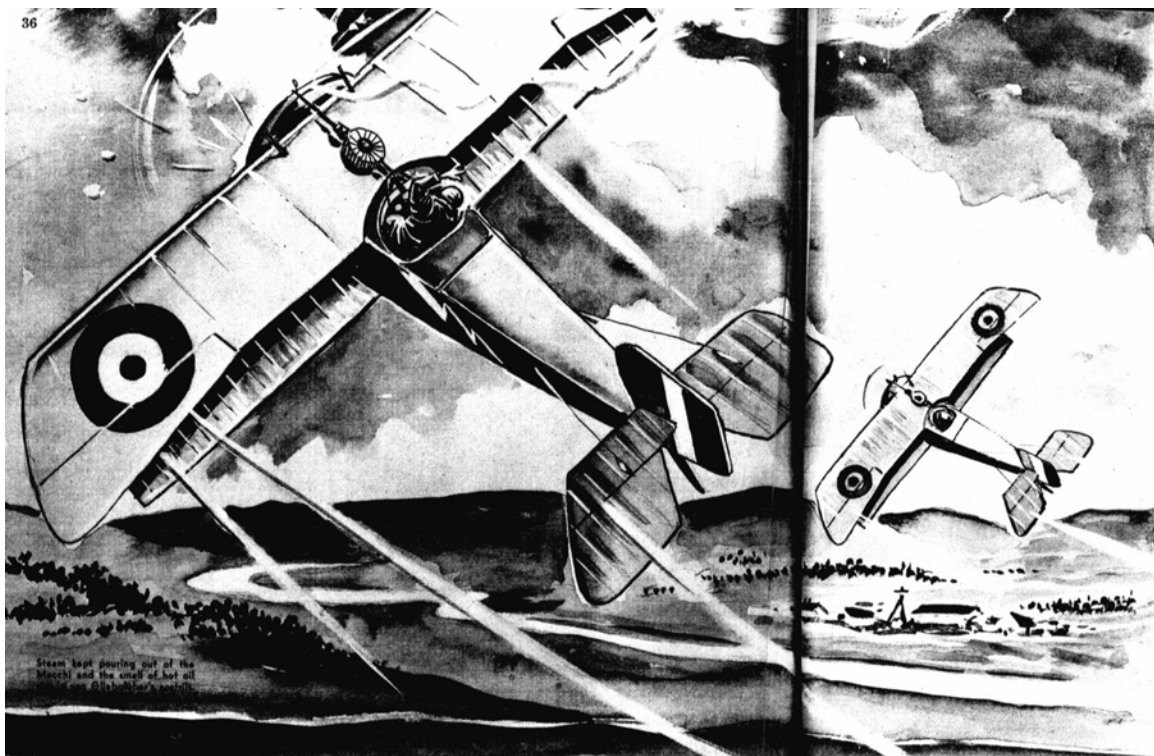


ITALIAN VAMOOSE

by JOE ARCHIBALD

Illustrated by the Author

Believe it or not—but the Boonetown Marvel was really the cause of Adolf's losing half a million men before Stalingrad. You doubt it? Let the real story speak for itself.



THE OLD BROMIDE has it that coming events cast their shadows before. A crumby paper hanger and a blubbery balcony bombast cast their silly silhouettes over the European topography in the first world war. You know that the present brawl is only the second act of a production of John L. Mars, Inc., following a long intermission. You all read the papers. You know that

Schicklgruber ordered the assault on Stalingrad despite the warnings of his brass hats and that a good 500,000 Herrenvolk were liquidated as a result. Adolf thought the stars knew more than his generals but one certain star double-crossed him, a star of many amateur theatricals put on in Boonetown, Iowa, one Phineas Pinkham.

You also know that Benito Mussolini is virtually a prisoner of der Fuehrer, a doghouse inmate, out on bail. Phineas had a lot to do with that, too. Hold on to your seats! The papers have been full of stories about the booby-traps and land mines in North Africa, cunning Kraut contrivances designed to purge the non-Aryans snapping at the empennage of Rommel. But how come a bobby trap was touched off in Brenner Pass late in the year 1942? An Italian soldier captured in Tunisia a few weeks ago claimed he was an eye-witness and after telling the story that made a Sinbad the Sailor yarn sound like a few paragraphs out of Farm and Fireside, he was taken to a near East nitwit nest for observation. The most amazing part of the tale was that a piece of newspaper wrapped around the booby trap came off the journal called *Il Popolo d'Italia* and it was edited by none other than Benito Mussolini just before and during the last war. Incredulous? Oh, brother, you haven't heard a thing. Just go on with this story.

Early in the summer of 1918, Lieutenant Phineas Pinkham was in Nice, France. He was in the pleasure resort on the Mediterranean getting his nerves loosened up after many weeks of air contact with Boche, and on this particular day he strolled along the Promenade des Anglais looking down on the harbor. Phineas wore the uniform of the U. S. Air Corps and it was not made out of pongee. The weather was torrid and Phineas felt like a meat pie that has just been pulled out of an oven.

"I can stand this burlap no longer," Phineas sniffed. "I am goin'

to git me a Palm Beach suit even if I am not in Florida. It will seem nice in civvies again and I wonder if I have forgot how to tie a necktie. Anyway, I wisht I had gone to Paree." He ambled over to the commercial quarter that was east of the hill and entered a haberdashery. He purchased a cream-colored suit, a straw sailor and a pair of sport shoes and then hied to the little hotel looking down on the Pallion. He transferred a few odds and ends from the pockets of his flying suit to the lightweight coat and slicked himself up. A few minutes later he surveyed himself in a mirror and grinned from ear to ear.

"If the bums in Barley Duck could only see me now," Phineas chuckled. "I look like a bloated bond holder from the U. S. on a vacation from Wall Street. I look full of savoy fare and am a swell bum vivant. I will prance over to a cafe an' let the femmes feast on me. Ho hum, the guerre seems far away. I wonder what that crate was doin' down there in the water. Looked like a Macchi-Nieuport. Maybe some rich Eyetalian commutes from Naples, or somewhere."

Phineas found himself in a little bistro a half hour later. It was not exactly of the better class but it had a very cosmopolitan atmosphere, its share of flies and two or three dark-skinned beauties. The Boonetown aviator ordered brandy and soda and then glanced about him, the fingers of his right hand caressing a little box that was in his pocket. It contained a little tin mouse that you wound up. Phineas knew it would be fun watching the mademoiselles reach

for altitude but he set his teeth and gave Old Nick his slipstream.

"It is one vacation I will not spend in a bastille. Major Garrity's prodigal son vowed and fortified himself and his will power with another jigger of Frog cognac. "This time I will stay out of a mess that is not served on a plate."

Lieutenant Pinkham lolled in the Riviera estaminet long after dusk and was ready to make his departure when four particularly tough looking gendarmes invaded *Le Cote d'Azur* and ordered everybody to stay where they were. Perspiration was trickling down their faces and their breathing sounded like an Alpine local getting up steam to climb a steep grade. The light was thin in the bistro and Phineas was barely aware that a customer bumped against him and caused him to spill what was left in his glass.

"Cover ze doors!" a gendarme ordered. "Everybodee weel be searched! Gaspard, line up ze customairs."

"Huh," Phineas grunted. "For once I do not have to worry, haw-w-w-w-w!"

The clientele of the *Cote d'Azur*, despite the protests of the proprietor, were lined up for thorough canvassing. A gendarme snapped: "He wore ze light suit, oui. A witness saw ze thief run from ze hotel after stealing ze emerald necklace. Ah, zere is two weeth ze light suits. Search zem, vite!"

Phineas Pinkham saw the gendarmes go through the pockets of a patron standing near the door. Then two big Frog cops loomed up in

front of him and gave him the same combing.

"Haw-w-w-w!" Phineas grinned. "It is a waste of time, as I am a U. S. tourist just here in Nice to—huh?"

A gendarme let out a coarse grunt and held up an article of jewelry for everyone to see. Phineas Pinkham's mental assembly conked for a moment, then sucked spark. The customer that bumped into him . . . wearing a suit so much like his own tropical ensemble

Phineas was a stranger in a strange land. He thought of twenty years in a Frog klink and in less than twenty seconds he had a gendarme on the floor, was out through a window and running for dear life.

"No matter if I—am—innocent—I git into the d—est Cripes!" Phineas gulped and headed for that part of the old town where the streets are so dark and narrow you have to step aside to let a cat pass. Behind him there was the confusion of the chase, the shrieking of whistles and the blood cry of the populace. Phineas kept running until he came to a grim, eerie place. An Italian cemetery, Campos Santo. It was a little compound filled with ghosts and stone statues and there were coffins arranged on shelves in a sort of flimsy morgue.

Black curtains were loosely drawn in front of them. They fluttered in the night breeze as if skeleton hands were reaching out of the boxes and pushing at them.

"Well, any port in a s-s-storm," Phineas shuddered and huddled near a big statue. "I bet the gendarmes don't dare look here.

Haw-w-w-w-w! What am I laffin' for ? I am nowhere near the State line yet. I wish I was in Barley Duck with Bump Gillis an' Howell an'—oh, that dirty crook!"

THE SOUNDS OF the manhunt died in Nice close to dawn and Phineas crept out of the Golgotha and made his way to a low, long, snaky stone fence. He climbed up and over it and dropped into a cramped patio in the rear of a crumbling stucco dwelling. He heard loud snoring, crossed the courtyard and peered into an open window. An olive-complexioned citizen was in a narrow bed, his face turned toward the ceiling. On a little table near the bed were three bottles and Phineas was positive they had been emptied. Hanging over a chair was a kind of military uniform. There was a visored cap and a pair of boots.

"No time is to be lost," Phineas mumbled. "He who hesitates in this town is lost. It is no wonder they pronounce Nice *Neece*. It is not nice." He climbed through the window and the man on the bed kept sawing cords of wood. Phineas snatched up the livery, went out through the window again and took his booty to a corner of the courtyard. In a few minutes he was wearing the uniform of an officer in the Italian Air Corps and it fitted him very well, everything considered.

"Huh," Phineas grinned. "He was a manna fromma Heaven. I bet that is his crate down there. Maybe he was lookin' for Kraut subs in the Mediterranean!" He balled up his tropical suit and crammed it near a pile of old rubble, then climbed over

the stone fence and started down toward the waterfront. Once he paused in a doorway and let two mumbling gendarmes go by and he took a little black mustache from his pocket and affixed it over his upper lip, having had the presence of mind to empty the pocket of that lightweight cream-colored coat. Just before the crack of dawn, Phineas stood at the end of a long quay feasting his eyes on a Macchi-Nieuport. He stepped up onto the pontoon snout, made his way to the supports holding up the LeRhône power plant that was fixed over and behind the cockpit, and reached up. The LeRhône had a crank like a Model T and Phineas risked a broken arm when he got the pusher going. It conked out twice and the worry dew was beginning to soak Phineas to the skin. He kept tinkering until the LeRhône agreed to perk up in earnest and when he had the mooring lines cut and was settled into the cockpit, three gendarmes were pounding their boots against the quay.

"I don't know what they want," Phineas muttered to himself. "They couldn't have found that suit I hid, so quick. Adoo, bums, as I am on my way. Where to, I have no idea, haww--w-w-w-w-w-w! I still got a week before I go to Barley Duck!"

Bullets sang past Phineas' head and passed just under the power plant. He gave the Macchi the gun and taxied across the water, nearly cracking off a lower wingtip that tried to kiss the water goodbye. Phineas corrected and felt the seaplane get buoyancy under his wings. It went up like a happy seagull and pointed its nose toward the Gulf of Genoa.

"Garibaldi, here I come, Haw-w-w-w! I wonder if there are still orgies in Rome!" Phineas yelped. "I should arrive for the first show in the Coliseum."

Phineas wondered who he was. He fished into the pockets of the alien tunic and finally found a card. On it was printed the name: Lt. Rienzi De Antipasto.

"Fancy that?" the Boonetown miracle man grinned. "I was always fond of the antipastos. I wonder if I have any relations named Ravioli."

Phineas Pinkham crossed the gulf and a storm blew up. He tried to keep the Macchi's nose pointed along the knee and the instep of the Italian boot because a crate that takes off from water has to have the same stuff to land on. The wind had its own ideas and it drove the Macchi inland, with Phineas wondering if the crate would hold together. It was not a fit day for man or Hun to be out. As if wind was not bad enough, rain began to pelt against the Italian seaplane and ceiling was at the roof tops in and around the city of Brescia, when Phineas was blown toward Lake Garda. Afterwards Phineas thanked the elements, for he never believed he would have had the gas to get him to the Neapolitan lake.

THE FLYER FROM Boonetown, Iowa, was forty feet up when he saw the waters of the lake below. He was soaked to the skin and the LeRhône was retching like a whooping cough case. It passed out cold twenty feet from the water and Phineas took the Macchi in dead-stick and put it down.

It hit with a loud thwack and the pontoon fractured under Phineas' pants. A wing dug into the water and the Macchi-Nieuport went into a fit and Phineas was hanging upside down and under water when it snapped out of it. He held his breath and groped for a jackknife. Just as he was practically ready to give up and drown, the knife cut the safety belt. He came to the surface and grabbed at a wing V strut and held on. He jettisoned part of Lake Garda just before his marbles spilled again and, slipping back into the lake, he wondered what his family would do with the ten thousand dollars insurance they would get from Uncle Sam.

The mermaid was a pip. She put her cold cheek against Phineas' freckled one and then started strangling him with her hair. He could not understand what gripe she had against him. He hadn't met a mermaid before. Everything went as black as the Kaiser's future for a while and then suddenly became as bright as day. It was day and the sun was blazing. Phineas was draped over a barrel and somebody was pressing their hands against his back.

"Hees eyes open up," a voice said. "He willa not die. But he shoulda die, the crazy pisan, flying heem the seaplane where there issa no sea."

Phineas rolled off the barrel and blinked up at a half-dozen dark-skinned citizens wearing the uniforms of the Italian air force. "Where am I, huh?" he choked out. "You git the mermaid? She slapped

me a beaut with her tail assembly an* then choked me—an'—"

"We pulla you out of the lake, joost in the nicks of time. It is a gooda thing we see the plane hit, you darna fool. We come from Vicenza on our way back to the airdrome," one of them said. "I am Major Carlo Pastrami, Commanding Officer of the Twenty-seexa Squadron, near Passano. Why you fly the seaplane here. Lieutenant?"

"I am an orphan of a storm," Phineas gulped and got to his feet. "I was accused of robbery and chased out of Nice an'—don't believe it as I am still delirious, Tony. I will never use water again as long as I live."

The Italians loaded Phineas into one of the squadron cars and took him to the drome near Passano. (Look at the map—Passano is not so far from Brenner Pass by fast plane). The Italian tarmac was at the foot of a mountain and on the southern edge of the field you could pick lemons when they were in season. There were the ruins of an old villa near the foot of the mountain and when Phineas got out of the car in front of the Italian Operations Office, he saw a figure on a crumbling balcony. He wore no hat. The sun shone on his bald head. One of his hands was shoved inside the coat of the uniform he wore.

"It looks like he maka the speecha," Phineas said to Pastrami.

"Maybe he practice one," the C.O.said. "He is beega newspaper man visiting us. Editor of *Il Popolo d'Italia*, an' was wounded in the fighting on the Isonzo. Benito Mussolini, wan bigga man some day

in Italia, you bet. Now he reports the guerro for the paper."

The C. O. introduced Phineas to the pilots of the Macchi's, designed to take off from the ground. Phineas catalogued the names abstractedly. Spumoni, Vermicelli, De Medici, Cacciatori, Scallopine. The hangars were great canvas structures and the business office of the squadron was housed in a long, low Neapolitan cottage with a red-tiled roof. Major Pastrami assured Lieutenant Rienzi De Antipasto that he was welcome until they could contact his C.O. over on the coast. Mess was on the table already. Spaghetti and meat-balls and chianti.

"Worms with anemia," Phineas yelped. "My favorite dish." Watching the pilots tear into the spaghetti, Phineas wished he owned a cleaning establishment in Passano. "Haw-w-w," he laughed. "First I thought all them spots on your tunics was medals, Major. I smell somethin' and it is not roses. No wonder you have a strong air force to fight the Austrians."

Immediately a wet blanket dropped down over the proceedings. Lieutenant Antonio Scallopine pushed the remains of his spaghetti away and poured a pint of Italian grape elixir into a big cup. He downed it in three gulps, then poured out another hooker.

"Did I say somethin'?" Phineas choked out.

Major Pastrami let his hair down. He said that a grim menace was hanging over the Squadron as he shoved another clove of garlic into his mouth. Phineas asked a non-com

for a fan and to open another window. "Well, we will fight this guerre until breath do us part, haw-w-w-w!" he said. Major Pastrami scowled and went on. Five of his Neapolitan Knights had flown solo over the Austro lines to get the lowdown on enemy movements. Five never came back. It was a rotten batting average and it suggested skullduggery.

"Santa Maria!" Major Pastrami yipped. "One he should come back, what'you t'ink?"

"There is a law of averages," Phineas agreed. "Maybe there is a fly in the olive oil, huh? A spy who used to do Vienna rolls over an Austrian tarmac."

PASTRAMI TOOK PITY on his pilots, especially one Antonio Scallopine, who was going over the lines in a few hours. He switched the subject, talked of his chianti business in Palermo. He furnished all the grog for his squadron at no cost to King Emmanuel. He was asking Phineas point blank, suspicion burning in his Latin peepers, why a flyer named De Antipasto spurned garlic, the national health food of Italy, when Benito Mussolini entered and surveyed the Macchi pilots. He struck an impressive pose that would have done credit to a Caesar and shoved his big chin out.

"Huh," Phineas muttered. "It is a wonder he does not rent that chin out for advertisers. Use Gorgomola's Grated Garlic. It Has the Strength of Gibraltar! Not bad, haw-w-w!"

Benito hurled a lot of Italian at Pastrami and banged a fist against

his chest. Phineas bet a lot of flies had broken their legs making landings on Musso's bald head. The potential dictator sat down and glowered at him and Pastrami introduced the newcomer to Musso. The little electric buzzer Phineas held in the palm of the hand that did the hand-shaking rolled Benito's eye around in their sockets. Sleight of hand made the buzzer and the wire attached to it disappear quickly and

Phineas grinned and said he had never met such a powerful, magnetic personality. Benito stopped scowling, puffed out his chest and sat down.

"He believed it," Phineas said to himself. "That big slob will buy a Napoleon hat, you wait an' see." He got up and walked out just after he heard Pastrami order the cook to prepare hot spaghetti for the editor. Against the wall near the kitchen stood a mop that had not been used much. Just inside the window was a big pot that boiled. Phineas thought and acted almost simultaneously. This Italian outfit needed a sense of humor during its jittery travail. He cut the long strings off the mop and dropped them into the big pot of boiling water. He turned and skirted the corner of the house and walked into the mess again.

Musso got his spaghetti. He took a great mouthful and started chewing. He kept chewing and soon a baffled expression came into his eyes. He looked at Pastrami, stopped chewing and then banged his fork down, reached into his mouth and pulled out long strings that had never been made out of flour. He swallowed the others and

started to choke. Macchi pilots swarmed over him and banged him on the back. Benito's face was the color of chianti when he was finally saved from strangulation. On that day, unbeknownst to the civilized world, Phineas Pinkham had nearly saved the future of Italy.

Phineas Pinkham, hardly able to restrain himself, walked out of the mess. Passing by the room where Major Pastrami and his subordinates conducted the administrative affairs of the outfit, he spotted a big jar of glue. He walked inside and saw an adjutant sitting near a makeshift switchboard. The Italian glanced over his shoulder at Phineas, turned and kept to his knitting. Surreptitiously, the Boonetown flyer, possessed of the very devil that day, poured some of the glue in the C.O.'s chair. When he got outside again, Musso was getting into a squadron car and he was baying like a hound that has treed game. He turned and shook a big fist at Pastrami and the Italian C.O. was trying to explain.

Just twenty minutes later, Antonio Scallopine climbed into the pit of a purring Macchi-Nieuport. His legs quaked a little and a lot of the olive tint faded from his physiognomy. Major Pastrami and all the pilots shook hands with Scallopine and Phineas maneuvered so he could get a look at Fastiami's pants. There was glue on the seat of them.

"Huh, they make lousy mucilage in this country," Phineas said. "Why, it took Garrity an hour to get cut loose the time I put U. S. brand glue on his chair. Huh, there is no fun

here. I wonder why Fastiami's scouts don't come back."

The Italian drome was steeped in gloom while the Macchi streaked toward the lines. While the pilots waited for the results, a call came in from an outfit near Spezia. A Neapolitan brass hat knew De Antipasto all right. But De Antipasto had been caught in Nice and would be brought back to Spezia to face a court martial for overstaying his leave twenty-two days. Major Pastrami had two Italian soldiers bring Phineas Pinkham into the Operations Office.

"So, you are the impostor! Santa Maria! Christopher Columbo! You don't lika the garlic and you talk heem all the time the English, pisan! The prisons in Italia—"

"Awright," Phineas said fast. "I used a name somebody had which was a coincidents, Major. You are not supposed to know who I am, as that is what the Italian High Command told me. You have a spy or a dirty Blackhander in your squadron. If I am of Intelligence, I have to be incognito even if I am in Passano. I flew to that lake on purpose so I could git in Italy without nobody knowin'. I am here to save the rest of your pilottas, oui. Haw-w-w-w, I will save them if I have to fly myself to see what is knockin' them off, Major."

Major Pastrami looked at Phineas steadily for several seconds. He kneaded the pointed end of a black mustache and puffed slowly at an ugly black cheroot. Finally he nodded, "It ees good. We have the dreenk an' be gooda fran's."

"Viva Italy." Phineas grinned and Pastrami summoned a non-com. In a few moments, a big earthenware pitcher of chianti was deposited in front of the C.O. and the intelligence officer without portfolio. Phineas absorbed his share of the grape and kept listening for the sounds of a returning Macchi. Time dragged as if it had millstones tied to its ankles. The Pinkham scalp crawled and not from the effects of the Italian grog. Over across the Piave there was intrigue, dark and sinister. It was high in the sky over the river that marked the Italian front line.

"I wonder how the mop he gets in Benito Mussolini's spaghetti," Pastrami said hoarsely. "That Mussolini he weel be bigga man some day an' now he is very mad witha me. Ah, Garibaldi! Santa M— —."

"That big bum!" Phineas said. "Somethin' tells me he should have choked to death. It is a spooky feelin' I have gotta. Like I was almost a man of destiny. But who would make me one of them, Major, huh? That crate should be back in here. It is ten minutes overdo an' it does not have extra gas tanks. You theenk heesa dead pigeona, too? This has got to stop or you will have no more air corps, Pastrami."

A NON-COM SET a phonograph going. The selection was Santa Lucia and Pastrami picked up a plate and threw it at the music box. Goose pimples of brine seeped out on his swarthy brow. Phineas wondered if Pastrami's boys were a lot of setups for the Austro crates. Green pilots, fish taken out of the pool too soon.

He had the answer twenty minutes later with the sun getting ready to call it a day in the west. An alert sounded and four Macchi pilots hopped into their battle buggies and roared away. They were at eight thousand feet over the Piave when the Austrians arrived to pour on the music made by Krupp and not by Straus.

Phineas could see the tiny ships put on the rhubarb and he saw the Macchi crates cut the Austro circus in half in less than two minutes flat. The others high-tailed it back to the Vienna woods and the Macchis came back in with hardly a feather of their tail assemblies ruffled.

"So that is the kind of pilots don't ever come back from scoutin', huh?" Phineas gulped out. "They are post grads in air fightin' and maybe it is a complex they got. It is a phobia, like some bums hate to be out alone with lots of space around them but are hellions when they are in a crowd. Well, Scallopine is not back, is he, Major? Cheer up an' have a cigar. It is my last one but I am like that. Those smudge pots you smoke remind me of a striped pussycat we trap back in the U. S. when it gets mad. This is pure Havana, Pastrami."

The C.O. accepted with thanks. Phineas put flame to the end of the long brown cigar, then walked away. He was inside the house with the red-tiled roof when he heard it go off. Major Carlo Pastrami came in five minutes later with half of his mustache burned off. He had a knife in his hand. Phineas went out the window and ran toward the mountain. He took refuge in the old

villa with the balcony. There he found a rough map which showed a shaded portion that was to be Italy in 1940. It included part of Austria, half of France and all of North Africa, and a chunk of the United States! There was also a copy of *Il Popolo d'Italia* on a table.

"Napoleon with a garlic breath!" Phineas choked out. "Musso, you are punch drunk!"

Phineas returned to the drome when Pastrami had cooled off. He assured the Italian that he didn't know it was loaded. The C.O. seemed on the point of carving the Boonetown wag up when a message came in from the front. Antonio Scallopine's Macchi had crashed just this side of the Piave and it looked as if he had been tagged by an explosive bullet or had bitten into a stick of dynamite. Phineas rode out to the wreckage with Pastrami and his pilots. The Italian pilot had been thrown clear. Phineas examined the cockpit of the wrecked Macchi and found something that puzzled him. It was a label off a bottle of chianti. He shoved it into his pocket and went over to where Major Pastrami was jumping up and down and swearing at the top of his lungs.

"Explosive bullets!" the C.O. roared. "It eesa murder! She ees barbarous! What you t'ink?"

"I t'ink she maybe wasa anti-aircraft might have smacked him," Phineas said. "You know somet'ing, Major? Tomorrow this bambino he goesa over the lines weeth the Macchi! When you want to find out what Romans do you do not go to Moscow, do you, Pastrami?"

"You are very brave man, Lieutenant De Antipasto," Pastrami said, and held out his hand.

"I will shake tomorrow," Phineas said. "I could change my mind over night as I open my big mouth without thinkin' first sometimes, haw-w!"

Late the next day, a Macchi was being made ready for Lieutenant Phineas Pinkham. The Boonetown flyer was saying goodbye to the Italian pilots and they were all making the sign of the Cross. There was a trace of latex in Phineas' knees and Major Pastrami noticed it. He took Phineas to his quarters, reached into his trunk and handed him a bottle. "The Pastramis make the best chianti in whole world, my good fran'. What you will see out there nobody she knows, so this wine will help. It ees cold, up high, over the enemy lines."

"Merci," Phineas said. "It will help." He shook hands with Pastrami then picked up a piece of newspaper and tied it around the bottle tightly with some string. "Well, I go forth for Garibaldi. First it is France I am helpin' save, then Italy. The boot has a heel somewhere, Major, and if anybody can find it, a Pink—I can. Whell, adoo or adosio, whatever it is here. I wish I was in Barley Duck. Don't take no wooden ravioli. Viva Ditalia!"

PHINEAS CHECKED THE instruments in the Macchi's office, then gave the sign that he was ready. Two minutes later he was over the Piave and still climbing. When he was at eleven thousand with a clear sky all around him, the

chill started gnawing at his bones and he pulled out the bottle. It was nice, having such a thoughtful C.O. Rufus Garrity would let a guy go out over Berlin without an aspirin tablet in his pocket. Phineas pulled the cork stopper and all of a sudden his ticker was clutched between two cold, clammy hands. His mind quickly checked back . . . the label found HI Scallopine's cockpit . . . the glue that had pasted it on must have been pretty weak stuff ... as weak as the glue Phineas himself had put on Pastrami's desk chair! The label had been about the right size . . . for the bottle Phineas clutched in his hand. . . . There was a pin on the end of the stopper Phineas quickly shoved back into the bottle—a metal pin like you pull out of a grenade. Phineas hurled the bottle out of the Macchi and nearly went into a spin. Three Fokker D 7's were coming down out of the sky.

The bottle plummeted down. It struck in the soft needles of a great pine tree and hung between two little twigs for almost twenty minutes. Finally it dropped clear and landed on top of a truck that was lurching along the road beneath. It rolled back and forth along sagging tarpaulin for almost two hours and then hopped off when the truck hit a hole in the road. It rolled into some bushes near a little railroad siding in Brenner Pass!

There was no longer a threat of the Unknown in the sky; Fokkers were tangible things. And Phineas had to get back to the upper of the Italian boot and fix that heel. A Fokker with an Austrian in it slammed lead into the Macchi's shortribs and for a few seconds,

Phineas thought he was in the ministrone soup. The hot red peppers from the Spandaus scorched his sleeve on their way past to the instrument panel. Phineas side-slipped, straightened out, zoomed, half-rolled and caught an Austro crate where he wanted it. Blooey! The Fokker turned a cartwheel and Phineas knew the pilot would never hear the recording of the *Blue Danube* again.

"That bum!" Phineas yipped. "Imagine him thinkin' up bombs made out of little bottles. I'm a son-a-magun!" He was streaking toward the Piave with the other two D 7's trying to catch up with him. The Macchi's power plant was burning up all its bearings when it skimmed over the Italians battling on the ground.

The Macchi was only about fifty feet up and Phineas was sure he could smell the garlic on the breaths of the ground troops below. He caught at Neapolitan real estate a mile or two behind the Piave and he walked away from the landing.

Phineas Pinkham, alias Lt. De Antipasto, started on the long voyage home. A truck rumbled up and the Italian dough offered the brave aviator a lift. "Mercy," Phineas grinned. "You no spika da Englis', non? This is some guerro, bambino. You have to talk Frog, U. S. and pig Latin all at oncet. They better watch here in Italy as bums like Mussolini—"

"Viva! Viva Mussolini!" the driver yipped.

"Huh ? So you want to try and get to Moscow some day, too, huh?" Phineas gulped out. "Already that big

bum is signin' up suckers. I should go to The Hague and report, but they would only laugh at me. They laughed at the guy who first said you could eat mushrooms without dyin', too. Oh, well. . . ."

IT WAS NIGHT on the Italian drome near Passano. The Major and his pilots were sipping the grape and wondering as to the fate of De Antipasto. "One more she ees gone," Captain Luigi Spumoni said and drank another pint of sour wine. "You know I find something outside the door where he slept, Major. I cannot read Englis', so you see what it says, yes?" He handed Pastrami a little folded sheet of dirty paper.

Pastrami perused it quickly when he spread it open. His bony pan paled to the color of the inner lining of a lemon skin and the black cheroot gripped between his teeth vibrated like a plucked banjo string. The thing he held was a dunning bill, dated way back in 1915. It was the balance due on a second hand auto purchased by one Phineas Pinkham of Boonetown, Iowa. "It is nothing important," Pastrami said, and tried to act calm as he walked up to his room. When he got there and shut the door behind him, he beat his fists against his chest and ripped out, "Gott sie dank! Such ein stroke of luck! I am finished here, ja. It means I gedt forty thousandt marks revord. I haff succeeded where all others from Wilhelmstrasse has failed!"

Hauptmann Guiseppe von Gliebgluber, half Italian and half Kraut, kept gloating. "So sick I am off der Italians, ja! Some day der bummers vill pay for not staying mit

der Triple Entente. Already they pay with six off der pilots. I fly away in der Macchi in der morgen, mit proof of der death of das Pingham! I vill take der last three bottles mit der bomben in undt show der Kaiser. We make thousandts an' drop them on France, ja. Booby traps. Ho! Ho! They pick them up undt—boof! Ach, das bummer fooled me all der time. I think he is der Italian-American! At five o'clock in der morgen I make believe Major Pastrami ist going out to brave der menace in der sky. Ach, we Chermans!"

In back of the sprawling Italian house there was a high bank. A man sitting on it could look into the windows of the second story. If he was agile he could step from a big outcropping of rock to a wide ledge that ran along under the windows in the rear. Phineas Pinkham was agile. He was crouching on the ledge listening to everything von Gliebgluber was saying. It had been easy slipping into the drome unobserved. Morale was low on the Italian drome and plenty of wine had been passed around.

"Just as I thought," Phineas gulped. "His old man was a Heinie. What a mixture. It is one of the world's worst poisons. Huh, in der morgen at fife o'clock, ja ? That bum must have a secret lodge sign to show when he gets up there in a Macchi. Huh!"

The ordinary man would have crashed the bogus Pastrami's cubicle then and there and smeared him. But Phineas Pinkham had an insatiable sense of humor. He slipped off the ledge, caught at a low hanging limb of a tree and swung to

the bank. Five minutes later he was inside the little room where Captain Luigi Spumoni and another Macchi pilot slept. He was sitting there when the two pilots opened the door and walked in. Spumoni started calling on the Saints for help but Phineas clapped a hand over his mouth and spoke to the other flyer. "You spik Englis' a little, huh? Listen, I am no ghost. I am back in the flesh. Now listen, fast!"

The little Italian interpreted Phineas' speech and gave it to Spumoni. Spumoni was for going in and knifing the Kraut right off the bat and it was all Phineas could do to hold him. In the morning, the most air-worthy Macchi Nieuport would be warmed up for von Gliedgluber. Another Italian crate would be warming up—in the hanger. Everything was set, Phineas said, or would be before he himself knocked off for the night.

Phineas paid a visit to the Italian drome's commissary an hour later.

AT FOUR IN the morning, Phineas Pinkham and his two Latin connivers arose. At five o'clock, Italian pilots lined up to cheer their brave C.O. who was going out to see for himself. Phineas watched from cover and eyed the Macchi that had been warming up for half an hour. Inside the hangar, another prop was idling.

"Now, I will go an' see what has been destroying our brave airmen!" Major Pastrami from Berlin said dramatically. "Never should they say

I would not go where I send my men! Contact!"

More cheers. The C.O. got into the office and gave the Macchi the gun.

"Spaghetti—and pretty soon he will be only a meatball!" Phineas Pinkham grinned and climbed into the pit of another Macchi. Italian groundmen ripped the canvas flaps aside and another pursuit crate taxied out. The C.O. was off the ground and climbing. He circled over the tarmac once and then headed for the Piave. The Macchi seemed to have lead in its seat as it tried to climb.

"Gott!" the Heinie grunted. "Der engine ist sluggish, ja! Maybe I should go back undt—" He looked around and below and saw another Macchi coming up and it was not a bit sluggish. The short hairs on von Gliedgluber's neck started getting vertical. "Wast ist? Ha—der brave Italian pilot does not want his commanding officer to go alone, nein? So it giffs him Spandau bullets, ja!" He gave the Macchi plenty of throttle and got no results. The nose of the Italian crate was belching steam. At the rate he was going it would take him a half hour to get to eight thousand feet. That other Macchi was right overhead and pouring on the coal. It went up and rolled over and came down and bullets stitched holes in his lower wing and splintered a V strut.

"Himmel! Somet'ing—
Donnervetter, das engine—!"
Guiseppe von Gliedgluber couldn't get altitude. He was just over the Piave at seven thousand and the Macchi was wreathed in vapor.



Something was so rotten it made the garbage in Denmark smell like jasmine. Bullets splattered the Macchi's empennage and a tail fin kissed the crate good-bye. Control wires were down and the Macchi started sinking.

"Ach du lieber!" the Kraut had to go down and he threw away his bottle grenades lest they blow up when he hit too hard. The other Macchi was crowding him close and once its wheels just grazed his top wing. Steam kept pouring out of the Macchi and the smell of hot oil was in von Gliebgluber's nostrils. The Macchi slammed against Italian soil a hundred yards from Italian dugouts, slid to the brink of a shell crater and toppled to the bottom.

Hauptmann Guiseppe von Gliebgluber crawled out of the crumpled crate and was half up the bank when he saw a face slide over the lip of the shell hole and grin down at him. He slid down into the

muddy water again, his mouth wide open and his eyes bugged out like a bullfrog's. "Nein! He ist dead! Das Pingham! I seat him out mit der bottle undt—"

"Wee gates, you half breed!" Phineas grinned. "That radiator of yours cooked a swell mess of spaghetti, haw-w-w-w! We warmed the engine up for more than a half hour an' we must have broke up a pound of the spaghet' and put it in. If we had some meat sauce now, we could eat, huh? Awright, you dirty spy, you are kaput!"

"Ach—Gott!" the bogus Italian C.O. choked out. "Efen in Italy no German ist safe. But der bottle. How—?"

"Huh? Oh, it was because that glue I put on your seat didn't stick," Phineas grinned. "That is all I will tell you. Come on up an' git ready to git shot!"

THE STORY told by the captured Italian in Tunisia? He was in Brenner Pass during one of the powows between Hitler and Musso. He swears it is true. He was standing guard near a little railroad siding where der Fuehrer and the Fascist fakir were engaged in secret parley. He saw Benito Mussolini nudge something with his boot, then stoop over and pick it up. The Italian dictator tore the paper from the little bottle and stared at the label.

"Santa Maria!" Benito said. "Chianti, Adolph! Somebody he drops it long ago and should be mellow, yes?"

"Sehr gut!" Schicklgruber grinned and Mussolini pulled the stopper out. The bottle slipped from his hand and hit the ground twenty feet away. Then it blew up.

Der Fuehrer, the Italian soldier related, was knocked off his tootsies and he pancaked and hit his noggin against the rusty rail of a spur track. Mussolini was tossed against a flat car and his bellows stayed flat for almost half an hour. German and Fascist soldiers were picking up medals for an hour. Der Fuehrer recovered quickest and the first thing he spied when his eyes uncrossed was a piece of newspaper. It was part of the front page of *Popolo d'Italia* and the date on it was 1918.

Adolph Hitler, the eye witness attested, went haywire when he had the paper translated. "For a few minutes," the narrator said, "we thought sure the Axis was going to split. But you know that right after that meeting, Mussolini had to kick in with a lot of Italians to go to Stalingrad and that Hitler moved



thousands of the Herrenvolk into Italy and took over. Mussolini had written in his newspaper almost twenty-five years ago that some day he was going to make Italy bigger than Caesar had made it. Hitler couldn't see where there was room for two Napoleons in the world."

It had taken Nazi and Italian diplomats six hours to make Adolph and Benito shake hands. Adolph had his pride and was badly hurt to discover that there was a booby trap so close to his pants. Benito could not explain how part of a copy of his old yellow sheet had been wrapped around it. You see, Benito had forgotten all about that citizen who had mixed mop strings with his spaghetti near Passano.

Another story seeped out of Central Europe six months ago. It said that Adolph, the demon exponent of astrology, had pooh-poohed his generals about that business in front of Stalingrad. He

had seen three stars in a bunch on several different occasions after escaping that booby trap in Brenner Pass. He had them diagnosed and they told him to stay in there and keep punching as who could hurt him? But you know which star was responsible for that condition. Hitting your head against a ' steel rail isn't so good. It cost Adolph Hitler over half a million Herrenvolk. You don't have to believe that Phineas Pinkham was responsible for it, if you don't want to. We are only passing on what we got from the feedbag. And not Goebbels' either.

PHINEAS arrived in Bar-Le-Duc week after one Guiseppe von Gliebgluber was liquidated. Major Rufus Garrity wanted to know where Phineas got the Italian medal.

"Oh, I picked it up doin' a little job," Phineas grinned. "It was all on account of me gettin' almost arrested for jewel robbery. You know somethin'? There is a big loudmouth in Italy who will start another guerre after this one is over, if we don't look out. He will bear watchin'. Why, I even saw him practicin' makin' speeches on a balcony. Remember what I have told you, if, some day—well, he will bear watchin'. His name is Mussolini and he runs a newspaper. What is cookin' for mess?" inquired Phineas.

Garrity and Bump Gillis and the others held their noses. The Old Man said: "I wonder if the Krauts are sending gas over tonight, huh? Better get the masks—the wind is just right—er—Italy, huh? Pinkham get out of here!"

"It is some breath, huh?" Phineas yipped. "Haw-w-w-w-w! I will keep it until the brass hats get here. It is more proof I was a hero for Italy than the medal. Haw-w-w-w-w-w!"

What do you think?

THE END

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