GOD IS MY CO-PILOT

By Col. Robert L. Scott

W.N.U. RELEASE

The story thus far: After graduating from West Point, Robert Scott wins his wings at Kelly Field and takes up combat flying. He has been an instructor for four years when the war breaks out, and is told he is now too old for combat flying. Appealing to several Generals, he is finally told he can get into the fight. He flies a bomber to India, but on arrival is made a ferry pilot and this does not suit him. After a visit to Gen. Chennault he gets a Kittyhawk and soon becomes known as the "one man air force," taking heavy Jap toll in Burma. Later he is made C.O. of the 23rd Fighter Group, but still keeps on knocking down Jap planes. His "Old Exterminator" is badly mauled in a dogfight.

CHAPTER XXIV

As I looked around now the bombers were gone, but climbing up from the South I saw four twin-engine ships that I thought were I-45's; later we decided they were Japanese Messerschmitts. I had plenty of altitude on the leader, and started shooting at him from long range, concentrating on his right engine. He turned to dive, and I followed him straight for the water. I remember grinning, for he had made the usual mistake of diving instead of climbing. But as I drew up on the twin-engine ship, I began to believe that I had hit him from the long range. His ship was losing altitude rapidly in a power glide, but he was making no effort to turn. I came up to within fifty yards and fired into him until he burned. I saw the ship hit the water and continue to burn. We had been going towards the fog bank in the direction of the Philippines, and I wondered if the Jap had been running for Manila.

I shot at two of the other twin-engine ships from long range but couldn't climb up to them. Then I passed over Hongkong Island, flying at a thousand feet; I was too low but didn't want to waste any time climbing. And I saw something that gripped my heart—a fenced-in enclosure which I knew was Fort Stanley, the British and American prison camp. There was a large group standing in the camp and waving at my ship. My saddest feeling of the war came over me then. Here were soldiers who had been prisoners of the Japanese for nearly a year. Month after month they had waited for the sight of Allied airplanes attacking Hongkong—and at last it had come. Even in their suffering they were waving a cheer to the few United States planes that had finally come, and I swore to myself I'd come back again and again.

Then I saw above me the criss-crossing vapor paths of an area where fighter ships have sped through an air attack. They almost covered the sky in a cloud. Here and there were darker lines that could have been smoke paths where ships had burned and gone down to destruction.

I was rudely jerked back to attention by a slow voice that yet was sharp: "If that's a P-40 in front of me, waggle your wings." I rocked my wings before I looked. Then I saw the other ship, a P-40 nearly a mile away. I think from the voice it was Tex Hill. I went over towards him and together we dove towards home.

The presence of the other P-40 made me feel very arrogant and egotistical, for I had shot down four enemy ships and had damaged others. So I looped above Victoria harbor and dove for the Peninsular Hotel. My tracers ripped into the shining plate-glass of the penthouses on its top, and I saw the broken windows cascade like snow to the streets, many floors below. I laughed, for I knew that behind those windows were Japanese high officers, enjoying that modern hotel. When I got closer I could see uniformed figures going down the fire-escapes, and I shot at them. In the smoke of Kowloon I could smell oil and rubber. I turned for one more run on the packed fire-escapes filled with Jap soldiers, but my next burst ended very suddenly. I was out of ammunition. Then, right into the smoke and through it right down to the tree-top levels, I headed Northwest to get out of Japanese territory sooner, and went as fast as I could for Kweilin.

I was the last ship in, and the General was anxiously waiting for me, scanning the sky for ships to come in. He knew I had shot down an enemy, for I had come in with my low-altitude roll of victory. But when I jumped from my cramped seat and said, "General, I got four definitely," he shook my hand and looked very happy. "That makes nineteen then," he said, "for the fighters and the bombers."

We had lost a fighter and a bomber. The bomber had become a straggler when one engine was hit by anti-aircraft; then it was shot to pieces by one of the twin-engined Jap fighters. The pilot had managed even then to get it down, but he had remained in the ship to destroy the bomb-sight, and had been shot through the foot by a Jap cannon. Two of the bomber crew had bailed out and were captured. The other two carried the injured pilot until he had begged them to leave him alone and escape. They had bandaged his foot tightly, but had refused to go without him.

As they moved on through the enemy lines that night, they stopped to rest, and the wounded pilot crawled away from them to insure their getting away to the guerrilla lines. They escaped, and later we received a letter signed by the other two crewmen which said that the pilot had been captured and was then in a Japanese hospital. The letter was a Japanese propaganda leaflet that the Japs had dropped near Kweilin, but being properly signed, it gave us hope for the remainder of the crew, and for the heroic pilot, Lieutenant Allers.

That night Morgan led a night raid to bomb Canton, and had a successful attack. Later the same night, Ed Bayse led six bombers to destroy the power station on Hongkong Island. In his return to Kweilin, five of his ships landed but the other continued to circle—informing the radioman that he had no air speed and thus was having difficulty bringing the fast bomber in to land.

Bayse, who had worked all the day and most of the night over enemy lines, started his ship and went aloft, got the other ship on his wing in formation, and told the pilot to keep the position. And then this experienced bomber pilot led the younger pilot in to a safe landing. It was teamwork of the sort that had begun to appear among the bomber crews, and more important still, as the co-ordinated attack had shown, between the fighters and bombers. This was what Colonel Cooper had been working for during the past several months.

Cooper had done another fine job, one that we learned of only after we returned to Kunming from the attack. In India the field in Assam

Gen. Chennault observes the return of the C.A.T.F. from a raid. Lieut. Grossclose at left.

had been raided heavily by the Japanese at the same hour as our attack on Kowloon, and simultaneously the Japanese had tried to strike at Kunming with a large force. Colonel Cooper had been left behind in the hospital with a sinus infection. He was chafing at the bit, and we sympathized with him—for after having planned the greatest raid of the war in China, he had been forced out of accompanying the mission. But it has always been our contention out there that "everything happens for the best." And it proved out again. When the enemy planes approached Kunming, Cooper left the hospital and took charge of the defense of the home base. He sent Schiel's Squadron towards the South at exactly the right time. They not only intercepted the enemy and foiled the attack but shot down eight of the enemy. That made the score for the Group twenty-seven enemy planes on October 25th, and three highly successful bombing raids.

We were ordered home the next day, although we now had the enemy at our mercy without fighter protection against future raids towards Hongkong. But heavy attacks had come to India, and we were needed to protect the terminus of the ferry route to China.

We managed, however, to leave a small force of P-40's under Holloway and Alison, with mission to dive-bomb shipping in Victoria harbor within the next few days. They took eight planes down and dove through the overcast towards some big enemy freighters that were on the way South towards the Solomons. Their bombs damaged two 8,000-ton freighters and sank a 12,000-ton vessel. Captain O'Connell made this last direct hit by almost taking his bomb down the smoke-stack of the enemy vessel, and in doing so he was shot down. He took the bomb very low, and in recovering from the dive he was attacked by a single enemy, who got one of the best pilots in the Squadron. Clinger and Alison saw the enemy ship, but from their distance they could do nothing in time to save O'Connell. While Alison was getting the lone enemy ship, Clinger dove in anger along the docks of Kowloon, strafing three anti-aircraft positions in the face of very heavy ground-fire.

The most vivid memories of our air war in China come from the little things. Like the memory of General Chennault, sitting there at the mouth of the cave in Kweilin through the long hours while we were away on the attack missions.

Sitting there smoking his pipe and, like a football coach, planning the next week's work. Joe, the General's little black dashshund, would be burrowing into the rocks, looking for the inevitable rats. When with the passing minutes the P-40's or the bombers were due to return, the General would begin to watch the eastern sky. There he would sit without a word until the last ship was accounted for. Sometimes I thought: The General lives through every second of the combat with us. With his keen knowledge of tactics and of the Jap too, he sees exactly what we are doing.

Another memory that always brings a smile is Lieutenant Couch's face when he was explaining what happened the first time he got a Jap Zero in his sights. The enemy ship was a lone "sitter," probably some inexperienced Japanese pilot who wasn't looking around and didn't know the P-40 was behind him. Couch said he kept moving up closer and closer until he knew the Jap was going to be dead the instant he pressed his trigger. Then he pressed—and nothing happened. He squeezed the trigger until he thought he'd press the top off the stick; he found that he shut his eyes, flinched, and bit his lip, but still the guns didn't fire.

The American pilot from the Carolinas swore and throttled back, dropping to the rear while the Jap kept flying innocently on. After Couch had recharged his guns he began to stalk the Zero again, going closer and closer until he could see the enemy pilot at the controls. He set his sights right on the cockpit and pressed the trigger once more. And again nothing happened.

Couch came home disgusted, and I think he worked on his guns all night.

Up between Hengyang and Lingling we had broken the main Jap force with several attacks and there were only stragglers around the sky. We had been searching them out for fifteen minutes when I saw and heard a remark that was nothing short of classic. From 21,000 feet I observed a lone Zero. But there was a P-40 trailing him, and so I held my altitude and watched. The P-40 closed the gap more and more, following the acrobatics of the Jap, and then drew up for the kill. As the tracers from the six guns went into the Zero I heard the voice of Captain Goss say, "There, Hirohito, you bastard—God rest your soul." Over the radio you could also hear the staccato roll of the six Fifties. The Zero slowly rolled over to destruction.

Sometimes the hated Japs had the last word. In regions where the air-warning net was working poorly or not at all, our first knowledge of the approach of the enemy would be the sight of Japanese bombers overhead. As the bombs blasted the runways and the Jap radial engines were taking their ships at high altitude back towards their bases, we would hear over the radio on our exact frequency, in perfect English: "So sorry, please, so sorry."

We would just shake our fists and wait for better days.

When I first brought "Old Exterminator" to China, I had painted the number 10 on the fuselage. Later on we used the last three numerals of the Air Corps numbers for call letters, or were assigned some name like "ash," "oak," or "pine." But the first time I came back from Chungking, late one afternoon, I approached Kunming down the usual corridor, expecting that to identify me automatically, and from far out I called by radio: "One Zero, coming in from the North." Of course I was using the numerals of the number "ten" to identify me to the radio-man. Instead, as I came over the field I saw anti-aircraft men of the Chinese Army running for their guns, and I saw six P-40's taking off to shoot the invader down. Meaning me. You've probably guessed it by now—the radioman gathered that some one had just warned him that one enemy Zero was about to strafe the field. Needless to say, I took myself to safer places for a few minutes until I could properly identify my ship. Then I landed and changed the fuselage number to lucky "seven"—but definitely not seventy.

There just wasn't much relaxation in China with Scotch at one hundred dollars gold a bottle—when you could find it. In fact, we didn't get to drink anything except boiled water and that really terrible rice wine. This we had to learn to down with the Chinese and in their manner, which was with the inevitable salute, "Gambey," or "bottoms up." Then they'd come and proudly show you the bottoms of their glasses, and you'd have to follow suit with a weak little gambey.

Then there was the incessant ringing of the telephones in the warning-net plotting-room that got on all our nerves. After months I found out that without exception every pilot tried not to let others know of his nervousness. But it became unmistakable, for the tension that built up around the card-tables in the alert shacks was not the most effectively disguised in the world.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

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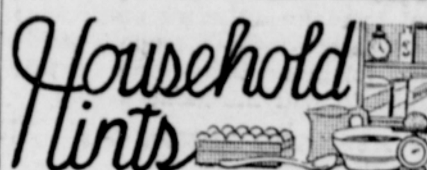

If the knob is pulled off a tightly closed drawer, use a plunger or a large suction cup to open the drawer.

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Instead of rooting and digging among the family's clothes to find the soiled ones for Monday's wash, give each member of the family a laundry bag or basket and have him bring his own clothes to the laundry room.

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