



a HUMPY & TEX adventure

SEAGULL'S LUCK

by ALLAN R. BOSWORTH

Humpy and Tex couldn't decide about an insignia for their crate until a U-Boat commander showed them the hot spot—and how to fill it. Then paint and Heinies got spattered all over the Channel.

TEX" MALONE DIPPED HIS BRUSH in the can of black paint and prepared to do things to the fuselage of the I-30. The artistic urge was strong upon him; it was high time he and "Humpy" Campbell had an insignia all their own.

Aces, they were now, and the best damn cloud crackers the navy had, if anybody asked Tex. He raised

the brush and made a half-hearted pass at the fuselage fabric. Then he lowered his hand again.

"I could use crossed anchors, but that's pretty common!" the lanky observer muttered. "Let's see now, what would be good?"

He leaned against the crate and pondered.

Rickenbacker had a hat in the ring. Tex didn't

believe in letting the army get ahead of the navy. The

brush came up again, but the would-be artist was interrupted.

Humpy Campbell rounded the corner in a burst of speed, spat a stream of tobacco juice toward the corner of the hangar with indifferent aim, and yelled.

"In that ark, sailor! Shake it up! The Old Man says the water off Point Penmarch is lousy with subs, and we got to help escort a convoy—"

"But we wasn't goin' to go up to-day—" Tex began.

"No, we wasn't, but we are now!"

The heavy-set quartermaster dashed to the hangar door and yelled to the aviation machinist's mates within. Tex heard them tell him the I-30 was fueled and ready. Several men came out to truck her down the runway.

"Aw, hell!" grumbled the ex-cowboy. He clapped the lid on the paint can viciously and set it and the brush inside his cockpit.

"What's the idea?" demanded Humpy as he adjusted his goggles and drew on his gloves.

"Paint's too damn hard to get!" Tex asserted. "I ain't leavin' none here for them monkeys to swipe. I chased the first looey all over the compound with a chit to-day and when I finally found him he growled like I was tryin' to requisition a battleship to take fishin'."

"Well, snap out of your hop and let's high-tail it out of here!" Humpy urged. "The navy ain't payin' you to do interior decoratin'."

He climbed to the pilot's cockpit. "Contact!"

The I-30's prop kicked over, her engine roared and the machinist's mates eased her down until she bobbed on the swells of the bay. Humpy Campbell looked back, took a plug of tobacco from his pocket and stowed a large part of it in his starboard cheek. Then he gave her the gun.

"So foggy the seagulls are walkin'!" swore Tex Malone as the pontoons skimmed the surface and the ark lifted in a dash of spray. "But we ain't seagulls."

The seaplane base at Ile Tudy dropped away into a gray void and vanished. Below the two flyers the ocean rolled, half shrouded by the clinging mist that seemed to be eternal on the coast of Finisterre. Tex settled in his seat, listening comfortably to the engine's drone and trusting perfectly in Humpy's sense of direction.

SOMEWHERE out over the rocky peninsula that is known as Point Penmarch, a wind swept down from the Channel and dispelled a part of the fog. Tex straightened in his seat suddenly. The convoy was below.

Humpy had seen it too. He eased forward on the stick and the I-30 roared down in a steep dive, straight for the belching stacks of the nearest destroyer. The trim little warship took on length and breadth; Tex could distinguish men on her deck.

He leaned over the pit coaming and waved. Humpy leveled off, gunned the engine to announce their arrival, then climbed to the customary patrol altitude of a thousand feet and began flying in long ovals over the southbound convoy.

There were four destroyers, dashing around the two huge troopships, cutting intricate patterns of white on the gray sea. Tex heaved a sigh and took up his grim vigil. Visibility was poor; it would be difficult to detect the dark blob of a deadly mine or the slender jab of a periscope. He strained his eyes toward the surface, sitting tensely erect with one hand gripping the lever that would release one of the two bombs the I-30 carried.

The destroyers ranged to seaward, leading the way around Point Penmarch, two of them abeam of the troopships. Humpy flew a zigzag course ahead, watching for oil slicks or periscopes.

There seemed to be nothing. He kicked the rudder over and swung the I-30 around in a long bank. Tex indulged in a yawn.

"When this is over, I'm goin' to print that insignia!" the ex-cowboy told himself. "I've got it! A star for Texas, and a camel inside for Humpy! That's it!"

Tex grinned confidently. He had no doubt of his ability to paint the design, it was easy as branding a—

A shrieking siren ripped up from one of the destroyers. Bells clanged; another siren took up the wail of alarm, this time from one of the troopships. Humpy jerked erect in the front cockpit; Tex stared wide-eyed at the surface craft below.

Surely it was a false warning; there was not a sign on the gray waters. Tex gripped the coaming and scanned the waves with an intense gaze.

Of a sudden he saw it—a white wake boiling along the surface at thirty-five knots, streaking straight for the side of the leading troopship.

"Torpedo!" yelled the observer, jabbing the air with an excited finger as he pointed. He felt the word sticking in his throat, drowned by the bedlam of noise from the convoy. But Humpy had seen.

Black smoke vomited from the four stacks of the nearest destroyer and fell flat on the surface of the heaving sea. Even as Humpy kicked over left rudder

and stood the I-30 on her ear, the deadly *Schwartzkopf* fish vanished under the smoke screen. The stocky pilot cursed the destroyer men for a pack of blithering, seagoing idiots, then gunned his plane in a dive straight through the sooty cloud.

"Lot of good a smoke screen'll do now!" the flying sailor muttered. He shifted his tobacco to port and set his jaw hard.

Tex Malone half stood in his cockpit, expecting the crate to shed her wings in that power dive. The wind howled about him in symphony of speed; he gasped as the acrid fumes closed about the plane and bit into the lining of his lungs. For a split second, the whole gray world was shut out from view, but he had seen that torpedo wake stretching out before them, heading straight for the troopship's hull!

Humpy leveled her off, there in the darkness of swirling, oil-fed smoke, and Tex felt his heart skip a beat. He knew a few more yards would have meant death. Now the plane streaked low over the water, making ninety knots to the torpedo's thirty-five.

"Hurry! Hurry!" the Texan shrieked. He could see that white trail of death just below. The smoke cloud ended suddenly, the flyers burst forth into daylight and pure air. A hundred yards ahead, the torpedo wake began. Less than four times that distance away, the troopship's broad sides, weirdly camouflaged, loomed!

Humpy straightened out and headed his ship down the narrow streak of foam. Tex grabbed the bomb-release lever and jerked it hard.

The I-30 zoomed under a hard back-stick and skimmed the slow trooper's funnels. Tex could see thousands of men in olive drab lining her rails and looking Death in the face before they got to France.

Boom! A dull explosion, a geyser of hell shooting out of the sea's bosom. The bomb had exploded fairly in the torpedo's path. Its delicate mechanism was wrecked by the concussion; from the plane they could see it twisted sidewise and tossing on the surface. A destroyer was standing by, a four-inch trained on the spent missile.

"Look for the sub!" yelled Humpy. He swung the I-30 around in a tight bank and roared north.

They heard the crack of the destroyer's gun and saw the Atlantic spout high again. The torpedo was done for. Destroyers increased their speed, cutting the water with knifelike bows, their stacks pouring out black smoke that encompassed the troopships like a velvety curtain, shutting the whole area out from view.

HUMPY climbed a little for a better survey of the heaving waters, but there was no sign of a periscope or a low-lying whale-back. The pilot turned to Tex, who shook his head. "Good eye, you blasted rubber sock!" the pilot shouted above his engine's noise. "See anything?"

"Not a ripple!"

"Well, we might as well follow the convoy!"

The I-30 slanted into another bank, and as she did so, she rebelled. Hot, sticky oil showered back into the sailors' faces from a broken feed line; the engine screamed and pounded as it went dry.

Humpy Campbell clutched at his goggles, wiped away the scum and saw the hot smoke pouring from the tortured motor. He groped for the switch and cut it, ripped off his goggles and made ready for a deadstick landing on the swells.

Tex Malone was swearing volubly, wiping stinging oil from his cheeks. The water rose to meet them, the plane glided into the wind, losing altitude fast.

"Our luck's still with us!" complained Humpy. "Off with your strap, she may capsizel!"

She didn't, but she didn't miss far. Her pontoons struck the crest of a swell, rode it out and pitched down into a trough. The gray mist closed in; down to the south was the convoy, rapidly disappearing in a curtain of black smoke.

"Here we are!" observed Tex. "I reckon a destroyer will come back when they miss us."

Humpy snorted. "They can't see their own taffrails on them tin cans for their smoke!" he retorted. "By the time they do miss us, they'll be nearly to St. Nazaire. Besides, what's the lives of a couple of sky bustin' gobs compared to a couple of troopships? Where's your patriotism?"

"Shut up!" Tex requested, forgetting in the moment of stress to be nautical. "Anything you can do?"

"Nope. Bearings already shot. If I hadn't cut her dead, we'd been afire."

They fell into a moody silence. The pitch and roll of the water underneath their pontoons seemed to be abating, but the mist was worse. It came in fitful gusts out of the north, wetting their faces and driving the cold into their bones. They sat and shivered.

Humpy cursed and took another vicious bite at his plug of tobacco, then sadly regarded the small portion that was left. Not much, but perhaps too much for his earthly needs. A plane wouldn't float forever.

"I got it!" Tex exclaimed. "Now's a good time to put that insignia on the old ark!"

"Yeah!" grunted Humpy. "For the mermaids to see! Did you ever fall out of your hammock at training station, or did your mother drop you on your head when you were a baby?"

"You're jealous. No appreciation of art!"

And Tex stooped in his cockpit and emerged with the paint brush and can of black. He produced a cattleman's knife and pried the lid open, humming a mournful ditty of the ranges.

*"Oh, bury me not on the lone prair-eee,
Where the wild coyotes can howl o'er me-ee"*

"Say!" he asked abruptly. "Ain't we got a Very pistol?"

"Nope. Took off in a hell of a hurry. Those monkeys said we were all ready, but I'll bet if they'd looked the crate over they might have found a weak joint in that feed line."

He spat tobacco juice over the side and watched it blend with the green of the water. Then he raised his head and looked toward shore, miles and miles away now. Perhaps they'd drift in, if they could rig a sail.

"Tex! Look!"

The lanky observer, about to begin his decorative task on the port side of the fuselage underneath his cockpit, jerked erect. Humpy was pointing to starboard.

There was a submarine, breaking water not a quarter of a mile away!

"Good God, that's the Heinie!" Tex exclaimed. "She's spotted us!"

She had. They saw the whaleback, gray and dirty, emerge. The conning tower hatch opened; men appeared on the bridge. A deck gun rose from its well forward of the tower and turned its dripping snout toward the plane.

"Ahoy, the plane!" came a hoarse shout. "Stand by, or we'll blow you out of the water."

"As though we could fly!" Humpy snorted. "She's comin' over to play with us!"

THE long, gray German ship cruised nearer gracefully, still under the power of her batteries. A seaman prepared to throw the Americans a line.

It whistled through the air; Humpy caught it and made fast around a stanchion. The men on the submarine heaved.

A stockily built man with bristling mustache smiled pleasantly from the bridge. He was clad in dungarees like the rest, but there was gold on his cap.

"Welcome, Yanks!" he called. "From the air to the bottom, all in one day. It is a strange war, is it not?"

"You said it!" Humpy returned. "What do you want us to do now?"

"Ah, you shall see!" smiled the skipper of the *Unterseeboot*. "That was a neat trick you accomplished a while ago; from the periscope I saw you blow our *Schwartzkopf* from the water."

"Oh, you saw it, eh?"

"Yes." *Herr Kapitan* twisted his mustache. "No doubt one of the destroyers will return when they discover you are missing. H'm. We must prepare a welcome."

He turned to a petty officer and issued instructions in German. The man nodded and went below.

"I have always wished to sink a destroyer!" the submarine skipper went on, smiling. "But so far, while I have thirty ships to my credit, I have no warships. Merchantmen, yes. Now is my chance. Shall I tell you of our clever little scheme?"

"Oh, do!" begged Humpy with mock interest. He heard Tex swearing under his breath in the rear cockpit.

"Here." *Herr Kapitan* reached out and took a coil of thin wire cable from the petty officer who had gone below. He issued more instructions in his own language. The petty officer climbed onto the wing of the I-30, walked to the fuselage, then stooped and made the cable fast around a pontoon brace.

"Going to tow us?" inquired Humpy.

The German laughed. The captain smiled more pleasantly than ever. "You have no objection to our using the plane as a marking buoy?" he asked. "You will be aboard with us, so you will be out of the cold. I have a mine I would like to attach to this cable, and when the destroyer comes near to investigate, we will merely let go. Ha-ha! You see the unlimited possibilities of the submarine? We will have England on her knees in another month."

He was garrulous, that skipper. Tex heard his voice as though far away, while the petty officer was making fast the line. Tex was helpless, sitting there like an idiot with nothing but a paint brush in his hand.

Nothing but a paint brush. Still, if he were at liberty to walk on the upper wing, that brush would be the means of warning a destroyer or whatever other ship came to their rescue. The ex-cowboy thought desperately.

He peered over the port side, the side of the fuselage that the Germans could not see. I-30, the letters said underneath his cockpit. I-30.

The U-boat captain was still killing time, allowing

fresh air to enter the open conning tower. Once below, it might be a long vigil beside the listening apparatus, waiting for a ship to come. Tex stole a glance at him, then leaned over the side nonchalantly, and made a swipe with the brush.

It was a mark next to the letter "I" —a mark that began straight and ended in a curve, transforming the "I" into a "U." Another swift slash of the brush—a straight mark across the open face of the "3"—and it became a "B."

Tex cast a swift look at *Herr Kapitan* and found him gazing off to sea in the direction of the departed convoy, trying to pierce the smoke and mist with a pair of glasses. The sailor dipped his paint brush hurriedly and got in some more work. Then he let the brush fall into the lifting swell, and nobody heard the splash.

It wasn't exactly the sort of insignia he had hoped to paint on the side of the I-30, far from it, in fact. Now the marking read, in plain black letters that could be seen rods away, "U-BOAT," and ended with a broad arrow that pointed downward!

"Now, I reckon the plane makes a pretty good marker!" muttered the ex-cowboy. He wiped a spot of paint from his hand.

The petty officer was straightening from his task; he pulled on the cable and grunted with satisfaction. It was secure to the plane.

"NOW," said the German skipper, "we offer you the hospitality of our craft. I trust you won't have to stay long before your friends come to see what happened."

"Go to hell!" flared Humpy Campbell. "Only a Kraut would think of such a trick! You can shoot me if you want to, I'm not going on your lousy tin whale!"

"Why, Humpy!" remonstrated Tex. "Where's your bringin' up? Here's a man invites you on his ship and you won't go! Come on!"

He managed to wink at the surprised pilot, and Humpy yielded, grumbling to himself. He climbed stiffly out of the cockpit and wing-walked to the submarine's rounded deck, following the man with the cable wire. Tex slid forward and followed.

Herr Kapitan motioned them down the ladder, a Luger in his hand. He gave more instructions to the men on deck, then descended. Several sailors were bringing up a huge mine; they rigged a sling for it and passed it up the conning tower from the control room.

"Do we have to stand by here and let a destroyer get sunk?" demanded Humpy. "I'd rather—"

"Hold your horses, sailor!" Tex answered. "There's

many a slip 'twixt the Kraut and the ship, or something like that. Only, if you started to say you'd rather die, I reckon you probably will."

Humpy, mystified, subsided into silence. Tex had never been aboard a submarine before; he glanced around him with interest. Mysterious mechanism crowded the huge tubs of death. The faces of the sailors were not like those of American seamen; they appeared servile and hard. There was tension everywhere.

The captain came back their way, climbed to inspect the mine tackle, and then gave the order to submerge. Men tumbled below and manned valves. The hiss of compressed air could be heard, and water rumbled in the tanks. Underneath the Americans' feet the deck slanted.

Down they went with the skipper closely watching the depth gauge. He knew how much cable could be paid out above; he barked an order and the U-boat resumed an even keel. All was quiet save for the hum of her motors.

"Our sonic devices are very delicate!" smiled the German. "I shall be able to inform you when the destroyer returns, long before she comes alongside your disabled plane. I can locate her exactly, and let the mine go directly underneath!"

"You can play hell, too!" Tex Malone grinned.

"Play hell?" repeated the German. "Ah, I see, some more of your incomprehensible Yankee talk. But you may as well be comfortable. Sit down on the deck. You may be my guests for some time. I am going to get five more ships—one, I hope, the destroyer."

"And then what?" asked Humpy.

"Then we will take you to Zeebrugge, and from there you go to Ruhleben, to the prison camp—"

"Herr Kapitan!"

It was the petty officer at the sonic apparatus. He told the captain something in an excited tone; the skipper grew jubilant. He sprang to the device, clapped ear-phones on his head and listened.

"Ha, they are returning to see what became of you!" he said. "Sooner than I thought. But I can tell the noise made by a destroyer's screw!"

The electric light was ghastly on Humpy's face; it was deathly chill inside that rounded hull deep under the Atlantic. Tex took a long breath and reached out for Humpy's hand.

"This is a hell of a way for a couple of sky busters to pass out!" the ex-cowboy declared. "But I reckon it don't make much difference. So long, Humpy!"

"What d'ye mean, so long?" demanded the stocky pilot. "It's those birds up there I feel sorry for."

"Yeah, and if you knew what I know, you'd feel sorry for us!" the Texan retorted. "Just sit tight, and you'll savvy what it's all about!"

THE skipper turned toward them, his eyes shining, a triumphant grin on his face. "They are almost above!" he announced triumphantly. "It might interest you to know that this is my own invention, a device to release mines from above. This is a mine-laying submarine."

"Is she circling the plane?" asked Tex eagerly. If they failed to see that warning on the port side of the fuselage—

"Apparently!" the captain answered. "Now she slows her engines; she is almost overhead!"

He turned to the petty officer who had secured the cable and gave a sharp order. The man stood by a lever, tense and waiting. *Herr Kapitan* raised his hand and held it poised, ready to signal release of the mine.

Tex felt cold perspiration stand out on his face; his heart was pounding hollowly against his ribs. Was his plan going to fail after all? Were those destroyer sailors too dumb to heed the warning?

He swallowed hard; his throat was dry as dust.

Crash! The lights went out, the submarine lurched drunkenly and Tex was hurled to the steel deck in a tangle of arms and legs with other men. He heard startled shouts, and then the splash of water!

Plates ripped open in the hull overhead. Cold and dirty sea water cascaded upon the men in the control room. A terrific pressure suddenly assailed their ear drums.

Boom! Another loud explosion, queerly dulled by the water, came close alongside. The submarine's hull seemed to leap upward in reponse to the shock. Humpy, struggling on his hands and knees in a maze of pipes and valves, heard the captain bawling frantic orders.

Compressed air hissed again, the stricken submarine started rising. Men fought in the darkness for a hold on the ladder, forgetting years of discipline in one mad moment of animal terror.

Tex saw a tiny crack of daylight streaming through the sprung hull plates; felt the U-boat heeling over. Somebody opened the conning-tower hatch, and the clean crack of a four-inch gun sounded from outside. Part of the hatchway clattered down the tower.

"Come on, let's get outa here!" Humpy was saying. He grabbed Tex by the hand and helped lift him to his feet. The last of the terrified crew were tumbling out on deck, yelling "*Kamerad! Kamerad!*"

"I told you!" the ex-cowboy muttered dazedly. "I told you there was many a slip 'twixt the Kraut and the ship!"

"Yeah, and a couple of depth bombs!" Humpy agreed.

