

Memory Flight

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Hogan saw a white man instantly pulled back by another

Captain Hogan Storms the Caribbean Skies to Obey His Orders by Breaking Them!

CAPTAIN HOGAN'S attention was wandering. Hardly listening to the skipper of the Aircraft Carrier *Langdon*, he looked up at the soft blue sky, reveled in the warmth of the Caribbean air on his face and hands. He listened to Captain Lockhart for a moment, to make sure he wasn't missing something important.

"Just remember, gentlemen, that we are not at war. Therefore, we are not justified in flying over territory that does not belong to the United States. To do so would be a violation of a country's neutrality. . . ."

It was the usual speech when the Atlantic Fleet was on maneuvers. Hogan had heard it any number of times. Smiling, he put his hand in his back pocket, patted the old blueprint there. Somehow, it made him feel younger. As a second lieutenant, years ago, he had supervised the mapping details over the entire Dominican Republic. Before going on maneuvers, he had dug the blueprint out of his trunk and brought it along just for the kick it gave him to remember his youthful achievement.

Abruptly Hogan snapped alert. Captain Lockhart was saying something that had

caught his wandering mind.

“The President of Santo Domingo has asked us to make reconnaissance flights over the Dominican Republic. Naturally we have refused. Even if he is right about secret agents operating there, we cannot involve ourselves in the difficulties of another country. But if he is right, this may be our first warning. The republic may be furtively occupied by a hostile power.

“The next logical step would be an air attack on the Panama Canal, from bases in Santo Domingo that may already have been selected and secretly developed. But there is nothing we can do, without violating Dominican neutrality. We can’t stop it. So we must stick to our regular maneuvers outside the territorial waters of any independent country or island.”

Hogan suddenly realized that Captain Lockhart had been looking at him all through that speech. His eyes seemed to be appealing, pleading with him for something. Was it Hogan’s imagination? It couldn’t have been. Yet what had been in the commander’s mind? Why had he directed his talk entirely at Hogan?

On his way to his ship, Captain Hogan’s mind was wrestling with the problem. What did Lockhart think he could do that no one else could do? He could fly, of course, but so could the other boys. He knew—

Hogan started, his eyes narrow with thought.

Captain Lockhart knew he had headed the mapping expedition over Santo Domingo! He realized Hogan knew the country better than any Dominican could possibly know it. Hogan knew exactly what spots he could pick as air bases if he were a foreign agent whose country intended to use Santo Domingo as a center of operations against the rest of the Western Hemisphere!

“Was that what Lockhart was trying to

telegraph me?” Hogan muttered. “And the President of Santo Domingo asked for cooperation!”

Maybe that idea hadn’t even occurred to Lockhart. But what would happen to Hogan if he disobeyed orders? He knew what it would mean, and his face was grim as he strode back to his quarters and picked up a map holder.

HOGAN settled into his pit, stiffened against the sudden pressure that jolted him back as he took the swift run, shot over the stern of the *Langdon* and streaked into the air. He climbed sharply to ten thousand feet. He was to make a routine patrol out of sight of the carrier and return. Under no circumstances was he to forget that this was war practice. He must maintain radio silence, no matter what happened to him.

Easily he banked toward the north, in the direction of Santo Domingo. When he looked back, the *Langdon* had vanished behind a pile of haze. Then he let his motor full out and banked left. The Curtiss fighter roared straight toward the chalk cliffs on the eastern shore of Barohona Peninsula.

Ten miles inland, he banked right and aimed for a notch in the Bahorucos. His keen gaze searched the ground below. He remembered almost every inch of the few trails beneath him.

“It’s a great joke.” Hogan smiled bitterly. “The Marines mapped those trails just in case Uncle Sam might be forced to occupy the island. Naturally the republic got copies of the map. Now wouldn’t it be a swell gag if the maps we made were used against us? Yeah—a swell gag!”

Under him rolled the waste of thorn trees. His head jerked forward abruptly, his eyes peering. That plateau in the foothills of the Bahorucos didn’t look right. He had flown over it long ago, and he still remembered it. Like all the rest of this

country that God had forgotten, it had been covered sparsely with thorn trees. Now the growth of trees on it was entirely too even, suspiciously greener than the rest of the wilderness of La Rabiza.

Hogan nosed down to examine the phenomenon. Those remarkably even trees masked the ground far better than did the thorn trees of the rest of the wastelands. Why?

“You don’t have to be a genius to know why,” he grunted. “From that plateau, guns of ordinary range can drop shells into Los Gatos, Trujin, Enriquillo and Paradis!”

Back and forth Hogan sped across the tops of the trees. Trying to see what was under them was useless, but the scheme he had worked out made that unnecessary. With his motor full out, he almost clipped the tops off the trees. Then he zoomed away toward the notch through the Bahorucos.

He glanced down at his leg. Strapped to it was the map holder he had put on just before taking off, and the credit line on the map said:

Under the direction of
Second Lieutenant J. R. Hogan

Grinning, he marked the spot where the green plateau had been. He wasn’t supposed to have that map, but he had made the blueprint to keep high the pride of his youth. Was that really why he had kept it? He shrugged. Perhaps even then he had been fated to make this memory flight.

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Beyond Boucan Polo, he shot down through the notch like a silver flash, streaked out on the other side of the Bahorucos. Hedgehopping so low in the tricky currents, he was taking deadly chances.

He swung across Neiba Desert, flew east of Neiba Village. Constanza was his destination—that cliff-walled amphitheater

in the heart of the mountains. The only ways of reaching it at all would be with ropes from the cliffs, or by an airplane stalling into the level, grassy floor. But an army of secret agents could hide in Constanza. With a concealed radio, they could send their plans out in code and not risk being discovered.

OVER Constanza, Hogan dived toward the amphitheater. Wild horses broke from cover, ran frantically to escape the frightful roar that had swept down on them. The mystery of those horses in Santo Domingo had never been explained.

The corners of Hogan’s lips drew down in savage mirth. Echoing back from the walls of the amphitheater, the sound of his motor would be amplified a thousand times. If there were human beings in the valley, they would think their secret had been discovered, that they were being attacked by a fleet of planes.

His grim smile widened to a fierce grin. Only one man leaped from a covert of trees to stare up at him. But someone else reached out and yanked the man back. And the face that had stared up at him and the hand that had reached out were white! White men where there should be none!

“If there are two,” Hogan muttered, “there must be more. A good show ought to drive them out and make them let me see something else.” For fifteen minutes he went wild in Constanza. His left wing was down as he circled the valley at top speed, his underside almost touching the black basalt of the ageless cliffs. Piling up the echoes, filling the valley with an ear-shattering roar, he watched the maddened horses.

They broke in all directions, smashed into trees and brush to escape. There was no escape, but they could crash through the brush. And when they did, they gave Hogan glimpses of human figures.

Somehow enemies had slipped into Constanza, just as they had filtered into La Rabiza. When they were ready to move, the Four Horsemen would plunge through Santo Domingo, and death and destruction would windrow corpses along the country's trails!

Nobody could do anything about it. Hogan had no right to do even the little he was doing. . . .

Murderously he climbed out of Constanza, leveled off to pass Loma Tina to the north. Again he marked a spot on his map. Long ago, Hogan himself had explored Constanza, found caves all around the floor of the valley. If not for those caves, men on the rim could have wiped out the furtive outfit below. But the protection of the caves made that impossible without his information.

North of San Jose de Ocoa, he shot down toward a ravine. As he sped along, his wings seemed almost to touch the sides. His undercarriage threatened the crags and trees. But he held the wheel firmly and studied the ground below with eyes that had been sharpened by fearful discoveries.

When he rose to ten thousand feet before coming in sight of Piedra Blanca, he had seen not a single white man, native or burro on the long trail. But he was ready to swear that at least one stripped tree was wired for radio. He indicated it on his map.

"I can save a little gasoline," he mused grimly. "I've been right on every guess, so I don't have to go any farther."

He climbed back to invisibility in the blue sky over Santo Domingo, headed southward toward the flight deck of the *Langdon*. As he flew, he marked circles on the map in the holder strapped to his leg.

"The whole republic is practically mined!" he grated. "But how the hell can I pass on my information? I can't just drop notes on the capital. All I can do is go back to the *Langdon*!"

He made a small correction in his flight, then looked down at the map again. Grinning with real humor, he connected the circles with a line that showed the route he had flown. All along the line he wrote:

No native population below

THE *Langdon* came out of the haze. Hogan lowered and began to circle for his run in to a landing. His heart hammered, though not for his safety. With the certainty of long practice, he landed on the flight deck. The moment he unfastened his helmet, an orderly saluted.

"Captain Lockhart's compliments, sir, and he wishes to see Captain Hogan in his cabin at once, sir."

Hogan nodded, and went below. When he entered Lockhart's cabin, saluted and stood stiffly at attention, the commander's face was red with wrath. But the expression in Lockhart's eyes did not seem to match his anger.

"Hogan, did you fly over Santo Domingo today?" he demanded.

There was no change in Hogan's expression, and he did not reply.

"I have a report here, radioed from Trujillo City," Lockhart said more harshly. "It says that one of our planes was seen in the following places."

Hogan stiffened, listened keenly. When Lockhart named the places, he didn't miss a single one!

Without a word Hogan put the map on the desk, pointed at the circles and the line. Lockhart bent over, read the information he was pointing out:

No native population below

The commander looked up. His face was still angry, but his eyes seemed to smile excitedly at Hogan.

"I'll attend to your case later," he snapped. "Go to your quarters till I send for

you again.”

Three hours later, Hogan was standing at attention before Captain Lockhart again.

“Let’s see if I have correctly interpreted everything you so loquaciously didn’t say,” the commander stated. “I radioed the president of the republic that nobody who had a right to complain could have seen one of our planes—er—if there had been any. I hinted that certain spots in Santo Domingo, which oddly enough coincide with circles drawn on this old map you left here, should be surrounded by native troops at once. After that, nature should take its course.”

He looked questioningly at Hogan. When there was no reply, he shrugged, and continued.

“You might be interested to know his answer. After all, we like to hear what’s happening in other countries. Well, he’s acting on my purely instinctive hint. Turn in till morning, Hogan, when I’ll have you back here for final action.”

EARLY the next morning, Hogan again faced Lockhart. There was no change in the squadron leader’s expression.

“It’s pretty sad, Hogan,” Lockhart said. “The President of Santo Domingo reports some amazing incidents in the places I happened to think might need inspection. A lot of people seem to have been killed. But the president tells us not to feel sorry for them. You see, they were killed by the same right that a man may kill a burglar who breaks into his house. They were not natives. They had no passports, and they weren’t Americans. Why, they didn’t even speak English! Apparently some of them aroused the contempt of the Dominican soldiers by begging for mercy.”

Hogan waited, still saying nothing.

“The president seems to have a sense of humor,” Lockhart went on. “Since no plane

of ours would have violated his country’s neutrality, he says he withdraws his protest and the request for an investigation. By the way, Hogan, what did the natives call you when you were stationed in Santo Domingo?”

Hogan reddened. “*El Gordito*—the little fat one. That’s slander, sir. I never was fat, and I certainly wasn’t smaller than I am now.”

“That’s an odd coincidence,” said Lockhart. “The president ends his message by giving the best wishes of his country to *El Gordito!* What could he mean?”

“He was a lieutenant of constabulary when I was a shavetail down here,” Hogan replied quietly. “Is that all, sir?”

“Yes. Report to your quarters—”

Hogan waited in dread for the two words that seemed inevitable—“under arrest.” But they did not come. Instead, Lockhart glared at him and snapped:

“I asked you if you flew over Dominican territory yesterday, Hogan.”

“And I definitely failed to answer, sir,” Hogan stated.

“Yes,” the commander admitted. “I definitely remember that you definitely did not answer. I definitely do not ask you again because I definitely don’t want you to lie, especially since the truth might get you court-martialed! Well, what do you suggest we do next?”

Hogan swallowed the lump that had suddenly tightened his throat.

“I—I suggest that I prepare for regular patrols, sir,” he faltered.

“Really?” Lockhart asked in surprise. “That’s just what I was about to suggest. Well, that’s all, Hogan. Dismissed!”

Not until Hogan had turned his back did Lockhart grin. After all, discipline must be maintained.