



COCARDE SHARPERS

written and illustrated by **JOE ARCHIBALD**

“Get das Pingham!” war-cried the flocks of squarehead flyers facing Bar-le-Duc. And when they proceeded to pour seven months’ output of Krupp poison onto the drome of the fighting Ninth in seven days, the battered and bomb-sprayed Major Rufus Garrity had to admit he was licked. “Pinkham,” he said, “for the safety of the rest of the service, go out—and get yourself killed!” And wasn’t Phineas always a man to obey orders?

MAJOR RUFUS GARRITY, C.O. of the Ninth Pursuit Squadron close by Bar-le-Duc, was sitting disconsolate on the steps of the old Frog farmhouse that housed his Operations Office. He was coughing, for fumes of cordite had fouled his bellows. And he was pawing at his eyes, which were as opaque as Trilby’s after Svengali stared her into a trance.

The Old Man was looking vacantly at the mess a Heinie egg-laying expedition had just left behind,

and he was wondering if there was enough fill left in France to smooth out the tarmac. Groundhogs were sweating and swearing as they fought to check a blaze that was licking at “A” Flight’s hangar. Sergeant Casey, the empennage of his dungarees smoldering, was cussing something terrible as he helped the greaseballs push a Spad out into the open.

The power truck was on the bias and there were no lights on the drome. Three Nisson huts had been rendered unfit for tenancy, and near the wreckage of-

one of them Phineas Pinkham of Boonetown, Iowa, was scrambling around feverishly on all fours in an attempt to resurrect a lot of his belongings.

Old Man Garrity's eyes strayed to Phineas and he said something that would have been out of place in a cathedral. Major Garrity did not mind being bombed once in awhile, for he knew that catsup could not be made unless a lot of tomatoes were stepped on. But too much of one thing, even cognac, gets monotonous. In just seven days the Ninth Pursuit had been picked on exactly four times. No sooner was their place of sky business straightened out, when over came the Dutch boys again with another load of Krupp mayhem.

Phineas suddenly jumped up and tramped over to the Old Man. "Lookit," he snorted very indignantly. "This is all I saved from what was in my trunk—a rubber cobra, a box of red pepper, an' a mask of the Kaiser! When're we going to do somethin', huh? I am gettin' sick of them bums tipping me out of bed every night. Lookit my eyes! Why, I ain't had sleep enough this week to rest a—"

But his sentence went unfinished. For Captain Howell and Lieutenant Bump Gillis staggered up just then and Bump looked like something that had been dug up for an autopsy. "I w-was lucky to hear Bump callin'," Howell gulped. "I dug 'im out of the cave-in in the bomb shelter just in time. And it's you who is to blame, Pinkham! It ain't safe anywhere with you around. Why didn't they kill you this time? Then they would stop cornin' over." The Major nodded. "Yeah. You're getting to be nothing but a hazard around here, Pinkham. It's you they want to wipe out. By-y-y cr-r-ripes! Why didn't those Krauts say so in the first place? If they'd have written me a letter, I would've saved 'em all the trouble. You're not worth the—"

"Oh, is that so?" Phineas yipped. "So I'm not wanted around here, huh? Well, if you bums want me to get transferred, I will not cry. Everythin's blamed on me. Awright, you big fat—Major, I will pack up everything I have left. I been wantin' to quit ever since—"

"Oh, yeah?" erupted the Old Man. "You think Chaumont wants another outfit shellacked just because you were sent there? Oh, the Heinies would know just as soon as you left! There's a spy around here some place; the Intelligence has been looking for him for three months. I bet he's here just to keep tabs on you, Carbuncle, and I don't see why he hasn't shot you before this so's we would be left alone. Pinkham, you've got to get killed!"

"H-huh?"

"It would save thousands of bucks worth of Spads and things," Captain Howell pointed out. "Carbuncle, you could do even more for the U.S. than Nathan Hale did. If you are a patriot, show us!"

"That's right," Bump horned in. "You'd be worth more to the Allies as the late Mr. Pinkham. I am for it. Let's draw lots to see who will shoot him."

Phineas let out a howl. "I will see Pershin' about this!" he hollered. "It is murder. You will all git hung, as I will leave a clew behind if it is the last thing I do. I—why it is treason. Shootin' an officer when he's not lookin'. I want a transfer—ugh—er—put down the gun, Bump! I insist!"

"Ha, ha!" Major Garrity laughed. "We would not make a slip like that. It is you who will arrange to get yourself shot down to save what we have got left of the Ninth Pursuit Squadron. It will be a favor to everybody. You will be a hero, as greater love hath nobody than the man who lays down his life for his—"

"Why, you bums!" Phineas protested. "What a nice bunch of pals I've got! Awright, I will go out tomorrow—if I can get a Spad that can hop all these holes the Boches put in th' drome. I will show you what a Pinkham can do! But I will come back every night and haunt you bums. I will sit on the edge of your crib, Major, and gnash my teeth at you an' play on a harp so's you won't ever sleep again. Oh, you'll wish you had never crossed a Pinkham!"

IN HIGH dudgeon Phineas stamped across the drome. And Sergeant Casey forgot his manners when the Boonetown pilot passed by him. The top-kick of the Flight let Phineas know in no uncertain terms that the entire ground crew were hoping every day to read of his obit in *The Stars and Stripes*.

"Oh, shut up, you big slob," Phineas bellowed. "I am committin' suicide tomorrow. Get this place cleared up so I can get a Spad across it—an' then all you bums can go fly a brick. I guess I should've joined up with the Krauts, as I would have been safer over there with them."

The miracle man from Boonetown, Iowa, then went in search of a tin can and a lot of oily waste. Later, when dawn was breaking, he sat near the ammo shack, the stuff he had collected scattered around him. Sergeant Casey watched from a distance while Phineas tamped old rags and oily waste into a rusty ammo can with a long stick and held his handiwork at arm's length to eye it.

Meanwhile, Major Garrity and the rest of the

buzzards were indulging in what little shut-eye they could get, but the sudden growl of a Spad brought Garrity out from under his blanket. He groped his way to a window, looked out over the hastily mended tarmac, and blinked sleepily.

Phineas Pinkham was climbing into the office of the warming battle wagon, and the tip of his thumb was pressed against his nose. The fingers that belonged on the same hand as the thumb were being waggled very significantly in the direction of the Old Man.

Now Phineas had never been accused of having a dulcet voice, so when he opened the cut-out on his larynx, his farewell to the personnel of the Ninth carried almost to Bar-le-Duc.

“Adoo, you bums!” he thundered. “If I ever see ya again, I hope it’ll be where there is lots of other lepers. Rufus, you ol’ blubber puss, it is better to be dead like I am goin’ to be than be alive with a mug like yourn. Haw-w-w-w! And now—Adoo forever!”

The Major waxed apoplectic and shoved his fist out at Phineas. But the window was not open. *Crash—clinkety clink!* “Ow-w-w! So I’m a—ow-w-w-w! You better get killed!” The C.O. looked at his gashed knuckles, then kicked what glass there was left out of the window frame—before he remembered that he had no boots on.

The Spad was picking a perilous way across the bumpy terra firma when he finally got to the window again to swear at Phineas. He watched the battle-wagon until it headed over Bar-le-Duc. Then he saw it nose toward the ground again. A half hour later he pounded down the stairs into the big room where his sleepy pilots were getting hot coffee and burnt toast.

“The big coward!” the C.O. yelled. “I saw him! He didn’t get beyond Bar-le-Duc. Got cold feet and isn’t goin’ to get shot down at all. That’s the kind of a guy he is! I always knew he was a four-flusher. Why, when I get my hands on the impudent—!” he raged “Get the car out! We’ll go and—”

“There’s nothin’ but a chassis to that bus now, Major.” Captain Howell interrupted Garrity. “A bomb—”

“Oh, all this fuss is over nothin’.” Bump Gillis clipped. “A guy who is goin’ to get killed always wants to see his dame first. The crackpot’s got to have a last word with Babette, don’t he, Howell? Even Pinkham oughta get that much consideration.”

“A” Flight’s skipper nodded. Then turning his face away so that Garrity could not see the grin that bisected it, he nudged Bump and got up from the table. Outside a few minutes later, the two buzzards

joined together in a prolonged chuckle. “I was hopin’ he would go an’ see her. D’ya think she’ll be watchin’?”

“Carbuncle will wait ’til Babette gets up an’ has breakfast before he goes over to her house. Listen, we promised that old dame we met, fifty francs, didn’t we? She’s been waitin’ for a week. Looks like th’ freckle-faced baboon won’t have to go upstairs to get washed up. Ha! Ha! When a Frog dame gets double-crossed—”

YES, skullduggery was afoot in Bar-le-Duc. Lieutenant Phineas Pinkham, anxious to have a last word with his weak moment in *la belle* France, stood on a street corner and watched a certain window patiently. At last, an hour after the feathered alarm clocks had crowed, Phineas reconnoitred toward the menage of Babette. He clumped up the stairs and knocked on a familiar door which was promptly flung open.

The Frog mademoiselle hastily arranged some strands of dark wavy hair and tossed out: “Ah, *bonjour!* The time she ees about come for that I see you, *n’est ce pas?* Babette, she ees ver’ seek *aussi* fatigue from be on ze stand-up, what you call eet.”

“Listen, mawn cherry,” the early Romeo pleaded with his Juliet, “I’m goin’ out to kill myself. I—”

Bang! Bang! Bang! sounded an insistent knocking from the vicinity of the street entrance.

“Eet ees somewan outside ze door,” Babette shrieked, her dark eyebrows lifting until they almost disappeared in the jungle of her mop of black tresses.

“Well, it sure ain’t mice,” Phineas retorted. “Who’s there? If it’s a Foolem Brush man, we don’t want none.” The door was pushed open, nevertheless, and Phineas whirled to see a very angry female standing on the sill. She wore an ambulance driver’s uniform and she had a chin as big and hard as an anvil.

“Bawn mattin,” Phineas gulped. “There is nobody been hurt here. You’re buttin’ in on a rendyvoose. You must’ve made a mistake, lady.”

“Oh-h-h, you. snake in the grass, Murgatroyd Mullet!” the visitor barked. “For two years I have been lookin’ for you. Left me with four kids to support, did you? I heard you joined up with the Air Force, and I’ve been searchin’ for you ever since. Phineas Pinkham you call yourself now, huh? Why, you cad! You low-down polecat! Desert me and—now look at you! Tryin’ to fool a poor dumb French girl with your oily ways. Why, I’ll—”

“Ugh—lookit here!” Phineas yelped. “It’s a mistake—”

Babette had already picked up a skillet. “I, Babette, am *zez* dumb wan, *non?* I weel—er—he ees *non* Peenkham, eh? He ees leave you *avec ze* keeds an’—oh, *ze* peeg, *ze chien!* *Vous* are *ze* ambairlance drivair, *madame? Voila*, he ees go’n’ need thees ambairlance when I geet feenish’ wiz heem, *oui! Mon Dieu—s-s-sacre bleu!* Zis you get, snake-from-ze-grasses!” And the enraged French flapper swung the skillet and let go, then made a dive for the butcher knife. Phineas ducked the skillet and kept yelling that it was a frame-up.

“So, *ze* frameop she ees?” Babette screeched. “Take zat an’ zees! Leave *ze* wife an’ *les enfants, oui?*” The knife whizzed through the air and stuck into the wall near Phineas, taking a lock of his rusty hair with it.

“I am goin’ for the *gendarmes*,” the wrathful female in the khaki outfit fumed. Then she turned and sped down the stairs.

“Listen,” Phineas implored his light of love, “it’s a mistake, Bab—!”

WHAM—O—O!

The pilot from Boonetown, Iowa, knowing that he could never duck all of the furnishings of the irate Frog femme’s flat, made his exit fleetly. He hit the street with a cookie crock breaking up against the back of his cranium. And he hardly remembered getting to the outskirts of Bar-le-Duc because of the kangaroolike speed with which he fled.

“Boy, oh boy, am I at bay!” the fugitive groaned, crawling into a copse where he could extract some chips of pottery from his anatomy. “The Boche want to kill me, the buzzards at the Ninth are after my life’s blood, an’ Babette would’ve cut my throat if I’d waited. It’s all cooked up, as everybody is framin’ me for a wooden nightshirt! I am a lone wolf an’—It was a frame—that dame—I never had no kids. Somebody put acid on them Spad wires, too, an’ they snapped just when I—oh, it’s a dastardly plot,” he raged. “But they do not know a Pinkham’s strength! I’ll get hunk! Murgatroyd Mul—ugh! Why, even if I was a fake, I would not be called Murgatroyd. Somethin’s gotta be done.”

TWO HOURS LATER a big boiler rolled up to where a Spad crouched outside of Bar-le-Duc. In the boiler were four brass hats—including Major Garrity and Captain Howell. The Old Man got out of the Chamont jalopi and roared for Phineas to show himself.

A familiar voice bellowed back: “Awright, awright, I heard ya. Even a moose in Maine could hear ya! I

ain’t got nothin’ to hide. I want to make a complaint to Pershin.” And Phineas stumbled out of the thicket and went over to where the quartet of officers stood. He pointed to the Spad. “I was forced down before I could commit suicide, an’ I can prove it. Them wires was softened up with somethin’, an’ it wasn’t ginger ale, neither. It’s murder! Sabotage! Treason! Conspiracy! I want to go to Chaumont immediately, as I must file charges against—”

“Now—er—Pinkham,” Garrity said hastily. “We were not ourselves last night. Ha! Ha! You took us seriously. Heh! You’re going to come back to the drome with us. We’ll send Casey out and a couple of his men to replace the control wires. I—er—there must be more than one spy behind the lines. A whole gang of agents, in fact. Colonel, we want more men from G-2. There is every evidence that the Boche know everything we do.

“Sure,” Phineas interrupted indignantly. “They even know my own pals are trying to kill me. Oh, you wait!” he yipped. “A Pinkham always keeps his word. I said I would get killed, an’—”

“Ha! Ha!” Captain Howell cut in. “He is not himself, sirs. Last night a bomb just missed him by a whisker and he has been imagining things ever since. We will have to get him to a hospital.”

“Oh, you liars! Listen, Colonel, they are guilty. They are just tryin’ to—”

“There, there, Pinkham,” one of the brass hats said soothingly. “Just come along with us. You won’t get killed.” Then and there the incomparable Yank saw that he was behind the eight ball. He would have to bide his time.

Of course Phineas Pinkham had had no idea of committing suicide for anybody’s sake. The thought had simply suggested a barrel of fun; for when a man is supposed to be dead, he can not be blamed for anything that happens after he has been rubbed off the tax list. At the moment, however, things were at a pretty pass. The brass hats were convinced that Lieutenant Pinkham was in a bad state of jitters and there was no telling what would happen when an A.E.F. alienist got hands on him. Why, they might even railroad him to a cuckoo chateau somewhere in France. Accordingly, Phineas docilely climbed into the Chaumont buggy while his brain revved frantically.

Then suddenly he saw a loophole and quickly decided to make a try for it. His fingers explored the depths of the pocket of his flying coat and came into contact with a small bottle of yellow fluid. Its purpose

was to keep the Pinkham hair in place; for when enough of the liquid was doused over his flaming pate, it could temporarily be combed down flat.

“Haw-w-w-w!” Phineas enthused, holding the bottle up to the light. “Nice li’l ol’ nitro! Don’t have to use it now. Don’t want to kill myself any more, haw-w-w-w! Blow up somethin’ else with it. Like to hear yellow hell-syrup go boom! Wanna hear a big loud nose, everybody? Just toss this to the runnin’ board an’—”

Sque-e-e-e-e-e! The scared dough at the wheel gave the boiler the brakes and Garrity went out of the back seat like a jack-in-the-box and plunged halfway through the windshield.

Captain Howell and the other brass hats ducked down into the skidding machine and clamped their hands over their ears. But Phineas Pinkham leaped clear just before the boiler ploughed *KER-WHA-A-ANG!* into the side of a Frog barn that had been reinforced with rusty, galvanized iron.

After awhile, one of the brass hats sat up and waited for the map of France to stop quaking. “It went off!” he gulped. “How many were killed?”

Captain Howell helped to move the C.O. of the Ninth out of the wreck. Garrity blinked and looked around, but Phineas was nowhere to be seen.”

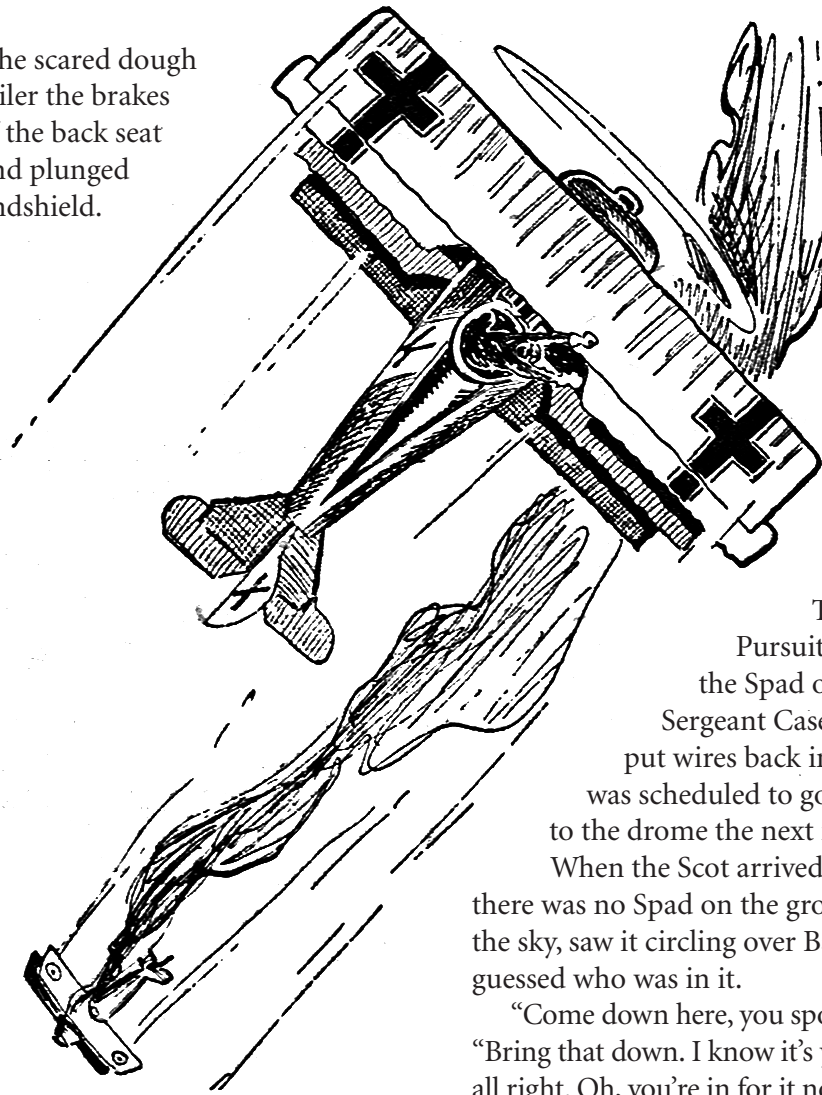
“He went overside with the juice,” another high mucky-muck of the A.E.F. choked out. “He must’ve been blown up. I heard a big noise an’—oh, this is awful, Garrity. Why is it you allow your flyers to carry nitro with ’em, huh? What kind of an outfit are you running?”

The Old Man’s eyes bugged out and he pointed into the ooze alongside the road. “Tracks!” he roared. “An’ they’re not bear tracks. Somebody went into the woods. That big fat—*sniff—sniff!* Do you smell anythin’?”

Howell admitted that he did. Then he looked into the back seat of the wrecked Chaumont hack and pulled out a piece of broken bottle. There was a label on it which read:

HARLEQUIN SURE-COMB HAIR OIL
Will keep horse hair down
25¢

Major Garrity roared. “He’ll go to Blois if he ever comes back alive. I nearly cut my throat goin’ through that windshield, confound him! Look at the Colonel, there. He still thinks he fell off a roller coaster and wants his money back. Yeah, that crackpot has got to get himself killed, as surer than Satan, I’ll—”



THAT NIGHT, Ninth Pursuit men went to work on the Spad outside of Bar-le-Duc. Sergeant Casey and two groundhogs put wires back into place and Bump Gillis was scheduled to go out and fly the ship back to the drome the next morning.

When the Scot arrived at the scene, however, there was no Spad on the ground. He looked up into the sky, saw it circling over Bar-le-Duc, and quickly guessed who was in it.

“Come down here, you spotted hyena!” Bump raged. “Bring that down. I know it’s you in that crate, Pinkham, all right. Oh, you’re in for it now, you imbecile!”

Phineas Pinkham could not hear Bump Gillis. But he could use his imagination, and he was chuckling as he circled around preparatory to a projected approach to the Boche attic. The ammo can stuffed with waste was hitched to a strut close to the motor bay, and there was a long pole sticking out of the pit with an unlighted torch tied to the end of it.

“So they want me to git shot down, do they?” the inimitable Pinkham grinned. “A Pinkham never questions an order from his superior officers, as an army has to have discipline or where would it end up,

haw-w-w-w-w? Come on, you Heinie bums, as I am a pushover—almost!”

The Krauts obliged when Phineas was five thousand feet over the Meuse. A big square-headed Von with a close-clipped goatee tumbled out of a three-ship Vee and gave the Allied crate three bursts to warm up his Spandaus. And to the Dutchman’s surprise, a long pennon of smoke immediately curled up from the Spad.

“*Der eyes I moost gedt idt ge-fixed yedt,*” the Heinie said gleefully. “*Der sighdt gets far off, ja! Der ship looked to me like idt vas far away yedt, budt it ain’t. Ho! Ho! Undt das ist Pingham! Heinrich, der Tag ist, hein? Down he goes mit und der verdammt Yangkee gets idt der cookink like der Wienerwurst. Gott sie dank! Hoch der Kaiser und Gott mit Uns! Der hero I will pe, und his majesty Wilhelm vill me invite by Potsdam.*”

Plenty of smoke was pouring out of the ammo can. It almost asphyxiated Phineas Pinkham before he could tie a handkerchief around his big nose. “Ugh,” the trickster said in a muffled voice, “I must’ve put a pair of C-Casey’s old socks in that can. Pe-e-e-you-u-u-u! But boys, I must look to the Kraut like I am already barbecued. Haw-w-w-w-w! Now where is the woods I had picked out? I’ll fold up in them and then I’ll be dead. I would like to see if Nathan Hale would’ve done this for the U.S.A. I—” Suddenly it occurred to Phineas that his demise might really happen to come about with no fooling, and his scalp tried to crawl from under his helmet.

Trees shot up at the errant Yank and he switched off. Soon he picked out an open space and went down into it. But too many branches were about, and his wing tips melted away as if they were made out of grandma’s waffles. He went in for a landing with no more buoyancy left in the Spad than he would have found in an iron bath tub, and the fuselage, with nothing more than pin feathers sticking out where the wings had been, nosed down into a bog and hedgehopped it like a flat rock, skipped across the surface of a stagnant pool. The remains of the bus then struck a gnarled old willow stump, arched through the air, then went *SPLOSH!* into the drink.

“Any landin’ you kin walk away from is a good one,” Phineas philosophized as he waded ashore. Spluttering, he sat down on the bank, spat out a lily pad, took a mud turtle out of his pocket, and then held onto his stomach. He was not sure how many tadpoles he had swallowed.

At last the rings that spread away from the spot

where the Spad had met a Watery grave were no more and all was still. “Well, I am now dead,” Phineas opined. “And it is deep in there, so they’ll all think I was drowned and won’t bother to get grapplin’ hooks. And it is-too far from Brest to hire a diver, haw-w-w-w-w! Well, I’ve got to get out of here before some nosey doughs come snoopin’ around and spoil things. It’s fun walkin’ around when you are supposed to be dead. What a *guerre!*”

Keeping out of sight of scattered patrols of Yankee doughs, Phineas then proceeded to make his way across Frog terrain. At dusk he came to a ruined village and a signpost on the fringe of it read: LUCY.

“Haw-w-w-w-w,” the A.W.O.L. Yank chuckled. “Lucy seems to have taken an awful kickin’ around. Well, I will go in and haunt what is left. If I only had a chain to rattle!” he added with a sigh.

The exponent of everything in the world that was not what it appeared to be went on into the apparently deserted Frog hamlet. One house that was a little less shattered than the rest looked inviting, and he went in and sat down to rest his sore and bruised undercarriage. Very shortly, however, the Boonetowner’s lily-pad ears picked up a sound that did not seem according to Hoyle, and Phineas ducked into the next room to await further developments.

Soon a nearby flight of stairs began to creak like a lot of frightened mice, and when Phineas peeked out he saw a Yankee dough making his way to the street floor. The fellow was a frowsy looking patriot from behind, and when he turned his head around, the hidden Yank saw a funny nose that was shaped like a spud set into a countenance that had no more expression than a wad of bread dough.

“Wh-who’s there?” the soldier croaked shakily. “H-huh, I must be gittin’ jumpy as—”

Phineas then tossed a jackknife into a far corner that was cluttered up with a lot of debris and worn-out furniture. The dough took the bait, stalked over to the corner from whence the disturbance had come—and promptly Phineas was on his neck.

“Surprise!” he yipp’ed, banging his fist into the dough’s chops. “Haw-w-w-w-w! Fancy meetin’ you here!”

CONSTERNATION reigned in Bar-le-Duc twenty-four hours later, whereas there was great joy in Potsdam. An infantry outfit had confirmed the rumor that Lieutenant Phineas Pinkham was the late Mr. Pinkham, having gone down in flames over the Meuse.

Doughs had reached the submerged wreck of his crate but had not been able to bring up the remains of the intrepid pilot from the depths of the stagnant water.

Major Garrity and the chaplain wore a lot of pencils into kindling trying to frame a pretty eulogy for the Boonetown Pinkhams, while the buzzards of the Ninth looked on with their consciences prodding them unmercifully.

“We will just say that a brave man went west,” Garrity said at last. “He laid down his life because we told him to—er—I mean he sacrificed his—er—that is—”

“It was murder in the first degree,” Captain Howell growled. “We would get the electric chair back in the U.S., you hypocrite, you. I—”

“Now, now, let’s talk things over, b-boys,” the Major gulped. “We—er—you knew I was kidding, didn’t you, huh?”

“Sure,” Bump Gillis horned in, “like the whale was when it snagged Jonah. I will go to the D. A.—er—Chaumont—an’ confess. I’ll get off with maybe twenty years, an’—”

Major Garrity spat out the shreds of one pencil and picked up another which he soon gnawed in half. Then he pawed his face out of shape with clammy hands. “N-now—er—where were we when—‘we take our pen in hand’—er—if this account is not paid by the first of the next mon’—uh—‘we regret to tell you that Lieutenant Phineas Pinkham was—er—’”

“Kilt in cold blood!” Bump supplied. “We are sorry that we made him commit suicide but—”

“By-y-y cr-r-ripes, there will be a murder!” the C.O. bayed. “You shut up, Gillis! Now—er—Chaplain, we’ll begin again. ‘We regret to tell you that Phineas Pinkham is dead.’”

NEXT DAY the Spads of the Ninth Pursuit Squadron took to the ozone with broad black bands painted around their midribs as a sign of respect for the man who had left their midst. Krauts, spotting the mournful formation, signalled to each other and laid off the browsing battle busses.

“*Ach, der brafe man vas das Pingham yust der zame!*” opined a little Von. “*Nie mehr ist, das grosser Pingham. Himmel, und von Lug, der grosser sqvareheadt, gedts idt der fordty t’ou-sand marks yedt. Donnervetter! He ist der Dumkopf vhat vould fall by der zewer und coom oop mit der pearl necklace aroundt der neck vunce. Bah!*”

Then when night fell, Major Rufus Garrity, his conscience still digging into his ribs with the tenacity

of cat claws, decided he had better leave the drome for awhile and drown his feelings in strong Frog brew. In other words, the Old Man headed for Bar-le-Duc to get thoroughly scalded.

En route, Garrity almost suffered a stroke, for a mule grazing in a Frog pasture alongside the road, emitted a “haw-w-w-w-w-w” that lifted the Old Man off the seat of the jalopi in which he was riding and shoved his head right through the top. Then all the rest of the way to town, the shaken C.O. brushed sweat globules as big as grapes off his brow. And when he got to the Cafe of the Pink Cow in Bar-le-Duc, he rushed in and demanded a water glass filled to the rim with brandy.

Having gulped it down, he called for another. And a half hour later he weaved his way out to the street to seek yet another place in which to drown his sorrows.

There were all kinds of patriots milling around Bar-le-Duc—Tommies, red tabs, *Poilus*, French officers, Yankee officers, and plenty of plain, ordinary U.S. doughs.

Three brass hats, who were on the prod, quickly spotted Major Garrity staggering through the crowd. They looked at each other, then nodded.

“That fellow’s the C.O. of the air squadron that’s based just south of here,” chirped one of them, a colonel with two chins. “Garrity’s the name—and he’s a poker fiend, too. Being plenty irrigated, we can take him for everything but his skivvies. Let’s go.”

Thereupon, he stopped the leader of the Ninth Pursuit and spoke up with loud enthusiasm.

“Hello, Major!” he blustered. “It’s a sight for sore eyes you are, Garrity. We figured to get up a little game, ol’ boy, ol’ boy. Nice place on the second floor of this estaminet—private an’ all that. We can play without being disturbed. How about it? This is Colonel Willynilley with me. And—er—Major Grubbe from Chaumont.”

“Poker?” Garrity beamed. “’S great shtuff. In fact, I inven’ed the blashted game. Le’sh go git shome ships—red an’ white an’ blue ships—play poker. Ha! Ha! I’ll clean you fellersh down to bare fushelagesh. Yeshir. Forward mar-r-rsh! Allonsh enfansh, do—re—mi—fa—so-o-ol—”

One of the brass hats hit upon a swell idea then. He suggested that they grab a dough and pay the fellow a franc or two to fetch and carry drinks, cigars, and such, while they were playing. Moreover, he could keep guard at the door to insure privacy.

“’S great shtuff,” the Major repeated bibulously.

“Jush’ like Waldorf Ashoria—there’sh big feller right there lookin’ in eshtaminet like he’sh thirshty—he-e-ey, *garcon*, ’tenshun!”

“Ah—er—yessir. I ain’t done nothin’. I am Private Willie Snoophiggins, an’ I got a leaf of—”

“Ha! Ha!” laughed Garrity, “Come on, Shouphidgins, we wan’ sherviee. Give you five francsh in real argent to be butler. Jush’ follow ush.”

“Oh, awright. But I—well, I can’t resist orficers,” the dough sighed.

MAJOR GARRITY was known back in his home town as the best poker player in seven counties. Even when slightly befuddled by giggle juice, he was a match for any group of gentlemen who had an idea they were slick pasteboard manipulators. So by the time an hour had passed, Major Garrity had amassed a tidy fortune in the little room over the estaminet tagged *La Cheval Noire*.

Colonel Willynille was peeling off his new tunic when Private Snoophiggins brought another round of

drinks. The Yankee dough dropped a glass and bent hurriedly to clean up the debris. Again the C.O. of the Ninth dealt the cards and looked at his hand. He tossed in five blue chips and waited for the reaction. Private Willie Snoophiggins’ hands worked incredibly fast picking up the broken glass, but then he clumsily knocked over an ash tray at Garrity’s elbow.

“C-come on—git out—shoo—shoo!” Garrity yipped. “*Allez ite*, Scooppidgeon. You’re in my hair. Ha! Ha! Shee you five an’ raishe you five more, Colonel. Let’sh shee shome competishun. Five blue ships againsh’ new whipcord britches you’re wearin’, Grubbe. What fun! Guesh I’ll buy Eiffel Tower ’n’ Foliesh Bergere. Huh, you call me, Colonel? Tsk! tsk! Here it ish—Three acesh an’ two pretty li’l queeniesh. Brunettesh the queensh I got. Allush like brun—”

“Wh-why, Garrity, you cad!” Colonel Willynille suddenly yipped. “You cheated, you scoundrel! I’ve got a queen of clubs, too. There’s only one in a deck, you—why—!”

“S’n outrage!” the C.O. of the Ninth stormed.



“Coffee an’ pishtolsh in the garden at shunrishe. You have inshulted honor of—” Rufus Garrity waved his arms around his head and one of his sleeves coughed up two more cards.

“Kings!” Grubbe yelled. “Why you—you—Garrity, this is—why it is dastardly, man! I’ve a good mind to bust you one on the beezel!”

Shocked cold sober, the C.O. of the Ninth put up his dukes. “You’ll bust who, ya frogface? Why—er—what’ve you got me into here, huh? Got me boiled an’ hooked me for a poker game, huh? Just some card sharpers, you dirty bums!” Then the Old Man slugged Colonel Willynille in the right eye and put a shanty over it, whereupon the Colonel swung and missed Garrity but landed on the prop boss of Major Grubbe. Infuriated, the latter brass hat came rushing in with both arms flailing, and one of his wallops caught the C.O. of the fighting Ninth square on the chin.

Private Willie Snoophiggins seemed to forget where he was. “Hit ’im again, Major!” he yelled. “That was one sweet swipe ya give ’im—er—ha-a-alp, police! Geendarms! Po-o-olice! He-e-e-ey!” Private Snoophiggins dives under the table, however, when the Frog cops and Allied M.P.’s broke into the place. A brigadier-general picked up Colonel Willynille and demanded to know who had slugged him. Grubbe pointed at Garrity and the C.O. of the Ninth yelled for Private Willie Snoophiggins. “He’ll be a witness that I was framed! They were robbin’ me. I had some drinks an’ they lured me into a poker game. I re—”

“It ith a lie!” Colonel Grubbe protested through a gap in his dental assembly. “He wath cheatin’ an’ had kingth an’ aitheth up hith thleeveth. We accuthed him, an’ he thlugged me wight in the fathe an’—arretth him for athault an’ cheatin’ at cardth!”

In the gab that followed the brigadier-general, to Garrity’s dismay, found out that Colonel Grubbe was a friend of his cousin’s back in Erie, Pennsylvania. And what made the C.O.’s woe even more profound was the fact that nobody could find hide or hair of Willie Snoophiggins.

“He’s got to be found.” Garrity wailed. “He can back me up. I gave him ten fr—I mean he would not be influenced as he was just hired to bring us drinks an’—I demand that Private Snoophiggins be apprehended and brought to court. I will get a lawyer an’ fight you big wart-hogs to the limit. I know my rights—er—aw-w-w-w cr-r-ripes!”

“There’s another charge,” Willynille howled. “Slander!”

“Yeah, thir. Cheatin’ at cardth, athault, an’ thlander,” Grubbe lisped. “Arretth him!”

THE NEXT MORNING Garrity arrived back at the drome, and the word spread over the sector that he was in a jam—that when Chaumont’s Blackstones got through with him, he would be no better than a second class potato manicurist. Officially under arrest, Major Rufus Garrity kept to his quarters and Glad Tidings Goomer told the buzzards of the squadron that all their C.O. kept saying when he got his victuals was “I wasn’t that boiled! There was a Willie Snoophiggins. I wasn’t seein’ things. They got to find Willie. He will go to bat for me. Yeah, Snoophiggins was the name.”

“Cheatin’ at cards, huh?” Bump Gillis said, shaking his head. “Somethin’s gaga. They’ll toss him out of the army for that. First Carbuncle gits killed, then the Old Man goes to the cleaners. What an awful pass we have come to. The Ninth Pursuit Squadron disgraced! I can’t believe it. But nobody could’ve even been born with the name of Snoophiggins! Garrity must’ve drunk all the snake cure in Barley Duck. If only Pinkham was here, he could maybe think a way out. He—”

“We’ll go an’ git a spiritualist,” Howell proposed sarcastically, “and contact that bum—er—guy. If there’s spirits walkin’, he’ll be one. You could not keep him down with a cement silo. Over at Commercy there is a medium who’ll do the job for ten francs.”

“We’re all nutty,” Bump groaned. But proof that spirits walk abroad at night hit the buzzards of the Ninth between the eyes the next morning. The pilots of “C” Flight were ten minutes late getting out for the dawn jaunt because Casey and his greaseballs had an awful time getting Spads out onto the line in their bare feet. It was Casey who finally found twelve pairs of shoes with socks tucked into them hanging from the limb of a big tree at the edge of the drome. Right under the tree was a big piece of burnt cloth and a rubber cigar. And when Sergeant Casey saw them he let out a frightened yelp and ran away from the spot without putting his retrieved shoes on.

Then Bump Gillis picked up the top-kick’s shoes and looked at them. “Blood!” he hollered—and he ran for the hangars. “He come back! Pinkham’s been here. Oww-w-w-w-w! Major!”

Five minutes later, as six scary-faced buzzards passed by the row of Nissons, they heard a familiar voice intone:

"I to-o-old you-u-u-u bums I'd co-o-ome back! It's nice where I a-a-am! The C.O. has got icings on here, to-o-o. Haw-w-w-w-w-w! Ado-o-o for now, as I have got to gild some gates. Ado-o~o-o—but I'll be back!"

The C.O. and all the buzzards turned the insides of the huts upside down but found no evidence of trickery. Old Man Garrity asked Glad Tidings Goomer for a bottle, then ran on wobbly legs back to his quarters. "S-see if I c-care if they bust me now, the big slob!" he choked out in a quaking voice.

In a wooded copse not far away a stealthy figure dropped a piece of twine that stretched all the way from his hiding place to the limb of a tree right behind his own renovated Nissan cubicle. He slipped away into the night, and there was no rattle of chains accompanying his movements.

"Cheatin' at cards!" the night prowler grinned. "Willie Snoophiggins! Ha! Ha! The ol' turtle must've been potted awright."

IN DUE TIME, Major Rufus Garrity was hailed into the A.E.F. court, and there was not even a cigar coupon wagered in all France that he'd escape the sling that Chaumont had put him in. Brass hats everywhere hoped that the C.O. of the Ninth would get "everything coming to him, the dirty cheat!"

Up to the time that the pow-wow got under way, there was no word regarding the whereabouts of Private Willie Snoophiggins, the Garrity alibi and ace-in-the-hole. Then just as the brass hats of the A.E.F. bar got the skids greased, word hit Chaumont that there had been a Willie Snoophiggins, all right—but that he had been buried in the Argonne four months back.

"Aw—er—somethin's rotten here," Major Garrity ripped cut. "I am bein' railroaded. It was a dough that was there and these officers who have got charges against me know it. He had yellow hair and a nose like a potato. I demand a delay until—"

"Don't be silly, Major," the officer in charge of the well-known works scoffed. "Are you guilty—or not guilty?"

"I banged the Colonel in the eye, yes!" Garrity raged. "But I never had extra queens or kings. I demand justice."

"Silence!" bellowed a brigadier. "As head of this court, I . . . And there followed two hours of accusative procedure which impressed upon Major Rufus Garrity the fact that his goose was cooked.

But just when the verdict was about to be tossed into

the Ninth Pursuit C.O.'s lap, there came a commotion outside the portals of the honorable court. Two husky M.P.'s came in struggling with a disheveled dough who had corn silk hair and a nose like a tuber.

"I admit I'm Private Willie Snoophiggins," the dough yipped. "And I heard somebody was lookin' for me. But I ain't done nothin'. They paid me t'wait on 'em in that poker game. I—"

"That's him, sir!" Garrity yipped, leaning against an officer who had gone to bat for him. "That's the guy. Now we'll see what we'll see."

A loud rapping finally produced order, whereupon the brigadier put Willie on the grill. "Tell us exactly what happened, Snoophiggins!" he barked.

"We-well, I was hired to wait on the orficers—by the way, I wasn't paid in full—the—er—prisoner was kind of potted—er—intoxi—he was a little stewed. An' the other orficers was as sober as you, Brig—er—sir. Well, I saw if I didn' break it up, the Major would git cleaned of everythin' but the fabric on his fuselage—an' he was the only one that give me any argent. Well, I guess I did put them extra cards in there so's the game would git broke up. I didn't think it would raise so much he—er—fuss. Well, it was that fat colonel there—he made a swipe at the Major but he hit the other brass hat, an'—"

"Just a minute, there, Private Spookhidgins—Souphiggins—Sloop—er—please show more respect for your superior officers or we'll put you—"

"I—er—I'm sorry," Willie apologized. "I fergot where I was. Well, like I said, Willynille hit the other colonel because he missed—er—the Major. I yelled for cops and then ducked, as I didn't want to get in a jam. It was just like that. They got the Major potted an' got him into a poker game so's they could—well, that is all, and I am sorry that—er—well, I done my duty.

Colonel Fortescue Willnilley, blue around the chops, got to his feet and laughed very nastily. "It's all a fake, that testimony. Willie Snoophiggins is dead. He was buried in the Argonne—*ha-a-ah!*"

Major Garrity's brain was full of butterflies as he looked from one to the other. Suddenly he jumped up again. "What of it? Whoever this dough is, he was at the poker game, wasn't he? What difference does it make if—?"

Private Willie Snoophiggins sidled toward the door. But an M.P. yelled: "No ya don't! Git back there—aw-w-w-wk, look! His nose is droppin' off. The end of it just flopped down like—"

“Haw-w-w-w-w!” the dough guffawed and yanked what was left of his fake proboscis loose. Major Rufus Garrity swooned—and it was fifteen minutes before he came too.

Standing there looking at him was Lieutenant Phineas Pinkham!

“Y-you—why, you big crackpot!” Garrity stormed. “It was you—you were—that dough was—you planted them ca—!”

Phineas lifted his voice to drown out his C.O.’s words. “Aw-right, so I was Willie Snoophiggins. I was supposed to’ve been kilt. I thought I was, and I wandered around after the crackup like a sleepwalker. Where did you think I recovered my senses? Right in Barley Duck when them brass hats were trying to ream my beloved C.O. Wasn’t that lucky? H-huh? I must’ve got that dough’s suit somewhere an’—I—I see it all now! It’s the spy! If Willie is dead, as you guys say, how can he be livin’, huh? I know where there is a spy locked up in a cellar—a Jerry spy, haw-w-w-w! He found Willie’s dog tag someplace an’—well, while I was supposed to be dead I found the spy and took the dough’s suit myself. All the time I was supposed to be dead, I was helpin’ to get a spy. Here I am alive, an’ I—” “Quick!” somebody yowled, “the brigadier is actin’ funny. Git some smellin’ salts. He—”

“It’s a good thing I got here in time, wasn’t it?” Phineas said to the Old Man. “Why I even come back from th’ grave to get you out of a jam. It’s not worth it, as I know when I am not wanted. Awright, I’ll tell the court you said to go out an’ kill myself as—”

Colonel Grubbe, still awaiting dental replacements, rose up abruptly and lisped: “If thith man ith Pinkham an’ not Private Thnoophiggith, he hath not got any righth to tethtify, ath he wath pronounthed dead like Thnoophiggith ith. I demand—”

But with that, the brigadier lost his dignity. He yanked hair from his thinning scalp and tossed it toward the ceiling. “Sit down! And shut up! All right now, who is dead and who isn’t dead? Pinkham, can you prove you’re—?”

“I am very modest,” the Boonetown pilot grinned. “But if you want to see a birthmark, come into the back room. Haw-w-w-w!”

“I protetht!” screeched Grubbe. “It’th a lie! I wath thlugged—!”

“Over here—quick!” a brass hat bellowed. “Another guy is passin’ out!” Fed up, the brigadier shouted the court into order and then absolved everybody but Phineas Pinkram. “Hold that man,” he roared, “for impersonating a—imperson—why, say, there isn’t anything in the books here about an officer impersonating a private! It’s a crime to impersonate an officer, but—I—I can’t do a thing to Lieutenant Pinkham, can I? Why, I—aw-w-w-wk, smellin’ salts, somebody!”

MAJOR GARRITY rode back to Bar-le-Duc with Lieutenant Pinkham. Halfway to the drome, the Old Man suddenly yelped: “You planted them cards! You let me sweat blood thinkin’ Willie wouldn’t ever show up. You—you—took them groundhogs’ shoes—we heard you on the drome after you were dead, you—you—”

“A phonograph in a tree,” Phineas explained blithely. “I had the record made in Paree the last time I was there fer I knew I’d be dead sometime, haw-w-w-w!”

The Old Man got his hands on the Pinkham windpipe and put on plenty of pressure. But Phineas gurgled: “Go ahead an’ murder me ag’in. I won’t never tell y-you where I hid that argent of yours I scooped up from that poker game—awk.”

“Huh?” Garrity gulped, relaxing the pressure. “Y-you did? I’m sorry, Phineas. I’m not myself, as what I have been through—I mean how much was it?”

“Two hundred francs,” Phineas grinned.

“I never lost at poker yet,” the Old Man beamed and lay back on the cushions. “They got to git up early to take me over!”

“Sez you,” murmured the incurable jokesmith to himself, caressing a wad of franc notes in his pocket.