

NIGHT FLIGHT—1942

By Quentin Reynolds

Collier's correspondent gets a gunner's-eye view of familiar France and London. Funny the things you think of when you're in a bomber

ILLUSTRATED
BY JO KOTULA

When the plane banked, I was alone again with a plate of glass between me and the water a thousand feet below. There is no more lonely feeling

THE moon high over the Channel was an orange ball, occasionally veiled by swirling white wisps of cloud. We were flying low and could see that the Channel tonight had a smooth, placid surface. I was in the glass-enclosed nose of a Boston; sitting ahead of the motors so that their roar came through the glass, muffled and dimmed, no louder than the droning of a fly. You feel very much alone up there in front, with the night on either side of you, with the sky above and the water below. You hope, too, that the glass is as strong as your pilot said it was.

"It's so strong you can't even kick a hole in it," he had told me cheerfully before we started on this night flight. "In case you have to bail out, you slide this gadget back, drop out, then pull the handle on your chute. When you land in the water unbuckle your harness and blow up your rubber dinghy."

It was warm there in the glass nose of the bombardier's compartment, so warm that I slipped the harness off and got rid of the parachute and heavy Mae West. I knew I'd never have nerve enough to bail out anyway. I am very allergic to parachuting. The fast Boston A-20A hurried toward France and enemy territory. This is one of the loveliest aircraft ever to be born on the blueprints of an American factory. The squadron I was with used Bostons as bomber-fighters. They were "intruders," and their job was to locate German airdromes, sit high in the sky, and then pounce on returning Hun bombers. If no bombers were about, they'd swoop down and bomb the airdrome. Laden as we were with bombs and with plenty of ammunition for our guns, the speed indicator in front of me showed 280 miles an hour. We had 3,200 horses pulling us; each motor was

1,600 horsepower, and both were singing sweetly. I had a helmet on with ear-phones and a disk through which I could talk to the pilot, whose cockpit was in back and far above me.

Then clouds left the moon alone for a moment and ahead I could see a thin pencil line on the horizon. It grew, and then the jagged cliffs of the French coast, ghostly in the yellow moonlight, appeared. We stayed low because if you are low enough the curvature of the earth prevents radio location. Even the fine ears of the German radio detectors couldn't pick us up when we were flying "wave high," as the pilots call it. We climbed a bit now and swung along and over the coast. There was nothing real about this. No light showed in the miniature towns below. This pilot knew the danger spots and he was apparently avoiding them, for no streaks of red flak came up at us. Then we saw a thin, winding strip of quicksilver and the pilot called cheerfully, "That's the Somme." I was flying over land of rather bitter memory. In late June, 1940, I was sitting in the Ritz bar in Paris, listening to nitwits who kept saying complacently, " *Ils n'auront pas Paris. Ils ne passeront pas le Somme.* " We heard it all over Paris in those days. We heard it from everyone except General Horace Fuller, then military attaché at the American embassy, the most brilliant military strategist I have ever met in half a dozen warring countries. But we never believed Fuller. The French had stopped the Germans once in another war at the Somme. Now? "Waiter, another *Pernod*—they'll never take Paris. They'll never cross the Somme."

When we foreign correspondents stop being reporters and become prophets, we often become as ridiculous as radio commentators and newspaper columnists in America who so blithely explain away the defeats of British and American arms from a distance of 5,000 miles. We don't do it often, and there are men in London like Raymond Daniell of the New York Times, or Bill Stoneman of the Chicago Daily News, or Ed Beattie of the United Press whose records since the war began have shown that they have dealt only in fact, and never in fancy, and therefore, have never had the humiliating experience of having their guesses come home to roost. But unlike them, I guessed once and I believed the cry of the Paris loafers — " *Ils n'auront pas Paris. Ils ne passeront pas le Somme.* "

I thought of that, crossing the Somme, which only two years ago was sluggish and uneasy because of the weight of the French and British blood it carried. We swung to the west, and in the distance red and white streaks bisected the sky and I thought of Coney Island in 1918 when the lifeguards, including me, used to stay behind on Saturday night to watch the fireworks.

"That's Boulogne," the pilot chuckled through the intercommunication.

"Let's get closer," I yelled, because when you live in England you yearn for a few things that Brooklyn has which England doesn't have, and one of them is fireworks. The other is the sight of Leo Durocher, wide-jawed and snarling, telling Magerkurth just where to get off. But we don't even have any equivalent of that magnificent sight in Britain.

"No, chum," (Continued on page 44)



Ethan's table was a mecca to which came glamorous pilgrims in stunning gowns

No Dependents

By Libbie Block

He wanted something real to leave behind. She wanted something real to say goodbye to. Ups and downs in the romance of two young people who misunderstood each other

HE TOOK another drink, quick and straight, hosing it down with a water chaser. Johnny Wallace watched him and said, "Since when have you been drinking straight liquor?"

"Since today. I phoned my draft board and they said they'd be paging me in about ten days."

"So what? The Old Man is going to have you commissioned as his assistant." Johnny put both elbows on the mahogany of the long bar against which they were wedged. It was a men's bar, it was five o'clock, and the incomes of most men ranged against it ran into five figures. "I sort of wish I could get a commission; you know the stork plays a return engagement at our place next winter."

"I know. How's Nora?" Ethan had a warm place in his heart reserved for Nora. She was a fine girl, a real wife-woman, who cleaved unto Johnny and comforted him. How many women like that were there in the world? And how could he tell Johnny that what gnawed him today was not the prospect of getting into the fight—he'd been longing for the chance.

The thing that bothered him was too nebulous, too personal to tell anybody. He was going to war and leaving behind him "21," the Stork Club, a mother with beautiful legs and a dozen girls, ditto. Johnny, when he was called, would be leaving Nora and one and a half swell kids. "Does it make sense," Ethan asked himself, "that I should envy Johnny because he's got a lot to lose? I haven't anything to lose except a first-class body and a second-class brain. I want something to leave behind me when I go, something worth leaving. Does that make sense?"

Not yet it didn't. So he said to Johnny, "The Old Man'll make a swell colonel. But I don't know why he thinks I'll be such an addition to Ordnance. Matter of fact, you know steel mills and law, both, as well as I do. I've just been with the

firm a little longer. Maybe he'll get you a commission too."

"The Old Man," Johnny said wryly, "was asked to choose one assistant." He looked for the check but Ethan had been there before him. "Thanks. I've got to get out to Westchester. Nora will be looking for me."

"I'm going back to the office to pack my briefcase," Ethan said. "I'm running down to Washington tomorrow. Maybe on to Pittsburgh; trying to get some stuff cleaned up before I move into the Army."

They parted on Wall Street, where Johnny got the subway.

Ethan Quigg was indeed a fortunate young man. At his birth, his fairy godmothers had chipped in to present him with every virtue including luck.

"Let him be good-looking," said the first fairy godmother.

"Let him be rich," said the second fairy godmother.

"Let him be intelligent," said the third fairy godmother. "Let him get a Phi Beta Kappa key at Dartmouth. And," she added hastily, "let him be popular so no one will mind it."

Then the godmothers consulted their lists of what was desirable on earth and gave him, further: gaiety, kindness, and a game of golf in the low eighties.

Thereupon the three old fairy ladies fell in love with Ethan Quigg, setting a widely followed precedent.

Ethan Quigg was no dope; he knew he'd been born with the world in his pocket. He was grateful. He figured that living is nice work if you can get it the way he had. He had been pretty happy these thirty-three years of his life. There was the dignified and successful law firm, of Shrew, Neiman, Hackney & Quigg, toward whose offices he strolled now in the late afternoon sunshine. There were his clubs, his friends, the house in Connecticut, and the East River apartment which he shared with his mother. Night clubs, invitations, kisses given and received. Oh, fine, fine!

But that life was over. "I'm in the Army now; it's different, boy . . . and how!" Well, that was all right too, the uniform, the companionship of men, and the tough, simple living he enjoyed. Besides, though he didn't give off much about patriotism, it was in him, deep and quiet enough to surprise most of the people who thought they knew him. He'd have been in the show long before