



Three Spitfires, loaded with light bombs and depth charges, appeared as if by magic

HIS MAJESTY'S TURTLES

By WILLIAM J. O'SULLIVAN

Yank airmen on an isolated isle begin dining in style—and wind up in an hilarious private war with their own allies!

HE WAS standing at the window of his office in the combined Operations-Headquarters shack, staring out over the ocean that stretched sixteen hundred invisible, impossible and unattainable miles toward the mainland, trying to figure it out.

They were playing some little game with him again, his staff was. It was like the time they turned up those few cases of

Canadian Club unexpectedly—or had that Simmons Beautyrest smuggled in for him—or came up with a staff sergeant who played a bang-up game of chess.

He could tell. He could tell by the slight grin with which his young adjutant studied him, when he thought the Old Man wasn't looking. He could tell by the way the executive officer now and again looked at the adjutant, winked, smiled and shoved the

papers around on his desk some more.

He didn't rush them about it. When you were stationed on The Stone, you didn't rush any pleasant surprises. You wondered about whatever it was, turning things over in your mind as if they were shells in a shell-game. You hoped you didn't guess the right shell, because failure prolonged the suspense.

Suspense was the really big thing about The Stone.

The Stone was a vital link in our late, great war. The Stone was a dab of volcanic rock that broke the monotony of the ocean not quite sixteen hundred miles out on the perilous—for aircraft—water-jump on the way to the war front.

Conveniently, it was owned by our British allies. Magically, it was converted by America into a fueling spot, distinguished by a mile-long landing-strip hacked out of the volcanic rock.

Here birds of war with parched tanks rumbled in out of the overcast that was the rule by day—rumbled in, shaved the cliff on the northwest approach and burped their tires down the runway that was flanked right and left by leaning peaks that stretched five hundred feet overhead—a narrow canyon with a runway bottom.

By night, The Stone was tabu for aircraft because of the swarms of gooney-birds that appeared at some unfathomable summons with the dipping of the sun into the westward waters. They circled in uncountable swarms, sobbing their weird cries like restless and lost souls, never alighting, never quieting—and vanished somewhere into the water-girt distances with the re-appearing of the sun out of the waters to the east.

“The Wideawake Birds,” they were called by some, because if they rested or slept, none ever saw it.

By day, gusty winds lifted whorls of lava-sand and eddied the gritty, stinging

stuff intermittently and irritatingly about for the crews that stopped to slake fuel tanks and take off again with the dawn. For the luckless personnel that manned the base to service the visiting planes and crews, it was just another step down the ladder that led to their personal hades.

Not that things hadn't improved after the arrival of “Rusty” Farson, Lt.-Col., Ferrying Division, Air Transport Command, Army Air Forces, A. U. S.—they had, and plenty, despite the fact that the aging but young-in-heart Rusty Farson was not Big Boss of The Stone. He was merely Commanding Officer of the AAF detachment sentenced in—or based, as you prefer—there.

The Big Boss was one Colonel the Honourable Geoffrey L. M. N. Jones-Smith, K.C.M.G., M. C. and what-have-you. What Colonel the Honourable Jones-Smith had, in addition to top-rank authority on this infinitesimal, imperial pinhead of British domain, was a beef-red complexion, blondish-yellow handlebar mustaches and an all-white, Colonial military rig of clothing that could have come from a fancy-dress costumer, it was that typical.

White pith-helmet—white, polo-type, half-sleeved shirt—white shorts—white, long stockings that stopped just below the knees—white shoes—white swagger-stick—even the ribbon that anchored his monocle to his shirt was white. Military ribbons formed an island of color on the polo shirt, as his rheumy blue eyes provided isolated blobs of half-color in his beefy-completed, lean face.

He had all that, Colonel the Honourable Jones-Smith did—and the power of veto over improvements on the sea-going pinhead of earth that was The Stone. And it was not a neglected power.

THE water for drinking purposes was formerly flown in, brought by C-47

transports with tanks built in. Rusty Farson had demanded a distilling plant so that unlimited water could be redeemed from the sea. Colonel the Honourable Jones-Smith had demurred, at first, because this new-fangled machine seemed a contradiction of the old order.

And the Old Order was Bible, Regulations and Law to the doughty colonel.

When the Cinema—movies to you—was installed in the west lee of the 1500-foot peak that boasted the island's only spot of green vegetation, and when a U. S. Military Road was extended from the Tent Area to service it, the colonel harrumph-ed and haw-ed and blew noisily through his mustaches. But he finally consented to let the British garrison attend.

He even, it was said, viewed with disfavor the engineering marvel that was the runway, and from which British fighters took off to patrol the sea-lanes in guard against "Louie the Louse," a playful German submarine commander who managed, in diverse ways, to make a nuisance of himself. For the runway was what attracted Louie.

Things had improved on The Stone, for the British as well as for the Yank GI's and the ferrying crews, with the arrival of Rusty Farson. Rusty had been a U. S. Army pilot in World War One, and he had the true pioneer spirit. Where others asked, Rusty did.

But the improvements had been despite, and not because of, Colonel the Honourable Jones-Smith. And improving The Stone was much like trying to cool hell—there was always room for so much more.

Rusty stood at his window, thinking about everything and nothing, when a sharp bark came from the Operations Room down the hall from his office.

"Ten-n . . . HUT!"

He twisted his graying head, his brown eyes squinting. No Vipers—Very Important Personages—had been announced by the ever-watchful Tower.

An answering bark told him what the "Attention!" had been inspired by.

"Keddy on, keddy on! Harrumph! Haw! Visiting the colonel, doncher know? Keddy on, men!"

Rusty groaned.

"Carry on" was British for "As you were." Harrumph and Haw meant something was cooking. Rusty Farson was turning to his desk when a sporadic burst of gunfire sounded from the near beach. He looked questioningly at Swanson, the adjutant.

"Some of the crews or base personnel target-practicing. With forty-fives or Tommy-guns."

"Oh, well. Show the colonel in."

When the colonel visited, something was impending. But Rusty's mind was only half on this fact. For again he detected the secret communication that flashed between his aides, Swanson and Hall.

"What are they up to now?" he wondered as he dropped into his chair. He kept his feet under him ready to spring to when the white clad British commander stalked in. His eyes brightened as he worked on the puzzle.

"A swank USO show? Or maybe some old pals of mine flying in? Or—a transfer! Well, anyway, something. . . ."

He jumped to his feet when the colonel loomed in the doorway.

"Well, Colonel! A pleasant surprise! Come in, come in!"

"Hello, old boy," Colonel Jones-Smith said through his nose, his over-large teeth showing in an intended grin. "Nothing special, doncher know. Merely dropped in to chat."

"We're both accomplished liars," Rusty thought, as he wheeled a chair up for the

man. "Isn't the .major with you, sir?"

The major was Major Pliny Jangstraw, Jones-Smith's aide. He was a stocky man, beefy-complexioned like his C. O., but wore a clipped, tooth-brush mustache of nondescript color and sported khaki gear in contrast to Jones-Smith's bleached glory.

"Er, don't know, doncher know. Here and about." The man waved a manicured hand negligently. "On some routine, no doubt."

"No doubt," Rusty thought darkly. Pliny Jangstraw was the colonel's gestapo. Jangstraw gum-shoed about with all the subtlety of an elephant crashing through a canebrake. He was eternally and forever on the prowl, scanning, examining, regarding, watching, observing. "No doubt!"

"Anything new, old chap?"

"I should be asking you!" Rusty mused, wondering what was behind the visit. He became official. "You got our report on Louie the Louse? He's taken to lying about a hundred miles west, and he is getting to be a nuisance with his radio.

"He operates on The Stone's frequency, sending a beam when static is making ours fuzzy. He flashed cones-of-silence—blot-outs, as if they were over The Stone's station—to four planes several days ago. They let down out of the overcast and blooey! He's going to hit one of our boys, some day."

"Haw Harrumph. Ow, yes! Louie . . . the Nazi submersible. The patrols are watching him, you know. Beastly annoying. Anything else?"

"We've had a new shipment of Spam. Or what they pass off as Spam," Rusty said, with a grimace. "What we need is a new cook-book to tell us some new ways to fix it. Fried for breakfast with powdered eggs—cold for lunch—chopped up for supper with some stringy corned-beef trying to hide in it. How's it with you?"

RUSTY knew how it was with the British personnel. Argentine beef was carried to The Stone by British transport-Argentine mutton, Argentine lamb, Argentine veal. In a far-off corner of Patagonia, in Argentina, some zealous and shrewd-thinking Western senators had found evidence of hoof-and-mouth disease in a cattle herd, and laws were passed by Right Thinking Americans to keep Right Eating Americans from the mistake of enjoying prime Argentinian beef. Even unto The Stone. . . .

Jones-Smith screwed his monocle into his eye, single-focused Swanson and Hall, and deftly popped the monocle out of his eye and caught it in his hand again.

"Tolerable, doncher know," he murmured. "There's a war on, old boy."

"I seem to have heard rumors of it," Rusty Farson said drily. "About your recent complaint of the runway being out of order—one of our lads came in flying a Baker-Two-Six, a Marauder, with one fan feathered. He landed pretty well down the runway—you know how it is? One third upgrade; one-third level; one-third downgrade?"

"Well, he purposely shot high, to miss the cliff on approach, and landed well along the runway. When he went to his brakes, he collapsed the nose-wheel and scuffed the sun-hot surface a little."

"Unfortunate, doncher know," Jones-Smith drawled. "My lads find it deuced rough. It will be smoothed out, eh?"

"Has been already," Rusty said, getting a nod of confirmation from Swanson. "Are your lads enjoying the movies, sir? Er—the cinema?"

"Quite, quite," the colonel said, not altogether enthusiastically. "Raw-ther! But—how about a few British films, eh, old chap?"

"The films we have are courtesy of the American producers," Rusty observed. "I'll

inquire if they own any British companies so we can get a few free of charge. Er—are the showers working out all right with the new pipe-line we laid to your Area?”

“Quite pleasant.” The colonel paused, stared around him. Then, “Would you care for a bit of sport, old boy? Fishing for some of His Majesty’s creatures, perhaps? Barracuda, horse mackerel or sailfish?”

Rusty blinked.

“His Majesty’s creatures?” he echoed. “You mean—fish?”

“Exactly, old boy. The waters surrounding the island are His Majesty’s waters, doncher know? The creatures abounding in His Majesty’s waters are His Majesty’s creatures.” He fell silent as a burst of small-arms fire spattered the silence.

“Be glad to have you join me in sporting for His Majesty’s creatures. Any time, old chap. Just say the word, eh?”

“I’d much rather have the sport of tackling a choice cut of His Majesty’s Argentinian beef,” Rusty thought. But he managed to beam his thanks to the invitation.

“Very nice of you, Colonel. I’m busy now. Details. Planning a new parking area, and two new roads. And we are going to enlarge the movie seating. Laying some more pipe-lines, too—for when the water-capacity is increased. I’ll be glad to join you after that, though.”

Colonel the Honourable Jones-Smith untangled his gaunt length and towered to his feet. He returned Rusty’s salute with a heel-clicking, half-bowing, open-handed salute of his own and paused at the door.

“Delighted to have you join me in some sport awfter His Majesty’s creatures any time, old chap. Toodle-oo!”

“Ten-n-HUT!” the Ops sergeant squawled, as the colonel went along the way to the open.

“Keddy on, keddy on, men.”

Rusty blinked and stared at Swanson.

“What’s the deal? What is our noble ally laying the groundwork for now? I think I’ll set up a counter-espionage system and have Major Jangstraw watched while he watches us. The old boy has something up his sleeve!”

“Could be,” Hall said, rubbing his chin. “By the way, how about having evening mess with us, Colonel? At the Permanent Mess? Or are you going to give Transient another try?”

“It’s a deal,” Rusty said, without relish. “What is the big surprise? Something new in Spam? Maybe Spam-on-Spam, instead of just plain Spam?”

Hall was innocence itself.

“Would you perhaps like a Spam-and-Powdered-Egg omelet, sir? Very tasty, I’m told. Our new chef, straight from the Ritz, I says that it is Spam Supreme. He says—I Please, sir! Don’t throw the ink-well! I’m in my best sun-tans!”

“Well, hold the comedy, then.” Rusty grimaced. “I’ll eat with you with the greatest of pleasure, gentlemen. Know why? Because The Honourable Jones-Smith didn’t invite me to eat his beef!” He crooked his finger, dug it into his eye-socket, and made motions of screwing it into place. “Keddy on, keddy on!”

RUSTY let the savory steam hit him full in the face, and he said through a gurgling intake of the liquid and through the steam of it:

“More! For Pete’s sake, have another ready. If you can spare it?”

Lieutenant Hall chuckled, his blue eyes delighted.

“Gallons of it, Colonel. But leave some room! We do have a new cook, but he is from Antoine’s, in New Orleans, which is perhaps a few cuts better than the Ritz. Something else follows this, sir.”

“More of this turtle soup,” Rusty

begged. "Nuts to what follows. This is certainly my dish!"

He had two more of his dishes; and then he went speechless at sight and taste of the meaty fillets that were set before him. He cut into one, tasted it experimentally, then grinned and held his thumb and forefinger in the "O" sign that means "Okay!" in the AAF.

"Where," he asked, between mouthfuls, "did it come from? Did the guy bring it with him, the new cookie?"

Swanson chuckled.

"That's the heck of it, sir. Or the goshdanged beauty of it. These huge sea-turtles have been here as long as The Stone, I guess. But until this New Orleans lad got assigned to us, nobody'd ever thought of eating them. The boys are shooting plenty, now. Some of them trap the eggs, but we aren't quite that hard-up yet—to try the eggs. You like?"

"I'm recommending you both for the DSM—and the cookie for the Medal of Honor." Rusty grinned. "You say we got plenty?"

"The sea is full of them! You heard that shooting going on today?"

"All turtles?"

"Mostly. They're big and tough. They run to over three hundred pounds apiece. And large around as washtubs. It takes a few shots to damage them."

"Target practice should be compulsory," Rusty murmured to his Exec. "On a slow moving target, especially. Make a note of that, please."

"Duly noted and will be so ordered," Hall laughed. "May I make a suggestion, sir? For morning mess? Fried, thin slices of turtle, in butter; with scrambled powdered-eggs flavored with Worcestershire. Fit for a king, sir."

Swanson's eyes crinkled in a laugh.

"Even fit for a Yank Looney-Colonel, if it comes to that. How about it, Colonel?"

"It's a deal. Now, boys, let's hit my bottle for a drink or so of Canadian Club; and then we'll take a short drive in the jeep and see what's at the movies."

"Betty Grable," Hall told him. "Humphrey Bogart tomorrow. Martha Raye, in person, night after that. And then Bob Hope."

"If I can spare time from the turtles, I'll see them all," Rusty chuckled. "This is almost too good to be true! Brother, The Stone isn't so bad, after all! Good old Stone!"

Later they drove on a short inspection trip through the parking area on the southwest tip of The Stone, pausing momentarily by the "gun crew" that guarded the runway approach—a set-up of a dummy gun, manned by a number of wooden figures who were attired in British tin-helmets and uniforms—a picture of On the Alert.

It had been speculated that Louie the Louse ran a big enough sub to carry a dismantled observation airplane and that it would be no tough trick for Louie to send the Obs crate up with some small bombs and wreck the runway some bad day. That would put a lot of airplanes beyond the Point of No Return behind an eight ball large and black as death, unable to turn back to the mainland and unable to land safely on The Stone.

So far the British Fighter patrol and the dummy gun-crew had proved an effective deterrent.

Rusty flashed his headlights at Tower, got the green light to cross the runway and tooled over slowly, the nightly cool breeze from the sea pleasant on his face, his eyes vaguely aware of the circling Wideawake birds swarming overhead like winged ghosts.

There was deep contentment within him when he rolled into his blankets in his tent-bed and let the breeze fan him to sleep

while the hiss and rush of the breaking surf deadened his ears, a contentment that spread through him like a rising tide of well-being.

For seven days, turtle was a thrice-daily treat—in various forms. On the seventh day, Rusty's appetite was almost ruined when, in the rain-swept, smut-gray dawn, Louie the Louse sneaked close in to lie in wait several hundred yards off the end of the southeast runway and unload some hate on a Mitchell that was roaring up in a takeoff.

Blam-boom-BOOM!

The Mitchell rocked in the violent gunfire and shed eight feet of its port wing. It dropped off sickeningly, then picked up when the desperate pilot yanked the Two-Stage Superchargers into high-blower and poured the mercury to the stricken plane.

"X-Ray Nona Pete to Tower! X-Ray Nona Pete to Tower! Emergency! Emergency! Attacked by hostile surface craft! Clear the runway, old man, I'm trying to make it back in!"

TOWER went into action. A Liberator that was squatting for take-off blasted down the runway to the first turn-off, then screamed partway around in a wild turn, braked and scuttled for safety. A Marauder slammed across the runway from the stacked-up line that was waiting to take off, and crowded close to Ops. An A-26 Invader turned on a dime and cleared the taxi-strip to huddle in the lee of a Fortress.

The siren-alert moaned alive like a tormented spirit, and the base personnel jumped to arms under the alarm, taking up positions for raid-defense.

And three Spitfires, loaded with light bombs and depth-charges, appeared as if by magic and howled down the runway in their racing take-offs.

The choking cough of the garbage-cans hitting the water was followed by whooming geysers of water standing in

disordered rows as the aerial fighters strove to bracket the now submerged Louie.

The British staff came on the double and barked orders to ground the ferrying crews who were waiting for take-off, as the disabled Mitchell came in with good wing low-cocked for a precarious landing. The fire-trucks lined up at the runway head and spurted after the stricken craft with sirens moaning when it settled, gear up, for a landing.

One of the sub's shots had pierced the rear compartment, narrowly missing the radioman at his liaison set, and effectively severing the hydraulic lines so that the gear could not be re-extended.

But the crew walked out.

"Let the planes take off!" Rusty yelled to the British staff.

"There's a war on. The Spits can patrol the island and stand guard while the crews hit the air!"

Major Jangstraw pulled at his prows-shaped jaw.

"Er—it's almost an order—Colonel Farson, sir, doncher know? The Stone is a British possession; and the British commawnder's suggestion, sir. . . . Doncher know?"

"No, I don't know, sir," Rusty bellowed. "The runway is a U. S. runway, the planes are U. S. planes, and they are going to help U. S. troops win the U. S.'s war! And I'm the U. S. commander. My planes take off on my runway! NOW!"

He was so upset, he almost didn't enjoy his turtle the next two days.

Then on the ninth day, toward evening, he did lose his appetite. Major Jangstraw appeared, all punctilio and salutes, and left a piece of paper with Lieutenant Hall. On the piece of paper was an account, stated as follows:

Due to His Majesty's Government from U.S.A. AAF Detachment, The Stone, for Sixty-two of His

Majesty's Turtles at Five Pounds Sterling Each. . . .
Three hundred ten Pounds Sterling.

Rusty Farson sat in the emergency meeting he had called, his eyes worried.

"How about it, Hall? What'll we do? You know how much of a chance we have to pry—let's see—three hundred ten pounds—thirteen hundred dollars loose from Mainland QM!"

"Don't make me laugh," Swanson said. "Those paddlefeet wouldn't authorize you two-bits worth of expenditure if you captured Louie the Louse singlehanded and intact!" He frowned. "So that's the deal! That's what the old boy was driving at with his 'His Majesty's creatures' talk!"

Rusty nodded. He worried his close-cropped, graying thatch with strong, square fingers.

"Old Jangstraw heard the shooting and investigated, I suppose. He and Jones-Smith probably sat up nights reading British law about His Majesty's creatures. At five pounds the copy for the turtles. I wonder if he can—omigosh, Hall!"

A burst of gunfire came from the direction of the beach. Swanson winced and got up.

"There go another twenty pounds Sterling, sir. Brother, those aren't guns, they are cash-registers!"

"Stop them," Farson ordered. "Not that the British can make this stick. What do you think, Hall?"

The executive officer blinked when Swanson slammed out of the room.

"Well, from what I know of Colonel Jones-Smith—look out!"

Farson nodded, his eyes troubled.

"That's my only worry. I'd say that the turtles belong to whoever wants them. But the old boy is very careful about his punctilio, precedents and all of that. If he presents a bill for His Majesty's Government, he must have thrashed the whole thing out thoroughly."

Hall worried a knuckle with strong teeth.

"Look! The turtles we got came up on, the beach, at our side of the Area. Right? Okay, then. They are American turtles. I don't think Jones-Smith can make it stick, either. But to avoid argument, we can claim that."

Farson thought about it.

"I wonder! The roads, the runways and the movies are ours. Also the water-distilling plant. But about the beach strip, now, I don't think so." He made a wry face. "I guess I'm back on my Spam diet again, blast it!"

SWANSON came dragging back into the room.

"Five more. And Jangstraw is acting as official score-keeper. You're not going to let them get away with this, are you Skipper? I mean, they get steak and roasts and like that regularly. These turtles are not important to them. Heck, I bet they never even tasted any!"

"Telephone them and make an appointment for zero-nine-hundred hours, tomorrow. We'll straighten this out. Meantime, no more turtle hunting."

"Roger, sir, will do," Hall said. He turned the crank vigorously on the field telephone, which was lashed to the wall.

". . . Colonel the Honourable Geoffrey L. M. N. Jones-Smith would be delighted to see Lieutenant-Colonel Russell D. Farson at the suggested hour in the morning. A pleasure. Thank you for calling, old chap. Toodle-oo. . . ."

They ate turtle that meal only because there was so much of it stacked up. But Rusty hardly enjoyed Jack Benny in the movies that night. Nor were Hall or Swanson balls of fire at levity. They were all suffering from too-rich food.

After all, fifteen hundred dollars worth of turtle is apt to lie heavily on the stomach.

THE whole thing was as cut-and-dried as a ration of GI corned-beef.

"Not my idea, doncher know, old chap," Jones-Smith murmured, his eyes carefully on the account of the AAF detachment. "British Law, what? 'Any creature that comes upon His Majesty's shores is His Majesty's creature.' "He pronounced it as if it were spelled "creeet-chaw." "Thus the sea-turtles are His Majesty's creeet-chaws. His Majesty's turtles, doncher know."

"We have no appropriation for it, Colonel, and no chance of getting one," Hall said. "You see, we didn't know. To us, turtles are turtles. We don't admit them to citizenship, in the United States."

Jones-Smith's pale eyes froze the Executive Officer quite thoroughly. Swanson flashed Farson's other side a warning look and cut in desperately. "Now that we know about it, we can—er—take steps to stop the turtle hunting. Can we let it go at that, sir?"

"Several cases of wanton destruction of His Majesty's turtles have been reported by Jangstraw. Indiscriminate shooting. . . ."

"The offenders shall be severely punished," Farson cut in. "But we'll probably find they were members of crews ferrying through and can't be identified positively."

"I dare say," Major Jangstraw said, not moving even his thin lips. "Steps must be taken. But about this accounting. . . ."

"I can't authorize payment," Farson said. "Nor can I get anyone else to. It would take an Act of Congress to reimburse me if I paid it. Which I can't, anyway. I have family responsibilities."

"And we have Empire responsibilities, old chap," Jones-Smith murmured. "Oh, well, I s'pose it is another of those beastly issues that must be taken up with your State Department."

Farson groaned inwardly. He could see the picture now. The British Ambassador in

Washington would submit a complaint to the U. S. State Department. The State Department would frown and turn it over to the Chief of Staff, U. S. Army. Hap Arnold would get it from them. And get it!

Then it would go to General George, of the ATC. General George would refer it to General Walsh, of the SAD, the division which supervised The Stone. And Farson would be called to the Mainland to explain. If he could.

Besides the fact that he might have to pay, Farson didn't have the time. There was a war on. And he was responsible for getting planes fueled and serviced and crews fed and rested and then re-briefed for the further flight of 1200 miles from The Stone onward. There just wasn't time. And he didn't intend to have this deal hanging over him eternally, worrying about who did what to whose turtles and who got the money.

"I'd like to have a few days to think this over, Colonel," he hedged, as he sought for a way out. "Agreeable?"

"Think what out, old chap—British Law? The turtles are His Majesty's turtles, and that is that. Says so in the books, doncher know. However, there are further offenses in this matter to be added to the complaint—more turtles.

"We'll submit our count—Major Jangstraw's calculations—to you for comment before we forward it through proper channels. That will be tomorrow awfternoon, let us say? Veddy well, gentlemen! Sorry, you know, and all that. But Law is Law. His Majesty's creeetchaws are His Majesty's creeetchaws!"

Outside, Hall spoke darkly.

"I wonder if they vote, the turtles? Holy cow, did you ever hear such a lot of gumbeating? And a war on! Louie the Louse? Okay! Crack-ups? Okay! Bum food? Okay! Lose planes and crews in the water? Okay! But just let us improve our

rations with His Majesty's turtles and it gives with Gehenna!"

"Here's a good argument, Skipper," Swanson offered. "We will say these turtles are identical with those we have off the United States. In fact, they all are turtles from the United States. They can't prove otherwise. How about it?"

"They get naturalized, or something, when they land here," Farson growled. "They become British."

"Why don't we, then? We landed here. We aren't British!"

"Maybe the runway is British, too," Hall said. "And the roads and the movies. Heck, this was Lend-Lease and it is ours on rental. Now if the beach strip were ours on rental, too, then it is U. S. property, and we can grab the turtles and no questions asked. How about that?"

Farson sighed.

"I looked that up already. The beach is theirs. No question of it. Well, we've got twenty-four hours to come up with a good one. But it burns my Yankee pants off to think this Old School Tie laddie is sticking it to me and I can't do anything about it—maybe."

"Huh? What do you mean, 'maybe'?" Hall asked.

"Well, I've still got one card up my sleeve. I hate to play it unless I have to. When I flash it, it is the desperation play. The old college try. Meantime, issue an order raising Cain about the turtles. Another one. Make it stiff as you can."

"Roger, sir," Hall said. "Er—maybe we'd better add that all of His Majesty's turtles are to be saluted henceforth?"

"You're not a bit funny," Farson said. But he was grinning when he went slowly on his way, deep in thought.

COLONEL JONES-SMITH scanned the compilation and nodded.

"Jangstraw estimated seventy-eight

turtles, old chap. At five pounds each. A total of three hundred ninety pounds Sterling. Fair, what?"

Farson shrugged.

"I suppose so. Incidentally, it is just about the exact count we have on you. For toll purposes."

Jangstraw sat erect and blinked.

"Eh? Us? Toll? What are you driving at, sir?"

Hall and Swanson blinked and stared at one another and then back at Farson. The U. S. commander shrugged.

The runway is ours. The roads are ours. The water-distilling plant is ours. The movies are ours. Just as the turtles are yours. It doesn't say anything about your using the runway for patrol planes.

"It does say, our agreement, that Allied aircraft may use the strip for ferrying purposes. Now, about the roads—they are my work, without question—and the movies and the water-distilling equipment. Have you ever heard of a toll-gate, Colonel? Or you, Major Jangstraw?"

JONES-SMITH was so wide-eyed his eye couldn't grip the monocle.

"But, of course, old chap! Where you pay a fee to use a road or a bridge, eh? To be sure! But I say, man, it is unthinkable that you should bring this up! We are your allies, old boy!"

Major Jangstraw sucked on his lower lip. "He wouldn't do it, you know," he told Jones-Smith. "It's a bluff, what? Like that bally game of poker! Raw-ther! Oh, no, a bit too thick, what?"

"Think so, eh?" Farson drawled. "Well, you've got just the same sort of fleas biting on you that I have on me. Your superiors. You don't want them yelling at you and asking for receipts and make five copies and reply by indorsement any more than I do. But you will have!

"I'm computing your tolls at five

pounds for each British plane that takes off daily. Five pounds for each time your Jeeps move down our roads. Five pounds toll for parking the Jeeps at the movies, and like that." He grinned.

"You know how long your boots would last if you short-cut across that sharp, knifing lava-rock. Heck, a tractor couldn't even make it. About the water? Well, I'm afraid the showers will be no more.

"I have no authority to use U. S. pipe to supply British baths. Or drinking water. Maybe I can't make it stick. But it will bring your superiors down on your necks if I send in my bill."

"I say, I say!" Jones-Smith murmured, stunned.

"Another thing," Farson said, quietly. "If you report that we are eating His Majesty's turtles, it will probably give your superiors the idea that maybe you don't need that Argentine beef you are getting, after all. Do I—er—make myself clear?"

Jangstraw sat with jaws slacked and eyes glazed. Colonel the Honourable Geoffrey L. M. N. Jones-Smith murmured, "painfully, old chap. Painfully!"

Swanson and Hall gazed at their skipper with admiration shining in their eyes. The old goat had plenty of kick in him yet! Farson sat with his brown eyes bland in his weathered face. Then he moved.

"Well? I guess that is all you want, eh, Colonel?"

"Sit down, old boy, sit down!" Jones-Smith barked. "Harrumph. Haw! I say, deuced embarrassing, what? Blawst those turtles anyway, coming ashore to create this issue!"

"They're pretty good eating." Farson shrugged. "As you will no doubt find out.

Of course, nothing like mutton or roast beef. Would you care to try some at our mess, Colonel?"

"No, no, no, no, NO!" Jones-Smith clipped out. "I prefer to take your word, old boy. Raw-ther! Hm-m-m-m-m. You know, old chap, they depend on us, at home, to be—er—diplomatic about this sort of thing. Still, there is the duty of protecting His Majesty's creetchaws. His turtles, in this instance. Jangstraw? Any suggestions?"

The major sighed.

"If we could perhaps have assurance that the Yanks would cease machine-gun practice on the creetchaws? And—perhaps permit them one of His Majesty's turtles daily? How would that be, Colonel?"

Jones-Smith grimaced. He stared at Farson.

"Are they really palatable, old chap? I mean really?"

"Well." Farson shrugged. "I think you'd find it much more to your taste to have us"—he indicated Hall and Swanson—"to dinner while we seal this secret agreement with some Scotch, than to join us in some turtle at our mess while we talk it over. However, perhaps you'd prefer Spam and powdered-eggs?"

"At six, then," Jones-Smith barked, banishing the idea. "Agreed?"

"Agreed," Farson said, getting to his feet. "I like my beef rare, if you don't mind? Ready, Hall? Swanson?"

The Britishers came to their feet with them. They saluted one another with dignity and decorum. Then Rusty Farson walked to the window that faced out onto the beach strip and came to another salute.

"To His Majesty's turtles," he murmured.