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WINIFRED WILLIAMS • LORD WAVELL • H. G. MISRA
R. MARRACK • H. E. BATES • MARY BENEDETTA

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There can be no peace or prosperity for India, nor anyone else, until Japanese ambitions are utterly destroyed. India is joined with four of the toughest nations in the world in spirit and in action. The end is certain and India may be proud of her contribution to it.

When the end will come it is difficult to say. Germany is reeling under a series of shocks, physical and moral, which may well put her out of the ring at an early date, although we must not count on it. We shall then be able to intensify the war against Japan.

— Lord Wavell, Viceroy of India,
to the Indian Legislature.

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Aircrew

H. E. BATES



There is somewhere on record, even if only in memory, a story of the last war and of how a pilot and his observer-gunner, flying one of those crazy antiquated orange crates, decided it would be safer, as well as more amusing, if each decided to learn the other's job. Accordingly the pilot learned to shoot, and the gunner learned to fly. There is no evidence that this reciprocal arrangement did not work admirably until one day, after a more than usually odd landing, the gunner warmly accused the pilot of not knowing how to fly.

"That was a hell of a landing!" he said.

"Good God!" the pilot replied, "I thought *you* were landing her.

Since those carefree days when two in a plane was company and the idea of three had not become a crew, much has happened to man's relations with the air. And among other things there has grown up the tradition of the air-crew. Before the war, certainly before the thirties, one scarcely ever heard of such a thing as an aircrew, and indeed such a thing hardly existed. Except airships, and then no aircrew of seven or eight or more men had ever flown into

battle. It was not until the creation of the R.A.F.'s Hampdens, Wellingtons and Whitleys; once regarded and described as giant bombers, and the larger contemporary bombers with crews of seven, and the still larger American types with crews of ten and eleven, that the fact of aircrew became established, and with it the rules of conduct which in a short time have become tradition and so, in a way, unwritten law.

The tradition and precedent for anything that happens in the air is very young. For flyers, of whatever nationality, there are no centuries-old tradition of classic gallantry and Spartan pain. A soldier fighting in the mountains about Catania or Cassino may remember that the Greeks and Hannibal were once there before him. A sailor engaged in the pursuit of the Bismarck may like to think of, and may even draw inspiration from, the pursuit at Trafalgar. The flyer has no such memories. If the last war can give him the names of a dozen heroic pioneers, and the intervening peace the epics of Kingsford-Smith, Jean Batten, the Mollisons and Lindbergh, it cannot give him, as a pattern of valour, a single air-bat-



de a thousandth part as renowned as the great victory of arms by the English bows at Agincourt in 1415.

In all the history of warfare there is in fact nothing to compare with the aircrew: the company of seven or eight men in charge of a compact lethal weapon, closely devoted to each other in duty and comradeship, relying with absolute equality on each other for efficiency and survival. Crews of ships are often small, but for centuries we have generally been accustomed to think of them as more often in hundreds. In sea warfare the submarine is the nearest parallel to the bomber. In land warfare there is no parallel at all, except in those accidents of war where small companies of men, cut off and outnumbered, have manned impossible posts until death or reinforcement have finally relieved them. From all these the aircrew takes no tradition or form.

Its shape, its customs, its behaviour, are things which have sprung entirely out of our time. We of our generation can look at the aircrew, in fact, and say not only with truth but also with amazement if war has not killed our capacity for it, that here is an entirely new manifestation of man's behaviour on earth. We are a generation that takes wonders, as we sometimes take scientific power and terror, too much for granted. But we should remember, some times, that never before in the history of man has man flown about the sky fighting battles of night, in the hideous extremes of sixty or seventy degrees of frost, in clouds violently charged with hellish electric power, in the wonder of

white moonlight above a cotton of cloud, or on fire. These things have not happened to man before. But they happen now, and are happening every day and night, to the aircrews of our generation.

Out of this kind of experience the aircrew has evolved its traditions. No one has taught it how to behave; it has taught itself. Sometimes the question has been asked as to how a captain selects his crew. The answer is that generally he does not. If he did he might conceivably select men whose behaviour was a known quantity, or whose character had affinities with his own. As it is his crew is, with few exceptions, selected for him. He is presented with a set of men whose character, ability and potentials are to him completely unknown things. They have to be proved to him, or he himself has to be proved to them, in only one way: in action.

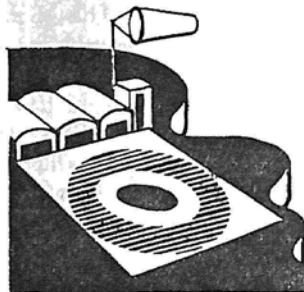
It invariably happens that aircrews are of the oddest mixture. In the R.A.F. Englishmen find themselves flying with Canadians, Welshmen, Scots, Australians, New Zealanders, West Indians and South Africans. Bank clerks find themselves teamed with fruit salesmen, fishmongers, insurance men, railway clerks, engineers, carpenters, farmers and tailors. If you seek a living and working example of democracy here it is. And it is made still more living, and very remarkable, by an astonishingly untraditional system which is unique, at any rate among British men at arms. For it frequently happens that the captain of a bomber is a sergeant who has beneath him, at his command, men of much

higher rank. In the Navy such a system would be an inconceivable heresy. In aircrews it is a common and accepted fact for officers to serve willingly and devotedly under men who are several degrees below them in rank. In the R.A.F. such a situation is not thought remarkable. For in the air there are no ranks; there can be no autocracy given by the stripes on a man's sleeve. The only autocracy is the word of the captain — which, whether he is sergeant or flying officer, warrant officer or group captain — is absolute and final law. For the rest everything is equal.

This equality is the basis of all aircrew tradition and behaviour. It is the basis, too, of an uncommonly fine devotion. It exists because it is firmly based on an irrefutable fact — the fact that in the air navigators, gunners, bombardiers, radio operators, engineers and pilots are all of undisputed and equal importance in the life of the aircraft. It is this equality, functioning within the confined limit of aircraft space, in common danger, common purpose, common discomfort, cold and pain, common exhilaration, common fear and in the last resort common sacrifice, that make the modern aircrew the most democratic unit of war ever created in our own, in perhaps any other time.

This is not all. Behind the devotion of aircrews to each other lies a common

devotion to the aircraft. Much of the unexpressed pride of flying men rises from their contact and devotion to a powerful and beautiful piece of mechanism. Tanks and mortar are, at best hideous things. Ships and aircraft are things of beauty, sacrificing the pride of men who handle them. For this reason, perhaps, aircrews have sometimes made the most fantastic sacrifices for their aircraft.



Every day bombers are brought back to bases under conditions where flying, in peace-time, would have been thought sheer madness. They have been flown back by dying pilots, and by navigators who have never flown before. There is a record of a navigator working out a course from Germany after his right foot had been shot away.

No story you can invent can match, for fantasy of action, the stories of bomber crews contained in the sober files of everyday records. And it is out of such records, before the heat of their action has time to get cold, that the tradition of aircrews springs. Their inspiration — if ever they think of it like that, which is very doubtful — springs not from the memory of some legendary Agincourt of Stirlings fought long ago — but from the sharp, stripped moment of the present.

To future generations of Britons this present will be the Agincourt, the Trafalgar, of our time.