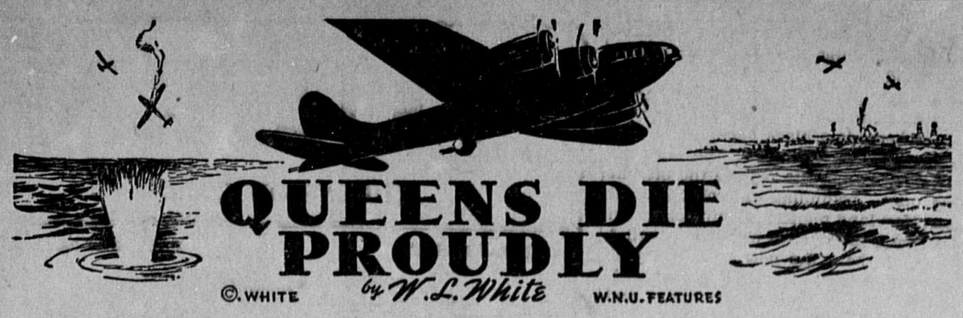

FOREWORD

SINCE Lieutenant Colonel Frank Kurtz and the other members of the crew of the Swoose, who furnished the material for this story, are as modest as they are brave, they asked me to point out that this does not pretend to be a complete history of the air force in the Southwest Pacific war, or even of the achievements of the flying fortresses in those islands.

After they had read my completed story, they insisted that many men who did as much or more in this war as they, are mentioned here only casually or not at all. These omissions were necessary because I wished to build the story on personal narratives, confining it wherever possible to what these five men had seen and felt, so in fairness to them it should be judged only on that basis.

But within these limitations we have striven for accuracy. Consequently I am proud that Lieutenant General George H. Brett, who is one of the ablest of that small group of officers who pioneered air power in the American army and who, soon after the original debacle on Clark Field, took command of the Far Eastern air forces and in six months laid the foundations for our eventual Pacific victory, could, after reading the manuscript, write me that "as far as memory serves, the incidents you described of operations in Java and Australia are historically correct."

W. L. WHITE.

CHAPTER I

The grizzled old Flying Fortress stood on the runway of an American airfield, presently to depart for another continent and another war zone. Those scratches on her running gear were made by sand grains of Wake Island when she was on her way to the Far East before the war. That little dent on her wing was made by a spent-bomb fragment the day the war began, when the Japanese destroyed all but a very few of our Far Eastern Air Force on Clark Field in the Philippines. She was one of those few. The battle paint on her wings was later blistered by the sun in the high skies over Java, and still later nicked by sandstorms over the Australian desert.

Of the very few to escape Clark Field, she is the only one to come home, and now, her guns removed, she is an old war horse turned out to pasture, the transport plane of a three-star general of the American Air Force.

Lieutenant General George H. Brett, USA, who until recently commanded the Far Eastern skies for the United Nations.

On her side is a jaunty emblem daubed there by the hand of some boy, unknown now and probably dead—the outline of a misshapen bird "The Swoose"—"half swan and half goose"—taken from a jingle, and beneath it the skeptical legend "It Flies?"

It did, for countless thousands of miles through cloud canyons and over oceans and islands of the war zone, and now in the shade of her wing sit six who have a story to tell. The pilot is standing. He is Frank Kurtz, who has been three times a member of the championship American Olympic Team as a high diver, who a year ago was a lieutenant in the 19th Bombardment Group, and who now holds the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Silver Star, and is a lieutenant colonel at thirty-one.

The others are Margo, his pretty, blonde, blue-eyed wife; Captain Harry Schrieber, his black-eyed, black-haired navigator; Master Sergeant Charlie Reeves, his bombardier; Master Sergeant Rowland Boone, his gunner; and Master Sergeant "Red" Varner, the merriest embalmer in the Air Corps, who a few years ago ran a comfortable little undertaking parlor out on the Coast.

"Red" is now crew chief of the Swoose, and lords it over the ground crews who swarm over her to check her engines when she hits the ground. He brings hot coffee and sandwiches to her pilot and passengers when she is aloft, and it was his duty in Java and Australia to steal anything from a carburetor to a roasting chicken necessary to keep the General comfortable and the Swoose in the air. But this is getting ahead of the story.

Since this was written, all the master sergeants of the Swoose crew have been commissioned.

Meanwhile Frank, the pilot, paces up and down. It isn't easy for him to begin. Few things have been easy for Frank Kurtz. It wasn't easy as a boy, when he earned his living selling papers on the streets of Kansas City. It wasn't easy later to leave home when he was fourteen because he had decided to become an Olympic platform diver and there was a famous instructor on the Coast the boy hoped he could persuade to coach him. He did persuade him, but it wasn't easy to earn his way through Hollywood High School while he took the training. Before leaving him, Frank had decided to become a pilot. He'll tell you it's so much like diving—all you need is perfect balance and timing and control; yet it wasn't easy to take those many hours of flying lessons, or later to win the Junior World's Landplane Speed Record, or to work his way through college and marry so popular and pretty a girl as Margo, or to learn to fly the Army way at Randolph Field.

All of it was hard, and Frank is never quite satisfied, because he's sure, looking back, that they all could have been done maybe a little better or at least a little quicker if he'd only worked harder; so naturally he's modest about them.

"I don't know where it begins," he said. "Maybe with the Swoose. Yet she wasn't my plane at the very first. I think it begins with Old 99, my very first plane, and with old Tex, *(Lieutenant Arthur Edward Gary.)* my co-pilot, and the rest of my crew, that I saw lying there on Clark Field—eight in a line.

"Maybe it begins with Old 99 and those eight in a line, lying so still, and it was such a bright, sunshiny day, and so quiet after the Jap bombers left.

"You see, on the morning war began Old 99 was clear down at the

The grizzled old Flying Fortress stood on the runway.

other end of the field, out of sight beyond the hump in the runway, and my crew was waiting with her, keeping her all warmed for the takeoff while I went to lunch and to the pilots' meeting.

"I was to have bicycled over to them, and we were to have taken off for Formosa, to take pictures of what the Japs were doing.

"I had finished lunch when the first wave hit. After that I had to stay in the foxhole for about an hour while they strafed the field. But when the fighters left, I jumped on my bike and rode down the runway through the smoke of the other burning Fortresses, to see what had happened to Old 99.

"Only if I begin here, maybe nobody would understand what his plane and his crew means to a pilot; that it's like his home and his family. Boys you've lived with and worked with for months. Your life has depended on them and their lives on you. And you've seen the pictures of their wives or girls, and know just where they carry them in their wallets, and how proud they are of them, and you've told them about your wife, and they know what you hope for in the future, and what you haven't told them you know they've guessed, and the same with you about them.

"And the plane—it isn't something that belongs to the Government with a number; it's Old 99, the beautiful new Flying Fortress that belongs to you. It's more than your home—it's, well, a kind of a sweetheart. All of you picked her up off the assembly line at the Boeing plant where she was born — a beautiful, smooth, shining, naked thing. Then all of you took her up over the clouds and wrapped that beautiful blue star-spangled gown of the skies around her, which is the way every Fortress ought to be dressed, because they're the Queens of the high skies.

"And you're so damn proud of her, all of you—knowing you're flying a Fortress, which everybody admits is the best ship in the business. So there isn't anything any of you won't do—pilots and greaseballs of the ground crew alike—to keep her polished and adjusted and ticking like the high-precision watch she was when you got her.'

"Well, as I said, there was a rise in the runway, and as I pedaled up it, for a minute I was afraid what I would see, looking ahead. But then my heart suddenly gave a big pound, because there was Old 99's vertical stabilizer—the big curve of her tail rising high like a game salmon's tail fin—gleaming above the runway; so I pumped the bike a few times more, being thankful it was a good American bike I'd bought off a fighter pilot instead of the junky Jap copies that are so cheap in Manila, only, my God, then—just then—

"I don't know whether I got off the bike at that point or not. Or fell off it. Or rode on a while, and then left it lying by the runway. All I can remember is how Old 99 looked and, a little later, walking over the field, slowly, toward her; afraid to come too close, too fast. Think about it not as a plane that has burned, or even your own house, but like it was a good friend burned up. And all that is left is that tall silver tail still up in the air, not even scorched or smoke-stained, and I am walking over the field toward her.

"Her poor old ribs black, twisted now; and with the aluminum skin melted off them so her carcass is naked, and you can see right through into the pilot's compartment, and the seats where I sat, and good old Tex, my co-pilot, right beside me. And my control wheel, and my two sets of pedals, and the duplicate set for Tex, only all melted or twisted with the heat—even the wall bracket where the coffee thermos used to hang is still there, only all twisted. And her four motors tumbled forward out of their nacelles in her crumpled wings onto the ground—everything about Old 99 still there, only melted and bent and ruined and her back sagging and broken, like you would take a delicate silver flying fish between your fists and break its back and drop it on the ground to die.

"Everything there, only something else, too. And I couldn't make out what it was. Yet I must have guessed. Because I began to feel sick at my heart and my stomach when I saw that curious, half-burned bundle of something lying there under the crumpled wing, and as I got closer I couldn't even deny to myself what it was. One of my crew. Lying under there. And right beside him another. Poor faithful boys, following orders, staying loyally by Old 99 even in the face of the advancing Japanese bomb pattern across the field like a hailstorm—and under the plane's crumpled belly still another, and under the tail our little Dodson—he must have run under there for shelter, and Old 99's tail settled down on him as her back girders melted when she burned. But only after I had walked around the tail could I see the eight in a line.

"There they were, lying so very still on this beautiful quiet day, my eight boys of Old 99's crew in a senseless, irregular line toward the woods, to which they had been running for shelter when they all had been killed at once, and left sprawling as they died.

"I remember standing there by the tail and counting — one, two, three, in that line and so on up to eight, toward the woods—my boys and each one I knew. Standing there, I could see it but not realize it even though I knew it—knew which ones would have their wives' and girls' crumpled pictures in their pockets. I knew they were dead now, and I started walking down that irregular line of men who had been running toward the woods, and then very suddenly it began to get me. For a while I don't know what I did. Then I remember going along the line from one to the other, talking to each the way I always would, and patting him on the shoulder like he were alive, because for me they weren't dead yet. And crying. And I'm not ashamed of that.

"Talking to each, from good old Sergeant Burgess, who was nearest the plane, on down the irregular line to dear old Tex at the very end, with all his clothes torn off by the blast. I recognized his shoulders. They were a fighter's big broad shoulders—Tex had been boxing champion of Texas A. & M.

"So maybe for me it begins when I got to where Tex was lying, and sat down by him to talk it over, lifting his curly head with one hand and patting his hairy back with the other. It was still soft and warm. It wasn't a body yet. It was Tex himself at the end of that sprawling line. I told him I didn't know why this had happened any more than he did. But they could trust me to find out, so it would never happen again. But regardless of that, he must understand this wasn't the end.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

IMPROVED UNIFORM INTERNATIONAL

SUNDAY SCHOOL Lesson

By HAROLD M. LUNDQUIST, D. D.
Of The Moody Bible Institute of Chicago.
Released by Western Newspaper Union.

Lesson for February 27

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JESUS PRESENTS HIMSELF AS THE MESSIAH

LESSON TEXT: Mark 11:1-10, 15-18.
GOLDEN TEXT: Again the high priest asked him, and said unto him, Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed? And Jesus said, I am.—Mark 14:61, 62.

As our Lord entered upon the last week of His earthly ministry, the time had come for Him to present Himself officially to His people as their Messiah. As He did so, we observe that He then had and now has a right to claim all that we have and are, as well as to exercise judgment over us.

I. His Right to Property (vv. 1-7).

We are so prone to call our possessions our own, and to hold them for our selfish purposes. Just a moment's reflection makes us aware that we are but stewards holding our things, as we hold ourselves, for the use of God.

That means that the Lord need only send for what we have, and we should gladly yield it to Him. "The Lord hath need" is the only requisition we need. He has absolute priority. And yet the very fact that He has need of us and what we have, dignifies our service or sacrifice on His behalf.

How surprising it was that the One who made and upholds all things (Col. 1:16, 17) should have to say, "The Lord hath need of him," in sending for a humble beast of burden. Yet therein lies a marvelous truth. He has graciously so ordered the universe that He has need of us and of our possessions.

Let us also learn the important lesson of unquestioning obedience taught in verse 4. "They went their way" to do what the Lord told them to do. How greatly simplified and glorified would be the lives of Christian people if they would thus obey Christ.

As He came riding into the city, we observe

II. His Right to Praise (vv. 7-10).

God says, "Him that offereth praise glorifieth me" (Ps. 50:23), and the believer recognizes that "praise is comely for the upright" (Ps. 33:1). Jesus is entirely worthy of the praise of every heart and voice.

Presenting Himself as their Messiah, Jesus received the enthusiastic acclaim of His disciples and friends, who were probably joined by others who were drawn by the excitement.

The Pharisees did not join in (see Luke 19:39, 40) nor did the city, not even knowing who He was (Matt. 21:10, 11). So it is today; some love and praise Him, some hate Him, others just ignore Him. Of which class are you?

He gave Jerusalem and the nation a final opportunity to receive Him. It was not yet too late, but it was their last chance. Such a time comes in the life of everyone of us. They rejected Him. Do we?

But even though some did reject, let us not forget that there were those who shouted, "Hosanna," who cast their garments down before Him and waved palms of victory and joy. Thank God for their holy enthusiasm. Pray God that we may have a little more of it.

III. His Right to Punish (vv. 15-18).

People like to hear about a God of love, one who knows their weakness, and is kind toward their infirmities. But we must not forget that God shows His love by a great and holy hatred of sin, and a desire to deliver us from that sin. This means that He must and will deal in drastic fashion with those who persist in their sin.

A second time He drove out from His Father's house those who had made it a place of merchandise, of commercialized thievery.

This is a majestic picture. The Son of God and Son of Man steps into the center of this unholy traffic and with mighty, holy indignation (not anger) drives it out. The people who had suffered long because of this religious racket, which paid a nice "cut" to the priests themselves (probably as a "gift" even as such things are managed now), were jubilant.

We read in the same story in Matthew 21:12-22 that the boys who were in the temple (for such is doubtless the meaning of "children" in verse 15) were so delighted at this magnificent exercise of His divine authority that they broke out into "Hosannas," which really amounted to a holy "Hurrah."

Well, why not? Hurrah for our Lord! He will not tolerate iniquity even though it hides under the cloak of religion. He is not afraid to speak out and to act against sin and corruption.

Possibly the church would reach a good many more men and boys in our day if it would step out in faith to fight the wrong and support the right. Then maybe the young men would shout, "Hurrah for the church."

The chief priests and scribes were afraid and displeased and began to plot against Him. The passage in Matthew indicates that their anger was aroused both by the acts of Jesus and the praise of the boys.

BOBBY JONES AND THE WAR

Bobby Jones, famous golf star, is now a major in the U. S. intelligence service in Europe. There is no better man to size up the distance, get the range and advise whether a bazooka or a mashie is needed on the next shot.

—•—

Bobby is on the job right now analyzing the enemy's form, finding out what clubs he has in his bag, determining whether the Nazis are lying about the score, and reporting whether their "new weapon" has an iron or a metal shaft.

—•—

There are rumors that the Germans are breaking their clubs, yelling at the caddies and blaming everything on the greens committees. Such a psychology as that is the prelude to defeat, as any golfer can testify. Bobby's job is to make an official report.

—•—

Possible File by Mr. Jones.

7893-A (A. Hitler).—All inquiries and observations regarding this party indicate he is through as a big-time competitor. He doesn't even talk a good game today. Now changes his stance frequently, wiggles the club too much, yells constantly for quiet when addressing the ball and hits from outside in. Recently used a putter to get ball out of a mudhole, on "hunch." Lost 17 holes in an 18-hole match the other day and called it a successful disengagement according to plan. Should not be taken seriously in class competition.

—•—

3582-B (Goering).—Now takes out five or six clubs before deciding which one to use. Has shifted from wood to irons on driving tees in the argument that he would rather keep straight than get distance. Keeps talking about a super club he used to have. Has shortened backswing so much it resembles preparation for a six-foot putt. Very irritable on the greens. Some idea of his state of mind can be obtained from the fact he recently tried wearing medals on his golf pants to see if they gave him more confidence that way. No luck.

—•—

4992-C (Goebbels). — Now putts with a chipper, approaches with a driver and tries a spoon in traps. Constantly complains there is something wrong with the ball. Took nine putts on a green the other day and delivered a long harangue claiming that in spirit and morale he was stronger than ever.

Is trying to drive with the left hand but that's no good either.

—•—

3330-H (Himmler).—Still thinks he can win by hanging his competitors, shooting the caddies and burning the scorecards. Is so nervous now that he won't even come to the first tee without his personal firing squad.

• • •

THOUGHTS ON A JET PLANE

The jet plane intrigues us. It is a cross between an airplane, a skyrocket and a comet, with an instrument board. It is a quantity-production meteor.

—•—

Science and engineering are moving too fast. By the time a pilot gets any new plane back from a test flight it's old-fashioned. It had become obsolete in midair.

—•—

This jet plane strikes us as something born of a nightmare, the thriller-diller fannies and the radio hair-raisers. It is a hot flame with passenger accommodations.

—•—

Man is ceasing to be a man and is becoming a Roman candle, a piece of fireworks, a skyrocket with a hat and coat.

—•—

A speed of 500 or 600 miles an hour is promised by jet planes. That's traveling, as the seagull chirped as he went through the windshield of a runaway bus going in the opposite direction.

—•—

You can't visualize such speed unless you have seen a man chase his hat through a wind-tunnel on roller skates.

—•—

It's faster than sound. A pilot gets to his destination before he hears his orders and gets back before the echo has been verified.

—•—

It has no propellers. They would only get in the way!

—•—

"It's all done by gas," explained Elmer Twitchell, the well-known aviator engineer, pinochle shark and stamp collector, today. "Yes, sir, all done by gas and air pressures, with black magic, and live sparks thrown in."

—•—

"I have just made a flight in one," said Elmer, who looked pretty scared. "At least, that's what the doctors told me it was."

—•—

"I just stepped in," he exclaimed. "the skipper touched a button and—presto—I was going so fast that radio messages had to move to the right to let faster moving vehicles pass."

—•—

"Just what's to be gained?" we asked. "The other fellow is bound to get a 600-mile-an-hour plane, too."

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Spoken Languages

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Jerry Shaw

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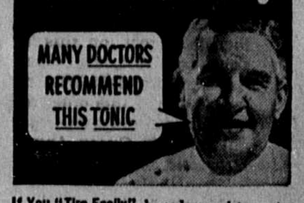
RUN DOWN?
MANY DOCTORS RECOMMEND THIS TONIC



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