and hung up.

Platinum!

That was the word that Nimbusser had told Ted occurred frequently in the code he was deciphering—the code Morton had taken from the men after the wreck. The code that they did not want Ted Scott to get his hands on!

The flyer glanced at the office clock. The Major was late. If he didn’t come within the next half-hour——

Not many miles away, a plane was coming directly toward the flying school. No other craft was near by except the one which young Bill Samson was piloting at the moment. The student had been so thrilled by the lesson Ted had given him, and felt so confident, that he had asked permission to go up, although this was not a night on which students were scheduled to fly.

The evening was dark, but that was all the better from Bill’s standpoint. He wanted to demonstrate that he could do things the hard way. And Ted Scott had banished any fear the youth had had. He grew more confident and satisfied every minute, as he realized that he was really conquering his worst enemy—the dark.

At last he was ready to come down. He had just cut his motors, when suddenly he heard the drone of another plane. Where was it? Could he keep out of its way?

The only things visible below were lights on the landing field and in Ted Scott’s office, where he knew the aviator was waiting to keep an appointment.

“Ah, there’s the moon,” thought Bill in relief. “Now I can see that plane.”

At the same instant he saw a sight that numbed his senses. The pilot of the other craft dropped something which hurtled to the earth directly toward

the lighted building. A few moments later there was a deafening explosion below, and Bill Samson in anguish lost control of his plane.

“Ted Scott!” he cried out. “They’ve killed you!”

CHAPTER X

A Disguised Pilot

Instantly the strange plane shot away from the scene of the explosion. Bill Samson had recovered at once from his momentary shock, turned on his motors, and zoomed. He could do nothing below, but he could find out who the devil was who deliberately had harmed his beloved hero!

By this time he was racing after the culprit. He could not hope to catch him, for the enemy's ship had been built for speed.

"But I'll find out who he is!" vowed the young flyer, straining his eyes to get a glimpse of some identifying mark.

He went higher, glad that the moon still shone. Just before the enemy disappeared into a cloud, Bill caught a glimpse of a light X in a black circle on the wings of the plane ahead.

"I hope my clue will help the police nab that villain," he thought as he flew back to the landing field.

As he came down, fear tugged at his heart. Had Ted Scott been killed?

Below there was a scene of wild confusion. The explosion had brought many people rushing to the spot. The bomb had made a gaping hole in one end of the building where Ted's office was. Fortunately the flyer had been waiting for his caller in the other end.

Captain Husted, his assistant, bursting into the room, found his employer stretched out on the floor. He bent over Ted, felt his pulse, and looked up hopefully.

"He's still alive," he said in relief to those with him. "Help me, someone, to put him on the couch."

A dozen pair of hands responded at once, and under their kindly first-aid treatment, Ted gradually came back to consciousness.

"How do you feel?" asked Husted, as the flyer opened his eyes.

"I'll be all right," returned Ted with a feeble smile. "What happened, anyway? Did the roof fall in on me?"

"Just about. But don't talk now," commanded the Captain. "Take it easy for a while."

In the meantime Bill Samson had landed and now arrived at the scene.

“Is—is Mr. Scott—is he dead?” he asked the first person he came to.

“No, thank goodness,” the man replied.

Samson wormed his way inside the building and found Captain Husted. To him he reported what he knew about the plane from which the bomb had been released. A little later, when Ted felt like talking, Bill Samson was invited into the office.

“The plane had a strange mark on it,” he said, when asked by Husted to repeat his information. “A light X in a black circle.”

“Could Charlie the pilot have done it?” thought Ted. “But why?”

One thing was sure. The falling of the bomb at this particular point was not mere guesswork. It had been meant to harm Ted Scott—and had almost succeeded. Whoever had dropped that missile of death knew precisely where the famous aviator was to be at that moment!

But how, Ted asked himself, still somewhat confused, could a stranger know that? He had not told anyone except Husted and young Samson of the engagement he had with Major Carleton. Only the Major, besides the three of them, knew of it.

Ah, that was it! Major Carleton! Who was Major Carleton? No doubt some enemy who had used that name to make the appointment, so that he would know where Ted would be at a given time.

This was becoming grimly serious. The flyer would have to watch his step. Nimbusser’s warning came back to him: “I’m afraid you have enemies!”

“Phone call for you, Mr. Scott,” said Captain Husted suddenly. “Do you feel like talking? It’s a Mr. Farmer who wants to speak to you.”

Ted took the instrument. Apparently the explosion at the other end of the building had not damaged the telephone system.

“Ted Scott speaking,” he said. After a pause he added, “I’m glad you traced me. We’ve had some trouble here.” He told the secret agent what had happened. “No, I’m all right. Don’t worry,” he concluded.

“I came near being too late with the warning I called up to give you,” said Mr. Farmer. “I can’t tell you much over the phone, but the code Nimbusser has unraveled reveals that some sinister plans have been formed. Unfortunately you’re marked for a victim.”

“Guess they’ve started working on me already,” said Ted ruefully.

“I want you to promise me something,” came the agent’s voice over the wire. “You can’t take too many precautions, either for your own safety, or for your future work. We don’t want anything to happen to you to keep you from carrying out the big plan.”

“Nothing will happen—” began Ted, but the man in Washington interrupted him.

“Now listen, Ted Scott. We insist that you wear a disguise from this moment on!”

“Is it as bad as that?” gasped the flyer.

“Those are orders. Furthermore, you are to move to another address from the hotel where you’ve been staying,” added Mr. Farmer.

Ted promised to follow the instructions, though he was by no means certain as to how he was going to disguise himself. Then, too, the thought of sailing under false colors, even for so good a cause, annoyed him. It was going to be very inconvenient in San Francisco, and he would not be able to take Eben and Charity Browning around as he had planned.

“Don’t give your enemies another chance. They might get you next time,” was Farmer’s final warning.

After consulting with Husted, Ted decided to leave the plant that night in one of the flying school’s planes, for this would be less conspicuous than the *Morning Star II*. Moreover, he would have one of the men pilot him to California and bring back the ship.

“I believe I’ll choose Bill Samson,” he thought. Then he realized he could let no one except Husted know of his disguise. “Husted, I guess you’re elected to ferry me to San Francisco,” he said.

Ted slept while his assistant with difficulty sought a wig and a mustache. At the public airport in San Francisco where they came down the next morning, Ted left Husted, boarded a bus, and went directly to the Hapworth factory.

Thus it was that, a little after ten o’clock, an airman with a pronounced limp, a heavy mustache, and short, cropped red hair, came to the gate of the fenced-in plant and applied for admittance. The place was heavily guarded, and the stranger was promptly stopped by a man in uniform who demanded to know the caller’s business.

“I want to see Mr. Hapworth.”

“Have you an appointment?”

“Not exactly,” the red-haired flyer replied.

“What do you want to see him about? Mr. Hapworth confers with visitors only by appointment,” the guard informed him.

At that moment the factory owner himself appeared, and the applicant hobbled over to him.

“If you please, sir,” he said, “I wonder if you could give me a job? I’m a good flyer and mechanic, but just at present I’m a bit down on my luck. I’d like a chance to show you what I can do, sir, if you would be so good as to try me.”

“We have all the men we need at present. We’re not hiring any more now,” said Hapworth.

He turned away, but the red-haired fellow limped after him persistently.

“If you please, sir, I really need the work. Won’t you give me a chance?” he begged.

“Well, you might apply at the superintendent’s office,” said Hapworth. “If he can use you, he’ll tell you soon enough. That’s his office over there,” and he pointed to a door in one of the buildings.

“I know,” said the man humbly. “But if you could just put in a good word for me yourself, sir, it would make me sure of the job.”

Walter Hapworth paused to look at the red-haired man more intently than he had before. He was growing impatient, though he tried to hide the fact.

“But, my good man, how can I put in a word for you when I don’t know a thing about you? I never saw you before in my life.”

“Are you sure of that, sir?” asked the flyer with a curious leer. “Have you looked *real* closely at me?”

“As closely as I care to,” retorted Hapworth, reaching the end of his patience. “I don’t know what your game is, my man, but get out before _____”

“Now, you wouldn’t do that, Walter, would you?” asked the red-haired man in the voice of Ted Scott.

Hapworth wheeled about, stared, and then laughed. “Why—why—” he stammered. “Ted Scott!”

“Sh, don’t let anybody know!” warned Ted.

“Come to my office and tell me what’s going on,” whispered Hapworth.

Ted limped along; then behind closed doors he told his story.

“Fooled you good and proper that time, didn’t I?” he chuckled.

“I should say you did, you old rascal,” replied Hapworth. “But why are you going about in a disguise?”

“Government orders,” said Ted. “The F.B.I. think things are getting a little hot for me, and decided I should lose my identity for a while.”

He went on to describe the bombing incident at the flying school and Farmer’s message about the deciphered code. Hapworth’s face became grave as he listened.

“Please don’t take any chances, Ted,” he said affectionately.

“Suppose you hire me as a new airplane pilot, and in my assumed character I can work around the plant without anyone bothering me.”

“I’ll do that on the spot,” grinned Hapworth. “From this time on you’re Tom Smith, and you take orders only from me.”

“All messages from Mr. Farmer for me will come to you,” said the flyer. “I’m going to stay with friends at a private house not far from the factory. I can trust them to keep my secret. Will you have Joe bring my things here?”

Hapworth arranged for Joe, Jed, Charity and Eben to come to the plant to see Ted. He tried his disguise on them, and they all proved easy victims except Charity. She knew those eyes. She was not pleased, either, to see her handsome pilot son in such a parody of himself.

“You look just awful,” she declared frankly.

“Never mind, Mother,” returned Ted. “It’ll be for only a short time. It’s better to be a live Tom Smith than a dead Ted Scott.”

This was one statement with which Charity Browning heartily agreed, so she made no further protest. After the group had left, Ted asked Hapworth how Morton’s invention was coming along.

“Fine, fine,” he replied enthusiastically. “Tomorrow we attach it to one of the *Patriots*.”

Hapworth went on to explain how many details had been involved. The bags that would hold the helium had to be made of strong, nonporous material, yet at the same time they had to be so light that the wings would not be too heavily burdened. The valves which would release the gas had to be so constructed as to open at the slightest touch.

“You are the person, Ted, to put the invention to the test,” said Hapworth with a smile.

The young flyer was intensely eager for the trial to prove successful. He well knew the perils the pursuit patrol might encounter, and welcomed anything that promised to lessen them.

“I’ll go up whenever you say,” Ted agreed.

Two days later he took off from the water, and flew several miles out over the Pacific. Up and up he went, until he reached an altitude of fifteen thousand feet. Then he stalled his motor and the plane began to drop.

Ted opened the valves that would release the helium into the bags attached to the wings. Now was the crucial moment.

Would the new invention work?

Immediately the speed of the downward movement was lessened. As the bags filled to capacity, the plane stopped almost completely, and floated idly between sea and sky.

“It’s a success!” thought Ted, then slowly sent the gas back into the tank.

Delighted, he repeated the test again and again, always with the same good result. The only change he would suggest to Morton and Hapworth would be to have the gas compress into the tanks at a faster rate. It now took too long.

“I’m sure that can be done easily,” he decided.

Busy with his experiment, Ted had paid little attention to the weather. It had been clear when he had taken off, but now a storm was about to burst upon him unawares.

He had just shut off his motors for the twentieth time, and let the helium into the bags, when a terrific hailstorm engulfed the *Patriot*. Hail as large as marbles and as sharp as glass descended on the plane.

Before Ted could deflate the bags, they were ripped open by the force of the stones. Through the holes the helium began to escape.

Quickly Ted used his starter on the motors, intending to zoom to safety. Nothing happened. Again and again he tried, while there still was some buoyancy in the bags. Not a sound came from the engines.

Now all the helium had disappeared. The *Patriot*, out of control, dived toward the waves below!

CHAPTER XI

Midnight Marauders

Ted tried desperately to start the motors. It seemed an age before he could do so. When they did leap into action, the flyer was so close to the water that it required all his skill to avoid disaster. In relief he at last climbed into the sky.

“That was a close call for you, Tom Smith,” he said shakily.

Ted decided not to tell anyone of his experience, but merely report on the invention itself. As he was about to land, he saw Hapworth and Morton on the dock. The flyer raised two fingers, forming the letter V to signify victory on the experiment.

“It worked!” cried Silas Morton, tremulous with pride.

Hapworth was equally pleased as Ted described in glowing terms the success of his tryout.

“Just what the doctor ordered,” he laughed, then sobered. “The one thing we didn’t take into account was hailstones, and some of them—the biggest and sharpest I’ve ever seen—punctured holes in the bags. I’d suggest giving them a coat of paint of viscose with that new duralium mixed in it.”

“We’ll do that at once,” promised Hapworth. “Any other suggestions?”

“If it could be possible for the pilot to compress the helium back into the tank a little faster, it would speed up things when he wanted to get started again on his journey.”

Morton said he would begin work on this feature at once.

“I have a message for you, Ted,” said Mr. Hapworth. “It’s from Mr. Farmer. He wants you boys to start for Washington tomorrow to be sworn in—that is, if our hundred and fifty hour test of the *Patriot* is a success. We’ll know that early in the morning.”

Ted’s eyes glowed. He was on the eve of the biggest adventure of his life!

“If the test is a success, you are to fly to Washington in one of the new *Patriots* and show it to certain officials there,” added Hapworth.

“Am I to go in this fearful make-up?” asked the flyer with a grin.

“I believe you’re still to be in disguise,” replied his friend, “but you might try a more becoming one!”

Before leaving the factory grounds, Ted met Joe. He had heard that one of the local theaters was showing a travelogue on Java. Thinking it would be a good idea to get some local color of the area in which part of the boys’ trip would take them, he suggested that the three of them attend.

“We’ll meet in front of the theater at nine o’clock this evening,” agreed Ted.

At the appointed hour the chums entered the moving-picture house together. Joe and Jed suppressed grins, for they could not grow accustomed to seeing their famous friend in disguise.

The scenes from Java were excellent, giving the boys a splendid idea of life on that island, and the accompanying comedy was highly entertaining. It was nearly midnight when they left the theater, and made their way along a side street in the business area, now practically deserted.

A few minutes later Ted had an uneasy feeling that they were being followed. He glanced behind him several times, but the night was dark and he could see nothing. Still his hunch persisted.

“Don’t look now,” he said to his companions, “but I think someone is following us. Quick! Let’s duck in here.”

They had reached an alley which ran between two buildings. The three darted into it and concealed themselves behind some barrels near at hand.

“Listen!” whispered Ted. “Someone is coming!”

Almost immediately the boys heard the sound of stealthy footsteps, and in a moment the figure of a man appeared. He was wearing a hat pulled far down over his forehead.

“Up to no good,” whispered Ted when it was safe to speak, “but I guess he wasn’t after us. Let’s see where he’s going.”

The chums moved with exceeding care until the dim shadow they were stalking halted at the back of what seemed to be a jewelry store. Several minutes passed, then a door was opened noiselessly and another man, also with a hat pulled low, slipped out into the night. He held a bag under one arm, and looked about him anxiously.

A subdued “hist” revealed the locality of his pal, and he hastened toward him. There was a hurried interchange of conversation in thieves’ slang, of

which Ted and his friends could catch only such words as “swag,” “cops,” and “getaway.” The boys were convinced that they had chanced upon a shady business.

“Shall we rush ’em?” whispered Jed.

“Not yet,” replied Ted, his voice barely audible.

His first impulse was to follow the men, and, when they should come to a brightly lighted thoroughfare, grab them and turn them over to an officer. But that plan had to be changed quickly.

Instead of going on ahead, the men turned and came straight toward the place where the chums were hiding! Did they know the boys were there after all?

Swift action was necessary, and Ted took it. He waited until the men were within three feet of them.

“Now, fellows!” he ordered.

The three flyers came down on the suspects like an avalanche. There was a yelp of surprise and terror from them, then a confused melee of whirling fists, as the two forces closed in combat.

The men put up a desperate fight, but they were no match for the husky airmen. One of them tried to draw a weapon, but Joe knocked it from his hand.

In a few minutes the struggle was over. The suspects, battered and spent, were at the mercy of their captors.

“Tie them up with your belts, boys,” panted Ted to his mates.

Joe and Jed obeyed, fastening the men’s arms tightly behind their backs. But not before one of them had thrust a paper into his mouth and attempted to swallow it.

Ted, however, was too quick for the fellow. He choked him, dislodged the wad, and put it into his pocket.

“That’ll hold ’em,” Jed announced to his companions, as he looked over their work.

The noise of the struggle had brought two policemen hurrying to the scene.

“Here, here, what’s up, you guys?” demanded one of them as he turned his flashlight on the group.

“Just nabbed a couple of men. We think they’ve robbed this jewelry store, Officer,” said Ted. “Suppose you frisk them and also see what’s in this bag.”

Surprised at finding the fracas was not a midnight brawl by disorderly persons, the policemen complied. They found that the boys’ suspicions were correct. Jewels, watches, and other valuables were located in various pockets of the rascals’ clothes and also in the bag.

“Caught with the goods, all right,” declared one of the officers. “Come along,” he commanded his prisoners. “And as for you fellows,” he turned to Ted and his companions, “you certainly will get the thanks of the police department for nabbing these men.”

Ted spoke up quickly. “We don’t want any thanks, and we’re mighty glad to have been of service.”

He nudged his chums, and the three moved off quickly before the policemen might insist upon getting their names.

“My goodness, Ted,” said Joe suddenly as the boys reached the lighted street, “you’ve lost your wig and mustache!”

“Hmph, that’s bad. Now I’ll be recognized, and the F.B.I. don’t want that,” replied “Tom Smith.”

Jed grinned. “Oh, I don’t know that you’ll be recognized. After that fight you don’t exactly look natural!”

His remark had a bit of truth in it, and Ted was glad to get to the home where he was staying, jump into a hot bath, and nurse a swelling cheek.

“I must see what’s on that wad of paper one of those thieves was trying to swallow,” he thought as he was about to turn off his bed light. “It must be important, or why would he try to get rid of it? Nobody likes paper as a regular diet!”

Ted studied the mysterious message. He saw at once that it was in code. What was more, the symbols were familiar to him.

“Those thieves are part of the same group as the ones in the train wreck!” he thought excitedly. “And pals of Charlie. I must have Nimbusser see this paper!”

Over the telephone the next morning he arranged for Hapworth to send a new disguise, and also left word for Captain Nimbusser, who was expected

back in San Francisco any minute, to meet him at the factory owner's office. At eleven o'clock Ted met Hapworth at the gate of the factory.

The flyer wore a dark brown business suit, a brown wig and mustache, and looked quite unlike Ted Scott, the aviator. The two friends walked to the owner's private office where Nimbusser already was waiting.

"Oh, how do you do, Mr. Brown?" he grinned at Ted. "Did you bring the paper, sir?"

The flyer laughed in return, then took from his pocket the code message which he had secured the night before and handed it to the expert. The latter studied it a few minutes before looking up.

"A few words I can't figure out," he said. "But in the main, it says, 'Z flies X to Cache Ten on Thursday. Big shipment starts in week. V no longer in good standing. Will be ——,' looks like 'liquidated.'"

"Liquidated?" asked Ted. "That's a funny one."

"The whole thing, sounds funny to me," remarked Hapworth. "No sense, even when decoded."

"The reason for that," explained Nimbusser, "is that it's a code within a code. Apparently the thieves use special letters and numbers to signify names and places, as well as secret symbols for reading and writing messages."

"Must be clever people back of it all," said Hapworth.

"You're right," declared the Captain. "It's thought their work is very extensive and not confined to this country alone."

Ted had not spoken. He was wondering about this new message which had been uncovered. Where was Cache Ten? Who was the unfortunate V that was to be liquidated?

"We are dealing with some very cunning crooks," said the officer. "It would be a great mistake to underrate them. You notice their caution even in the paper on which they write the code. It has no identification mark and probably no fingerprints except yours. I'll bet the thief you took this from wore gloves."

"For a fact, he did," exclaimed Ted. "By the way, I must find out who those men are."

He telephoned to the Chief of Police and learned that the two prisoners were clever thieves with long records. Ted had asked Silas Morton to go

look at them. The inventor had reported they were not the two he had followed from the train wreck.

“I believe the fellows you captured last night are just small-time thieves, but working under orders from a group of big-time crooks,” said Nimbusser. “The F.B.I. is working on an important clue now. I believe they’ll uncover something very soon.”

In a few minutes Joe and Jed arrived, and the whole group went to the flying field to see one of the *Patriots* putting in its last half-hour of the required one hundred and fifty of continuous performance to meet military standards.

Hapworth, tense, had his watch in his hand. “It’s nearly time!” he exclaimed in a half whisper.

Then no one spoke until the time was up. Ted was the first to wring Hapworth’s hand, but he was too choked up to say anything for a few moments.

Jed broke the silence. “Congratulations, Mr. Hapworth,” he said fervently. “I hope my flying of your new amphibian will be worthy of such a wonderful plane.”

The factory owner smiled in pleasure and thanked his admirers. Then, to cover his embarrassment, he said:

“Well, boys, there’s nothing standing in the way of your trip now. Hop off to Washington to be sworn in, and when you get back, I’ll have a little private farewell dinner for you.”

Ted piloted one of the other *Patriots* to the capital, and there showed it to representatives of the government who knew about the secret mission on which it would be taken. They gave it their heartiest approval, saying they could not see how anyone in another nation could find the least fault with this model built for international air police work.

After the test, Ted and his chums went to Mr. Farmer’s office where several high-ranking F.B.I. men were awaiting the boys. Ted insisted upon removing his disguise before being sworn in.

“I’m going to serve Uncle Sam as Ted Scott, in my right mind, and with my own looks,” he declared, and the officials agreed to wait for him to take off his disguise.

Mr. Farmer began the ceremonies by disclosing some of the troubles our own and other governments already were facing in various parts of the

world. They would grow worse in the future, wise men feared.

“For this reason it seems essential for a strong international air police force to be developed,” he said. “The old method of trailing thieves, spies, and other enemies on land will not be enough. To do it by plane, across vast stretches of water, will become a necessity.

“Ted Scott, Joe Scarlet, and Jed Nothby, by the authority vested in me, I do hereby appoint you as the first international air policemen from the United States.”

He shook hands with them, while the heart of each beat excitedly. In turn, the other men in the room came to congratulate them.

“You are rendering your country the highest possible service and will, I know, perform your duties ably,” said one of them.

“Your pursuit patrol will pave the way for a finer world for men to live in,” added another. “When dishonest men learn there can be no escape for them through the air, though the space be vast, then a great work will have been accomplished.”

For two hours the boys listened to instructions for carrying out their mission. Ted was to lead the patrol and decide all matters in question. He was to confer with foreign officials as they stopped at various places.

“Should it become necessary for you to chase and arrest any enemy, you have the power to do so,” Mr. Farmer told them in closing. “Take care of yourselves, and God speed your trip!”

The ceremony had given the boys a greater conception of what their country meant to them, and what a glorious thing it was to serve her, than they had ever had. The oath they had taken with their lips had been registered in their hearts. As they came out of the great building, they saw Old Glory flying in the breeze. Instinctively they saluted it.

“A flag worth living for,” murmured Joe.

“Worth fighting for,” added Jed.

“Worth dying for,” declared Ted solemnly.

CHAPTER XII

The Fateful Thursday

As the boys started back to San Francisco, they were quiet for some time, but presently the exuberance of youth asserted itself. In a gay mood, they began to discuss what name each boy should give his individual plane.

“We might call them *Patriots One, Two and Three*,” suggested Ted.

“I’d like something more intimate,” grinned Jed.

The affection that the pilot would develop for his plane seemed to demand that it be given a nickname rather than an impersonal number.

“What are you going to call yours, Jed?” asked Ted.

“One of the stars, I’ll bet a dollar,” interposed Joe, teasing Jed about his pastime of star gazing. “How about Venus? She was the beauty for whom a star was named.”

“Had too many fellows hanging around her, from what I hear,” replied Jed gravely, “and I don’t want to be bothered thinking about girls while I’m up in the air. No, I believe I’ll call my *Patriot Mars*. That fellow was a husky fighter, and, if I should get into a scrap, I’d like to feel he is close to me.”

“Mars it is then,” laughed Ted. “How about you, Joe?”

“I believe I’ll call mine *Icarus*,” replied the flyer. “You know, he was the first aviator.”

“*Icarus*?” said Jed. “I thought the first——”

“Oh, he was way back in Greek mythology,” laughed Ted. “You don’t want to name your plane for him, Joe. Don’t you remember he put on wax wings, then flew too close to the sun, and they melted?”

“That’s so,” laughed Scarlet. “I don’t want that to happen to me. Let’s see, there’s *Diana*. She was a huntress. I’m going to be a hunter on this pursuit patrol. Yes, I’ll take *Diana*.”

“I might have known you’d pick a girl,” sniffed Jed. “What’s yours, Ted?”

“*Aeolus*.”

“Never heard of him,” said Jed. “Who was he?”

“A sort of god, according to the old Greeks. He was ruler of the winds,” explained Ted. “Lived on an island named for him. There he kept the winds in bags and sent them out only under orders.”

“Kind of a handy fellow to have around,” laughed Joe.

The boys reached San Francisco after a swift and uneventful flight, and arranged to have a tryout of the three *Patriots* in formation the following day. Ted, still in disguise, had his parents meet him at a secluded country restaurant that evening. The three knew this would be the last opportunity for a get-together for some time.

“I’ll bring you a rare gift from the South Pacific,” Ted told his mother, when he noted her becoming a little tearful. “What would you like—a koala Teddy bear, or a kookaburra bird?”

She had to smile, and left him, happy again. By the time Ted reached Hapworth’s plant the next morning, he found *Mars*, *Diana* and *Aeolus* warming up. Joe and Jed already were seated in their flying suits, eager to start off.

“We’ll go over both land and water,” said their leader, “and we’ll speak only in our own new code language. S 4 and 117?”

Hapworth, standing near by, laughed. “I suppose that means ‘Meet you in Australia.’ ”

“Oh, no,” grinned Ted. “Sorry, Walter, but I can’t tell you what it signifies; at least, not until we get back from our long trip.”

For several hours the three chums worked together, trying out various stunts. Each was delighted with the performance of his new amphibian. They took off and made landings on earth and on water. They came down and went up separately and together. They remained close to one another for some time, then finally separated, flying many miles apart.

“We haven’t seen anyone in the air,” thought Ted as he was about to give the signal for his chums to return to their base. “Perhaps it’s just as well, then no one will want to know who we are, or what we’re doing.”

The thought hardly had been formulated when he caught sight of a plane in the distance. Knowing it could not be that of Joe or Jed, he grabbed up his binoculars. The craft appeared to be an amphibian.

“There’s an orange-colored X in a black circle on its wings!” he discovered excitedly.

The plane itself resembled the one he had seen out on the Pacific a few days before—the one which had drawn up the net basket from the fishing boat. And its identifying mark was the same as that of the sinister group which had tried to kill him!

“I wonder if that fellow ahead could be Charlie!” he thought grimly.

The strange plane kept on its course, which resolved itself into a semi-circular one, as though the pilot were trying to find something in a given space.

“What is its purpose?” Ted asked himself. “He isn’t trying to shake me off, that’s sure.”

Then suddenly he recalled something. Instantly he picked up his telephone.

“Number One calling Two and Three; Number One calling Two and Three,” he said.

“Two listening!”

“Three listening!”

Joe and Jed had heard him!

“It’s T 9,” said Ted.

“Right,” replied Joe.

“611 S T 49 double,” spoke Ted into his telephone.

“Correct,” responded Jed, his pulse beginning to beat faster.

He and Joe, at this moment separated from Ted by many miles, put on all possible speed, and in a twinkling were in formation to left and right of him. His summons had been urgent.

Today was Thursday. The latest message in code wrested from the thieves had said Thursday was the day somebody was to fly to Cache Ten. Ted suspected that the plane he had just seen with the telltale insignia might be the very one indicated.

“We’ll follow!” Ted ordered the pursuit patrol.

To his dismay the suspected plane had vanished suddenly. The pilot probably had taken advantage of an intervening cloud to make a quick

descent toward the landing place for which he had been looking.

Ted carefully scanned the earth below. It was a territory of ranches with widely scattered buildings. There were cattle here and there, but no signs of human beings.

The flyer was about to give up the search in disgust when his sharp eyes caught sight of something unusual. Upon looking more closely, he detected what looked like a huge mound of hay.

As he gazed at it, a stiff gust of wind carried away some of the hay, and Ted thought he saw a tractor engine protruding from beneath it. Then, with a start, he distinctly saw the outline of an airplane's wings!

This, then, was the solution of the plane's sudden disappearance! It had taxied under a small camouflaged hangar! Such a procedure was so strange that Ted was sure something mysterious was back of the move.

"That must be the house the pilot went to," he thought, as he noticed a large, old-fashioned structure. "Funny place to build it."

The rancher's home was located on a plot of ground completely surrounded by water. Marking on his map the exact location of the place, Ted hastened to get away from it before he might be seen. When he relayed this message to his chums, Joe objected.

"Why don't we go down and clean 'em out?" he suggested belligerently, speaking in code.

"We can't take any chances with these *Patriots*. They're too valuable," objected Ted. "I see by my map that there's an army field up the coast a little way. We'll make a landing there, where the planes will be guarded. I'll get in touch with the local police, persuade some of them to go with us to the ranch as soon as it gets dark, and perhaps bag Charlie and all his friends!"

The good sense of Ted's reasoning was apparent, and the other pilots agreed. Upon their arrival at the army field, Ted showed his credentials to the major in charge, and gave what explanation he thought necessary. Then he got in touch with the sheriff and secured a ready assent to his scheme.

The boys still had some time to wait until darkness should set in, and accepted the major's invitation to take dinner with him. Then they piled into automobiles with several deputies, and started out. Presently they saw lights in the ranch house a little distance ahead.

"It didn't take as long to get here as I thought it would," said Ted as they hid the cars.

The group started out stealthily on foot. Dusk was just settling when they found themselves near the house. The island on which it stood seemed to be an artificial one, made by dividing a shallow river into two streams.

The water looked deep, and this fact was borne out by the presence of a rowboat tied near the house. Ted was convinced that the reason anyone had gone to the trouble of fixing the place this way was because something of great value was hidden within it.

Surely this was Cache Ten!

The boys and the sheriff held a conference to determine the best way to storm the place. They had just decided to separate, when they heard the drone of an approaching plane.

“Down, fellows!” Ted called, and set the example by dropping to the ground behind a giant redwood tree.

CHAPTER XIII

Prisoners

A few moments elapsed. Then they saw the plane. It descended upon the field near the camouflaged hangar. Scarcely had it settled when a man emerged from the house, climbed into the rowboat, and came across the water to take the pilot aboard. In a few minutes the two reached the building and vanished inside.

“Ever see that flyer before?” whispered Joe.

“No,” replied Ted. “I want to get a look at his plane. While we’re waiting for darkness, let’s crawl over to it and take a peek.”

Cautiously the two boys made their way toward it. They were not surprised to find an orange X in a black circle on the top of each blue wing. The fact confirmed Ted’s suspicion that they had found the hiding place of the suspected group.

“Wish I could disable the plane,” he whispered, “but we’d certainly be seen.”

An hour remained before full darkness would set in, and Ted and his chums grew more impatient with every moment that passed. The hay-covered hangar was too much in the open for them to inspect.

The arrival of the second plane brought up a new question in Ted’s mind. For what purpose were the two aircraft there? Perhaps to take away the other members of the group who were in the house. At any moment the rascals might come out and make off.

Ted presented the matter to the sheriff, suggesting that they storm the place at once, but the officer preferred to wait until it was fully dark.

Ted reflected for a moment. “All right, Sheriff,” he said. “I don’t want to urge any man to go against his better judgment. Suppose we leave it this way: my mates and I will take a chance right now and swim over to the island. We’ll untie that rowboat and I’ll bring it to this side. Then, when it’s dark, you come over in it with your men. How about it?”

“You’re taking a big risk, sir,” said the officer doubtfully.

“I know it,” replied Ted, “but there are times in my business when I have to take risks. All right, then. We’re off.”

Joe and Jed agreed enthusiastically with Ted's idea. In a moment they had stripped off their pilots' garb, and stood only in their underwear. All of them could swim like fish, and they made their way silently to the other side, half the time under water.

They reached the rowboat, unfastened it, and Ted towed it over to the waiting group. Then he swam back, and the three crept onto shore.

They had taken the precaution to land on the far side of the farmhouse, which stood a little distance from the bank. Stretched out at full length, they waited to see if anyone had watched their coming.

Apparently no one had. Yet, at the very moment they became assured of this, a man appeared and slowly sauntered about. Presently he stopped within ten feet of the boys, yawned, and struck a match for his pipe. He surveyed the sky, wet his finger, held it up to determine the way the wind was blowing, then rounded the corner of the house in the direction from which he had come.

"Close call for us," whispered Ted in relief.

"They don't come any closer," agreed Joe.

"Let's go," urged Jed.

Moving with exceeding caution, the boys reached the rear of the house. An open door revealed a flight of steps leading to the cellar.

"This is luck," thought Ted, motioning to his friends to follow him.

They groped their way down, feeling the wall inch by inch, lest they knock against something that would betray their presence. It was very dark, and the musty odor of the place was almost overpowering. At last they reached the lower level. In a far corner burned a tiny light over a door.

The boys could hear voices in the room overhead, and strained their ears to listen. What they did hear was just a confused mumble that gave them no indication of what was being discussed. That it was an argument was evident from the angry tones of the voices.

"Our friends seem to be excited about something," Ted whispered.

"I'd give a good deal to know what that something is," replied Joe.

"Wonder if the door over there is locked," observed Ted, tiptoeing toward it.

As he did so, Joe noticed an odd symbol painted on the woodwork. Suddenly it flashed upon him what it meant. During his years in the province of Tibet, he had learned the language of that country and had become familiar with Oriental writing.

That mark meant danger! Danger of the deadliest kind!

Ted in the meantime had found the handle of the door. "Why, it isn't locked," he was beginning to say, when Joe cried out:

"Down, boys, down!" at the same time throwing himself flat on the cellar floor, and dragging Ted and Jed with him.

Ted's hand was jerked from the handle, but already the latch had been released, and the door now swung open. Instantly a machine gun, automatically set off, sent a rain of bullets over the spot where the boys had been standing.

There was a shout of surprise from the room above. A dozen men came pounding down the stairway. In a trice, Ted and his chums found themselves facing a battery of evil eyes and revolvers.

"We surrender," said Ted simply.

He knew the fortunes of war were against them. Any resistance would mean instant death.

The boys were hustled roughly into the room above. Ted's eyes swept over the faces of his captors. He did not recognize one of them.

The flyer decided that their only chance of escape was to play for time—time for the sheriff and his deputies to come to the rescue. They must have heard the machine gun and the excitement that followed.

At that moment two men, who had not been with the others, came from an adjoining room. Ted's heart beat faster.

Togoty and Charlie! The recognition was mutual.

"You're the guy I saw on Waikiki Beach," snarled Togoty.

"And the fellow that chased me over the Rockies," added Charlie. "Boot's on the other foot now, eh?" he added with a grin.

"Well, he won't do any more chasing," cried Togoty. "You've come to the end of the road, Ted Scott. What were you doing in the cellar here? Speak up quick now, or I'll find ways to make you. And they won't be nice ways, either."

“Why, I suppose it was curiosity as much as anything,” said Ted slowly. “We were just cruising about and happened to land near by. It’s been a hot day, the water was tempting, and we dipped in for a swim. Got over on this side, saw that this looked like an abandoned farmhouse, and strolled up to take a look at it. No law against that, is there?”

Togoty sneered.

“That’s a likely story,” he said. “You fellows are agents of the United States Government. You came snooping around here to find evidence.”

“Evidence of what?” asked Ted innocently. “You haven’t been conspiring against the government, have you?”

“Never you mind what we’ve been doing,” snarled Togoty. “In just a few minutes I’m going to make you talk. But I’ve got a little matter to attend to first. Come along, Charlie.”

The two went into an adjoining room. Through the open door Ted saw a grim, hard-looking man seated at a desk.

“Was this the mysterious X who was to have been flown to Cache Ten on Thursday?” thought the flyer.

His air of authority indicated he might be in command of the outfit. He had just finished sealing some letters, and these he handed to Charlie and Togoty, together with a suitcase. He must have urged haste upon the two, for they thrust themselves into flying coats and helmets.

“Sorry I can’t wait to finish you innocent swimmers off in person,” sneered Togoty, coming back to the boys for a moment, “but Hoagland here”—he indicated a hardened ruffian—“will attend to that. Wait till you hear the plane start off, Hoagland, and then do the trick.”

“Don’t you worry, boss,” replied the fellow with an evil grin. “Nobody’ll ever find ’em where I’m goin’ t’ put ’em.”

A few tense moments passed. Ted and his chums looked at one another.

“I guess it’s our finish,” whispered Joe.

“Good-bye, fellows,” said Jed. “I wonder which planet I——”

“Nonsense,” replied Ted. “We’ve been in just as tight places before. Keep up——”

He was interrupted by the hum of the enemy’s plane as it started on its journey. Hoagland beckoned to two of his companions.

“Come along and get this thing over,” he growled.

The men grabbed the bound prisoners and started toward the cellar with them.

CHAPTER XIV

Inside Information

“Get them, men!” shouted the sheriff, as he and his deputies burst into the room.

There was a wild melee for a few minutes. Fists whirled and clubs crashed, as the officers knocked the men into submission.

Several of the enemy were thrown to the floor and lay there unconscious. Others burst through windows, carrying the glass with them. Some were huddled into a corner and handcuffs slipped on them. The raid was over!

“Thanks, Sheriff,” said Ted fervently, as the officer took off his bonds and those of Joe and Jed. “You’ve saved our lives.”

“We owe everything to you,” added Joe, rubbing his arms to restore the circulation, “and we can’t thank you enough.”

“Thought we were goners, sure,” exclaimed Jed. “Sheriff, if I had a medal, I’d pin it on you.”

“It was a close squeeze, sure enough,” smiled the officer, “but a miss is as good as a mile. Guess we’ve rounded up most of the gang.”

“A couple of them got away,” said Ted as he hurried into the adjoining room. “And the boss of the outfit is missing,” he added regretfully.

The flyer had one bit of luck, however. The flight of the grim-faced man had been so hurried that he had left a number of carbon copies of letters on his desk. Ted picked them up, and a hasty glance showed that they were important.

“These are instructions to Charlie!” exulted Ted, who was able to decipher just enough of the coded message to make him certain of this.

He hastily reported his findings to Joe and Jed, then sought out the sheriff who was preparing to leave the place with his prisoners.

“I have to hurry off,” Ted said. “I’ve just discovered something the government must know about at once.”

“That’s all right,” replied the sheriff, who was in fine spirits at the success of the raid. “I’ll take care of everything.”

“I suspect that this old ranch house holds many secrets,” Ted went on, “and it should be searched thoroughly. I’ll leave my friends here to help you.”

“Fine,” said the officer. “Then they can report to you about anything we find.”

“Be very careful,” Ted warned the group as he prepared to leave. “Watch out for machine guns behind doors and other hidden dangers.”

Joe and Jed took their chum across the water in the rowboat, and all three donned their pilots’ clothes. Then Ted walked to one of the deputies’ cars and was driven back to the army field.

There he tried to get in contact with both Nimbusser and Farmer through the Intelligence Officer stationed at the post. But neither was available at the time, so the aviator left a request with the army man to keep on calling the two until he could reach them.

“I’ll fly back to Frisco,” he said, “so I can get these letters in code to Nimbusser as soon as possible.”

On his way there Ted went over the various angles of his recent adventure, and one fact stood out clearly in his mind: the only person among the enemy group who had winced at Togoty’s order to Hoagland was Charlie.

“He actually had a look of pity for us in his eyes,” thought Ted. “But probably he was afraid to protest. I believe he’s just a tool who gets good pay for flying. He’s no doubt a daredevil and doesn’t mind taking chances. But he’s not a murderer like Togoty and that other fellow. I wish I could get Charlie alone. I might make him talk!”

Then Ted realized he would have no opportunity to do this. He was going to the South Pacific and other places on a government mission.

Idly he fingered the letter of instructions to Charlie, trying to decipher more of it. Suddenly the meaning of several words came to him.

“Can it be possible?” he asked himself. “Is Charlie going to——”

Ted could hardly wait to meet Nimbusser, but it was not until morning that he contacted the man at his office. At once he turned over the carbon copies of the letters and sat eagerly on the edge of his chair while the Captain decoded them.

“These messages form the missing links in the case,” the officer said at last. “You took your life in your hands to get them, and we’re mighty thankful you came out alive. They’re invaluable evidence against the platinum pirates.”

“Platinum pirates?” repeated Ted, intrigued by the phrase.

“That’s what Mr. Farmer calls them,” explained Nimbusser. “Apparently there’s a big ring picking up all the platinum they can lay their hands on. They melt it down into ingots, and then take it out of the country.”

At this point in the story the telephone rang, and Nimbusser, after answering it, put Ted on the wire.

“This is Joe,” said the voice at the other end. “Thought I’d find you there. Say, we found a lot of stuff at that ranch house. Among the things was an outfit for separating platinum from other alloys in jewelry and various articles.”

“Honestly?”

“Yes, and what do you think? One of the prisoners owned up that he was the fellow with Charlie at the Wildwood Club. He bought the diamond and platinum necklace from the thief right after he had robbed the woman. Charlie was there to take the jewelry away in his plane, and bring it here.”

Joe went on to say that he and Jed were just ready to take off in their *Patriots*, and would return at once to Frisco.

“Ask them to come to my office,” interrupted Nimbusser, so Ted relayed the message.

“Mr. Farmer is flying here to see you boys,” the Captain explained. “Has something of great importance to say to you.”

The officer would tell no more, and the time was filled in by conversation on various topics. A little later Ted asked the question:

“Doesn’t one of these letters to Charlie give instructions to take a valuable load to the Pacific island we call Number Thirty-one in our pursuit patrol code—the one Jed nicknamed Nightshade on account of the color of most of the inhabitants there?”

Nimbusser started in his chair. “Indeed it does,” he replied. “I didn’t know you could read the platinum pirates’ code so well.”

Ted laughed. “You’ve given me many hints,” he said. “And a knowledge of it may come in handy in the future. I’ve studied the symbols very

carefully, and I haven't forgotten that other message, saying, 'Big shipment starts in week.' "

A few minutes later Mr. Farmer, Joe, and Jed arrived. The F.B.I. agent plunged at once into the matter that had brought him across the continent.

"The Bureau has uncovered enough evidence to show that a world combine has been formed to corner the market on platinum," he began.

"Whew!" whistled Jed. "How'd they happen to pick platinum? It's kind of scarce, isn't it?"

"That's exactly the point. Platinum is one of the rarest and costliest of metals, and it's worth hoarding."

"Costlier than gold?" asked Joe.

"Gold doesn't compare with platinum," replied Farmer. "Gold seldom goes above twenty dollars an ounce. Platinum has brought as high as one hundred and fifty dollars an ounce."

Ted gave a whistle of surprise.

"Over seven times as costly as gold!" he exclaimed.

"Exactly," replied Farmer. "That's because of its rarity, for one thing. It's found in extremely small quantities, principally in Canada, Russia, Colombia, Australia and Alaska.

"But its special qualities make it eagerly sought. It doesn't corrode. Platinum utensils are necessary in every chemical laboratory."

"I know platinum points are used on spark plugs and pen points," said Jed.

"Magnetos, radio, long distance telephones and airplanes need it," added Ted.

"And an endless list of other things," said Farmer. "Now suppose a group has been formed to buy up all the platinum at its present price. The quickest and easiest way to get it would be from thieves, especially those clever at robbing persons, stores, and even wholesale establishments."

"After a certain length of time these world-wide crooks would be able to get the stolen articles very cheaply by threatening to expose the local thieves to the police," put in Nimbuser.

"That's true," agreed Farmer. "The platinum pirates probably are working their scheme in practically every country of the world. This will go

on until they have the greater part of the world supply in their grip. Then they'll boost the price to unexampled heights—say to a thousand dollars an ounce. The commercial world will have to pay it or go without. They won't go without, so they'll pay the price, however outrageous.”

“So that's the game Togoty and his friends are playing!” exclaimed Ted.

“Exactly that,” declared Farmer. “Togoty is an authorized buyer. The thieves turn over their loot to him, sometimes all of it, sometimes only the platinum in it. He, in turn, sends it to be melted into ingots which are flown out of the country by Charlie and other expert pilots.”

“Couldn't Togoty be nabbed on his return to Honolulu?” asked Joe.

“I doubt if he'll go back to Honolulu,” smiled Farmer wisely. “Not when he finds out you boys escaped from the ranch. I venture to say he'll get as far away from there as possible.”

“I'd like to lay my hands on that skunk!” said Jed belligerently.

“And I hope you can, too,” replied Farmer, a twinkle in his eye. Then he became serious again. “Ted, do you realize that you led your pursuit patrol after an international enemy?”

“I never thought of that,” said the flyer, startled.

“Already you boys have captured several members of a world-wide ring,” the man from Washington went on. “The Bureau suspects that the headquarters of these platinum pirates is somewhere in the South Pacific.”

“Charlie is flying toward one of the islands right now, we think,” Ted reminded him.

“We want you to lead your pursuit patrol after him,” said Farmer. “Get what clues you can, as you go from place to place to show the *Patriots* to foreign officials, and track down those international crooks. Find out where they're storing the platinum.”

“It's a big job, sir,” replied Ted, “but we'll do it. What say, boys?”

Joe and Jed nodded.

“When can you start?” asked the F.B.I. man.

“At dawn tomorrow,” responded the flyer. “If all goes well, we'll reach our first stop late tomorrow afternoon.”

“You'll make the whole four thousand miles in that time?” gasped Nimbusser.

“The new *Patriot* is a wonder,” smiled Ted.

“Don’t forget the farewell party tonight, everybody,” said Nimbusser. “Mr. Hapworth is giving it at his club.”

Before leaving, Ted again went over Charlie’s instructions, as given in the letter.

“You are sure that Nightshade should be my first stop?” asked Ted, using Jed’s nickname for the island they would head for.

“I think so,” observed the Captain thoughtfully. “Charlie’s stuff may not be ready for him there, as the papers hint, and until it is, he may hide out somewhere on the island. This will give you a chance to catch the fellow. Maybe he’ll talk and give you a clue to the headquarters of the platinum pirates.”

Ted and his chums spent the rest of the day in preparation, then appeared at the club. Ted was in disguise again, and Hapworth had warned him not to give himself away to any of the waiters who might know him.

“My make-up doesn’t add especially to my style,” Ted grinned. “But once on the broad Pacific, I’ll be Ted Scott again.” As he seated himself in the chair reserved for him next to his foster mother, he asked her mischievously, “How do you like me?”

Charity made a grimace. “I think you look awful,” she said. “I want my handsome Ted again. I never can get used to that terrible disguise. Seems as though I’d lost you, somehow.”

To keep her and Eben from feeling sad, the boys made the dinner a jolly affair. Jokes were cracked, humorous stories told, and everything went merrily until dessert was reached. Then Hapworth noticed one of the waiters hovering about in an embarrassed way. He called him over.

“Puzzled about something?” he asked.

“Why, yes, sir,” was the reply. The man picked up an envelope from the tray he was holding. “It’s this letter. It’s addressed to Ted Scott in care of you, but Mr. Scott is not here.”

“Where did you get this?” evaded Hapworth.

“It was left at the office,” was the reply.

Hapworth thought quickly.

“Give me the letter,” he said. “I’ll see that Mr. Scott gets it.”

The waiter complied and withdrew. Once the door was closed, Hapworth tossed the message to Ted.

“From somebody who knows you’re here,” he said, frowning. “Perhaps you’d better read it at once.”

Greatly surprised, the flyer tore open the envelope.

“Ted Scott, alias Tom Smith, alias Mr. Brown,” he read. “Don’t take that trip across the Pacific, or you’ll never come back alive!”

CHAPTER XV

Combing the Skies

The warning was printed in block letters. It carried no signature.

Ted looked up to find all eyes fixed upon him. He summoned a smile.

“A perfectly good disguise shot to pieces,” he said, and passed the message to Farmer with a wink to be cautious about revealing its contents.

The younger men at the table understood nothing was to be said in front of Eben and Charity Browning, so it was not until after Ted had bidden them good-bye a little later that the subject was brought up again.

“See here, now, no tears!” he said gently as he kissed his mother and felt the wetness on her cheeks. “I’ll be back again before you know it. And just think of the good work I’m going to do for Uncle Sam!”

Charity smiled waveringly, took out a handkerchief, and resolutely wiped her eyes.

“I oughtn’t to cry when I’m so proud, but, Ted darling, do take care of yourself.”

The flyer hugged her and Eben, too, and the couple left in a taxi. Then Ted turned back to his friends.

“What do you make of the letter you received?” asked Hapworth, worried. “It certainly means that, despite all the secrecy about your trip, the news has leaked out—and leaked out apparently to the very people you don’t want to know it.”

“I’ll pay no attention to the warning,” replied Ted. “But I wish I knew who sent it.”

“Better turn it over to me,” said Farmer thoughtfully. “I’ll have some of my men look it over. No fingerprints, probably—crooks are too smart for that these days—but there may be some other peculiarity that will give us a clue to the writer.”

Ted did as his chief directed, and no further reference was made to the letter. But it created an uneasiness, and the party broke up early.

Day was just dawning when Ted, Joe, and Jed met at Hapworth’s plant. They gripped one another’s hands and looked into one another’s eyes. There

was no need for long speeches.

“Lead off in *Aeolus*, Ted,” said Jed. “And tell your wind god to keep his winds to himself!”

The three chums climbed aboard their flying boats, Joe in *Diana* and Jed in *Mars*. Then the three *Patriots* soared into the sky.

Up and up they went in formation, gaining altitude steadily, until they reached a height of ten thousand feet. They had started on their long and perilous journey to prove the efficiency of an international police patrol, and to find the far-off hideaway of the platinum pirates!

The tawny California coast line soon was far behind them, and beneath them was a mass of clouds of every color of the rainbow.

“There is no life like this,” thought Ted.

This was his natural element. He felt free and happy. Jed and Joe, with whom he kept in touch by radiotelephone, reported everything going well.

“Having a little trouble with this Howgozit Curve,” said Jed after they had been flying several hours. “On this chart the first curve shows miles versus gallons. What are the others?”

“The second line is gallons versus hours of flying,” replied Ted.

“So that means the third one is hours versus miles,” said Jed. “I was twisted around, so I’ll throw this sheet overboard and start again.”

There was silence for some time, then Ted picked up his telephone. “M 4 L 21,” he said into the instrument.

Joe and Jed grinned, for the phrase meant, “Time to eat!”

Several hours later their leader spoke to them, but this time not in code. His message startled them. The day was not over, yet he said:

“Did you know it’s tomorrow?”

Then they caught on. They had reached the International Date Line! Now in the early evening they were jumping right from Saturday into Sunday!

It meant also that they were not far from their goal. Four thousand miles! A long stretch to stay at the controls of a plane! A strain on the eyes and a strain on the nerves.

But the boys forgot this as the island nicknamed Nightshade appeared in the distance. They had covered the miles in record time, and the *Patriots* had given them no trouble at all.

“I must cable Hapworth and tell him the good news,” decided Ted.

He planned to have their flying boats come down on the waters of the island’s fine sheltered harbor, cradled in the crater of an extinct volcano. This would require expert maneuvering in the dusk, for there would be many other vessels docked there.

Soon a faint glow, cast by the lights of the Naval Station, could be seen. This was the beacon that Ted desired. In a short time he and his chums were hovering above the waters of the port. Slowly they circled, coming ever closer, until they were able to see the harbor clearly.

As Ted had surmised, a number of vessels lay at anchor. But near the outer rim of the port the craft thinned out. Exercising the utmost care, Ted, Joe, and Jed set the pontoons of their amphibians on the surface of the water. They attached them to some of the buoys with which the harbor was studded, and proceeded to the dock in their rubber boats.

“Well, we brought it off all right,” said Ted exultingly as the three met. “Here we are at the island which Robert Louis Stevenson called ‘the land of perpetual song and dance.’ ”

“Maybe it is,” groaned Joe, as he rubbed his aching limbs, “but I couldn’t do much dancing now. My legs are too stiff from sitting so long.”

“Same here,” echoed Jed. “And I had all I could do to keep from falling asleep. I kept myself awake by trying to figure out how many stars there are.”

“Figuring out which one was to be your future home, I suspect,” grinned Ted. “Suppose you fellows watch the planes while I find somebody. Place seems to be deserted.”

“Going to report to the authorities tonight?” asked Joe.

“I don’t know where we’ll sleep if I don’t,” laughed Ted.

Several natives who lounged some distance away directed him in broken English to the residence of Commander White. He was the man whom Ted had been told to look up.

“My name is Scott, Ted Scott,” he introduced himself to the gray-haired officer. “Flew in today from Frisco. You were expecting me?”

White was a man nearing sixty, but he was as straight and vigorous as though he were half that age. He had been in the Air Force during the first World War, and had achieved a great reputation as a flyer. He shook hands cordially with Ted.

“Yes, I received word you were coming,” the man replied, “but to tell you the truth, I didn’t expect you today. You made a speedy flight.”

“Our planes are fast,” agreed Ted.

“It is indeed a pleasure to welcome you,” continued White delightedly. “I’ve hoped to meet you, but our paths haven’t happened to cross. You are to be my guest while you’re here. Oh, I had forgotten; there are two others in your party, aren’t there?”

“My friends are guarding our planes,” Ted responded.

“I’ll attend to that at once,” said Commander White, picking up a telephone. In a few minutes he turned back to Ted. “The planes will be watched day and night. And your friends will stay here as well as yourself—as long as you may wish.”

“That’s mighty kind of you,” smiled Ted. “As to the length of our stay, that will depend on our government mission here.”

“I had a cable from my friend Nimbusser today,” said White. “He said you would give me details, and asked me to give you all possible help. Of course, I’ll be glad to do so.”

“I’m sure of that,” said Ted, smiling. “I wonder if you have seen or heard anything about platinum pirates down this way.”

“Platinum pirates!” said the officer with a puzzled air. “That’s a new term to me. What are platinum pirates?”

“Men who are trying to corner the world platinum market and are causing thefts to be committed right and left to do it,” replied Ted, and went on to describe, briefly, the activities of the world ring of crooks.

“An international affair,” mused his listener.

“There’s one fellow especially that we want to catch,” the flyer said, meaning Charlie. “Judging from some instructions to him, which we secured, he intends to make this island his first stop. Probably has some pal here on whom he depends to give him stolen stuff from European countries. Know of any suspicious character here who might be involved in that kind of business?”

“No, I don’t,” said White after a few minutes of thinking. “Of course, we have a few shiftless, no-good individuals around, as every place has, but we seem remarkably free from major criminals. That doesn’t mean, of course, that there may not be some that we don’t know about.”

Joe and Jed arrived at this moment, and the three boys went to bed immediately. Each was asleep as soon as his head touched the pillow.

By the time they appeared for breakfast the next morning, their host had gone out. He came back presently, however, bringing with him a British officer.

“I’d like you to know Captain Hovenden,” he said. “He has come from his European home to spend some time here. Captain, these are the young men of the pursuit patrol. After some coffee, suppose we go out to see the planes.”

He then told the boys he had talked to the chief of police. But that man had no information about a pilot of Charlie’s description, nor of anyone who might be in cahoots with him.

The conversation turned to the new amphibian. Both Hovenden and White were enthusiastic at hearing of the wonderful performance of the *Patriots*, and eagerly set out to inspect the flying boats. Ted took White up, while Hovenden went off with Joe.

Jed remained below, for he felt his *Diana* needed a little pepping up. His Howgozit Curve chart indicated that his plane had not shown up as well as the other two had, and he felt that this must be remedied.

“Can’t let you fellows get ahead of me,” he grinned.

White and Hovenden exclaimed in delight over the looks, equipment, and handling of the *Patriots*.

“I never saw anything finer!” cried the Commander, after he had piloted the plane for an hour.

Hovenden was equally enthusiastic. “I shall advise my government to adopt this model for the work of the international air police patrol,” he told the group after they had returned to Commander White’s home.

During the luncheon which followed, the conversation turned to the subject of life on the island.

“How about the natives?” asked Joe. “Have any trouble with them?”

“None to speak of,” Commander White replied. “They get along very well with the whites, and we don’t interfere with their tribal customs. By the way, they’re going to have a feast and dance tonight. I’ll take you boys over if you’d like to go.”

The flyers assented gladly. They slept during the afternoon and awoke refreshed. Shortly after dark they accompanied their host to the scene of festivities.

“The affair tonight is a very special one,” explained the Commander. “It is an inauguration ceremony for the newly chosen chief of this tribe.”

In a grove of breadfruit trees the people were gathered to see their leader, a brawny, six-foot man, covered with fine tattooing, do the dance required before taking office. The boys smiled at the strange performance, but the natives were very solemn. Speeches by leading elders of the tribe, lauding the chief, followed.

“Now comes the feast,” said White. “I hope you’re hungry!”

Roast pig was the principal item on the menu. Other South Sea delicacies passed in endless profusion from hand to hand under the waving palms—yams, bananas, coconut meat.

“The crowning glory of the feast comes next,” whispered Commander White an hour later.

This was a dessert known as the “pudding of the three palms.” It consisted of a large portion of pearl sago, over which was ladled coconut milk mixed with grated coconut meat. On top of this was poured golden palm syrup.

“Yum-yum,” murmured Jed, smacking his lips, “these natives know a good thing when they see it.”

After the feast came the native dances, which grew wilder and wilder as time went on.

“I guess this was where American jazz started,” laughed Joe.

Suddenly a very pretty native girl whirled out of a group and pulled in Jed as a partner. Joe and Ted roared with laughter as they watched their bewildered friend dizzily trying to keep step with his brown-skinned charmer.

Then they themselves were drawn into the maddening whirl. When the dance was over, Joe and Jed returned to Commander White who had been

watching it with amusement.

“Where’s Ted?” asked young Scarlet, looking about him in every direction.

His friend was nowhere in sight. The group waited for several minutes, but Ted did not return.

CHAPTER XVI

Telltale Insignia

“I’m worried about Ted,” said Joe to Jed, when an hour had slipped by and their chum had not returned.

“Do you suppose that by any chance he caught sight of Charlie and is trailing him?” asked Jed. “I wish he had left some word, so we might help him.”

“Probably he didn’t have time,” replied Joe Scarlet. “But I believe we ought to try to find him. He may be in trouble.”

They excused themselves to Commander White, suggesting that he not wait for them to return home, and explaining briefly what they intended to do. They were puzzled about how to start their search, but a tribesman, on his way to his hut, gave them a clue.

“Birdman go that way,” he pointed. “Mauki tribe like Birdman.”

Joe and Jed, as they started off in the direction indicated, wondered whether this was good news or bad. Sometimes, among superstitious people such as these, “liking” a white person meant danger, even death. Quickly the boys pursued a trail through palm trees, and at last saw a small light in the distance.

“We’d better take it easy now,” advised Joe. “It might be best for the natives up there not to know we are coming.”

The precaution was unnecessary, however. The group of tribesmen in this spot were having a happy celebration of their own. Through the trees the boys saw a sight which brought smiles to their faces.

On a small platform, evidently one used for special occasions, stood their friend Ted. About his neck hung several strings of beads. On his head was a crown made of coconut palm leaves. He looked very solemn.

“They are paying homage to him,” said Joe. “I’m going to move a little closer and try to hear what they’re saying. You know, there is a similarity in this native tongue to Oriental languages. I’m sure I can understand enough of it to learn what’s going on.”

He listened intently, then turned to Jed who had followed him.

“What do you make out of it?” the latter asked.

“Someone probably told them of Ted’s reputation as a great flyer, and that’s their way of showing admiration,” Joe replied.

“Apparently they don’t put you and me in the same class,” grinned Jed. “But I wouldn’t care to be decorated like that, anyhow.”

“What do you think we’d better do?” asked Joe.

“Just walk right up,” replied Jed.

The boys moved forward and made their presence known. Relief showed on Ted Scott’s face, and he beckoned ever so slightly for his friends to come to his side. At a second signal Jed moved off to distract the attention of the natives, so that Ted could whisper to Joe.

“I have submitted to this mumbo jumbo to get information,” Scott declared in a low voice. “Talk to them and tell them that the brother to the birds wants to know whether any white stranger from another country has been here lately, or whether they expect one. You know I am referring to Charlie.”

Using his knowledge of many languages, Joe addressed the throng in their native tongue as well as he could. At first the men looked suspiciously at the speaker, but presently they began to mutter among themselves, until finally one spoke up.

“White man come in plane sometime. He friends with worthless member of tribe. He no good bird.”

Joe was able to figure out from words and phrases given by several members of the tribe that the aviator referred to landed at a certain spot offshore in another part of the island. He always came to the beach in a rubber boat, and held conferences with the native who was in disfavor with the tribe.

“I’ll bet it’s Charlie who comes,” said Ted, when Joe relayed the information to him. “Get the exact location from them.”

A newcomer to the group, apparently one who had stayed longer at the earlier festivities, now came toward Joe. He had just heard what the conversation was about and offered a clue.

“That man here last night,” he said. “I think he come back in morning.”

The natives who had been paying obeisance to Ted, now became so interested in the new subject that they failed to notice when the flyer and his

chums quietly slipped away. As quickly as possible they hurried toward Commander White's home.

"We will get up at dawn," Ted ordered, "and follow this tip. It may not lead to Charlie at all, but we must track it down."

Commander White had told Ted that any time he wanted to use the man's motor launch, he should feel free to take it. So early in the morning the chums took advantage of the offer. They made their way around the island toward the spot where they hoped to find the flying platinum pirate.

"No plane in sight," observed Ted as they neared the place.

There was no sign of any human being on the shore at this point, and the boys decided that they probably had come on a wild goose chase.

"Nevertheless, I am going to investigate," determined Ted. "Suppose you row ashore with me, Joe, and, Jed, you stay here in the launch."

The two climbed into the smaller craft tied to the launch, and went to the beach. For twenty minutes they searched in a grove just back of the water, but could find no one. There was a small thatched-roof hut, however, which evidently was the retreat of the native who was in disfavor with his tribe. From it footprints led straight toward the beach.

"Really they are shoeprints," Ted decided, after looking at them carefully. "I am sure the native would go barefoot. These must be those of his visitor, and they are still fresh."

In the meantime, Joe had been looking about the hut, and upon the floor found a partly crumpled letter. Staring him in the face was the word "Charlie." Quickly he seized the message and handed it to Ted.

"We are on the right track!" exclaimed the flyer, when he had spread out the wrinkled paper and deciphered the code on it. "Great Scott! This says Charlie was to pick up over a hundred pounds of platinum here and fly off with it!"

"Does the message say where he went?" asked Joe.

"Unfortunately, no," Ted replied. "But if that native should come back, maybe we can make him talk."

They waited for some time, but no one arrived. They both were becoming extremely hungry, as they had had no breakfast, and Joe suggested that they return to Commander White's house.

“I hate to leave here without seeing the one person who could give us the information about Charlie’s destination, but I suppose we can come back,” observed Ted.

At this moment their attention was attracted to Jed. He was ringing a bell on the launch. At the same time they spied a fisherman in a boat which had pulled up alongside Commander White’s launch.

“I guess Jed wants us to come out there,” said Joe, so he and Ted left immediately.

Good news awaited them. The native fisherman in broken English had told Jed of having seen a plane take off from that spot at dawn. Furthermore, he had watched it long enough to know that apparently it was heading for an island to the southwest.

“We must waste no time,” urged Ted, quickly tying the rowboat to the launch and jumping into the larger craft with Joe.

Jed already had the engine going. Soon they were speeding back where their flying boats were anchored. The *Patriots* already had been refueled, and stores put aboard, and the boys wasted no time in getting ready for a take-off.

“I will telephone to Commander White,” Ted said, “and make our apologies.”

Jed made a grimace. “Gee, I was hoping we were going to get a good breakfast before leaving,” he grumbled, but in a moment declared that he could make out very well with the food stored in his plane.

Within twenty minutes the three flyers took off from the water, zoomed into the skies, and set off in hot pursuit of the pilot they felt sure was Charlie!

Hours passed. Though they pushed their planes to top speed and kept a sharp lookout at all times, the boys caught no sight of their quarry.

“Got too big a start over us,” Joe telephoned to Ted.

“Looks that way,” agreed the leader of the pursuit patrol. “But I’m sure our amphibians are swifter than the other plane.”

Suddenly, as his binoculars swept the horizon, his eyes lighted up. Far off two tiny specks glittered in the sun. Minute by minute they grew larger, and Ted’s heart beat faster.

“Sighted two planes,” he told Joe and Jed. “Give yours all the gun you can.”

He strained his eyes to see if he could detect any markings on the flying boats ahead. Nothing showed at first, but as the space narrowed between pursuer and pursued, he could make out dimly what he had hoped to see.

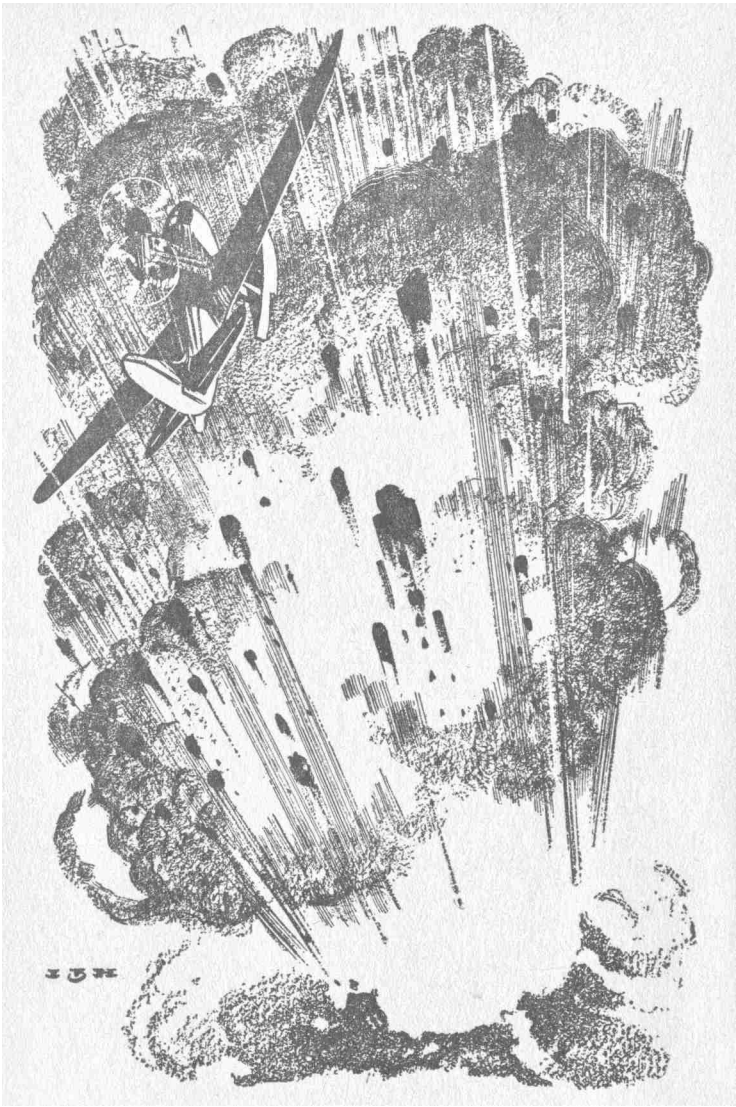
Both planes had the same insignia: *an orange-colored X in a black circle!*

Doubt was banished. Almost to a certainty one of the planes was Charlie’s. The other no doubt was being flown by another platinum pirate.

“Here’s where the international air police get to work!” decided Ted grimly.

A few minutes later he was closing up fast on the enemy. Then a most unexpected thing happened. The boys were winging their way over a small island, flying low to escape some clouds, when there came a terrible roar from the earth below them.

A stream of lava shot up thousands of feet into the air, straight at the *Patriots!*



A STREAM OF LAVA SHOT UP THOUSANDS OF FEET!

CHAPTER XVII

Volcanic Dust

The shock of the volcano was astounding! Steam and lava shot into the air at terrific speed. It almost seemed as if the molten mass were aiming directly at the *Patriots*!

It was only because the pilots in control of the planes were such expert aviators that they and their machines kept from crashing. Higher and higher they zoomed in a cloud of dust.

“Eighteen thousand feet!” Ted read on his altimeter.

Already he and the other boys had adjusted their oxygen masks. But it was not necessary for them to go higher, for they had climbed above the danger zone.

“Number One calling Two and Three,” the leader of the pursuit patrol said into his telephone.

Joe and Jed reported they were safe, but wanted to know what the plans were.

“We’ve lost our enemy,” said Ted simply.

The boys had no way of knowing whether the planes they had been pursuing had been caught in the eruption. Visibility was completely blotted out by the steam, dust, and ashes just below them.

“I believe we’d better climb and get out of reach of a second eruption before we go on,” advised Ted. “One may come at any moment.”

He gave a signal, and the planes shot up to an altitude of twenty thousand feet. Apparently no damage had been done to the craft, although they were spattered and pitted by stones that had been spewed from the crater of the volcano.

“We’re just plain lucky,” observed Ted, a prayer of thanksgiving in his heart. “But we mustn’t overwork these engines.”

It was highly probable that ashes from the eruption might have seeped into the motors. The penetrating power of the dust was certain to affect cranks, valves, and everything connected with the delicate mechanism of the high-powered engines. Already they were beginning to rasp and grind.

To make an examination in the air was out of the question. Somewhere the flyers must make a landing. But the ground below was covered with streams of lava, rolling in every direction.

Ted consulted his map. The nearest island was one of the Fiji group, and that was over three hundred and fifty miles away. He spoke to Joe and Jed, using their code, although he wondered whether he need take this precaution. He doubted that anyone would be listening, or care what message he sent in this atmosphere.

“We must examine our engines as soon as we can find a possible landing place,” he said. “I figure that will be at Number Seventy-two. Let’s get going.”

Unfortunately the volcanic dust was blowing in the direction they were taking, so they had to fly high to keep out of it until they left the area. Moreover, they did not want to tax their engines in their present condition, so they maintained only a moderate speed. Fully two hours went by before they reached their destination.

“I’m certainly relieved to see land,” thought Ted as he started down.

The countryside beneath them was a charming one. Fertile fields stretched away in every direction under the afternoon sun. Here and there could be seen a sprinkling of native huts, but there was no sign of any large city.

Through his binoculars Ted scanned the coast line for any indication of a cove or bay on which his flying boats might land without damage. He found one at last that seemed to meet his needs. But before landing, he issued a word of warning to his mates.

“I see that already a lot of people are gathering on the shore below,” he said. “I hope they’re friendly. We want to show them we intend no harm, but keep them away from the *Patriots*. Make them think it’s bad luck to come aboard, or something like that.”

The boys taxied to a stop some distance from the shore. Then they got out the rubber boats, and propelled themselves to land.

“Pretty fierce looking bunch,” remarked Jed as he gazed at the waiting group.

These people were descendants of cannibals, and they looked the part. They were flat-nosed and had crinkly hair which was a flaming red!

“The natives use lime to bleach it that color. Originally it’s black,” Ted told his companions.

“I should think it would take off their scalps!” remarked Joe.

“Too tough,” laughed Jed.

“You tell them how much we admire their hair, Joe,” Ted advised.

The effect was immediate. Guttural cries of delight came from the natives. Grins spread over the painted faces. It was evident that from this time on the flyers had nothing to fear.

Some of these people could speak broken English. From them Ted learned that there was a gasoline station a little way inland, where planes sometimes stopped to replenish their stores. This was good news to the boys, since they would have to go considerably out of their course to reach their next scheduled destination. The following day they had the natives bring fuel to them, and they filled the tanks to the brim. Then the boys started work on their motors.

In the late afternoon, as they were about through, there came a sudden cry from the natives. They began to point, then run to shelter. The boys looked in the direction from which they had come the day before.

“The dust from the volcano!” cried Ted, as the cloud came toward them and settled over the island.

“All our work for nothing!” groaned Joe. He and the others closed everything possible on the *Patriots*, but all knew it would do little good. “I didn’t know lava ashes could travel so far.”

“I’ve heard they’ve been known to fall a thousand miles from an eruption,” stated Ted. “This is going to delay us even more. If Charlie is still alive, he’s well on his way to the hiding place of the platinum pirates and without any interference from us!”

“I feel like an air policeman off duty,” sighed Jed. “But I guess there’s nothing I can do about it.”

It was maddening for the boys to have to wait on the island, when time was so important. But Ted Scott and his friends found plenty to do calming the superstitious natives who went wild with fear. It was not until the following day that the air cleared.

“Guess we can get back to our work on the *Patriots* now,” said Ted. “That is, if these crazy natives will let us!”

There had come a cry from a crowd that had gathered on the shore to watch them.

“Now what’s up?” asked Ted.

A brawny islander, clad only in a breechcloth and brandishing a wicked-looking knife, was chasing a fellow through the water directly toward the flyer! To escape the deadly weapon, the native leaped to the wing of Ted’s plane. The fellow with the knife would be there in a few seconds!

Ted sprang into action. He must stop this! The wicked knife must harm neither the man nor the plane!

He called to the fellow to crawl into the cabin. Ted jumped into the pilot’s seat and started the motors. As the fellow with the knife paused, bewildered by the roar, Ted raced the huge amphibian in circles, then drove it straight toward the man!

The terrified native ducked, but the flyer had no intention of harming him. Smiling, Ted turned away before he reached his victim. The fellow scuttled back to shore. In his fright he even dropped the knife!

“Me thank,” grinned the black-skinned fellow beside Ted. “Me give present.”

He got out, and Ted went on with his work. But the islander was back a short time later, handing Ted his prize possession. It was a banana sixteen inches long!

“That’ll keep us in food for a week,” shouted Jed from *Mars*, and the three flyers joined in a laugh.

By midday the planes were ready, and the boys prepared to scrub themselves clean of the oil and grease on their faces and bodies. Joe turned to Jed with a mischievous grin on his face.

“If you’d just stay the way you are, and put lime on your hair to turn it red, you could remain here and become a native!” he said.

While they were eating a lunch of strange dishes served by the islanders, a motor launch, trailing a rowboat, appeared in the distance. Presently two British officers, apparently on an inspection trip, came ashore. They were surprised to see the Americans and their flying boats.

“We’re delighted to meet you,” they said. “Don’t often see white men at this spot. Here on a holiday?”

“Not exactly,” responded Ted. “We were chasing two planes which we think held some crooks we’re after. But we lost them during a volcanic eruption some miles from here.”

The officers looked at each other, then one said, “It’s possible two planes that landed on the island we’ve just come from are the ones you’re looking for.”

“Did you notice any markings on the wings?” asked Ted eagerly.

“Yes, I did,” replied the other Britisher. “An orange X in a black circle.”

“Those are the fellows! We must be off at once!” cried Ted. “Joe! Jed!”

They learned from the officers exactly where the island was. A few minutes later the three boys took off.

CHAPTER XVIII

Battle in the Clouds

The newly-cleaned motors of the *Patriots* worked beautifully, and in a short time they came in sight of the island mentioned by the British officer. Through his binoculars Ted caught sight of two objects in the distance, rising from the far side of the island. Instantly he signaled to Joe and Jed.

“I believe Charlie and his friend are ahead!” he said in code. “Maybe they saw us coming and are skipping out. We’ve missed our chance of catching them on the ground. Now we’ll have to chase them.”

There ensued a game of hide-and-seek among the clouds. The fugitives tried to gain an advantage by doubling back on their tracks, but the pursuit patrol discovered the maneuver. The enemy planes turned, and again went on in the direction they had set originally.

Once, when Ted picked up his telephone to call his friends, he caught a part of the conversation of the men they were pursuing. “. . . Scott, I’ll show him my stuff. This has gone far enough,” one of them declared.

The second voice replied, “I won’t be a party to any of your murderous schemes!”

“That last person was Charlie, sure enough,” decided Ted. “Wonder who the other man is. Guess I’d better keep my eyes open for funny business.” Then he smiled. “They probably had that warning all fixed up to scare me,” and thought no more of it.

The pilots ahead had other ideas. One was waiting for darkness to shake off their pursuers. The other, more desperate, suddenly shot his plane up another thousand feet, then turned back. When he was directly over the three *Patriots*, he smiled evilly, sought out the leader, and dropped a bomb.

It missed its target, but landed on one wing of *Diana*, not far from the window. Then it exploded. The flash lighted up the interior. To the horror of Ted and Jed, they caught sight of their chum wavering in his seat.

“Joe! Joe!” cried Ted.

“They can’t do that to you—and get away with it!” exclaimed Jed.

Seeing Ted go to the help of their friend, Jed sped after the planes of the pirates. They were leaving the scene as fast as possible.

To chase them would be foolish, Jed decided, for probably they would only bomb him! He must do something else!

“If I send a few bullets into their gas tanks, it won’t hurt *them*,” he reasoned. “The fuel will leak out, and they’ll have to come down. Then I’ll fix them!”

He remembered that, first of all, his job was to find the hide-out of the platinum group. A dead prisoner would tell him nothing. Accordingly, he crawled up on the planes ahead, and took aim with deadly accuracy at the one which had dropped the bomb.

At that instant total darkness surrounded the enemy. A storm cloud had loomed ahead, and Charlie and his companion had wasted no time flying into it to make a getaway.

“Worse luck!” cried Jed.

As he came into the clear sky again, he could neither see nor hear the pirates. The pilot of *Mars* was disgusted, and mumbled to himself, “I’d better turn in my badge as an international air policeman! And Joe—poor Joe——”

He hated to telephone Ted, for he feared the worst had happened. He picked up the instrument, his fingers trembling as he did so.

In the meantime, Ted had left to assist young Scarlet, his heart beating wildly with apprehension. His friend’s plane had gone into a nose dive.

Then suddenly it had righted itself. The helium bags on the wings had been inflated!

Good old Joe! He had had presence of mind enough to open the pedcock to the tank. The amphibian would not crash—thanks to Silas Morton’s invention.

“But how badly is Joe hurt?” Ted asked himself with a sinking feeling.

Anxiously he banked his own plane, bringing it close to that of the wounded man. He turned his searchlight full on the pilot’s compartment. Joe lay on the floor. His telephone dangled from its hook.

“Joe, Joe!” Ted shouted into his own mouthpiece. “Can you hear me?”

For several seconds there was no response, then the urgency of the cry pierced the other’s dizzy brain. Joe stirred and pressed a hand to his forehead.

“What—what happened?” he muttered, and the words carried to Ted.

Joe was alive! His friend breathed a prayer of thanksgiving. When he could find his own voice again, he said soothingly:

“You’re all right, pal. Take it easy. You’re in your plane and perfectly safe.”

Slowly Joe sat up, then looked about.

“Were you injured?” asked Ted presently.

“N—no, I guess not,” came the reply. “That bomb had some kind of gas in it that put me to sleep. All I had time to do was open the pedcock to the helium tank.”

“It’s lucky you did. Don’t try to take over until you feel better,” advised Ted.

“I’m all right now,” insisted Joe. “A little more fresh air, and I’ll be quite myself again. Where’s Jed?”

“He went after that villain who tried to murder you!” replied Ted. “I’ll signal to him.”

The flyer did so, and received a response that the third member of the pursuit patrol was coming back to them.

“Any luck?” asked the leader.

“The worst,” the pilot of *Mars* responded. “Just got ready to bring them down, when a cloud stopped everything.”

“Hard luck,” agreed Ted, “but we’ll catch up with them yet. In the meantime, we’ll go to Island Number Forty-five—the one you call Babel—that is, as soon as Joe feels able to proceed.”

“I’m all right,” the pilot of *Diana* insisted. “And the bomb didn’t do the plane any damage—just a gas bomb, I guess.”

“Then we’re off,” declared Ted, and led the way. “We’ve lost our enemies, but we have another job to do.”

He headed for the island nicknamed Babel, the island of people speaking many languages. Here Mr. Farmer of the F.B.I. had directed Ted to contact certain representatives of the Dutch and Chinese Governments. These men would inspect the *Patriots* and report on them for use by an international air police force.

In the late evening, the flyers saw a faint glow in the sky, reflected from the lights of the chief city of the isle. Soon they were directly above the harbor. They circled about slowly, looking for a safe place to come down.

“I’ll go ashore first,” telephoned Ted, “and find out what’s doing.”

He landed his amphibian on the water and rowed off in his rubber boat. Men in variegated costumes were talking wildly, elbowing one another around, and pointing first to Ted, then to the three *Patriots* in their harbor.

Too late the approaching flyer realized that something was amiss. In a moment he was surrounded by a group of dark-skinned natives and rough-looking whites. One of the latter stepped forward and said gruffly:

“So you got here at last, eh?”

CHAPTER XIX

A Strange Belief

Ted Scott had been in many a tight place before. Long ago he had learned that calmness had earned him more respect with strangers than a fighting mood. Now he said in an even voice:

“I didn’t know you were expecting me. Are you sure you haven’t mistaken me for someone else?”

“You’re from Ameriky, ain’t you?” asked another white, unshaven and dirty.

“Well, I have been there, but my friends and I have been stopping somewhere else,” Ted evaded the question. “I came here to see the governor. Will you direct me to him?”

The words had an instantaneous effect. The crowd fell back, and several pointed toward a hill overlooking the city. Ted was about to proceed on foot, thinking this the safest way to travel, when there was a commotion beyond the crowd and an automobile came into view.

“Here’s the gov’nor now,” spoke up one of the mob.

Ted made his way toward the car and introduced himself. The white-haired man in the rear seat apologized profusely for the annoyance Ted had been caused, and invited him and the other aviators to accompany him at once to his palace.

“Thank you,” responded Ted. “But first I must provide for the safety of our planes.”

“I will do that,” said the governor. He summoned the native chief of police. “Get a squad of your men here at once,” he directed, “and put a strong guard over the water front, where the planes can be kept in full view. No one else is to be allowed to go near them.”

The chief saluted and hurried off to the police station near by. The boys waited until the guards arrived, then rode off to the palace. There they were served dinner and shown to comfortable rooms.

“In the morning representatives of the Dutch and Chinese Governments will be here to meet you,” announced the governor as he said good night.

The callers arrived directly after breakfast.

“I saw the flying boats in the harbor,” said Mr. Bloomfeldt, a Hollander, when introductions were over. “They are the most beautiful planes I have ever seen.”

Mr. Sin Ying was equally high in his praise. He added that the two pilots who would try out the *Patriots* were to arrive at ten o’clock. Joe and Jed went off to clean and tune up the motors, while Ted conferred further with the men.

“Our guests did not receive a very cordial welcome last evening,” said the governor, and went on to tell of the attitude of the natives toward the boys.

“The fairy tale that has been circulating recently among the peasants and the mine workers here no doubt is responsible,” said Bloomfeldt. “The island has had its misfortunes, and the story got around that help was coming from America.”

“I see,” mused Ted. “My friends and I were supposed to be bringing that assistance. But the men seemed to be unfriendly.”

“Probably because you gave no sign of being the gift-giver they were expecting,” Sin Ying responded. “The people here have suffered severely. A recent tidal wave has ruined their crops and homes.”

“That would have been bad enough, for the islanders are used to calamities of that kind,” Bloomfeldt took up the story, “but in addition to these, there have been heavy thefts from some of the mines that yield platinum, so they’ve been shut down.”

Platinum! Ted’s interest became intense.

“Can’t the thieves be found?” he asked.

“We suspect they come here from some distant point, either by air or by boat. But we haven’t been able to find them,” the governor replied.

“In order to fool the miners, who are ignorant and superstitious, someone has been spreading tales of relief coming from America—America the rich, America the generous,” said Bloomfeldt. “So, if America is going to take care of the people, why should they worry about not having work?”

“An ingenious and cruel lie,” exclaimed Ted indignantly. “Do you know who has spread these stories?”

“Not positively,” was the reply. “Within the past month several strangers have been reported in the vicinity of the mines—white men.”

“I have an idea who they might be,” spoke up Ted.

He went on to tell some of the story regarding the platinum pirates, keeping to himself those secrets which his government would not want to have revealed. His listeners were astounded at the scope of the scheme.

“Are these strangers by any chance still here, do you think?” asked Ted.

The governor contacted the chief of police who gave him the latest report from the guard at the mine. It was discouraging.

“The strangers left in the dark, but no one seems to know where they went,” he stated.

Ted’s mind was leaping ahead. The way to fight fire was with fire! If the platinum pirates had used the ignorance and superstition of the natives to gain their evil ends, then Ted could work on those same characteristics for a good purpose. Not only would he benefit the miners, but he would stop the work of the crooks! Surely they had had native assistants who might be made to reveal the pirates’ secrets.

“Will you tell me something of the customs and beliefs of the people on the island?” the flyer asked the governor.

“The great majority of them are Mohammedans,” he explained, “but this faith is almost lost in superstition. The great mass of the people must be considered as followers of Animism.”

“Just what is Animism?” asked Ted.

“It was the primitive belief of the ancestors of these people,” replied Bloomfeldt. “They think that animals, trees, and plants have souls like those of men. Many of the natives will tell you that the trees, for instance, have feelings such as we have, and that once those same trees were living men.”

“How strange!” said Ted.

“There are other things even more strange,” smiled Sin Ying. “For instance, some natives believe that it is possible to have one’s soul taken away for a time to keep it out of danger. For example, removal into a new house brings on trouble. So a priest collects all the souls of the family in a bag beforehand. Later, with the proper ceremonies, he restores them to their owners!”

“And charges them well for the trouble, no doubt,” smiled Ted.

“Oh, he doesn’t forget that part of it,” agreed Bloomfeldt.

At this moment a servant appeared, announcing that the two aviators for whom they had been waiting were at the door. Bloomfeldt and Sin Ying bade the governor good-bye and went off with Ted.

“Will you ride in my plane, Mr. Bloomfeldt?” the flyer asked. “My friend Joe Scarlet will pilot you, Mr. Ying, and I’ll have Jed Nothby take up each of your aviators in turn in his plane. Jed’s our expert mechanic, and no doubt your flyers will have many technical questions to ask him.”

“It will be an honor to fly in your pursuit patrol,” replied the Chinese representative. “My government thinks the plan now being worked out is the best step forward in the international control of crime that has yet been undertaken. They hope it will prove a great success.”

Joe and Jed were on the dock, awaiting the group. The *Patriots* had been brought alongside the wharf where the water was calm. The guests climbed aboard, and the pilots took their places.

“How air travel has changed things,” remarked Mr. Bloomfeldt as they taxied away. “America seems very close to us now.”

“Unfortunately, fast planes can carry enemies to you as well as friends,” remarked Ted. “I want to see an international air police force formed very soon.”

“It looks to me as if this amphibian would be the right craft for the work,” remarked his passenger after Ted had explained various features of the flying boat, including its retractible wheels for ground landings.

It was a glorious day with perfect flying weather, and Bloomfeldt declared the trip to sea and over the island a great success. Once Ted asked to have the mines pointed out, as he intended to go to them as soon as this flying test should be over.

Sin Ying was delighted with the performance of the *Patriots*. He said he had never seen such triumphs of engineering skill as the plane exhibited. And the helium bags of Morton’s invention seemed to be the last word in safety.

When the groups gathered again, the Dutch and Chinese pilots reported very satisfactory trips. They gave the new planes their heartiest approval.

“Outlawry can be curbed,” said Sin Ying. “I shall recommend that my government approve of these planes for the international air police patrol.”

Bloomfeldt spoke in similar terms. A little later Ted and his chums left the group, and returned to the governor's palace for luncheon.

"I should like to visit the platinum district," Ted said to their host, as dessert was being served. "How far is it from here?"

"About eight miles," was the reply. "I'll have a car take you out there."

"That's good of you," said Ted, "but I'm afraid an automobile would be too conspicuous. I want to go in as simple a way as possible so as not to attract attention."

"The usual method of getting there is in one of the native carts drawn by oxen. The country is very rough and mountainous, and it will be a wearisome journey for you. But I'll have a vehicle here in less than an hour, if you say so."

"Fine!" said Ted. "And also, if you don't mind, we'll take rooms at the hotel tonight upon our return. If we should be trailed, it would be best not to come here."

While they were waiting for the cart, Ted urged his friends to accompany him to town. He sought out one of the stores. There he purchased some cheap slacks, jackets, and sombreros for the three of them.

"Here are your clothes for the trip," he said, handing each the garb usually worn by prospectors. Then he bought a considerable amount of phosphorous, and two large white linen sheets. Joe and Jed watched the performance with wondering eyes.

"What's the big idea?" questioned the former.

"I'll tell you later," Ted replied in a low tone.

The boys hurried back to the governor's palace, and donned their prospector's outfits. Then they jumped into the ramshackle cart drawn by Zebu oxen already standing in front of the door.

They were soon outside the city limits, jouncing along rough and rutted roads that, as Joe put it, threatened to "shake the daylights out of them."

"Boy, I miss the smooth comfort of the air lanes," complained Jed. "But if I'd flown *Mars* over here, I'd have had to land him on a mountain top, I suppose. And he might not have liked that," the pilot grinned.

"Now, Ted Scott, you old tightwad, open up," said Joe. "What's the dope on those things you bought and put in the back of this cart?"

“It’s like this,” explained his friend. “I heard this morning about the superstitious beliefs of the natives here. I want to turn that superstition to good account.”

“How?” demanded Jed.

“I don’t know yet,” acknowledged Ted. “A lot will depend on what we find out—or don’t find out—about the thieves who have been robbing the mines of platinum.”

“Are you suspicious of anyone?” asked Joe.

“I feel that some native or natives are the thieves and are selling the stuff to the crooks in the world combine,” replied Ted. “What I want to do this afternoon is find a clue. Then later I can use the services of the two very accomplished young gentlemen at my side—” he grinned and paused.

The others bowed in mockery.

“Thanks, Milord,” said Jed.

“Time you admitted it,” added Joe.

“I have a hunch I can use your talents tonight,” Ted went on. “I’ll tell you more later. You go on looking at the scenery, while I do some thinking.”

The scenery was well worth viewing. In the afternoon sun it was a gorgeous panorama of all the colors of the rainbow. Flooded paddy fields were everywhere, rising like steps up the mountainsides.

“Those plants ought to produce plenty of rice for the natives,” remarked Joe. “Why are they talking of people starving?”

“I presume the tidal wave ruined or carried away what they had on hand, and the new crop won’t be ready for some time,” was Ted’s guess. “Oh, look there!”

A farmer, near his little thatched cottage, was guiding an ancient plow through a field. He was urging on two lazy water buffalo which were pulling it. A near-by group of sylphlike, laughing maidens, in flashing sarongs, waved at the youths.

“This is like a picture book,” said Jed. “And the people don’t look too unhappy, even if they want more to eat.”

But the scene grew grim as the boys went on up the hill. Indications of poverty could be seen everywhere. The children looked to be frightfully

undernourished. Sullen men and women gazed suspiciously at Ted and his companions.

“This is a dreadful sight,” declared Joe. “If those platinum pirates are responsible for this, they ought to be—ought to be—” he was too angry to go on.

Soon the three youths reached a settlement where the inhabitants lived very near the opening to the mines. The boys alighted from the cart and looked about them. They strolled around like prospectors, their eyes missing nothing of their surroundings.

“Water is still flooding the mines,” said Ted. “That tidal wave must have been on this side of the island.”

“No work here, but these people don’t seem to mind that,” observed Joe. “And they look well fed.”

“The contrast between these natives and the other miners we passed gives me an idea,” said Ted thoughtfully. “I believe I’ve found a clue to the platinum pirates.”

His chums looked at him in surprise. Before they could question him, he pointed out a man who seemed to be the leader of the group.

“He looks well nourished,” whispered Jed.

“That’s just it,” said Ted in a low voice. “When some people are virtually starving, and their neighbors are well fed, look for a dishonest reason. In this case, isn’t it logical to suppose the platinum pirates brought food here in return for metal?”

Joe and Jed were about to tell him they agreed with his reasoning, when the pudgy little man walked forward. He was decked with jewelry and ornaments.

“Do you speak English?” asked Ted.

“Leetle,” the man replied. “What you want?”

“I’m looking for a man—a white man. I was told he was up here.”

“No—nobody here,” answered the native quickly. “Big wave. Nobody come!”

Ted tried another idea. “That’s too bad. I had an important message for him.”

“From big boss?” asked the dark-skinned leader. Then he realized he had said too much. “Big boss of mine,” he added quickly.

The boys did not let on they realized the man had given himself away, and Ted at once changed the subject.

“We’ve had a long drive,” he stated. “Could we get a little food from you?”

At once the man expressed regret that he could not offer refreshments to the newcomers. He and his people were down to bedrock so far as food was concerned. They had barely enough to sustain life from day to day. No, it was terrible! Terrible!

Ted expressed the proper amount of sympathy, then said that, since this was the case, they must head back to the city for food. Gravely the three boys climbed into their cart and started down the hill. They had gone only half a mile when Ted pulled into a grove of trees and stopped.

“What’s the idea?” asked Joe.

The other’s eyes were alight. “We’re staying here a while, then we’re going back to find out from that fakir where the headquarters of the platinum pirates is.”

Ted called his friends close to him, and in whispered tones outlined his plan.

CHAPTER XX

The Tree Talks

Darkness settled upon the island. On the side of the mountain near the opening to the mines, three American flyers eagerly watched preparations for a feast.

The leader of the natives had issued some gleeful commands to his followers. With equal hilarity those commands had been obeyed. The people now hurried from every direction, bringing abundant supplies of all kinds of food from hidden stores.

No question of scarcity here! Pork, bananas, yams, sago and vegetables fairly overflowed the rude tables set up on the edge of the forest below the mines.

“Let the dance begin!” shouted the leader.

At once several youths stepped forward. In their hands were strange-looking musical instruments. They were bamboo tubes, held in bamboo frames, which gave off sweet sounds as the boys shook them.

Girls began to dance, first alone, then with the young men. The American onlookers did not know what it was all about, but guessed that one maiden would be chosen as the next bride of the group. Sure enough, a girl was led to the head of the table by the oldest man.

“Wonder who the lucky groom will be?” thought the watchers.

To their disgust, the squat, unattractive leader to whom the American boys had talked earlier that day seated himself beside her. Then the feast began.

The crowd ate greedily. Here was no thought for their undernourished brothers a few miles away. Good cheer and laughter ran riot.

Then came a startling interruption. From one of the trees there issued a long, piteous wail, repeated several times.

The laughter stopped as if by magic. Blanched faces looked fearfully in the direction from which the sound had come.

The tree shook violently. Then, in the native tongue, *it began to talk!*

“Oh, wicked ones,” it wailed, “you have helped those who robbed the people of this island. The spirits of the mines are in great distress. They stand on the mountainside and weep. Behold their suffering!”

The frightened people looked. There, on the side of the near-by hill, were two enormous nuggets of platinum, surrounded by flickering flames. The huge masses, seemingly alive, swayed back and forth as though in agony.

Shrieks of fear burst from the throats of the superstitious watchers. They beat their breasts and fell upon the ground.

“Help us! Save us!” they cried out.

The leader of the group had lost all his pompousness. No one could have been more lowly than he as he left the table and crawled on hands and knees to the foot of the tree. He bowed his head in supplication.

“Let the spirit of the mines speak its will, and it shall be obeyed,” he promised.

“This then does the spirit decree,” came the voice from the tree. “Order the men and women of the tribe to enter their huts and stay there until morning. Let no light be shown. No one must look through doors or windows.

“In the morning you must bring out all your store of food and share it with the starving islanders. And when the white men come again tomorrow, you must answer all questions they ask, and tell them what they want to know about the men who have been robbing the mines.”

“It shall be done, O Spirit,” said the chief humbly.

The tree stopped speaking. The stricken people rose from their knees and fled into their huts. They barred the doors. They put out the last glimmers of light. They kept away from all windows and entrances.

In a short time complete silence hung over what so recently had been a scene of jollification. Even the native guards at the mine entrance had fled. The drama on the hill had lapsed into darkness also.

“Well, I guess it’s safe to descend now,” a figure in the spirit tree said to himself.

With the utmost caution Joe Scarlet slid down the trunk and hurried to his companions who were standing where the enormous nuggets had swayed a moment before. Joe found them busy wrapping up sheets.

The boys looked at one another, and burst into laughter. It was some minutes before they could speak.

“Hi, spirits of the mines,” chortled Joe.

“Hello, talking tree,” they came back at him. “Say, you were wonderful. That talk of yours turned the trick. You had them absolutely awe-stricken.”

“Too easy, maybe,” Joe replied. “They may catch on before morning. But it sure did me good to see that fat old boss of theirs cringing in the dirt.”

“He needed humbling,” laughed Ted. “And I doubt that the natives will become suspicious, because they’re too deep in their belief in Animism. But now, fellows, let’s gather up every scrap that might betray our presence here, and get going.”

The boys carried their paraphernalia to the hidden cart, jumped in, and started off. The roughness of the road, and their unfamiliarity with the country, prolonged the trip. About halfway down the mountain, Ted thought he saw a moving light off in the woods.

“I wonder if someone is following us,” he said, alarmed.

Joe stood up, and strained his eyes in the direction Ted pointed out.

“Can’t see any light now,” he reported. “Perhaps you’d better stop, and then we can hear if anyone is walking over there.”

Ted halted the oxen, and waited tensely. The only sounds were those of insects. After a few minutes he drove on, but the feeling persisted that someone was watching their movements.

“Perhaps some young man, better educated than the others, has seen through our hoax and is going to make trouble for all of us,” Ted worried.

His companions, still pleased with the way their scheme had turned out, were not concerned about such a possibility. Presently they talked Ted into a gay mood again.

It was late when they reached the city. They had had no food since lunchtime and were ravenously hungry.

“Let’s eat!” cried Joe, and the others agreed it was high time they did.

They left the cart and oxen at a stable the governor had mentioned to them and walked to their hotel.

“Hope the dining room is still open,” remarked Jed.

As the boys were about to enter the building, a black-eyed native girl sidled up to Ted.

“Woro know where white men went tonight,” she said in a low tone. “Woro has nice batik. If white men buy batik, Woro not tell what white men did.”

Ted was thunderstruck. How had this young woman learned where he and his chums had been, or what they had been doing?

Were all his plans going to be spoiled, so that he could not get the clue he sought to the platinum pirates?

CHAPTER XXI

The Missing *Patriot*

Joe and Jed were on the alert in an instant. Before Ted could speak, the former said to the native girl, "What do you mean?"

"Woro sell good batik. You buy, Woro not tell that white men go to mountain."

"Of all the nerve!" exclaimed Jed. "Ten to one she's just bluffing."

"I don't know," said Ted, perplexed, then added with a wink, "Perhaps the best thing to do would be to buy some of her stuff. We intended to bring presents for the folks at home, anyway, and we may as well get them from her as from anyone else. In the meantime I'll figure something out."

He motioned with his hand for the girl to follow them into the hotel. She came, all smiles, and opened a basket she carried.

The fabrics she had for sale were very beautiful. Their lovely texture and design must have required months of effort.

The native girl had won her point, and she knew it. Her black eyes sparkled with mischief, but she made no further reference to her threat as she displayed her goods.

"How do they put these designs on the cloth?" asked Joe.

"The governor was telling me about it last evening," responded Ted. "First they apply hot wax in the form of a design with a little wooden instrument. Then, when the cloth is dipped in the dye, those covered places don't take up the color."

"Very clever," said Jed. "Later, I suppose, they remove the wax with hot water."

"Correct," replied Ted. "One process in preparing the material is unusual. The white muslin is dipped in coconut oil, and ashes are rubbed into it. Then, when these are washed out, the cloth becomes this lovely creamy shade you see here."

"I've read there are as many as six processes for a two-color batik," said Joe, "and even more for the intricate ones."

“No wonder they’re so expensive,” stated Jed. “Well, here goes the old bank roll.”

Ted bought several articles; a shawl for Charity, a scarf for Eben, besides a number of other attractive pieces. Joe and Jed also purchased some gifts for relatives, although every time they saw a glint of mockery in Woro’s eyes, they felt like wringing her neck. While Jed was looking over some articles and asking the price of them, Ted took Joe to one side and spoke to him in a whisper.

“We’ve done what this girl asked,” he said. “But all the same, I don’t trust her. This is what I wish you’d do. Slip over to the police station and see the chief. Tell him that I want Woro shadowed closely for the next twenty-four hours. He is not to arrest her; he is simply to see that she does not communicate with anyone from that group up near the mine.”

“I’m off,” said Joe, and started away immediately.

In the meantime, the desk clerk of the hotel, thinking that Woro might be annoying the guests, motioned to her with a frown and pointed to the door. The girl gathered up her basket and moved as though to obey.

“Oh, just a minute!” said Ted.

Now was no time for her to leave! She should not go away in anger; and besides, he must keep her there until Joe had accomplished his mission.

“I’d like one more scarf,” Ted said quickly, and thus delayed her until he saw his friend returning.

An almost imperceptible nod of his chum’s head assured him that matters had been arranged with the police chief. He completed his final purchase and paid the girl.

It had been a profitable evening for Woro, and she was delighted beyond measure. She made the boys a low, mocking bow, and fairly danced away.

“Regular hold-up,” growled Joe.

“Almost cleaned us out, for a fact,” smiled Ted, “but the money was well spent. And now, let’s get scrubbed up, then eat.”

After a meal of native dishes, to which the boys had grown accustomed, they went to their rooms. It had been a long day for them, and they were asleep almost as soon as they got into bed.

They arose early, and hurried through breakfast. Then Ted laid out their plans for the day.

“Suppose you, Jed, go down to the harbor and give the *Patriots* a good tuning up. See that everything is in readiness for us to take off at a minute’s notice.”

“Count it done,” said Jed.

“Joe and I will run out to the vicinity of the talking tree,” grinned Ted, “and see if it’s necessary to have it do a little more talking. I hope it won’t be, but you never can tell. If luck is with us, we’ll be back shortly after twelve o’clock.”

With this understanding, the boys parted. Jed made his way to the shore. Ted and Joe rented an old rickety car, and set out to the scene of the previous day’s happenings.

“Do you think that fat leader might suspect he was tricked last night?” asked Joe as they rode along.

“I hope not,” said Ted. “He was pretty scared.”

“He was funny,” Joe chuckled. “I had all I could do to keep my voice firm and solemn.”

“I hope that girl Woro hasn’t sent word to him in the meantime,” said Ted. “I can’t help wondering whether someone was following us last night and told her about it.”

“That would complicate matters,” agreed Joe. “But we’ll soon find out.”

They were approaching the section where the people had looked half starved the day before. But now a change was noticeable. Languor and hopelessness had given place to keen anticipation. Men and women were standing in groups, talking excitedly, and pointing to an oxcart rumbling down the hill road. On it were heaped vegetables, coconuts, and sacks of rice.

The vehicle stopped in the center of the settlement. The drivers tossed its contents to the people who crowded around wildly, chattering and reaching out with greedy hands.

The boys looked at each other and smiled.

“There’s the answer!” exclaimed Joe. “The people up the hill already have started to give away some of the surplus food they were hiding. Our hocus-pocus worked!”

“And for a good cause,” said Ted. “I guess no one has found us out yet.”

The supposition became a certainty as soon as they reached the scene of the former night's ceremonies. When they called upon the fat little leader of the group, they found a changed man. All the pomp and pretense of the day before had vanished. He bowed to them meekly and awaited their pleasure.

"Spirit of tree tell me to answer questions of white men," he said simply.

Of course, Ted and Joe had to appear to be wholly ignorant of what he was saying.

"Spirit of the tree!" exclaimed Ted in pretended astonishment. "What do you mean by that?"

In reply, the man told with evident sincerity the facts with which his hearers already were familiar. They listened with grave faces and occasional exclamations of wonder.

"You have done well to obey," said Ted approvingly. "We saw, while coming here, the food you sent to the starving people. Now they are happy again. And the spirit was right when it said you should tell the white men what they want to know, for that will help many people."

"Speak, and I will answer," was the reply.

Ted learned that two men, whose description seemed to fit Togoty and Charlie, had been frequent visitors to the place. The former had purchased some platinum which had been stolen by certain members of the tribe.

The chief admitted that he had been well paid for it, partly in food, partly in money. But, he righteously added, he would give the money to the mine owners, now that the spirits of the mines had been so hurt. Yes, those spirits had been in agony.

"Where did those men take the platinum?" asked Ted.

The fat man said he had heard one tell the other of a faraway place called Comongin. It was situated on the Bulloo River. He had told the chief of the tribe that there were jumping animals there that were sacred and had to be fed platinum!

"Kangaroos," observed Ted to his friends. "What a crazy reason to give for securing the platinum! It's a valuable tip for us, though. I believe our next stop is Australia!"

"Looks like it," agreed Joe.

Australia! What a chase the pirates were leading the pursuit patrol!

Excitedly the chums thanked the little man, and quickly made their way back to the city.

“We’d better leave here at once,” declared Ted. “Let’s pick up our belongings and Jed’s, and hop off immediately.”

As they entered the hotel, the clerk rushed forward to meet them.

“Oh, Mr. Scott,” he shouted excitedly, “I’ve been looking for you everywhere! Your plane has been stolen.”

Stolen!

Ted’s heart missed a beat.

CHAPTER XXII

A Sinister Face

“What!” exclaimed Ted in consternation. “My plane stolen? How do you know?”

“It’s gone, anyway,” said the clerk. “I’ve been trying to find you for some time, but nobody knew where you were.”

Ted and Joe waited to hear no more. They rushed at top speed to the water front. Their minds were in a whirl. There must be some mistake.

But there was no mistake, and a sickening sense of loss took possession of them. *Aeolus* was nowhere in sight.

“My flying boat is here,” spoke up Joe, “but Jed’s—Where is Jed, anyway?”

He and his plane were gone.

“Maybe he’s chasing the fellow who took yours,” suggested Joe.

At a little distance Ted saw the native officer who had been left in charge of the amphibians. He rushed up to him.

“My plane! My plane!” he shouted, grasping the man by the arm. “You had charge of it. What happened to it? Where is it?”

The officer burst into a torrent of explanations, his words fairly tumbling over one another, as he sought to free himself from blame.

Yes, he had had charge of the flying boat. But early that morning a man in a pilot’s uniform had come to him and told him that Mr. Scott had sent him. He had brought a signed note with him, giving the stranger permission to take Mr. Scott’s plane aloft.

“I never wrote such a note!” declared Ted. “It was a forgery.”

“I am sorry,” replied the native guard, shrugging his shoulders.

To him, everything had seemed in order, so he had allowed the stranger to take the flying boat.

“I have been waiting at the dock for him ever since, but he has not come back,” the man sighed. “I am afraid that——”

Ted cut him short.

“What kind of a person was this stranger?” he demanded.

The guard’s description was too vague to be useful. This was maddening!

Ted would have liked to take the stupid officer by the collar and shake him until his teeth rattled. But almost instantly he became less angry. After all, the man was not entirely to blame.

“Come along, Joe,” Ted cried. “We’ll go up in *Diana*, and we won’t come down until we find my plane. And heaven help the man who stole it if I get my hands on him!”

They rowed out to the flying boat and climbed aboard. In a few minutes, Ted, at the controls, was giving it the gun. The guard had pointed out the direction the stranger had taken, and the flyer now turned in the same general line.

He was desperately disturbed—as much so as he ever had been in his life. What chance did he have of discovering the stolen plane in this boundless realm of sky? Hours had passed since the theft had been discovered. By now *Aeolus* might be a thousand miles away!

And if it were never recovered—which might very easily happen—how was he to explain its loss to those who were backing the pursuit patrol? He pictured the chagrin of Farmer and Hapworth and the embarrassment of Eben and Charity Browning. Worse than that, he thought of the glee of the enemies whose plans he had set out to thwart.

“I’ll try to get in touch with Jed,” he decided.

He turned to the radiotelephone and called. No answer! Again and again he tried, but heard only the click of his own instrument in reply.

His anxiety grew with every passing second. Had anything happened to Jed? That dependable person was usually so prompt in responding. The loss of the plane was bad enough. But the loss of Jed——

Suddenly the radio flashed, and Ted jumped. He grabbed the headpiece frantically.

“Hello, hello!” he called. “Is that you, Jed?”

“Nobody else,” was the response.

“Thank goodness!” exclaimed Ted from the bottom of his heart. “We thought you were lost! What have you been doing? Chasing my plane?”

“That’s what I’ve *been* doing,” drawled Jed, “but now I’m bringing it back.”

“What!” cried Ted, wild with delight. “You mean to say you have it?”

“Absolutely,” replied Jed, and Ted could almost see the grin on his friend’s face.

Ted sank back in his seat with a sigh of relief. Jed was safe. The lost *Patriot* was recovered.

“Capture an enemy, too?” he asked after a moment.

“Yes, I did. We’ll be back to the island in short order.”

He rang off. Ted and Joe looked at each other. Who was the prisoner, and how was he coming? There was nothing the two in the plane *Diana* could do but go back to the harbor and wait.

It was some time before *Mars* and *Aeolus* appeared. Ted’s plane came in first, and from it leaped an aviator who was a stranger to the boys. He jumped into the water and tried to escape, but Ted was after him in a moment and brought him to the dock.

“Who are you?” cried Scott, “and what do you mean by stealing my plane?”

“It was all Hoagland’s idea,” replied the pilot sullenly.

Hoagland! One of the platinum pirates!

By this time Jed had landed, and the whole story came out. Hoagland and this stranger, who gave the name of Hank Tippin, had been spying on the pursuit patrol, and had stolen one of the *Patriots* while the boys were away for the night.

“I didn’t want to do it,” whined Hank, “but you can’t argue with Hoagland. He wrote a note and signed Ted Scott’s name to it for me to give the guard. We sneaked back here last night. At dawn I was to take off and meet Hoagland a few miles from here and follow him. But your friend here —” he indicated Jed—“was too quick for me. Hoagland or no Hoagland, I didn’t want to be shot down in the air.”

Behind the fellow’s back Jed gave Ted and Joe a broad wink. Without being told, they knew their friend had given Hank such a scare that he had

consented to returning to the island, hoping to get off with a light punishment. He would answer no further questions Ted put to him, so he was hustled off to jail.

Ted clapped Jed on the shoulder in thanks for his deed.

“Nothing more than either you or Joe would have done,” his chum said modestly. “I was here. You were out in the country. That was all there was to it.”

“We must waste no more time here,” decided the leader of the pursuit patrol. “Let’s fuel the *Patriots* and get after Hoagland! If we give our planes all the speed they’ve got, we probably can fly two miles to one of that platinum pirate’s. We may catch up with him before nightfall.”

In a short time the three flying boats were in the air. They followed in general the course Hank had been taking. Their chance of catching up with him was not good, but they had the added information of Comongin on the Bulloo River.

And luck was with them. They had been flying for some hours, when a plane suddenly appeared within range of their binoculars. There was something familiar about it.

As the boys came closer, they were able to identify it definitely, for painted on its blue wings was the telltale insignia, the symbol of the international crooks—an orange-colored X in a black circle!

By this time they were nearing a large island. Just what Ted wanted!

Putting on speed, he raced past the strange plane. As he did so, he caught a glimpse of a scowling, ugly face.

Ted knew that face. The sinister eyes, glaring at him, were those of Hoagland—the man who was about to lead the boys to their fate one night in a California farmhouse! Only the action of the sheriff had saved them from possible death.

The recognition was mutual, judging by the look of hate in the fellow’s eyes. But Ted Scott was not going to capture him, Hoagland decided!

Across the space that separated the two planes, Ted signaled for his enemy to land on the island. The man’s only answer was a deepening scowl, followed a moment later by a rain of bullets from a machine gun.

Luckily none of them took effect. But they showed the desperation of the man. Ted resolved on drastic measures. He drew back out of range, while he

telephoned to Joe and Jed in code.

“I don’t want to harm this fellow, but I want him to surrender,” he said. “Shoot above him so that he’ll hear the bullets whizzing, and won’t know what minute one may hit him. He realizes we can get him, and my guess is that he’ll decide to take imprisonment on land, rather than death in the air.”

The boys followed the orders, and the fusillade began. Hoagland answered, but his nerve was weakening and his shots went wild.

It was not long before Ted’s strategy proved its worth. His enemy became convinced that the game was up. He raised his plane’s wings in sign of surrender, and the boys instantly ceased firing.

By this time the combat in the sky had attracted the notice of people on the island. An excited throng had gathered at the water’s edge, all faces turned upward.

Ted ordered Joe to descend and notify the police to take charge of a prisoner. Then he and Jed, one on either side of Hoagland, accompanied their enemy down.

As Hoagland stepped ashore, he was handcuffed by a native guard. This man, who spoke English fluently, had a conference with Ted. The flyer showed his credentials as an international air police officer, explained the work of the platinum pirates, and asked that the prisoner be held for examination. This was agreed to readily, and Hoagland was driven off to the local jail.

“I’m going to search his flying boat,” Ted told his chums. “Come help me.”

The boys were astounded at what they found. The plane was a veritable treasure trove. It held several hundred pounds of platinum, secreted in various hiding places. The value of the metal amounted to hundreds of thousands of dollars!

“Another blow to the platinum pirates!” cried Jed.

Ted now was busy going through Hoagland’s papers, which he had taken from a secret compartment. Fortunately the man had not had time to dispose of them. As the flyer studied the words, which were in code, two stood out prominently.

Plata Merino.

Plata. Could that refer to platinum?

Merino. A famous breed of sheep.

An idea shot swiftly through Ted's mind.

"I have it!" he cried. "I know where the headquarters of the pirates is!"

CHAPTER XXIII

The Pursuit Patrol

“What!” exclaimed Joe and Jed, startled by the exclamation.

“Well, perhaps I was a little hasty,” grinned Ted, “but I think I have a clue to the cache of the platinum pirates.”

“Let’s hear it,” demanded Jed eagerly.

“It’s in the code,” Ted explained. “‘Plata Merino.’ Plata is silver, or platinum. Merino indicates sheep, and sheep probably mean a ranch. Also, it confirms the idea which that fat old chief on the island Jed called Babel gave us.”

“No other country in the world raises so many sheep as Australia, and that’s where the Bulloo River is,” stated Joe.

“I’m not so sure about Plata,” Ted went on, “but I figure the headquarters of the pirates is on a sheep ranch in the vicinity of Comongin near the Bulloo River.”

“Hoagland definitely was headed that way when we brought him down,” agreed Jed. “But say, that island is a mighty big place, almost as big as the United States. Do you know where Comongin is?”

Ted thought for a few minutes.

“Not exactly, but it’s in the interior, in the vicinity of Cunnamulla. And I think that’s where we can get details, and also some help.”

“Don’t tell me you know somebody who lives there,” scoffed Jed. “But then, I’d forgotten you visited that island once. Leave a girl behind?” he grinned.

Ted ignored the question, but said that on his previous visit he had not gone inland and was not familiar with the country.

“Hapworth spoke to me about a relative of his, a Mr. MacDonald, who owns a big sheep ranch near Cunnamulla,” he explained. “A fine man, according to Walter, and an officer of the law as well. I’m sure he’ll do everything he can to help us.”

It was decided that the boys would not start until the next morning. Since it was late in the day, and there was no enemy to chase, it seemed best to get

a full night's sleep. Furthermore, it was necessary to remove the platinum from Hoagland's plane, and put it in a bank vault until the proper authorities could take charge of it. Ted went off to attend to this, and came back smiling.

"This island has no such thing as a safe deposit vault," he said. "The only bank here has a wooden file to keep things in. The president of it was aghast at my request, and insisted the police take charge of the platinum. So I guess Hoagland will have his treasure in the same building with him!"

The pursuit patrol was an eager group when its members started the next morning on what they hoped would lead them to victory. Ted had cabled separate messages to Hapworth, Nimbusser, and Farmer about the capture of Hoagland. Now he hoped that in a short time he might send another, telling them of complete success.

It was a beautiful day, with not a cloud in the sky. The *Patriots* were in perfect condition and sped through the air as though they themselves knew the mission they were on. Hours went by without anything unusual happening, then suddenly Joe and Jed saw that something was the matter with their leader's plane.

"Ted's in trouble!" cried Joe over his telephone.

The motors of *Aeolus* had stalled abruptly, and now Ted's flying boat was dropping rapidly toward the ocean. Alarmed, his chums shot down to aid him when he should touch the water.

Before he reached the waves, however, his descent was checked. One helium bag opened, and the plane hung in space a few moments. Then the motors started once more, and Ted zoomed upward to the same altitude as before.

"What happened?" cried Joe and Jed into their telephones.

"Sorry you boys were worried," Ted replied. "It just occurred to me to test how the plane would act if only one helium bag were working. The other might go flooey some time, you know. So I shut off the motor and inflated just one of them."

"Glad it worked," said Joe, "but for the love of Pete, give us warning the next time you try any of your stunts. I nearly had heart failure."

"Same here," added Jed. "No more circus tricks, old fellow."

"I'll be good," Ted promised with a laugh.

A few hours later, the coast of the island continent they sought loomed up before them. Their spirits thrilled at the sight. Here, perhaps, was the end of the chase!

The coast was rugged, with many deep inlets and bays. Busy cities dotted the shore line. But Ted was not going to stop here. He was headed for the interior. Some time later, after flying over vast, fertile stretches of terrain, he called his chums on the telephone.

“Cunnamulla just ahead,” he reported.

A few miles beyond the town extended a vast ranch, stretching as far as the eye could see. This, Ted surmised, must be the property of Mr. MacDonald.

“Going down here,” he directed his chums, as they saw beneath them a large house, flanked for fully half a mile by a series of outbuildings. It was like a small city in itself.

“Some place!” murmured Jed, as he and the others let down their retractable landing wheels.

This time they would set their amphibians on solid earth. No sooner had Ted taxied to a stop in a large field than he was met by a group of people.

A fine-looking man detached himself from the others and stepped forward. He was tall and broad-shouldered, deeply bronzed by life in the open under the hot sun of the island.

“I wonder if I’m speaking to Mr. Angus MacDonald,” said Ted with a smile.

“Yes, you are,” was the surprised reply. “And who may you be, who comes from the sky to visit us?” the man added, his eyes twinkling.

“My name is Scott, and I’m from the United States,” replied Ted. “Walter Hapworth, I believe, is a relative of yours. He happens to be one of my best friends. He told me to drop in and see you if I ever came this way.”

MacDonald’s face lighted up.

“Any friend of Walter’s is a friend of mine,” he said warmly. “Delighted to see you, and I hope you will make us a long visit. These are my daughters, Helen and Margaret,” he added, drawing forward two very pretty young women.

Ted acknowledged the introduction, and in turn presented Joe and Jed. Then the group made their way toward the house, Ted and Angus

MacDonald in front, the other boys bringing up the rear with the girls.

The young women hurried into the house to order refreshments for their unexpected guests. Mrs. MacDonald greeted the boys, and took them to cool, attractive bedrooms with private baths. The flyers marveled at the comfort and luxury of this home, so many miles inland.

“Did you ever see such eyelashes as the MacDonald girls have?” said Jed with a grin. “Like the kind the movie stars have.”

“This climate makes creamy complexions, too,” grinned Ted. “But don’t forget we’re after pirates, not——”

Jed made a pass at his friend, then went straight to the porch to hunt up the daughter named Margaret. Dinner was a light-hearted affair, but directly afterward Ted went into conference with the ranch owner. They walked a little way from the house and sat down in a grove of eucalyptus trees.

“What I am about to tell you is of a very confidential nature,” said Ted, “and I do not want anyone but yourself to hear it.”

“I understand,” replied Mr. MacDonald. “We’ll not be disturbed here.”

Ted went on to relate the suspicions of the F.B.I. that a group of men were trying to corner the world market on platinum. The rancher listened with absorbed attention, but looked startled when the flyer said he thought the thieves were hoarding the metal near Comongin.

“Did you ever hear of a ranch called Plata Merino?” Ted asked.

“Indeed I have. It joins mine,” was the reply. “I had no idea the man running it isn’t honest.”

“How far is it from here?” asked Ted.

“Oh, about a hundred and twenty-five miles,” said MacDonald. “You wouldn’t count that being a neighbor in America, would you? But it’s different here.”

“I should say it is,” smiled Ted. “Tell me what kind of place it is, and who owns it.”

MacDonald’s brow puckered. “The owner went to England about a year ago and leased his station—that’s what we call a ranch here. I’ve had no contacts with the people there, so I know nothing about them.”

“They probably didn’t want you to,” said Ted. “I shouldn’t wonder——”

He was interrupted by a sound back of him, followed by laughter. Ted jumped to his feet, startled. Had someone else been listening to the conversation? As he turned to look, MacDonald smiled and told him to be seated.

“Only a kookaburra bird,” he explained. “Silly little things that laugh idiotically.”

In relief Ted went on with the conversation, finally asking if Mr. MacDonald could lend him fifty men to storm Plata Merino.

“I certainly will,” declared the station owner. “Some of them can go ahead by auto and pretend to be looking for a certain breed of sheep they have heard is to be found at Plata Merino. They can get the lay of the land and then come back and report.”

“It won’t be necessary for them to come back,” said Ted. “Why not have all fifty of them leave tomorrow? It wouldn’t take more than two days for them to reach the place, would it? Then the other boys and I will go over in our planes. We’ll keep the thieves from escaping by the air, while your men guard the land exits.”

“Fine,” agreed MacDonald. “I’ll tell my men to hurry the matter as fast as they can without arousing suspicion. In the meantime, you can have a much-needed rest here for the job before you. All that my home offers is at your disposal.”

Ted thanked his host and hastened to notify Joe and Jed of the plan. Needless to say, they were glad to spend the extra time at the MacDonald station, for it proved to be a fascinating place.

There was, for instance, the sheep shearing. Some of the animals had to be driven in from pastures fifty to a hundred miles away.

“We have to plan carefully to get them here in relays,” explained MacDonald. “If they arrive too fast, we can’t feed them properly.”

The men who did the shearing worked with clocklike precision and amazing speed. Each one was expected to clip up to two hundred sheep apiece a day.

“Some of the experts exceed that number,” smiled the station owner. “By the way, there’s to be a kangaroo hunt tomorrow morning. How’d you boys like to join in?”

“The best we could do would be to watch, I guess,” laughed Ted. “Suppose we look on from the air.”

Accompanied by the girls and their father, the boys used their planes, circling above the chase and keeping it in full view. The speed of the awkward animals, running and leaping on their hind legs, was phenomenal.

“Sometimes they make as high as forty-five miles an hour!” said MacDonald. “And they can jump over a fence thirty feet high!”

Few of the kangaroos were run down. The majority were chased along the fences and off the station. This was the main object of the pursuit, since the animals were eating the pasturage intended for the sheep.

Upon the return of the boys to the MacDonald home, they were met by a messenger from the party that had gone to Plata Merino. The man’s report confirmed Ted’s suspicions that the place would bear investigation.

“It is heavily guarded,” he said. “No visitors are allowed inside.”

MacDonald’s men had been stopped by a barrier on the road and questioned by guards. They had stated their business, and had been told that no sheep were for sale.

They had asked to see the owner of the ranch. Their request had been refused. The man in charge was very busy and could not be disturbed.

There was nothing for the scouts to do but retire. They had joined the others of their party some miles back and had made camp in a heavy grove of eucalyptus trees. From there they had sent the messenger at top speed, asking for further orders.

“My further orders,” cried Ted, angry at being thwarted, “are for the men to come back. My friends and I will attend to those pirates from the air!”

After the messenger had gone, MacDonald laid his hand on the flyer’s shoulder.

“I have a surprise for you,” he said mysteriously. “Come with me.”

CHAPTER XXIV

A Bitter Struggle

“A surprise?” questioned Ted.

“You’re not going out there alone,” said MacDonald. “No friend of Walter Hapworth can try that without my backing him up. No telling how many rascals may be over there.”

Ted could see the good sense of this, yet he was impatient to be off. The station owner read this in the flyer’s eyes.

“We try to be up-to-date here,” he said. “It may surprise you to learn this, but I actually have a trained parachute troop, not only for use if we should have difficulty with some foreign enemy, but also for assistance in our work. Sometimes we have trouble with our sheep in a district far away from here. Help could not get there in time by motor, and there might not be a place for a plane to land. So the men are carried to the spot by air, and go down with supplies by parachute.”

“That certainly is a modern method,” said Ted in admiration.

“My parachute troop is at your disposal,” offered MacDonald. “A surprise attack by them may prove to be the best way to capture those pirates.”

Ted wrung his host’s hand. “My government and yours will never be able to thank you adequately for your assistance,” he said. “Your plan is wonderful. Joe, Jed, and I can follow your men, and bring our planes down silently by using our helium gas bags.”

The men were summoned and arrangements were made quickly. Six of them were to go with the pursuit patrol—two besides the pilot in each of the three *Patriots*. The other twelve climbed into MacDonald’s two planes, and the party took off on its mission. Ted had directed that they keep together until they should come within twenty-five miles of Plata Merino. Then all of them except the *Aeolus* were to go down and await further orders. He himself would keep on and gather what information he could as to the strength of the place he was preparing to attack.

“A single plane, winging lazily across the sky, is a common sight on the island, and one not likely to arouse suspicion, I’m sure,” Ted told the men

with him.

His orders were followed strictly. After the planes had traveled a hundred miles, Ted saw the other aircraft going down, one by one. It was late afternoon when he caught sight of the enemy's stronghold. It was of considerable size, though by no means as extensive or impressive as that of MacDonald's. While the latter's station had thousands of grazing sheep on it, not a single animal could be seen on the whole range of Plata Merino.

There were many outbuildings, but no trace of activity. A sinister atmosphere hung over the place.

The only sign of a human being was what appeared to be a sentry. This man paced back and forth before a small, one-story building with a metal fence around it. Occasionally he directed his binoculars toward the sky.

Through his own glasses, Ted studied that building. It was made of stone and was massively built. It was the only one thus set apart from the sprawling wooden sheds that were scattered about the place.

"I believe that is the spot we should aim for," he told his men, deciding at once that it probably was the cache of the precious platinum.

Near by flowed a shallow river. No doubt this was where Charlie and other pilots set down their flying boats. Ted had a thrill of satisfaction, as he recalled that Hoagland would never land another plane here!

During Ted's inspection there had been no sign that the sentry had been disturbed by the plane overhead. The pilot flew out of sight, made a wide circuit on his return, and came down where his party was awaiting him. There he imparted the information he had gathered and gave his orders.

"You men in Mr. MacDonald's planes had better start out right after darkness comes, and drop down by parachute one by one at some distance from the building I want to investigate. Stay far enough away so that the guards won't hear the motors. You go the rest of the way on foot, and we'll meet you in a grove of trees near the spot. You'll find it easily."

Because of the extra time needed for this, it was arranged that they should start an hour earlier than the others. They ate the lunch they had brought, then the first group took off.

No night could have been better suited to their purpose. The skies were clouded; neither moon nor stars were visible. The pilots of MacDonald's planes reported to Ted a little later that all the parachutists had landed, apparently without being seen by the enemy.

At the appointed time Ted, Joe, and Jed zoomed into the air, one by one. Over the place agreed upon, they opened the pedcocks to the helium tanks, and shut off their motors.

“This is a marvelous invention,” said the man beside Ted. “Whoever thought of it and worked it out to such perfection is a genius.”

“The person is a kindly, elderly man, who never flew in a plane until after he had invented it,” smiled Ted. He wished Silas Morton could know at this moment what a big part he was playing in the capture of dangerous lawbreakers!

So well had Ted Scott calculated the moves of his two forces that they met with almost military precision. He had figured on making his attack an hour before dawn, since sleep is heaviest at that time, and human resistance is at its lowest point. In the meantime he would investigate the suspicious-looking building surrounded by the fence.

Availing themselves of every clump of brush that might hide a creeping figure, the men, with Ted, Joe, and Jed in the lead, stealthily approached the gate. They could dimly see a man pacing back and forth within the enclosure. His guard duty extended for perhaps a hundred feet on either side of the entrance.

He was evidently weary, for he slumped as he walked. At intervals he would stop, look at the sky, and yawn. Once the boys heard him muttering curses upon the boss who had appointed him to his task.

“There’s no enemy within a thousand miles,” the sentry said under his breath.

He carried no rifle, but there was an ugly looking bulge in his loose trousers that indicated a revolver.

Ted whispered to Joe and Jed, “Leave that fellow to me!”

He waited until the guard was near the further end of his beat. Then, like lightning, he vaulted noiselessly over the gate, and crouched among some bushes on the other side.

The sentry had turned and was coming back. Ted waited until the man was abreast of him. Then he leaped upon him like a tiger, and with one crashing blow to the jaw, sent him to the ground.

There was no time for an outcry. The man lay where he had fallen, unconscious.

Ted snatched the revolver from the fellow's pocket and thrust it into his own. Then he hastened to unlock the gate, and his chums hurried through it. They dragged the prisoner out.

"Bind and gag him, and pull him into the bushes," Ted directed a couple of his men. "I'll go inside the building now."

He made for the door to the stone structure, Joe and Jed at his heels. He hoped it would not be locked. They had nearly reached it, when the door opened, and a man stepped out. Before he knew what was happening, he too was knocked unconscious and put under guard.

The boys slipped through the open doorway, and with flashlights began their search. No one was inside, and they were able to look about undisturbed.

Ted's wildest dreams as to what he might find were far surpassed. Row upon row of ingots were stacked high. Here were millions of dollars worth of the precious metal.

The boys were highly elated at the discovery. Here was the end of the chase!

"We've won!" cried Joe softly.

"Pin a medal on my air police coat," grinned Jed.

Ted was still serious. "We haven't caught the enemy yet," he reminded them. "Our biggest job is still ahead of us. But we're ready for it!"

He led the way outdoors, and signaled to all the men to follow him. He headed for the main residence of Plata Merino.

"Here comes a man from the house," Ted whispered to Joe and Jed. "Pass the word back."

A wild yell of surprise and consternation broke from the stranger's lips, as the group rushed toward him. He drew a revolver, but Jed knocked it from his hand, while Joe caught him with a left to the chin.

But the yell had done its work. Within a minute half-dressed, bewildered men came pouring from several buildings, as well as from the main house.

Then there was a free-for-all. Many of the platinum pirates had snatched up weapons, but in their groggy state their shots went wild. Guns were knocked from their hands by the hardy native cowboys, and the struggle resolved itself into a battle of fists.

The forces were nearly equal in numbers. The scoundrels fought with the fury of desperation. Some had criminal records, and knew what would happen to them if they were conquered.

Ted was everywhere—in the battle one minute, into the house another to find any man in hiding, running outside the next to various buildings with his flashlight.

Joe and Jed were in the thick of the fight, their sinewy arms and strong fists smashing like sledge hammers into the faces and bodies of their foes. At last they were at grips with the men they had chased halfway round the globe!

“This,” muttered Joe as he knocked down one man, “is for the time you rats held us in the lonely farmhouse.”

“And this,” panted Jed as he felled another, “is revenge for robbing those poor islanders.”

Ted had a special recollection. He doubled up his fist in memory of the bomb that had come so near killing him at the office of his flying school.

At last the fight was over. Many of the enemy were stretched unconscious on the ground. Others staggered about weakly, and held up their hands in token of surrender.

“But Charlie and Togoty are not here,” thought Ted in disappointment when the prisoners were rounded up.

He gave orders for the binding of his hostages, and left to the parachute troop the task of delivering them to the proper authorities. In his plane he would take the ringleaders.

“Will you men,” he said, addressing the two who had come with him, “please take charge of the platinum until I can make other arrangements?”

They nodded, and turned to take up their duties at the stone building. Ted went to the office which he had discovered in the house. There he took possession of documents in code that might prove useful, and also long lists of names and firms. He scanned this quickly and had a great surprise.

Bromville House! So these men *had* taken Charity’s watch!

As Ted looked out of a window, he caught sight, in the dim light of dawn, of two figures hurrying out of a near-by outbuilding. There was something familiar about them.

“Togoty and Charlie!” he cried.

He raced outside, bumping squarely into Joe and Jed. He took no time to explain, but said, "Come with me. Quick!"

The next moment the boys were rounding the corner of the building. Down a narrow lane the two pirates sped like the wind. They were headed toward a building on the river where their flying boat was concealed. If they could only reach it, they would have a chance of escape.

The lane, familiar enough to them, was a puzzle to the boys. Roads and by-paths branched off in various directions. At one of the intersections the fleeing men vanished from sight.

When Ted and his chums reached the spot, they paused, wondering which way to go. Thinking they heard the sounds of running feet, they took one of the roads. But a few hundred yards farther on, it came to a dead end.

"They got away!" gasped Ted.

"Who?" asked Joe.

"Charlie and Togoty!"

"We mustn't let them!" cried Jed, doubling his speed.

The boys retraced their steps to the point where the roads forked. This time they chose the right one, and pressed on. But valuable time had been lost, and the fugitives had made the most of it.

"There goes a plane!" exclaimed Joe.

As the boys reached the river, up rose a flying boat. Charlie was at the controls, while the sneering face of Togoty looked out from the cockpit. He waved in mockery at the lads.

"There they go," exclaimed Joe, infuriated.

"And here we go," cried Ted, rushing toward the spot where they had left the *Patriots*.

Suddenly they saw that two other planes, which evidently had been heading toward Plata Merino, were now turning and following Charlie.

"Two more of the platinum pirates," cried Ted. "They got the high sign and are escaping!"

The boys raced toward their amphibians and got them into the air rapidly. By now the other planes were becoming mere specks in the sky.

Ted telephoned to Joe and Jed. “You boys chase the strangers, and hang on like grim death,” he directed. “I’ll go after Charlie.”

The leader of the pursuit patrol shot after him like a streak of lightning.

CHAPTER XXV

Victory

Ted, every nerve strung to the highest tension, settled down to getting all the speed possible out of his *Patriot*.

“Now is my chance to prove what kind of an air policeman I am,” he told himself grimly.

Charlie and Togoty were at the point of desperation, and they took fearful chances. They put on all the power that their engines possessed, straining them to the limit, Ted imagined. He would not have been surprised to see an explosion any minute.

But all the recklessness of the men could not prevent the steady gain of *Aeolus*, winging closer and closer like a messenger of doom. Just when the planes reached the waters of the Pacific, Ted came within bullet range.

Yet he did not want to shoot down his enemies. He must capture them alive!

“I wonder why they don’t send a hail of bullets my way,” he thought.

Ted snatched up his binoculars, and noticed that a violent argument, almost a physical struggle, seemed to be taking place in the plane ahead. Then abruptly Charlie zoomed. Up and up his flying boat went, until it seemed as if it were being aimed at the stratosphere.

“Well, that’s a game two can play,” thought Ted.

He took out his oxygen mask, sensing that Charlie, having one of his own, hoped that Ted had none and would have to abandon the chase for fear of suffocation in the high altitude.

It was not long before the wily airman realized that his trick had failed. Down he went again. But this time, to Ted’s surprise, Charlie banked and headed in exactly the opposite direction. Instead of fleeing from the island, he was making straight for it.

Why the sudden change?

Two explanations suggested themselves to Ted. One was that Charlie and Togoty figured, if possible, to come down on land and hide in the woods until things should quiet down. The other was that they were running short

of gas, and preferred to take a chance of safety on land with a possibility of escape.

“No matter what they’re planning, they’re not going to get away,” Ted determined.

He formulated an idea quickly, and when he saw the buildings of the MacDonald station, he put it into action. Using his authority as an air police officer, he ranged the *Patriot* alongside the other plane, and held up his hand.

Then he pointed his thumb toward the ground below.

There was a furious splutter of curses from Togoty. He would not surrender! He tried to seize the controls, but Charlie knocked him aside, and in obedience to Ted’s command, brought the plane to a landing.

A number of MacDonald’s men, who had been watching the scene, now ran forward and seized the prisoners. Ted did not come all the way down. He hovered about, until he saw that the pirates were held. Then, with a wave of his hand, he pulled the stick all the way back, and set out to join Joe and Jed.

But the other two members of the pursuit patrol needed no assistance. They had attended to their own jobs, and had come through with flying colors.

When they had seen Ted returning to the island, they had so maneuvered their planes that they had forced the others to turn in the same direction. There was no chance of the enemy escaping, and at signs from Joe and Jed, they surrendered. They were proceeding meekly toward the MacDonald place when Ted came across them.

As soon as the group reached the station, several brawny cowboys took charge of the prisoners and locked them up. MacDonald wrung the boys’ hands until they were sore. The men of the ranch crowded around, overwhelming them with questions. And the bright eyes of the girls were filled with praise.

The young women and their mother arranged a splendid dinner in celebration of the capture of the platinum pirates. The boys were glad of a few hours of relaxation.

“You have accomplished a wonderful thing,” said MacDonald, proposing a toast during the meal. “May your success be an incentive to all future international air police!”

Ted thanked his host, and declared that the work could not have been done without his help and inspiration.

After the dinner was over, the flyer went out to the building where the prisoners were confined. He gave only an amused smile in answer to Togoty's bitter objections. His business was with Charlie.

This pilot, no older than Ted, was in a dejected mood. He seemed frightened and remorseful, certainly not like a criminal.

"Sorry to see you in such a fix, Charlie," Ted said, not unkindly.

"My own fault," muttered the young man. "Got off on the wrong foot, I guess. But I never did any actual robbing or killing. Just carried the platinum from place to place. Sorry I ever got mixed up with the thieves. And I never meant to do you any harm. I tried to put in a good word for you that night in the farmhouse. I stopped Togoty in the plane today when he wanted to shoot you."

"I appreciate that," returned Ted. "I noticed you were having a tussle with him. Well, Charlie, I don't think you're bad at heart. You'll have to serve a term in prison, I'm afraid, but when you come out, look me up. You're a fine airman and a plucky fellow."

"Thanks," said Charlie. "I don't deserve it, but I'll sure remember your offer. And please forgive me for the way I acted when you saved my life outside Honolulu. Hoagland was supposed to be right behind me. When I got in trouble, I sent him an SOS and he said he'd speed up and rescue me. When I woke up in your plane, and saw my things all over, I thought you had arrested me, and I was scared to death."

"What made you unconscious?" asked Ted, to whom this was still a mystery.

"Just as I got into my boat, the wind turned one wing my way, and it cracked me over the head," explained Charlie.

"That's a little detail Joe and Jed will be glad to have cleared up," smiled Ted as he left.

The next week was a busy one for him. He had to see more representatives of the British and other governments. Each in turn gave his stamp of approval to the *Patriot* for use for an international air police force. Pleased, Ted at last was able to talk of returning to the United States.

Ten days after the battle of Plata Merino, the pursuit patrol was ready to set out for home. Ted had with him a coat, made of wool sheared on

MacDonald's ranch, for Walter Hapworth, and a koala bear for Charity.

"Take these eucalyptus leaves with you," laughed Margaret, "or the cunning little animal won't have anything to eat!"

She handed the flyer a basket. He thanked her, then climbed into his *Patriot*, and taxied away. The MacDonalds waved as long as they could see the three flying boats.

A jubilant welcome awaited the travelers when they reached California. Hapworth was there, bursting with pride over the splendid record made by his new amphibians. There was Farmer, who had made a special airplane trip from Washington.

There was Morton, delighted as Ted told him that his helium device had made possible the silent descent that caught the platinum ring by surprise. There was Nimbusser, whose clever work with the pirates' code had earned him a promotion.

And above all, there were Eben and Charity, who had prolonged their stay in San Francisco. Eben could hardly speak from emotion. Dear old Charity flung her arms about her boy's neck, and hugged him as though she never would let him go.

It was late that night when the weary but happy chums found themselves alone in Ted's room at the hotel.

"Well," yawned Joe, "we put it across."

"Right you are," agreed Jed, as he gazed through the window at the stars. "What will be our next adventure?"

What, indeed? For a little time the flyers were not to know that ahead of them lay excitement and danger in "Under Sealed Orders."

"I wish I knew what our next adventure will be," smiled Ted, "but of this I'm sure. When it comes, I hope I may lead it with the pursuit patrol!"

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

Illustrations have been relocated due to using a non-page layout.

[The end of *The Pursuit Patrol, or Chasing the Platinum Pirates* by Franklin W. Dixon]