

Last Laugh

JACK FULTZ

Co-pilot Arnold Thurber's sly, cunning eyes became mirrors of wide-eyed terror and disbelief as he watched the bomb-bay doors of the huge bomber close the last inch. With haste born of desperation, he whirled and fought madly to return to the pilot's seat. Already the huge aircraft had started to spin. Reaching the pilot's seat, he saw, with glimmering hope, that pilot John "Speed" Lawson had the salvo switch shoved back in place.

As the plane started a final mad whirl for the ground, the ship's commander had a faint smile on his lips; of that Thurber was sure. A kaleidoscopic scene appeared before his eyes as the centrifugal force pressed him solidly against the bulkhead. Thurber's thoughts with the whirling plane.

It seemed only yesterday that he and Jack Lawson were in high school, both striving for the city championship in the one-hundred yard dash. Each had broken ten seconds during the season, and the winner that day was to receive a scholarship to State.

"Speed" won and he kept on winning. When State had an invitation to send a man to the Gardens, it was freshman flash "Speed" Lawson who went.

The wind protested with shrieks of dismay as the plane cut a fiery, ragged pattern across the sky.

Lieutenant Jack Lawson was to be married one week from today to Janie Coffman. Thurber could remember the days when he was number one on Janie's Hit Parade, and Lawson was a poor second.

After Jack had enlisted in the Army Air Corps, it seemed that Janie's conversation was more and more about him; then

came that infamous night when Arnold could stand it no longer and had made the crack about "Speed" being a sucker. After this Arnold heard no more about Jack or the Air Corps. He and Janie had "split up" that night. The greetings letter came the next day, and Arnold was gone before he could begin reconciliation overtures.

Soon after, he read in the alumni magazine that A/C John E. Lawson and lovely Jane Coffman were engaged; now he was assigned to a crew with Jack Lawson as first pilot. Neither the meeting nor the first few transitional flights had been too bad. It wasn't until he saw Janie at the Officers Club that he decided to kill Jack Lawson

It started as a routine short cross-country flight. However at 7,000 feet, a fire had started in the number three engine before it was noticed. As "Speed" pushed the bail-out buzzer, Arnold knew that this was his opportunity. The engineer and radio operator having already bailed out, Jack jerked his head for Arnold to go. Thurber's hand closed over the small fire extinguisher which was a perfect weapon for his preconceived plan.

Jack had risen half out of his seat when Thurber struck. It was the look on Lawson's face, a sort of understanding, that really scared Thurber.

Now Thurber knew!

Jack Lawson's last effort had been to close the bomb-bay doors, turning the flight deck into a death trap.

"Speed" was out. He would never know when the plane hit.

Arnold Thurber's ironic laugh swelled into a crescendo.