



The plane cartwheeled clear over

*Captain Barry White Takes a Vital Message and Flaunts
It in the Grinning Face of Death!*

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CAPTAIN BARRY WHITE, acting C.O. of the 38th Pursuits, slowly placed four aces and the king of hearts on the table, and then scooped up the hundred odd francs in the center.

"You see?" he grinned at the four sour-faced pilots seated about the table. "It's simply a question of knowing what to do at the right time. You tramps were just bluffing, and so that was all there was to it."

"Tip" Granger, a flight commander

himself, and White's closest friend in France, scowled at the two pair he'd been betting on, and shook his head.

"Of all the damn luck!" he muttered. "A month's pay practically shot to hell, and I didn't even get any fun out of it."

The acting C.O. patted the stack of French money in front of him. "Cheer up, Tip," he said. "If the war only lasts long enough, maybe you'll—"

The sudden opening of the mess lounge stopped the rest. Instantly the five players

leaped to their feet as the tall, hawk-faced figure of Colonel Parsons came striding inside. The senior officer started to return the salute, but checked the movement and stiffened. Anger leaped into the man's black eyes as they swept the card- and money-littered table. Then they snapped to White's face and became brittle.

"Perhaps you don't realize there's a war on, Captain White?" the Wing C.O. said tartly. "Or have you suddenly decided that it is an acting commander's privilege to turn his mess lounge into a damn gambling parlor? What the devil's the matter with your phone?"

WHITE looked him in the eye, spoke in measured tones.

"Nothing, sir," he said. "At least it was working all right this morning when I called the Issy Replacement Depot."

"Well, it's haywire now!" the other barked. "I've been trying to get you since noon."

The senior officer stopped short and made a slightly exaggerated gesture toward the card table.

"It's a shame to interrupt you, of course!" he grated. "But in exactly forty minutes the Seventh Infantry will attempt to take the Contreau Hill in front of them. I had planned for this squadron to maintain troop contact with them, but—Well, I don't know. I rather wonder, White, if I haven't made a mistake in appointing you acting C.O. until a permanent appointment comes through from G.H.Q. Right now I rather doubt your ability to even keep your mind on the war, to say nothing of leading men into battle."

White's jaw muscles tightened a bit, but he gave no other outward sign of his rising anger. Certainly not in his voice.

"I'm sorry, Colonel, that you feel that way," he said. "I think we're doing our job here, all right. Until you arrived, our next

patrol wasn't scheduled for another two hours. Between patrols it helps for us all to relax a bit."

"Really?" the colonel echoed softly. "Well, you can stop relaxing. Unfortunately, there is no other squadron available, so you'll have to assist the Seventh Infantry. You will fly a full squadron patrol, maintain closest contact with the advancing wave at all times, and drive away all enemy aircraft that attempt to strafe our troops. That's all. I'll be expecting a detailed report when you have completed your job."

With a curt nod the senior officer turned on his heel and strode over to the door.

There he paused, and turned back for a moment.

"Incidentally, Captain," he said, his black eyes fixed on White, "I shall expect you to make that report in person, at Wing H.Q. At the same time we can talk about the other little matter."

The colonel didn't have to explain the last. His sharp gaze switching to the card table again, was plain enough to all. And then he was gone through the door. For a moment there was silence, then White grunted.

"All right, fellows," he said, "we have got a job to do. Go rout out the others, and get your ships warmed up, and set to go. Four Cooper bombs for each ship. Okay, get going."

They all left without a word. That is, all save Tip Granger. He remained right where he was, questioning eyes fixed on his friend.

"What do you think, Barry?" he suddenly asked.

"Eh?"

"His nibs," Granger said. "That phone stuff was a lot of prop wash, if you ask me. Just one of his trick ways of sneaking in on us to see what we're doing. But I'm sort of

worried, Barry.”

White shrugged, stuffed his poker winnings into his wallet, and put the wallet in his pocket.

“Nothing to worry about,” he said slowly. “Parsons has been gunning for me ever since General Branker *suggested to him* that I be made acting C.O. He’d love to boot me back to the States. But don’t worry, something always turns up to spoil his hopes.”

Granger sighed.

“What a man!” he muttered. “Nothing ever bothers you. Sure wish I could be that way. Your job, maybe, going out the window, and it doesn’t even faze you a bit. Me, I’d—”

“Sure you would!” White grinned and moved toward the door. “And it’s because you haven’t learned to take things in stride. Keep your shirt on. There’s lots of really important things in this war.”

“Such as?” Granger growled.

“Fokkers,” was the reply. “Let’s go.”

Flying Number 4 on the right of the huge V formation, Granger automatically held his position and stared moodily at the helmeted head of Barry White in the cockpit of the lead ship. For two weeks, now, in fact, since the day White had been made acting C.O., pending definite approval from G.H.Q., he had worried more than a little about his friend.

Always an easy-go-lucky type, White followed his motto to the letter. He took everything in stride, and in so doing, made the toughest of assignments seem simple. For that reason his name seldom appeared in official communiques. No beaming generals hung medals on his tunic. And no home-town papers put his name in banner headlines across the front page.

And that was exactly the trouble, Granger reflected for the umpteenth time. White did everything all the famous aces did, some of the things even better. But no

one, save the pilots of the squadron, noticed it. Least of all Wing H.Q., or G.H.Q., As a result the making or the breaking of a perfect commanding officer was in the balance. That White wanted the job, loved the responsibility that went with it, Granger realized beyond a doubt. It was just that his easy-going pal wouldn’t stick his hand up and call the attention of the big wigs to his ability.

“If they could only see the way he slaps down Fokkers!” Granger growled. “Or if he would just do one little thing, and make it look hard. Then his job would be set for the rest of the war. And me, I could stop worrying about the big bum. Dammit, he’s aces, and he belongs on top!”

CONSIDERATION of the problem was cut short a few seconds later. A red “attack” Very light signal had arced out from White’s cockpit. A snap glance downward, and Granger saw the reason. Following a terrific barrage, the first wave of the 7th was now going over the top, and was dashing across No Man’s Land to storm the west slope of Contreau Hill.

Perhaps the Germans were expecting the attack, or perhaps they just happened to spot it coming in time to get word back to their own air dromes. At any rate a squadron or more of Fokkers was racing in from the south and the north, and was showering the Yank troops with hissing lead.

Slamming his stick against the instrument board, Granger slanted his Camel and went thundering down, engine full out. Exactly one thousand feet from the ground he caught the snap glance of a Fokker cutting in toward White. A split-second later the Fokker was a ball of fire tumbling earthward. Another split-second, and he had his own sights on a German plane.

Then began a furious battle for the

permanent possession of Contreau Hill. Darting and twisting this way and that, jabbing the trigger trips every time a black cross raced across his sights, Granger fought with the fury of an eagle gone berserk. A dozen times he tried to tear into the clear and take time out to see what White was doing, but each time one or more Fokkers made him change his mind.

Finally, though, he did manage to thunder clear. But at first he didn't see White. As a matter of fact the struggling Yank troops on the ground caught and held his attention. A squad of doughboys, led by an officer, was trying to signal the American planes. Shell smoke, however, blotted out their signals. Meanwhile a terrific angle fire from the German forces on the hill was spilling good American blood on the slopes.

DIVING down, Granger flew over the helmeted heads of the Yanks, striving to pierce the ground smoke and find out what was wanted. To try and land was more or less asking for death. A plane settling on the uneven terrain would not only crack up, but it would draw shells from every German piece of artillery within range.

Half a dozen times or more Granger tore up and down just over the heads of the troops. But though they waved their arms and seemed to point toward the hill, he couldn't grasp what it was all about. And then suddenly he spotted White a few hundred feet above him. The acting C.O. had obviously been right down close to the crest of the hill, and was now tearing back to join the general melee of Yank and German ships. Had White spotted what was wanted?

The question flashed through his brain as he saw his pal suddenly slant his ship earthward, straight down toward the group of frantically waving American soldiers.

Two snub-nosed Fokkers were tearing in on White to box him for a cold meat shot.

"Barry! *Behind you!*"

Granger bellowed the words aloud but there was no need. In the last split-second allowed, White seemed to realize that death was slicing in at him. In a dime turn, he spun around, then slapped his ship into a flash half roll. One Fokker pilot, trying to follow through with the maneuver, flew smack into a savage burst from White's guns. The other German, however, was not to be nailed that easily. Cutting out and away from White's bullets, he yanked his Fokker up in a zoom, and let it fall off the top.

Expecting to see White pull his own plane up and drill the German, Granger let out a shout of surprise when, instead, White carried right on through his half roll and went hurtling earthward. Thirty feet or more from the ground, and White's plane suddenly flattened out, side slipped to the right a shade, and prepared to land on a handkerchief patch of ground.

For a moment the crazy suicide maneuver didn't make sense to Granger. And then suddenly the answer came to him. White had undoubtedly seen something on the hill. Perhaps it was the defense holding up the Yank advance. And rather than trust a message dropper, or arm signals, in the thick shell smoke, he was risking his life and limb to land and deliver his information by word of mouth.

Pride surged up in Granger as he watched White float down, with German rifle bullets raking his plane from wing tip to wing tip.

"At last!" he cried. "At last he's done something folks will talk about. Sitting right down in that hell hole. Damn you, Parsons, there's one for you. Can't lead men into battle, huh?"

As though he himself were actually landing the plane, Granger held his breath

and waited for White to hit. He didn't have to wait long. The plane settled on soft ground. Down it went on that side to snub the wing tip. Instantly the plane cartwheeled clean over, and slid down the smoking side of a shell crater. No sooner had it stopped at the bottom, than the figure of White scrambled out from under the crumpled wreckage, and tore out of the crater to firm ground.

Granger saw him pause, as though to get his direction. Then the man went legging straight toward the spear-point of the American advance. Behind him exploding shells churned up the ground, and practically obliterated everything from view. When Granger next saw White through the heavy smoke, the acting C.O. was surrounded by Yank troops.

Another four minutes and the tide of the battle suddenly changed. The Yank troops formed separate charging squads, and went tearing up the slope of the hill at varying angles. A sweeping glance at the hill, and Granger saw what White had undoubtedly spotted long ago. Cleverly placed German machine-gun nests had been mowing down the Yanks at will and stopping them cold. Not knowing the exact positions of the nests, the American officers were helpless. But White, risking his neck, had landed in the midst of the battle, and delivered that very much wanted information.

FROM that point forward it was a walkover for the Yanks. Spurred on by the heroic deed of their C.O., the Yank Camels tore into the Fokkers, smashed half of them down, and drove the other half east. And eventually, bullets and bombs gone, and gasoline getting dangerously low, Granger took charge of the squadron, signaled them into formation and led them back toward their home drome. Not, however, before he caught a glimpse of

White, in the company of two infantry officers, making their way to the rear of the American lines.

Two hours later Granger greeted a very muddy and blood-spattered White, as the latter climbed stiffly out of a dispatch rider's side-car in front of 38th's squadron officer. With a whoop of joy he grabbed his friend by the hand, pumped it up and down.

"Everything's perfect now, Barry!" he shouted. "The whole A.E.F. is talking about what you did—landing that ship to tell them about those machine-gun nests. Why, listen, old hawk-face Parsons, no less, called up about twenty minutes ago. He was drooling honey. Wants you to come up there to receive his personal congratulations just as soon as you can. Boy, I knew you'd show 'em!"

"Don't believe all you hear, Tip," White said in his slow drawl. "It's just the way things work out. Just as I've told you so many times. Let's get a drink."

Granger's mouth sagged open.

"Hey!" he suddenly blurted out. "Doesn't it mean a thing to—"

"Nope," the other shook his head. "You see, Tip, it wasn't my original idea to land that crate. Oh, of course, I had spotted what was holding up the advance, and I was headed back to drop a message to our troops to tell them about it. But those Fokkers jumped me, and I dropped something else. This."

White pulled a mud-smear'd wallet from his pocket, held it up.

"My poker winnings, and three hundred francs more," he said quietly, "fell out of my pocket when I made that lousy half-roll. So I just followed it right down, got it—thank God—and gave our troops the news by word of mouth, instead. Funny—I drop my wallet, and I'm a blasted hero. Oh, well, you never can tell how things will work out. They just always do. You'll realize that some day."