



Wethersfield, England: The author in the cockpit of Excalibur IV at the end of the 6-hour-and-33-minute, 3600-mile flight, the first by jet fighters on the direct great-circle route to Europe.

McGuire Air Force Base, New Jersey: (From left) Captain Cesar Martinez, Colonel Blair and Major Robert C. Tomlinson with the author's Thunderstreak interceptor just before their take-off.

WE FLEW OPERATION SHARKBAIT

An Air Force pilot tells of the harrowing, tension-filled hours in a jet fighter that spanned the Atlantic on a hush-hush test flight.

By Col. Charles F. Blair, Jr., USAF Res.





Colonel Blair (center), the flight leader, discusses the long, over-water course with Sharkbait fliers "Tommy" Tomlinson (left) and "José" Martinez, veteran Air Force fighter pilots.



Major Tomlinson and the author. Behind them, a swept-wing Republic F84-F jet fighter, one of the deadliest and most versatile pursuit planes ever built.

It's a poor time to get bad news. We already have our fighters at the end of a long runway on McGuire Air Force Base, in Central New Jersey, ready to take off in a three-plane V. But the control tower is transmitting an urgent message:

"Sharkbait, your reconnaissance advises that cloud tops in Area One are too high for refueling operations. You will rendezvous with tankers in Area Two."

I hide a grimace behind my oxygen mask. Operation Sharkbait, Tactical Air Command mission scheduled to be the first nonstop flight of jet fighters on the great-circle route to Europe, is ready to roll. But where in the world is Area 2? In our briefing with the tanker men three weeks ago, there had been no such terminology. Alternate refueling areas, it was agreed, would be spelled out in plain English.

Evidently some junior birdman has dreamed up a new scheme which includes the code words "Area 2," but he hasn't bothered to give us the code.

I have to think fast. We're into the middle of April, 1956, and behind us is the momentum generated by weeks of concentrated preparation. As Sharkbait Leader, I must decide right now whether to cancel the mission. Should we taxi back and wait for a perfect arrangement—which we might never get? No, I think not. We'll solve this mystery of Area 2 after we're airborne. If we can't find the tankers—well, there are intermediate fields all the way up to Newfoundland.

I sound off into my oxygen mask, "McGuire Tower from Sharkbait. We're ready to roll."

"Cleared for take-off," the man says. "Left turn out."

I raise my right hand, twirl a forefinger and glance to right and left. My two wingmen nod in readiness, and we take off in close formation. Heading for New York International Airport, seventy-five miles to the northeast, we cruise low, beneath a layer of stratocumulus. Sandy Hook is sighted far ahead and slightly to the left; to the right are the Jersey beaches. The overcast breaks up, Idlewild Approach Control clears us across the airport, and we start our climb.

At 35,000 feet we level off and I engage my auto-pilot. My aircraft, called Excalibur IV, bores a nice clean hole in the sky. I check my wingmen, and momentarily admire the long, white contrails streaming from their tailpipes.

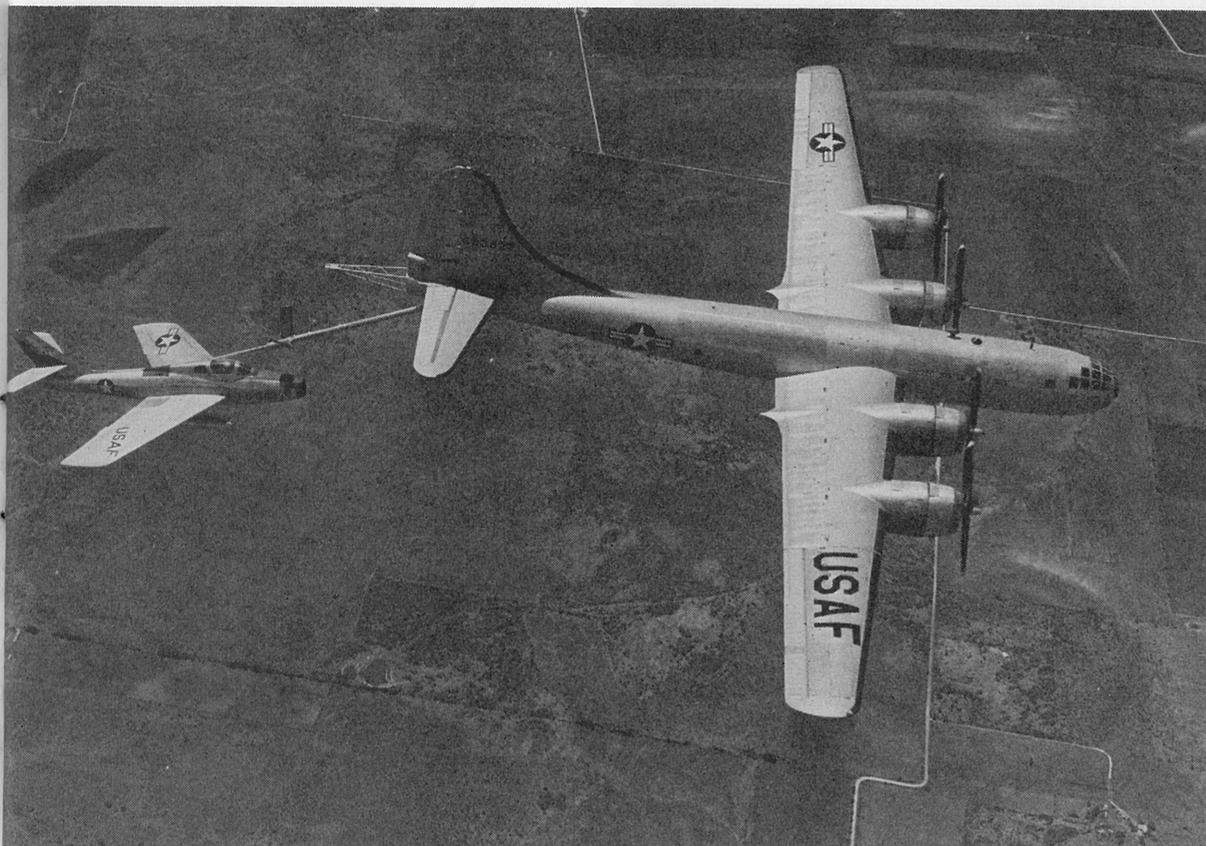
Now it's time to solve our air-refueling problem. "Area 2" must be translated into plain English. I give this job to Sharkbait 2, who flies on my left wing. He loosens up the formation, shifts radio frequency and proceeds to burn up the air waves.

In the meantime, I busy myself with the electronic guidance equipment which must find a navigational pinpoint on the British Isles. We are flying swept-wing F84-F jet fighters—Thunderstreaks. When they came off the Republic Aviation assembly line on Long Island, they were standard, long-range blowtorches. Now, with the addition of a celestial tracker and other electronic devices, my aircraft has some of the aspects of a missile guided only by sun and stars and a Doppler dead reckoner. If this flight is to be rated a complete success, we must have no other help; that's why the radio direction-finder on Excalibur IV has been deactivated.

A glance over the starboard side reveals a curved tentacle of land immersed in a calm, windless ocean—Cape Cod. Then, as we cruise over the Atlantic toward Nova Scotia, a curtain of cloud rolls beneath us. The surface of our planet disappears, but those vacuum tubes in Excalibur's nose keep us on course. If our electronic intelligence flickers out, I'll need a wire-cutting tool to reactivate my radio direction-finder. I happen to have one. It cost me \$1.87 secondhand, and that could be a bargain.

Sharkbait 2 comes back on our radio frequency to report. "Colonel," he announces cheerfully,

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Mid-air refueling: A Thunderstreak jet fills its tanks through the flying boom extended from the tail of a Boeing tanker plane. This recently developed technique enabled Col. Blair and his team to hop the Atlantic nonstop.

We Flew Operation Sharkbait

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"nobody can explain Area Two. All I got was the weather. Torbay has one hundred feet ceiling, with a quarter mile visibility. Gander's got four hundred and a half in fog. Harmon is O.K. Nobody knows anything about us. I guess we're too classified."

In our flight plan, Torbay in Southeast Newfoundland and Gander in the north are the emergency airports to use if we should miss connections with the tankers. But a warm front that should have moved far to the east of Newfoundland has reversed itself, and now sits squarely over Torbay, Gander and our original refueling area. Our troubles are snowballing.

If we fly as far east as Torbay to search for the tankers, and don't find them, we won't have enough fuel left to return to Harmon, in Southwest Newfoundland. A southwesterly jet stream now blowing in the Newfoundland area will guarantee that. Yet if we turn around short of Torbay, we'll never solve the tanker mystery. Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, lies twenty miles ahead under the cloud deck. Wind? True speed? No need to guess; I have the Doppler ground-speed meter, probing the earth with radar signals. It tells me we're making 540 knots—nine nautical miles a minute. That means it's two minutes to Yarmouth, approximately. I write the time on my clipboard.

The big question plagues me again. Where will we find the tankers? The radar station at Torbay may supply a clue, when we get close enough to communicate. If Area 2 turns out to be beyond our reach, we'll have to put in at Gander. Not a happy thought: Gander weather is so bad that we'd have to make an instrument penetration, and land out of a low ceiling onto a wet, slippery runway. The weather is good at Harmon, but a landing there would mean canceling the mission. We'll go on to Torbay.

In one way, the decision to go ahead has been easy. I'm hemmed in by a couple of tigers. Sharkbait 3 on my starboard wing is Maj. Robert C. (Tommy) Tomlinson from Headquarters, USAF in the Pentagon. He works with the Fighter Branch of the Directorate of Operations. He has as much jet-fighter time as anyone in the Air Force. Sharkbait 2 on my port wing is Capt. Cesar (José) Martinez, Operations Officer of the 509th Fighter-Bomber Squadron at Langley Air Force Base. He has flown more than a million miles in jet fighters. These are worthy gentlemen.

I return to my electronic devices. The celestial tracker feeds out some pertinent digits. Nova Scotia, blanketed by cloud, has been invisible, but the tracker shows we've been there. We're now over the Gulf of St. Lawrence. The Doppler ground-speed meter, its reading steadily increasing, reveals that we're entering the swift current of a jet stream. It finally reads 600 knots, which means we're hurtling toward our rendezvous at nearly 700 statute miles an hour, crabbing to the right to maintain our intended track while we ride this torrent of wind in the sky. Before long we'll be talking to the Torbay radar station.

The cloud deck below remains unbroken and builds up to higher altitudes on the eastern horizon. These higher clouds undoubtedly represent the backside of the warm front. We must refuel above them—but can we? The tops may be too high for our tankers, handicapped by old-fashioned reciprocating engines.

Twenty minutes from Torbay, close enough for radio contact. I thumb the mike button on my throttle. "Torbay, this is Sharkbait. Do you know the whereabouts of Sharkbait tankers?"

The answer is ominous. "Sharkbait, your tankers last reported two hundred thirty miles east-northeast of this station, heading east. They've disappeared from my weapon."

Our fueling stations are far at sea, beyond our point of no return, even beyond the vision of ground radar, which must bring us together. Those long, dry runways at Harmon are beckoning. A quick turn, a long dive and we could snuggle back to Mother Earth. But there's still a fair chance, if the tankers can be brought back.

"Turn 'em around."

Our message rings far out over the Atlantic. A faint acknowledgment seems to come from another world. The tankers, hundreds of miles away, have heard us.

The radarman at Torbay blurts out an urgent order, "Tankers, reverse course to Torbay. Climb at war emergency power to twenty thousand."

The acknowledgment comes faintly from a great distance. The tankers are turning back toward Newfoundland. That dry concrete at Harmon is now beyond reach, literally gone with the wind. We're riding in the core of the jet stream, with just enough fuel left to fly 150 miles beyond the Newfoundland shoreline, and turn back—if we miss the tankers—to cloud-covered Gander.

The gap between fighters and tankers is closing at fourteen miles per minute. But how far at sea are the tankers? Perhaps

too far. I finger my dead-reckoning computer and put the question over the air.

"Stand by," comes the answer.

Torbay radar has spotted us, still to the west of his station. He advises us to "steer ninety degrees," although the tankers have not yet reappeared on his scope.

The unbroken expanse of clouds beneath us is now being darkened by higher layers. The stratification will merge as we approach the warm front, leaving no clear room between layers for refueling. Flying at 35,000 feet, we ride out to sea on a tenuous hope, all the while thinking about Gander and the low ceiling there.

I take another reading on the Doppler and celestial tracker. The celestial device indicates that we passed Torbay at 1920 Greenwich Mean Time, one hour, fifty-three and a half minutes after passing over New York, now 1150 miles behind our tail pipes.

At 1928 GMT, the radarman at Torbay oversteps his role. "Sharkbait," he announces, "you're passing your point of no return."

The man is slightly mistaken, and my starboard wingman voices his displeasure. "Torbay," he says, "you take care of your job. We'll mind ours."

The radarman comes back on the air, his voice triumphant, "I have your tankers on my weapon. Steer ninety-five degrees—one-one-five miles."

We're back in business, if the cloud tops don't get in our way. We would prefer to refuel at 15,000 feet, where the tankers can give us enough air speed, but the clouds are much higher than that. Even at 20,000 feet, and the tankers' top

speed, we could barely hang on to the refueling booms, our tiny wings close to a stall.

We drop down to 30,000, dead on track for an intercept. There is more brisk chatter from the radarman. Fifteen miles to the tankers, one minute to go. I alter course slightly so that the tankers will pass on our left, and search the cloud tops below. My wingmen draw in close.

"Tally-ho!"

To the left and far below I catch sight of four huge airplanes lumbering westward. Occasionally they fly through cloud tops and momentarily disappear. There's no time to waste.

"Dive brakes!"

There's a momentary shudder as the dive brakes extend. We dive steeply in close formation and spread out, each of us directly behind a tanker. There is one tanker for each jet, plus a spare.

My altimeter reads 21,000 feet. This should be interesting. I lower my flaps slightly, so the airplane will handle better at slow speeds. At the flick of a switch, the boom receptacle in my left wing pops open.

The tanker commander asks us what air speed we desire. I reply, shaving a few knots off the figure we really need, but still asking for the impossible. These double-decked KC-97's simply won't fly that fast at this altitude. I'm sure of this because I've had thousands of hours at the controls of a similar airplane, the Boeing Stratocruiser.

My tanker occasionally disappears as it plunges through the clouds. I follow closely, boring in for the connection, and a glance at my fuel gauge lends a sense of urgency. I snuggle under the tanker's tail. The receptacle in my wing yawns invitingly at the tanker's long, slender boom.

In a window near the big ship's tail I can see the lad who will maneuver the boom. He regards me glumly and finally speaks up, "Back five."

I drop back. He stabs his boom into Excalibur's left wing. The fuel gauge, a most depressing sight a few moments ago, begins to creep to a higher reading.

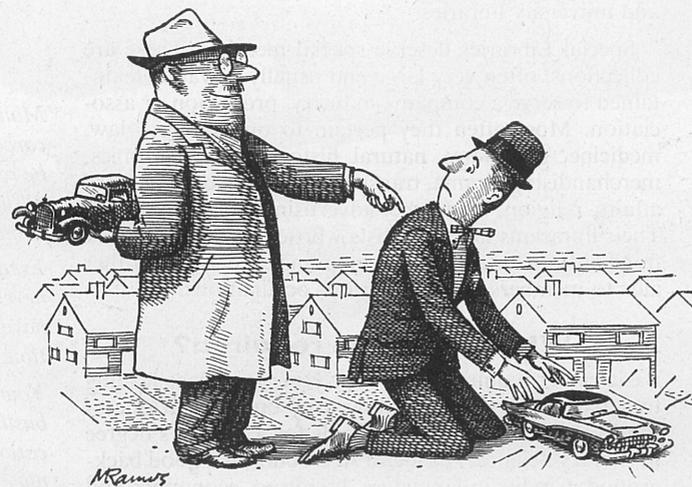
A complaining voice rattles in my earphones, "I'm in emergency override!" The tanker pilots are tearing the life out of their engines in a desperate attempt to keep up with the jets' minimum speed. These are aggressive, motivated tanker men of the Strategic Air Command.

We must find lower cloud tops, somehow, so the tankers can descend and reduce power—but the cloud tops become higher. Soon we are entirely submerged, four tankers and three fighters in formation. We hang onto the booms like suckling calves.

The tanker leader orders a turn to a heading where we might find lower clouds. As we turn, my airplane separates from the tanker's boom. I jockey back into position and the boom thuds back into Excalibur's receptacle. The point on the tanker which I must line up so carefully is now out of sight behind the metal frame of my windshield. To improve my view, I lean backward until I'm almost lying down in the cockpit.

It occurs to me that my natural habitat is the front end of that four-engine monster ahead of me. Exactly a week ago, I was skipping a Pan American World Airways' flight to London. On that day I was resting comfortably in an overstuffed chair with my Size 12 shoes propped on a Stratocruiser's instrument panel, all the while assisted by a half dozen efficient crewmen and waited on by a bevy of pretty young women. Today I'm not asking for creature comforts. All I want is a full load of fuel, and I'd like it pronto.

My headphones advise that Tommy and José are (Continued on Page 90)



The Perfect Squelch

Young Horace and family fitted perfectly into the new suburb of identical, gadget-gorged ranch homes. He and all his neighbors had approximately the same income and floundered in the same deluge of time payments for cars, televisions, furniture and backyard barbecues. Horace finally reached the point where he had to skip three consecutive car payments.

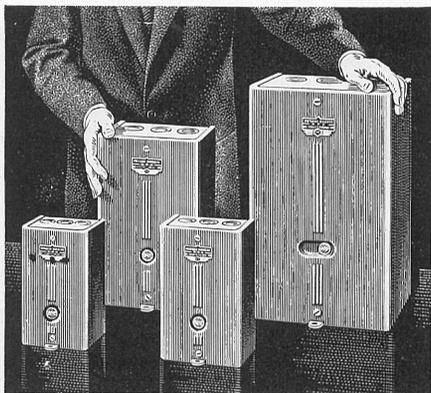
The elderly automobile dealer, who remembered his own past monetary difficulties, regretfully informed Horace that he would have to repossess his hardtop. "But we don't want to leave you afoot," he said. Pointing to a somewhat worn eight-year-old model, he added, "This car will give you transportation for at least a year. Pay for the title transfer and it's yours."

"That clunker!" Horace snorted. "Park that thing in my drive? What would my neighbors think I am?"

"Solvent, son, solvent," the dealer replied with a smile.

C. M. Morris

WHAT'S NEW IN MOTOR CONTROL?

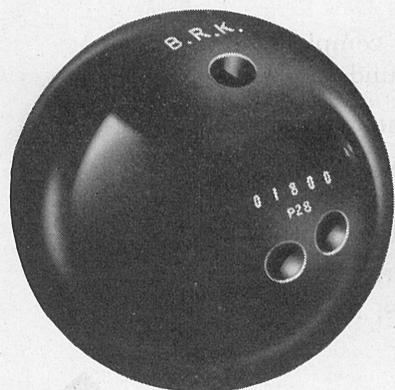

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CURTIS CIRCULATION COMPANY
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(Continued from Page 86) fully fueled and standing by. I should have a full load, too, but my fuel gauge reads only three quarters full. The boom operator says, "I've got pressure, but no flow." Something has gone bad in Excalibur's fuel system.

I disconnect from the boom and draw back a few yards to analyze the problem. A check of individual tank gauges reveals that the right-hand external pylon is empty. It's a huge tank; I can't reach the other side of the Atlantic without it.

A tiny fuel valve is stuck in the closed position. José suggests that I pull a certain circuit breaker, which will bypass the electrical signal from the closed valve. The circuit-breaker panel is somewhere near my right foot, out of sight. Keeping an eye on my tanker, I bend forward and blindly run my hand along the surface of the panel, feeling for the second row from the top, fourth circuit breaker from the front. I find the button and pull it out, but the effect is not what I wanted; my refueling receptacle slams shut. It appears that my airplane, an earlier model than José's, is wired differently.

I reset the little button to reopen the wing receptacle, and climb back on the tanker boom for another connection. It's no good. The boom operator repeats, "Pressure but no flow."

This is a new dilemma. We have enough fuel now to fly all the way back to Harmon in southwest Newfoundland. Or we can proceed farther out to sea with the tankers, refuel to the maximum again, and continue east. I can land at Shannon, in Ireland, and thus complete the navigational testing phase of the mission, in spite of the empty tank. My wingmen can take leave over Shannon and fly on to England to complete the deployment exercise. It won't be neat, scattering ourselves in this way, but the job will be done.

No one thinks seriously about returning to Newfoundland. The tanker commander agrees to escort us out to sea. We take an east-northeasterly heading, pointing toward distant Ireland, and fly along in the wake of the tankers toward our jumping-off point. I rework the fuel-versus-mileage computation. At what point can we take leave of the tankers? If we stay with them too long we'll compromise certain requirements of the mission. If we leave too soon, I'll have to swim the last miles to Ireland. I estimate the shortened range of my bird, allowing for the empty fuel tank, and mentally spread the figures across the miles from our present position to Shannon. My figures are padded slightly by reckoning zero tail wind. This padding will be my reserve fuel supply.

But our plans are jarred by a new development. José has an oxygen problem. A valve has unseated, causing his entire supply of liquid oxygen to vent overboard. Does he wish to return to Newfoundland? He barks a "negative."

Without oxygen for José, we must fly lower than planned, and that will increase the rate of fuel consumption. I revise my fuel and navigational figures, reckoning a jumping-off point readjusted to the airplane's pressurized-cabin altitude. José should be able to function safely with his cockpit at a pressure altitude of 12,000 feet. What does he think?

"No sweat," he says, and raises the figure to 14,000. Allowing for the pressure in his cockpit, that will give us a cruising altitude near 35,000 feet. For an emergency, José has a few minutes of oxygen attached to his parachute in a jump bottle.

The cloud tops are lowering. We drop down to 17,000 feet, and I maneuver behind a tanker to try my luck again. The fuel-gauge needle stops dead at the three-quarter mark, just as before. I disconnect and try again.

There's a warning shout from the boom operator, "Receiver, you're siphoning fuel!"

The precious liquid is flowing overboard in a thick stream. It's another stuck valve—this time the shut-off valve in the top of my main fuselage tank. I grope hastily in the region of my left foot to pull the battle-damage switches. The overflow stops.

At this juncture an Air-Sea Rescue amphibian happens to be circling below us. It calls itself "Duckbutt Whisky." Its appearance here was prearranged weeks ago. We must have been psychic.

Hoping to cure my sticky valves, I draw away from the tanker and maneuver violently, pulling many times the force of gravity. Back I go onto the tanker's boom. The needle of the fuel gauge rises steadily to full. There's no siphoning. Tommy and José are simultaneously topping off. We break away with full tanks. I swap information with the tanker's navigator and make a quick estimate.

"We'll pass Shannon at two three two zero, ETA Wethersfield zero zero zero five. Tankers from Sharkbait, we thank you."

"Good luck," says the tanker commander.

He starts his formation in a sweeping turn toward the North American continent. We pour on the power and climb to 32,000 feet. It's a new flight. Two thousand miles to go. We cruise at a high power setting—José, without oxygen, must be expedited.

As the sun drops below the horizon, cirrus clouds lend a gray cast to the western sky behind us. The insignie that adorns José's fuselage glistens in the fading light. It is the skull and rose of the 509th Fighter-Bomber Squadron, 405th Wing, Tactical Air Command. The squadron commander is Maj. Harry Evans, a super-professional; José is his right-hand man. A skilled navigator, José is also an expert at aerial gunnery, ground strafing and tossing atomic weapons. His airplane is named Aurora, for the mother of his three kids. He is an unadulterated fighter pilot. Unlike me, he logs all his flight time single-engine, single-seat.

Tommy's airplane has the glossiest look. It is the latest model F-84F, with a more powerful engine than mine or José's.

Tommy is well known in the fighter trade. Back in World War II, he was gunning the enemy out of the sky over Italy. More recently he flew with the famous acrobatic team called the Acrojets, and later led the Skyblazers in Europe. Nowadays he mills impatiently around the Pentagon, helping mastermind the new Air Force.

We cross the thirty-fifth meridian of west longitude and pull up to 36,500 feet. José announces he has 14,000 feet worth of atmosphere in his tiny cabin. That's as high as we'll go. The black night surrounds us with a canopy of stars. Directly astern is the planet Venus, hanging like a lantern in the western sky. The star tracker is paying undivided attention to Venus, measuring her for precise data which tell us of our progress across the meridians.

I keep glancing to right and left to make sure Tommy and José are there. Their planes appear to hang in space, their red and green navigation lights blinking against a backdrop of stars. Occasionally Tommy and I chat a little, mostly about the state of José's health. José doesn't talk. Without oxygen, he's saving his breath.

We've reached mid-Atlantic, halfway between Newfoundland and Ireland, almost 1000 miles from either shoreline. Does the engine sound a little rough so far from dry land? I'm too busy to listen. Is this trip necessary? Yes, we're hammering out the details of a manned missile that can carry a nuclear punch. With small airplanes there are jokers in the operational deck. What about pinpoint navigation? What about long-range and all-weather operations? How do you squeeze all that into a small package? Those are the details we're beating on. Properly forged, this little weapon can fill in for its big cousins, the B-47 bomber and the B-52.

The star tracker has cast Venus aside and is now measuring Polaris, a tiny pinpoint of light in the northern sky. It guides us due east as we cling to a latitude slightly south of the fifty-third parallel. I pick up my sextant, and shoot the star Arcturus, which glistens high over Excalibur's nose. It tells us we're passing the twentieth meridian of west longitude. Weather Ship Jig should be directly below.

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(Continued from Page 90) I call José. Tommy calls José. There's a profound silence. I search the northern sky for his blinking lights, but there's only a black void filled with stars. Suddenly a dark specter swoops up from below. A green light rotates vigorously in an otherwise invisible cockpit. It's José, waving his multi-colored flashlight. His radio has gone dead. We're due for a reading on the English weather. There's a special weather service tonight; a jet fighter circles over Western England, high enough to overtop the curvature of the earth that lies between

us, and so make long-distance radio contact. Our arrival procedures were planned over dinner at the London Savoy several days ago. Col. Dave Schilling, the first man to cross the Atlantic nonstop by jet was there (he died several months later in an auto accident in England), along with Col. Art Salisbury, Commander of the 20th Fighter-Bomber Wing at Wethersfield, and Col. Bill Ritchie, Director of Operations of the 20th, and myself. Ritchie is aloft in the fighter. I've forgotten his call sign, so I sound off, "Ritchie from Sharkbait."

A familiar voice replies from faraway England, "Hey, Charlie. Where you been?" As we pass south of Shannon, Tommy announces that this is his first crossing of the Atlantic by air. "It's a piece of cake," he says. My first crossing was made fifteen years ago, and I've made some 700 crossings since, mostly as an airline captain. But this is my first ocean hop in a jet. The lights of England decorate the black surface of the earth; Swansea, Cardiff, Bristol and London appear in sprawl-

ing array. We pass over London airport six hours, thirty-three minutes from New York, and turn slightly left for Wethersfield R. A. F. Station, fifty miles away. A red light flickers on the instrument panel—the low-level fuel warning. It makes no difference. Two long rows of parallel lighting are in sight, and we hear a welcoming voice, "Sharkbait from Wethersfield. Come on down. Your steaks are on the fire." "Make mine rare," says Tommy, and we go barreling down into the dark English night.

How an Ambulance Chaser Works (Continued from Page 19)

\$22,222.22 for Fyre. Cases that big are relatively rare, of course. But recently in a brilliant *tour de force*, Fyre signed up five big cases in a single week.

They were all single or double amputations. Experts in assessing these things say the cases should have "gone for \$75,000, average," meaning that settlements would average that much. Total, \$375,000. To Fyre, that string of cases could have meant \$41,666.66. Things didn't work out that way. Like men and women in more reputable lines, Fyre hits exasperating streaks of unmerited bad luck. In his unhappy opinion, the lawyers fouled up these five cases, and Fyre's take was nowhere as high as it should have been. But the achievement stands. Five good cases in a week, won by outplaying clever rivals from six or eight cities, is very likely an all-time record.

Fyre and his operations upset almost all common conceptions of ambulance chasing. That term is off-register to begin with. It describes only one phase of the multimillion-dollar accident-case business. Focusing on the small fry, it overlooks the big-timers. There are chasers who climb hospital fire escapes to get to a victim's side, others who buy tips from hospital orderlies and ambulance drivers. They work in frantic haste. That's all far beneath Fyre.

He never raced to an accident in his life. "Chasing" suggests hot pursuit. Fyre may not favor the injured person with a call for several weeks. Fyre drives up in a quietly glossy car. His salesmanship is calm and unhurried, and he is about as raffish, except in private conversation, as Anthony Eden. One accident victim said in court, "I felt sure I had seen the gentleman somewhere and was ashamed I could not remember his name."

That prospect was a railroader who lost one leg—the other was badly smashed—when he was run down by a locomotive in the railroad yards. Fyre visited him three or four times in the hospital, expertly discussing accidents and accident lawsuits. By then the victim was thoroughly sold on Fyre and, by association, on Fyre's lawyer. He signed. Fyre's lawyer then advanced the client \$200 a month for living expenses.

If you met Fyre socially, he would describe himself as a "railway-claims specialist." You might assume he worked for the railroad. Actually, Fyre's activities explain, in part, why injury claims now cost the lines roughly \$95,000,000 a year as against \$20,000,000 in 1941.

Not that Fyre makes any bones about the nature of his work while he is at it. He sometimes tells prospects, "I'm a chaser. That's been my business for nearly twenty years—chasing accident cases." Those being solicited don't call the police. On the contrary, a good many become Fyre's tipsters while convalescing.

"Fyre's" real name—one of the most popular American surnames—is an asset.

He and others are given fictitious names here for a combination of reasons. Although Fyre can operate legally in only sixteen states, he must be circumspect to avoid, in some of them, the old common-law charge of barratry—that is, persistent incitement of litigation.

Thus Fyre is a shady character in New Jersey, but not in Delaware; in Indiana, but not in Illinois. As for the lawyers

... ..

The Perpetual Painter

By Richard Armour

You think you'll just touch up the edge,

Then finish painting all the ledge.

You do the ledge, and then, behold,

The wall is looking rather old.

You paint the wall; then have a feeling

You'd better brighten up the ceiling.

The ceiling done, you paint the door,

Which only leaves, of course, the floor,

And when the floor is painted, well,

The next room's dullish—who can tell?

... ..

involved, it is unethical in all states for them to obtain cases through chasers, and unlawful in some states. But some lawyers contend the thing is no worse than entertaining corporation officials at the country club in quest of their business. And in any case, the laymen are not bound by the lawyers' canons.

In view of this moral and legal confusion, Fyre's doings shed much light on a fast, tough business in which are mixed tragedy, money hunger, legal skill, wily bargaining and foxy maneuvering. Accidents having become one of our major products, millions of dollars are involved. Also, the word "racket" gets loosely applied to the whole personal-injury situation. That is indiscriminate and unfair. It tars reputable lawyers who happen to specialize in this field; it may deter accident victims, to their disadvantage, from seeking legal advice.

Nor are things all of a piece on the unethical side of the fence. The injured man's rehabilitation may be delayed be-

cause he follows his lawyer's advice to remain inactive. There are instances of shameless fraud. At times clients have been misled by greedy attorneys. In spirited bidding for a case the lawyers may make promises they can't keep. In a classic instance, a disabled railroader relied on his attorney's written guaranty that he would receive a minimum of \$40,000, and ended up having to accept a settlement of \$5300. Lawyers dealing extensively in auto-accident cases may settle whole bundles of them at once—hence the name "wholesalers." In these deals your case, worth, say \$20,000 if faithfully prosecuted, may be settled for half its value.

There are times when all concerned, including the accident victims, are wielding very sharp chisels. On the other hand, there are times when the result of a chased case is thoroughly good: the client gets an able trial lawyer and wins an adequate award.

As for Fyre's part in all this, he likes to regard himself as the protector of unsophisticated accident victims from heartless claim adjusters. Others look on Fyre and his kind as predators fattening on tragedy. In any event, Fyre's work is lively, hotly competitive, full of stratagems and spoils.

To hear this lawyer or that assailed as an ambulance chaser gives Fyre a wry grin. A fat lot of chasing the lawyers do, he would say. The American Bar Association likes to point out that only a minute fraction of lawyers can be called ambulance chasers. Fyre would add that they do only a minute fraction of the work. Some are energetic. They fly or drive to the injured man's side, put themselves across as the attorney who can do the most for him. They entertain handsomely and write good letters. But, in general, Fyre thinks of the lawyers as coming in only to kick the point after touchdown. "The chasers are the boys who bring in the business," Fyre will say. "They're what make a lawyer big." Bearing him out is the sad story of what happened when a big-timer went legitimate a few months back.

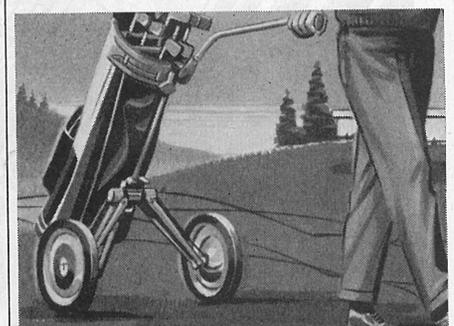
Some think he had the biggest operation of its kind and that it made him a millionaire. He had touches of style which were much admired. Dealing with a wife, he might hand her \$500 and say, "Get those nice kids some new clothes and get something pretty for yourself; you'll feel better." It was a gift, not an advance. Clients loved him.

But his ship was springing leaks. Four of his chasers were arrested. They carried "kits"—copies of checks for big verdicts, grateful letters from clients and other sales material. All plainly identifying the lawyer, of course.

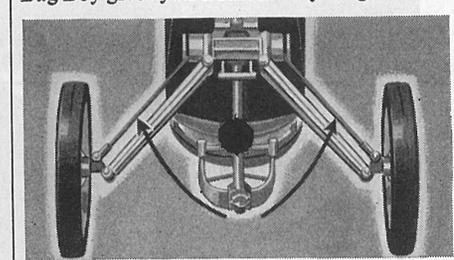
The arrests signified that railroad investigators were watching the lawyer's operations and that disclosures were imminent. The (Continued on Page 96)

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