

# **Wings Above Warsaw**

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## **From *The London Times*, September 1**

Germany has opened attack on Poland. Warsaw and all Polish cities await tonight's inevitable air raids... Among prominent Londoners stranded in Warsaw is Dennis Carradine, noted sportsman aviator and son of Sir Francis Carradine, well known Parliamentary leader.

A RAMSHACKLE taxicab jounced along the road leading to the Warsaw Airport. A blond, solid young man, the lone occupant of the cab, leaned forward in his seat, placing his mouth close to the ear of the driver.

"I say," said the passenger, "how far is it to the Warsaw Airport now?"

The cabby, an old fellow with a walrus moustache, spoke without turning his head. "Not far. We are almost there. A few minutes, perhaps."

Dennis Carradine didn't bother to answer. He leaned back against his seat, glancing swiftly at the luminous dials of his watch. It was almost midnight. The expected air raid was less than an hour off. Impatiently, he fished into the side pocket of his tweeds and drew out a cigarette case. He extracted a gold tipped cigarette and lighted it. As the flame glowed momentarily in the darkness, the cabby turned swiftly to issue a warning glance at his passenger.

Dennis Carradine smiled reassuringly and the cabby once more turned his concentration back to the road. "Nerves," thought Dennis, "I've never seen a city so on edge before."

Dennis felt for the black leather portfolio at his side. It was still here, reminding him of his father, of the mission he was to perform for him. Dennis remembered the anxious white face of the consulate orderly when he had picked up the portfolio at the British Legation. Everyone seemed worried over this new bluff. It was amusing. He smiled again, this time to himself, as he remembered his father's cable. The old boy had been quite insistent that he return immediately to London—by train and ship—and with the portfolio.

The taxicab lurched sharply to the right, traveled a few more yards, and came to an abrupt stop. The cabby turned half-way around in his seat, looking silently at Dennis.

"We're at the airport?" Dennis inquired.

The cabby nodded. Dennis sensed that the old fellow was more than anxious to be off. He picked up the leather portfolio from the seat and climbed out of the taxi. He pressed several banknotes into the driver's hand. Before he had time to turn, the car whipped off into the night. Dennis grinned, juggling the portfolio lightly in his huge right hand. He wondered, with merely a vague curiosity, what it contained.

Dennis stood there in the darkness, feeling the silence tingling in his eardrums, trying to accustom his eyes to his surroundings. After a moment he recognized the blurred outlines of the hangars, the towering shadows of the Airport Office. Gravel crunched under his feet as he started off in the latter direction.

"Travel by train and ship!" Dennis grinned once more at his father's command. Fancy Dennis Carradine returning to London by any other route than the skyways. England's finest sportsman flyer clinging to the ground. It was laughable.

Suddenly, without warning, Dennis heard a sibilant hissing command in Polish. A rifle muzzle jarred uncomfortably into the small of his back. A second command followed. Dennis recognized it as, "Keep walking!" Without protest he obeyed. He wanted to get to the offices anyway.

A moment later they were before the large door marking the main entrance to the Airport Office. Then, for the first time, his sentry stepped in view, a stocky fellow, clad in the uniform of the Polish infantry.

He held Dennis by the arm, knocking on the door with the butt end of his rifle. A moment later they stood blinking at a spacious, brightly-lighted room. Men in uniform stepped swiftly over to Dennis. The sentry left his side and stepped back out into the blackness, returning to post.

A small, dapper, little man with a waxed moustache, apparently the commanding officer of the group, was standing before him, speaking.

"Please explain what you are doing here." His tone was crisp, authoritative, and as his sharp eyes seemed to sweep in every detail of his appearance, Dennis ceased to wonder how the fellow guessed he was English.

"I am Dennis Carradine," Dennis began. "Three days ago I arrived here in Warsaw by plane, my own ship." He paused, slightly surprised that his name caused no reaction. "I came from London by way of Basel. I must return tonight. You'll find my passports, visas, in order and—" The Polish officer cut him off sharply.

"No planes take off from Warsaw tonight. Didn't you see the posted ordinance?"

Dennis smiled tolerantly. "Of course, naturally. However, this is rather urgent. I shall be all right, never fear. Incidentally, my name is er, ah, Carradine, Dennis Carradine." He felt certain that the commanding officer had not recognized his name the first time. Repetition might awaken the fellow.

The dapper officer was polite but firm. "Yes, Mr. Carradine, I have heard of you. Nevertheless, no one leaves the airport tonight. There are trains—"

"But—"

"As I was saying," the officer continued, "there are trains out of Warsaw, all very capable of evacuating non-combatants. I am sorry. We have our orders."

He turned and spoke rapidly in Polish to the other men in the group. They looked at Dennis and nodded, then broke up and returned to their stations by the shuttered windows. "For the present," the officer concluded, "I would advise you to make yourself as comfortable as possible during the ensuing hours. We have a rather trying wait ahead of us." He turned and strode away.

More annoyed than surprised, Dennis slumped his well-knit frame into a nearby bench. His gaze swept across the huge waiting room, now transformed into a military barracks. He noticed that soldiers sat at radio control boxes in front of the four large entrances. Head-phones were plugged into the boxes, and Dennis guessed that they must be amplifying connectors, used to pick up the sound of approaching aircraft.

The majority of the men in the room wore the insignia of the Polish Air Force on their uniforms. Dennis hadn't expected the airport to be transformed into a military base so rapidly. Germany's offensive had hardly begun. Dennis felt suddenly impatient that this mock warfare should delay him. All this rigid regimentation over something that would end in a day or so was annoying. Damned stupid.

Whether they liked it or not he was going to leave tonight, by plane. He compared the gigantic clock on the wall with his wrist watch. The expected raid was due within thirty minutes. He thought of his chunky, powerful racing ship waiting outside in the first hangar...

SIR FRANCIS CARRADINE ran a square hand through his graying hair and gazed anxiously at his watch. Parliament buzzed with many voices. The Dictator had not yet answered the ultimatum. Sir Francis thought of the portfolio carried by his son. It was a chance. It still might save the situation. Dennis would be surprised when the German officials took the portfolio from him, but it was better that he didn't know. It would make the officials even more certain that the information was authentic. If the portfolio were carried to the Dictator—then the

diplomatic bluff might avert war. Sir Francis looked up. The Prime Minister had entered...

DENNIS glanced sharply at the far corner of the room. An excited soldier at one of the sound boxes was gesticulating wildly to the commanding officer. In a moment, a knot of soldiers collected around the amplifying box. Something was up. Dennis sprang to his feet, as though interested in the proceedings. But he casually, yet carefully, backed to a tiny door leading to an unoccupied baggage room. No one noticed as he stepped inside, closing the door softly behind him. In a moment he found the window. In another he opened it, dropped softly to the ground outside.

Crouching there for a heart-beat, Dennis allowed his eyes to focus in the darkness, watching to see if he had been noticed by a sentry. Dennis grinned. This would make good telling in London. He began to move deliberately through the inky night. Chances were that sentries were posted around the field, but Dennis doubted that any would be stationed before the hangars. He noted, with satisfaction, that the doors to the hangars were open. Dennis slipped inside.

Less than thirty feet from where he stood, he could see the shadowy outlines of his stocky, low-winged monoplane. He breathed a sigh of relief. For a moment Dennis was afraid that they might have moved his ship. He went over to it soundlessly.

Swiftly, Dennis checked it over. Everything was in order. Placing the portfolio in the seat of the leather lined cockpit, he stepped back outside the hangar for one last look around the field. It wouldn't do to be surprised at this point. There was still no sign of a sentry patrol. Dennis returned to his plane, and a few minutes later was slowly rolling it out of the hangar, onto the concrete runway. In another few moments Warsaw Airport was reverberating with the snarling of his high-powered motor.

The startled Polish sentries arrived on the field just in time to see an English monoplane racing down the runway. With mouths agape they watched it climb skyward, then they rushed to spread the news to their officers.

SNUG and serene in his comfortable enclosed cockpit, Dennis Carradine watched the earth fade away beneath him. He was grinning smugly. Try to keep Carradine on the ground, would they? He chuckled again at this and threw his craft into a sharp bank. It would be best to circle the field once and check his instrument panel.

He was startled by the first explosion.

It burst about a hundred yards above and to the right of his wing-tip, rocking the ship violently. Dennis ruddered hard, forcing the bank sharper in an effort to get a glimpse of the field below.

Then a second shell burst, a little closer this time. Cursing, Dennis whipped the nose of the ship up into a steep climb. Damn them. What were they popping those anti-aircraft guns at him for? Then, even above the roar of his motor, the sound of sirens wailing in the streets of Warsaw came to his ears.

"Good God," thought Dennis, "do they take me for an invader?" Almost before he breathed the question, an answer was forming itself in his uneasy mind. There

was a general order that no Polish planes take to the air in the vicinity of Warsaw. Such being the case, anti-aircraft gunners would naturally presume that any ship in the sky would be an enemy, especially since an air raid was expected.

Dennis made certain that his instrument panel was working. Checking the gauges with a swiftness born of something akin to fear, he set a course in the general direction of Basel and turned the nose of the plane in that direction. It would be wise not to linger above Warsaw. Playing Hide-in-the-Dark with a Polish anti-aircraft battery did not appeal to Dennis at that moment.

Climbing and weaving on his new course, Dennis at last reached an altitude that seemed to pull him out of range of the guns below. At any rate, the explosions were not nearly as close now as they had previously been. He was congratulating himself on his plane and his ability when he sensed, rather than saw, the reason for the lessening of fire. The guns were ignoring his ship, now, and concentrating their bursts on a range a little less than a mile to the right and above Dennis—a section of sky almost blackened by German planes. The German sky raiders were over Warsaw!

The terrorizing wail of the warning sirens was drowned out swiftly by the thundering detonations of bombs falling in the heart of the city. The anti-aircraft batteries were now ripping the sky apart in an effort to drive off the raiders. Dennis felt as though he was an uninvited guest at a Mardi Gras in Hell. Feeling most unwelcome, and having no particular desire to linger until the Germans became aware of him, Dennis made up his mind to get the hell out of there.

### **From *The London Times*, September 2**

Military circles were still perplexed, this evening, over Poland's reason for not bringing her Air Force into the defense of Warsaw when the city was bombed by Nazi aircraft.

DENNIS, realizing that it would be necessary to alter his course once more, threw his throttle wide open in a snarling climb. If he could get above the altitude at which the raiders were flying he might have a chance to slip through unnoticed. He ran his tongue across dry lips and breathed a silent prayer, his eyes glued to the altimeter. He was leveling off when the first anti-aircraft searchlight picked him out. Dennis cursed in desperation, throwing the ship into a swift bank-skid. It was a wild maneuver, but it worked. The damage, however, had been done, for in the next instant a shell exploded within a hundred yards, shaking his plane like a piece of paper in a gale.

Dennis felt the shrapnel ripping into the belly of his ship. A piece of it smashed through the pane on the glass covering his cockpit. He was too busy righting the ship to appreciate the miracle that spared his life and his motor. During the next five minutes it seemed to Dennis as though every anti-aircraft shell in Poland was bursting within a five hundred yard radius of him. Twisting, turning, slipping, sliding, he was putting his ship through every acrobatic maneuver in the gamut.

In the middle of a wild circle Dennis heard a sudden roar above his shoulder, felt a shadow falling swiftly down on him. Instinctively he straightened out, not an instant too soon. Like a flame-spurting comet, a Nazi pursuit ship dropped sickeningly past him—a coffin hurtling earthward. Dennis realized too late that his

maneuvers had brought him directly beneath the raiders. Even now they must be aware of him. His heart turned a ghastly somersault. He shot a quick glance upward over his shoulder. There they were. Nazi bombers, convoyed by formations of combat ships! They were only a little over a thousand feet above him, ominous, shadowy birds of prey. Dennis struggled with the wild impulse to dive his ship earthward, and even as he did so, three ships detached themselves from the first convoy formation, roaring down directly at him.

The hawks, returning homeward, had seen the sparrow and were now giving chase. Three hundred feet from Dennis, the first combat ship opened fire. Lead sprayed the cockpit cowl and the second Nazi fighter let loose with a fresh burst of sharp machine gun fire.

Dennis dove, the wind screaming through the broken cockpit pane, his throttle wide open. It was a matter of sheer luck that he angled his power dive in counter-direction to the dives of his pursuers, and it was all that saved him. When he yanked out of it, fifteen hundred feet later, his action was abrupt enough to clear his tail of them for a few precious moments.

Looking upward, he could see the bombers and their convoy growing smaller in the distance. Evidently they were heading directly back to their lines, figuring that three combat ships should be able to dispatch Dennis in a few moments. Dennis had time for one brief gulp of thanks, then he heard the snarl of the Nazi combat ships climbing back at him.

A sportsman pilot in a racing ship, unarmed, unversed in military flying—faced by war birds, outnumbered three to one! Dennis knew that there was small hope of coming through alive. There might have been, had there been any chance of landing. But the Polish anti-aircraft knew that any planes in the sky tonight were not their own. In a split-second panorama, Dennis had a mental picture of his father, the portfolio, and the white-faced consular orderly who had given it to him. Then Death, in the form of tracer bullets, was spitting venomously at him once more.

As the Nazi combat planes closed in on him again, Dennis did a desperate and accurate bit of calculation. He knew that the one-sided affair could only last a few brief minutes more. He was also quite aware that those short minutes probably marked his last seconds of life. His decision was swift. He would gamble skill against arms, nerve against numbers. The first step of the scheme depended upon his skill—and a great amount of luck.

Dennis leveled his ship from the climb he had started into. He could hear the combat planes roaring after him. A quick glance over his left shoulder showed him that they were closing in as before, in a "V" formation directly behind him, with a slightly higher altitude. As he expected, the Nazi airmen were in a hurry to be done with him and rejoin their convoy flights. Their machine-guns were chattering simultaneously in short bursts, but they were not close enough, yet, to do damage. Fighting against every instinct Dennis forced himself to hold his line of flight until the first tracers ripped into the tail of his ship.

Eagerness to finish the job, the inky blackness of the night, under-estimation of their victim, any one of these can be called responsible for what happened in the next moments. Throwing the throttle wide open, Dennis banked sharply, then dove. His motor pounding furiously, he pulled out of the dive—out and up—and

began to climb. He was now flanking the combat ships, and they were jockeying frantically in the same formation. Dennis turned to his nerve to finish the job, angling straight at the side of the group, motor wide open. Someone would have to give way, and Dennis knew he wasn't going to do so.

**From *The London Times*, September 3**

An official communiqué from the Polish Army Headquarters in Warsaw reports that Polish anti-aircraft downed two German planes during last night's bombing of the capital. Two other German planes fell when they collided in the darkness.

THE Nazi airman saw his victim driving head-on at the side of his ship. Frantically he pulled up in a steep, banking climb—driving into the under-structure of his slower comrade in the combat ship to his right. They fell earthward locked together, a blazing streak of orange flame. Dennis Carradine had had luck to aid his skill...

JAW set in resignation, Sir Francis Carradine carefully folded the cablegram from Basel, Switzerland. Dennis said that he was safe, but had a time of it with some German airplanes—while flying from Warsaw. Dennis assured him that he would have the portfolio in London by morning, and half-humorously commented on the advantages of air travel over land transportation. A tall, moustached gentleman leaned over and whispered a few words into Sir Francis' ear. "I am sorry," said Sir Francis, "but it failed, utterly. They never intercepted it." He looked at the clock on the wall: 11:30. Parliament was crowded, but silent. No answer had been given to the ultimatum. The Prime Minister entered the chamber...

**From *The London Times*, September 3**

"ENGLAND IS AT WAR!"

