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Only Regret Is Medics Can't Fix His Watch, Too.

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# Only Regret Is Medics Can't Fix His Watch, Too

By ERIKA MANN

LONDON

**I**N the afternoon we had had a bit of sunshine, but now it was raining again, and there would be no take-off for the next half-hour or so.

Our plane was crowded; its bucket seats weren't too comfortable; nevertheless none of us dreamed of getting off. Quietly and resignedly we stayed where we were, for unless you invaded one of the tents which U.S. troops had brought to Normandy or crept into one of the dug-outs all you could do was to stand about in the rain and watch the mud—a sticky, squelchy glue—swallow up your boots.

My fellow-travellers were casualties—none of them gravely wounded, walking cases all.

"Going to England?" The shout came from outside and was refreshingly cheerful. "May I come in?"

The nurse in charge of our transport rushed towards the door.

"Sure," she said. "Are you injured?"

"No . . ." said the voice; "well—just a little."

And there he was—a bare-headed and breathless young man in the uniform of the R.A.F. "That's what I call luck," he said.

"Boy, I never thought I'd make it tonight. Actually," he added, in a lower voice as if talking to himself, "I hardly thought I'd make it at all."

He was Pilot Officer George L. Bilz, 26, of Toronto, and it turned out that he had been on a mission earlier in the day and an hour ago he had crash-landed his Typhoon on our airfield. "We'd been over Paris," he reported. "There were six of us. Everything seemed fine—weather, visibility and all. Once in a while a bit of something or other would come up—no flak really, just small stuff, nothing to worry about. Then things started to happen. Sixteen of them! Sixteen Me 109's closing in on us from every possible direction! It was quite a party, and—as parties go—I couldn't say now just what happened. I got one of them though; at least I think I did. I saw another go into a spin. After that something went wrong and I didn't see anything much for a while."

Ever since he had occupied the bucket-seat opposite mine I had tried to make out the color of his eyes. At present they were red, glaringly and incredibly.

"It's oil," he explained. "They got me in a dozen or so different spots. My starboard engine was completely shot off; my gasoline

tank had gone and I was losing gasoline pretty fast; one of my tires had been hit, too. Luckily nothing had happened to the radio and once I knew I was over liberated France I made up my mind to crash-land right then and there. I couldn't see a thing—not even ships on the channel. Besides, with the speedometer gone there was no way of telling about my speed. All I knew was that I had to bring her in at 120 miles an hour, or else get into a fatal spin. And, funnily enough, I made it!"

There was nothing boastful about his way of telling his story. Not even the pert understatement with which he concluded had sounded deliberate.

At this point the nurse intervened. Had his eyes been looked after, she wanted to know. And what about those splinters in his leg?

"All taken care of," he assured her. "Your doctors fixed me up all right. Too bad they couldn't repair my watch, too. Anyone got the time?"

The time was 6.30 and we had been over the channel for 10 minutes or so. The lucky Canadian had brought us all luck. While listening to him I had barely noticed that it had stopped raining and that we had finally ascended into a friendly sky.

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