

# HOODOO PLAYS THE HERO

By MEL PITZER

Colonel Carth of the 12th American Bomber Squadron had no use  
for the Springer Spaniel Hoodoo, until—

ON THIS morning, Colonel John Carth commanding the 12th American Bomber Squadron, somewhere on the Australian coast, came out of the operation shack and glanced up into the drizzling gray sky. The night before, a bad storm had swept in from the sea, and the remains of it were everywhere.

Sergeant Tom Layton, the orderly, now joined the Colonel. He was a big heavy-shouldered, former prize-fighter, with a heart as big as his fist and a disposition as gentle as any kitten.

The lanky figure of Colonel Carth turned and went inside.

"No flying today, Sergeant," he said. "Everything will be grounded and the blimps will take over to protect the convoys at sea. Word came in from headquarters. You can pass it on to the men."

The Sergeant turned to carry out the order. That was when they heard the high, shrieking howls of a dog.

The Colonel slammed a fist on his scarred desk. "There's that Springer spaniel Hoodoo again," he growled.

He stepped to the door, the Sergeant behind him. Both could hear the howls turn into yelps and from inside a hangar across the wide runway they saw a small black and white dog come sprinting out, his short legs driving wildly to gain more speed. His big ears flapped up and down as he tore along.

The Colonel started to grin and then laughed outright, as the jumper-clad figure of one of the ground crew came tearing out after the dog. By this time, the spaniel had turned into the stretch of the runway and was really beginning to move. When he had put a good distance between himself and the hangar, he cast a wild-eyed look over his shoulder, then skidded to a stop.

Corporal O'Malley, the grease-monkey who

had come after him, was now threatening the dog with everything from a wrench to a spare bomber wheel.

"What did he do this time?" the Colonel called.

"Well, sir," answered the mechanic, "my favorite hammer, sir, the handle was all chewed to practically nothin'."

The ground crew man went inside. "Sergeant," the colonel said, sternly, "I think we'll have to get rid of that dog. He's causing too much trouble."

"He should be good for something, sir," retorted the orderly. "He seems like a finely-bred dog, sir."

THE Sergeant went over to the pilots' headquarters to give the latest orders.

Hoodoo walked dejectedly into another hangar nearby and lay down near the open door.

No one knew where the spaniel had come from. He appeared one morning as the dawn flight patrol was preparing to take off. He came out of the woods bordering on one end of the runway and strolled onto the drome. After that he was a permanent fixture.

But Hoodoo, if he could talk, could have told about the merchant ship which had been one of many in a convoy. One night the ship was torpedoed and sank with all hands lost. He could have told how he found himself swimming until he climbed onto a bit of wreckage and drifted for days until at last he came near a rocky coast and was able to swim to shore. From there he had made his way inland until he reached the 12th Squadron.

One morning Lieutenant Bracken gave the dog a friendly pat before he took off. But the Lieutenant never came back. The other pilots remembered that Bracken had petted the dog before he went into the air, but laughed off the

superstition which had entered their minds.

Pilot Harden had been feeding the dog scraps one day. The next time he came in for a landing, his brakes locked, the ship nosed over and Harden was sent back to a base hospital with a broken collarbone.

The dog began to be disliked after that. Since then he had run between a flyer's legs, tripped him and the man received a broken jaw from the fall. A jeep had swerved to keep from hitting Hoodoo. It crashed into the side of a hangar.

Thereafter they named him Hoodoo, roughly chased the dog away whenever he came near them.

On this particular afternoon, after Hoodoo's set-to with the mechanic, Colonel Carth came up to the communications tower. The radio man reported that nothing had come through of importance, but gave the C.O. a few messages he had picked up.

The Colonel took the papers and a map and went out. Coming down the stairs from the tower, he was glancing at the messages. After the last step his foot *should* have touched terra firma. Instead, he stepped on Hoodoo who had happened to pick out that particular spot to stretch himself.

There was a howl. The Colonel's legs shot outward and the C.O. went in it tumbling heap to the ground. Carth left a twinge of pain in his left wrist and was sure he had sprained it. Hoodoo had done it again.

The C.O. had a cussing vocabulary second to none. As he picked himself up, he told Hoodoo that he thought the mutt was working to disrupt the whole United States Army.

Hoodoo slunk away and the Colonel began to yell for his orderly. When that worthy came up on the double, the C.O. snapped:

"Layton, take that dog, put him in a jeep, drive him out to the Surrey woods and leave him there. Do you know where they are?"

"Yes, sir, about thirty miles, sir."

"Well, drive him out there and leave him," thundered the officer. Then, holding his wrist, the infuriated colonel went to his quarters.

Sergeant Layton got into the jeep and his call brought Hoodoo. He put the dog on the front seat. "I got to take you for a ride, Hoodoo," muttered the non-com, "it's orders."

As they drove off, Hoodoo looked at him out of big, accusing brown eyes.

"Aw, it ain't that I want to do it, Hoodoo," said Layton, "it's orders, I tell you."

EVERY minute that they rolled along through country roads, Layton was prepared for something to happen. Was not Hoodoo riding with him? But strangely enough, the trip was uneventful.

They came at last to mountainous ranges of forest. The non-com stopped the jeep, took the dog under his arm and walked through the trees and brush for a hundred yards or so. Then he put Hoodoo down, saying:

"You stay there now, pup. You'll get along all right."

The Sergeant started back for the jeep. Once he glanced around and saw the dog still squatting where he had been put, watching him.

The Sergeant hurried on, jumped into the jeep and started back for the drome with motor wide open.

Hoodoo, when at last the sound of the jeep had passed away in the distance, felt a great loneliness inside him. Instinct told him that he wasn't wanted any more, where he had so long made his home.

He looked over his new surroundings and sniffed the air. Then he turned and trotted off through the brush. Night found the spaniel curled up beneath the hollow of an old tree. Nearby he had found a trickling stream where he quenched his thirst. But there was nothing to appease the hunger that he was beginning to feel.

Another gray, misty dawn found Hoodoo on his way once more. A short time later he came to the edge of some brush and looked out on a rocky coast, with the sea stretching away before it. Hoodoo's tail wagged slightly, because now he could recall pleasant things about the smell of this water. He stared out into the vast stretches of it with his big brown eyes, until at last a speck in the sky made him lift his head. He watched intently and saw at last that it was a low-flying bird, struggling gallantly against the hard wind that had started to blow.

The bird dropped lower and lower. As it came closer to Hoodoo, its wings suddenly folded and it plummeted from the heights, striking the water with a splash.

The dog jumped up and ran down to the water's edge. He surged out into deep water and

then swam for the bird that floated, inert, some distance away. This was something that Hoodoo could understand. He remembered a place somewhere else when he had gone out after birds and brought them, swimming through the water, back to the first master he remembered.

Now he had the feathered body in his mouth and, turning, started for the shore. He dragged himself onto land. There he set the bird down and shook himself.

Before him was a choice morsel that would appease his hunger. But he remembered something else at this instant. On those long ago, almost forgotten, times when he had brought birds back, there had been kind words and a hand had softly patted his head.

There had been good things to eat too. If he brought this bird to the men who had raised their voices in shouts at him, perhaps if he laid this token of his prowess and friendship at their feet, they would treat him like his first master had done.

It was a great many hours later when the dog, tired, thirsty and hungry, came back to the runway. There in the doorway, where Hoodoo had seen him many times before, was the kindly-voiced Sergeant to whom he had taken a liking. Up to him went the bedraggled, dirty spaniel with wagging, tail and laid his offering at his feet.

Sergeant Layton, his eyes bulging, turned.

"Colonel," he called. "Colonel, sir, here's that dog Hoodoo, again. He's brought a bird back with him."

The C.O., his wrist bandaged and with a look of disgust on his face, came out and saw the dog.

"Bird, Sergeant!" he cried now. "You say a bird!"

**C**OLONEL CARTH hurriedly picked up the feathered body and rushed inside, the Sergeant following. Neither paid any attention to Hoodoo walking proudly in behind them. He went over and laid down by the wall. Very soon he saw the many men he knew rushing in and out of the place. Then came the strange booming noise of the giant birds that many times had filled his ears.

Hoodoo stretched out his weary body and dozed. He was very, very tired.

Colonel Carth and Sergeant Layton had gone to the radio tower, where they fidgetted as time went by. Finally the operator began to write a

message. Then he removed his earphones, saying, "They did it, Colonel, sir. Blew the Jap carrier and its flock right out of the water."

A tired but satisfied smile touched the C.O.'s face. Later, the B-26 Martin bombers came back to their roost. The pilots assembled in the operations room. When they had all gathered around, Colonel Carth spoke.

"Men," said he, "not so long ago you got a rush order to go out and bomb a Jap plane carrier heading for our coast. You blasted them out of the ocean. I called you in here to tell you something. As you know, the blimps took over for the heavier-than-air craft to protect the convoys while this bad weather lasts. The blimp T-4 got a break in the weather for a short time and saw the carrier proceeding this way, three hundred miles out at sea.

"A reconnaissance plane took off from it, went inland and then, by radio, flashed word to the carrier that they were near our drome and the bombers could be gotten ready. The reconnaissance plane then returned to the flat-top. Of course, the blimp commander could break down their code in which the message was sent. It seems they had discovered our drome and were preparing to bomb it."

The colonel cleared his throat and glanced at Hoodoo still comfortably snoozing by the wall. But now soft bags were his bed and his hunger had been appeased by food given him by the sergeant.

The Colonel smiled slightly, "The T-4 wanted to warn us," he went on, "but they wouldn't dare use their radio as the message might be picked up and they'd endanger themselves. So they sent me word by carrier pigeon. Somewhere between T-4 and here the bird fell dead, probably from exhaustion or something else.

"Gentlemen, Hoodoo found that pigeon and brought it in. I got the message that was in the cylinder tied to his leg. He probably saved all of our lives, because right now, Jap bombs might have wiped out this place and us with it. As you know, I got rid of the dog. The Sergeant set him loose miles from here. Well, gentlemen, he might have been kicked out as a hoodoo, but he came back a hero and he'll continue to remain here and I'll appreciate it if he'll continue to be treated as one."