

The MODERN BOY

WEDNESDAY SATURDAY
WEEK ENDING
NOVEMBER 24TH 1934
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2^D



*The First Glider
Air-Trains!*



Like a tiger the newcomer leaped, and Kit Hudson heard the crack of breaking bone.

PRISONERS of the CANOE-HOUSE!

Koko, the giant Kanaka, deals with the Devil-Doctor of Suna-Suna and finds Ken King's lost chum!

by

CHARLES HAMILTON

The Cannibal Den!

KIT HUDSON had lain for long hours in the dimness of the canoe-house without knowing that Dandy Peter was there.

Night lay black on the bushy island of Suna-Suna. In the grass-houses of the savages all was still. Kit Hudson lay where he had been flung on the earthen floor of the canoe-house, hands and feet bound with such tightness that the circulation of the blood was almost stopped. He lay like a log, a prey to utter despair.

He was worn out with fatigue, with hunger and thirst, but he could not close his eyes. Sleep? He could not sleep in that house of death, lying amid dead men's bones, with the smell of death round him.

The air of the canoe-house was thick and foul. Pestilent vapours from the channels of the mangroves penetrated it. The smoke from the wood-fire that burned incessantly was pungent. The odour of decay reeked through the long low building. When Kit Hudson raised his head to stare round him with aching, weary eyes, all things seemed spectre-like in the dim light of the smouldering fire.

He made out the long, dark shapes of the canoes with their high, carved prows. He made out the smoking, smouldering fire, over which, on a tapa cord from a beam above, hung a human head, turning and turning in the smoke. By the fire crouched a bony, wizened figure in a dingy loin-cloth, with unsleeping eyes, the claw-like hands turning the head that was being smoke-cured.

It was the devil-doctor of Suna-Suna; too busy on his hideous task to heed the prisoner staring at him in the dimness. Hudson's flesh crept at the sight of him and his occupation. How long, was the fearful thought in his mind, before his own head was turning in the smoke under those talon-like claws?

He sank back again with a suppressed groan. He lay long in a stupor of suffering and despair. It was night, and the night seemed endless; yet he shuddered at the thought of day. For he knew what must come with the day—the cooking-fires, and the end of all things.

He had taken the chance when he sought the gold of the sunken brig, the Crackerjack, on the wildest and

loneliest shore in the Solomon Islands. But it need not have come to this had not his partner played him false. It was Dandy Peter's treachery that had lost all. He gritted his teeth at the thought of it.

With the thought of Peter Parsons in his mind, he lifted his head and stared round him again in the dimness of the smouldering fire. Was Dandy Peter Parsons, the sea-lawyer of Lukwe, dead, or a prisoner in the hands of the cannibals, like himself? It was then that he made out a bound figure lying only a few feet from him, and knew that it was Parsons.

Bound, as Hudson was bound, his clothes in rags from his last desperate struggle, Dandy Peter lay there, his eyes closed, sleeping. Even in that desperate extremity, in the shadow and the smell of death, the iron nerve of the Lukwe adventurer had not failed him. He could sleep.

"You cur!" breathed Hudson. "Oh, you cur!"

DANDY PETER'S eyes opened. He made a movement to rise; as if in the moment of awakening he fancied himself in his bunk on board

Prisoners of the Canoe-House!

his cutter, the Sea-Cat. Then, as the movement brought sharp pain through his cramped limbs, he sank back with a low groan.

The sound reached the ears of the wizened old wretch crouching by the wood-fire. He glanced round, showing his gums in a toothless grin. Then he turned to his occupation again.

"You!" Dandy Peter peered at Hudson. "They've got you! I reckon I was sleeping when they brought you in."

"You can sleep—here!"

"Why not!"

Bitter words rose to Hudson's lips. But he checked them. What was the use of reproaches with death hovering over both of them? There was a long silence in the canoe-house.

Parsons broke it at last.

"We're done for, Hudson!" he said. "Your shipmate, King of the Islands, was right—it was a madman's venture! But we might have won through—with luck. My black boys running off with the Sea-Cat knocked us out! By James, if I could knock seven bells out of their black hides with a belaying-pin—" The sea-lawyer gave a snarl of rage. "The cowardly scum, running in the cutter and leaving us on the reef!"

"What was that to what you did?" said Hudson bitterly. "I turned down my shipmate, King of the Islands, the truest friend a man ever had, to sail with you! And you took the boat and deserted me on the reef

—like the treacherous cur you are! You've thrown away both our lives, Peter Parsons!"

"It was a chance, and I took it!" snarled Parsons. "What was the good of sticking on the reef with you? They'd have got me when they got you."

"They'd have got neither of us if you'd stood by me!" answered Hudson. "I kept the brutes off for the best part of a day, alone. If you'd stood by me, we should be free and safe now, and thinking of raising the salvage of the Crackerjack. King of the Islands would have saved us both."

"King of the Islands!" Dandy Peter stared at him. "Your shipmate's hundreds of miles from Suna-Suna."

"I tell you he would have saved us! I tell you his ketch, the Dawn, was in sight when Komo-omo and his bucks got me!" said Hudson savagely. "I turned my back on him, but he never turned his on me—he must have come out to the Solomons to look for me. I tell you, the Dawn was coming on hand-over-fist when they got me off the reef. She ran down one of the canoes, but the other—with me in it—dodged into the mangroves! It was a matter of minutes, and if you'd stood by me on the reef—You treacherous scum, you've thrown away both our lives!"

"By James!" muttered Dandy Peter. "King of the Islands in these waters—who could have foreseen—" He broke off and sank back wearily.

His treacherous desertion of his partner had cost him dear—as dear as it had cost Hudson. He had taken what seemed to him the only chance of escape—but he had not escaped, the cannibals had been too watchful for that.

If he had stood by Hudson like a white man, King of the Islands would have found them both on the reef and saved them!

Hudson lay silent. He closed his eyes and tried to sleep. Again his weary eyes opened on the glimmer of the canoe-house.

There was a movement in the shadows. The devil-doctor had turned his head and was looking towards the doorway, where a screen of pandanus hung and shut out the night. The pandanus had stirred, and a dark figure came silently through.

It was little more than a black shadow in the dimness; and Hudson could only make out that it was a native of giant frame. He wondered, with a creeping of the flesh, whether this meant that his fate was not to be delayed till the day.

The wretch by the fire had risen to his feet and was staring at the newcomer, as if surprised by his coming. Hudson heard him speaking in a cracked, croaking voice, but he spoke in the native Melanesian dialect of Suna-Suna, of which the mate of the Dawn did not understand a word.

But he gathered from the devil-doctor's tones that he was surprised and angry at the intrusion, and that he was bidding the newcomer to go.

What came next seemed like a dream to Kit Hudson. The shadowy figure that had come through the pandanus screen stood for a few seconds, peering in the dimness—and then, with the spring of a tiger, leaped on the devil-doctor.

The croaking cackle was cut short by the grip of brawny hands—there was a momentary struggle and then the crack of breaking bone sounded sharply, and the devil-doctor of Suna-Suna, his neck broken, hung limp and lifeless in the brawny hands that had seized him.

In the Mangrove Swamp!

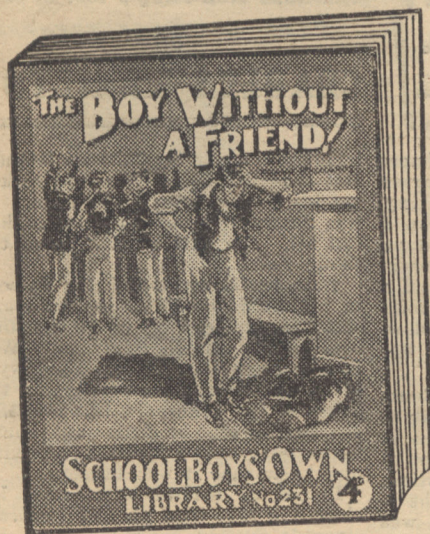
BURNING no lights, a black shadow on a black sea, the ketch Dawn lay hove-to between the island of Suna-Suna and the reef. King of the Islands, boy skipper and owner of the Dawn, his hands gripping the teak rail, stared shoreward at the black mass of bush that topped the mangrove swamp. Beyond the mangroves, beyond the bush, was the den of the cannibals—the village of Komo-omo, chief of the salt-water blacks—and there, a prisoner in savage hands, was his shipmate, Kit Hudson.

Living, he knew, for he had seen him in the canoe that fled into the mangroves under the red sunset; living, but his life counted perhaps in hours. Ken King's face was white and set; his resolve was taken. Forgotten now was that old dispute at Lalinge, and the high words that had passed.

His shipmate was there, there

(Continued on page 26)

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Prisoners of the Canoe-House!

(Continued from page 24)

beyond the black bush, doomed to fearful death; Ken had come too late to save him. But he would save him yet, or die at his side. To attempt to penetrate into that dark den amid a swarm of foes was death—and he knew it.

Even if he could find and follow the way through the dark, reeking mangroves, it was death to follow the cannibals to their lair. Only too well the boy trader knew it. But his resolve did not falter.

Koko, the giant Kanaka boatswain of the Dawn, watched him in silent anxiety. The faithful Koko did not need telling the thoughts that were passing through his white master's mind. Lompo and Lufu, Kolulo and Tomoo were wakeful on the deck; only the snore of Danny, the fat cooky-boy, came from the galley. Long King of the Islands had stood there, leaning on the rail, staring at the black shadow of Suna-Suna, and Koko waited for him to speak. Ken turned on him at last.

"The boat, Koko!"
"White master tinkee go along place belong Komo-omo?" asked Koko.

"Ay, ay!"
"You listen, sar, ear belong you, along this feller Koko speakee," said the boatswain of the Dawn. "White master stop along ship! No good white feller go along shore, sar! Kanaka feller go, sar!"

Ken shook his head.
"You tinkee, sar, head belong you!" said Koko earnestly. "This feller Koko go along Suna-Suna, plaps kill-dead along Solomon Island boy, plaps findee white master Hudson, sar! White master go, he go finish altogether too much!"

Ken smiled faintly. He knew that Koko was right. There was a chance—a dog's chance—for a native to find his way through the swamp in the darkness, and penetrate into the cannibal village. There was not a dog's chance for a white man. He knew it; but it went too sorely against the grain to remain while Koko made the desperate adventure. He shook his head again.

"This feller Koko, sar, no common Kanaka!" said Koko. "Tinkee too much, head belong him, sar! This feller savvy!"

"It's death, Koko!" muttered King of the Islands.

"Me savvy plenty, sar! Plaps me go finish! White master go finish plenty too sure, sar. No findee feller Hudson, sar, along you go finish."

Ken stood silent. To throw away his life—he was ready for that. But that would not save his shipmate. Coming down to brass tacks, there was a chance that Koko might pull through, and there was no chance for a white man. And yet—

"You sing out, this feller go, sar!" murmured Koko. "Along dark he stop, Solomon Island boy no savvy this feller Koko. Savvy white man too much!"

Ken drew a deep breath. The savages would be sleeping; but there would be wakeful eyes among the grass-houses. A native, seen in the darkness, might be taken for one of the tribe. Ken did not speak; but he grasped the boatswain's big brown hand and pressed it. And Koko's dusky face lighted up with relief as he knew that his white master had yielded.

With hardly a sound, the whaleboat slid into the calm water. Save for the faint ruffle of the wind on the sea, the night was calm and still. King of the Islands sat in the stern, his rifle on his knees. Koko, as he sat, felt the razorlike edge of the long bush-knife hooked to his girdle. Koko had no use for white men's weapons.

Lompo and Lufu bent to the muffled oars, and the whaleboat silently approached the mangrove-lined shore of Suna-Suna. From the ketch, Kolulo and Tomoo watched, in silence, as it disappeared into the darkness.

THE smell of the mangroves came thick on the night air. King of the Islands steered into the channel by which the canoe of Komo-omo had fled from him. He had marked it well before the sun went. The oars were taken in, and the whaleboat floated on foul water, among rotting roots and dripping branches, in darkness so thick that a hand could hardly be seen six inches from the face.

But Koko seemed to have the cat-like faculty of seeing in the dark. The channel through the mangroves was too narrow for rowing at a short distance from the sea. The Kanakas punted the whaleboat up the shallow channel till it bumped in soft mud.

"Feller boat stop along this place, sar!" whispered Koko.

Ken could not see him in the blackness. But he stretched out his hand and pressed the sinewy brown arm at his side.

There was a faint splash as the brown boatswain slid from the whaleboat. But no further sound came from him. He was gone into the darkness, and King of the Islands, his heart heavy with anxiety, could only wait—wait for the endless minutes to pass. Silence, broken only by the faint gurgle of water among tangled roots, reigned in the mangrove swamp.

Silence—which every moment the boy trader dreaded would be broken by the yell of alarmed savages, telling that Koko had gone to his death. But still the heavy silence held as the long minutes crawled by.

Suddenly a sound! Had hours, or only minutes, passed? It seemed like an eternity, and then came the sound—a shrill, high-pitched cry that rang and echoed through the swamp. Ken started convulsively, the blood thrilling to his heart. If that cry came from Koko—

Had he, in that vain, delusive hope of saving his shipmate from

(Continued on page 28)

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The Modern Boy

Prisoners of the Canoe-House!

(Continued from page 26)

certain death, sent the loyal, stout-hearted Koko to his doom? In an anguish of anxiety he listened, his ear-drums throbbing with the intensity of the effort. But there came no further cry. Had it been Koko that cried out—death-stricken in the darkness? Was it a death-cry that he had heard?

Lompo and Lufu were muttering together as they peered into the dark. Ken caught Lompo's mutter.

"Solomon Island boy go finish!"

"He go finish along bush-knife belong Koko!" muttered Lufu.

Ken peered at the dark figures in the boat. How did they know? Their belief brought comfort to him. But how did they know?

"You feller boy," he whispered, "what name you tinkee Solomon Island boy go finish along swamp? You no tinkee feller Koko go finish?"

"Tinkee Solomon Island boy, sar, along savvy him sing out, sar," answered Lompo. "Sing out along top belong mouth belong him, sar!"

Ken wondered. The cry had been high and shrill, characteristic of the Black Islanders. It was a black man of Suna-Suna who had cried in the darkness. The Kanakas did not doubt it. Ken tried not to doubt it. But his heart was heavy, his eyes haggard, as he peered into the

blackness and waited—and waited—and listened.

But the cry was not repeated, and only the gurgle of water broke the deadly silence of the swamp.

Koko to the Rescue!

KOKO drew back the bush-knife and wiped its blade on the rotten vegetation round him. His dark brown face, could it have been seen in the gloom, was grim and terrible. Koko was no longer the grinning, good-humoured boatswain of Ken King's ketch. He was the fighting-man, descendant of a long race of fighting-men.

Wading up to his knees in mud, with moisture dripping from him, the smell of the swamp thick in his nostrils, Koko had been gliding like a shadow among shadows, and almost touched the black man before he knew that he was there.

One howl had come from the black—a cry of alarm prolonged into a death shriek as the bush knife struck. Koko had no need to strike again. A dead man sank into the ooze at his feet, sinking out of sight, and Koko wiped his knife.

Standing silent, motionless, the giant Kanaka listened. Here and there the faintest glimmer of starlight came through; but the darkness was deep. Yet Koko, with cat-like eyes, had seen his enemy—a black man. But whether one of

Komo-omo's tribe watching the ways through the swamp, or some bushman from the interior, lurking round the salt-water village on the chance of picking off a straggler and capturing his head, Koko did not know.

Neither did he care. It was an enemy he had slain, barely in time before a spear-thrust reached him, and that was enough for him to know. But he listened, intently, to learn if the shrill, echoing cry had caused alarm.

There was a faint splashing—rustling in the mangroves. A low murmuring sound came in the silence. There were black men at hand. Not all Komo-omo's tribe were sleeping—five or six of them, at least—and they had heard the cry, whether it came from one of their own tribesmen, or from a lurking enemy.

Koko's grip clenched on the handle of the long bush-knife. Battle appealed to him. But he was not there for a fight that would give the alarm to the whole tribe. How near he was to the black village he did not know; but he knew that it could not be far away. He thrust the knife back into his girdle, and crouched low in the darkness.

His giant form sank out of sight silently in one of the innumerable deep pools by the path, only his brown face remaining above the surface. Unless they stepped on him, he was safe from discovery.

(Continued on page 30)

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Prisoners of the Canoe-House!

(Continued from page 28)

He heard the footsteps—the muttering, high-pitched voices; he caught a glimpse of shifting shadows.

They moved on, and all was silent again. They had not seen him, heard him, or dreamed that he was there. But for five minutes after there was silence the Kanaka did not stir. Then he crawled dripping from the pool, covered from neck to feet with the mud of the swamp. He shook himself. Then, silent as a snake, he crept on through shrouding darkness.

The high bush was round him now—he was through the swamp. The path was hard under his feet. This was the way the canoes were dragged up from the sea. Starlight glimmered in the open ahead of him. The village of Komo-omo lay in a clearing in the bush that covered Suna-Suna like a garment. Round the clearing the walls of bush rose, high and dark.

There was a huddle of grass-houses, and beyond, the little fields of yams and Indian corn. A larger building stood out among the rest. The roof was ridged, and from some opening in it a curl of smoke rose in a spiral against the stars. Two tall doorposts of hardwood were strangely and hideously carved into shapes, half human, half animal.

The starlight, faint as it was, seemed bright after the blackness of the bush and the swamp. Koko's

keen eyes picked out all he needed to see. That spiral of smoke came from the wood-fire that was kept perpetually burning in the canoe-house, where dead men's heads were hung to dry.

Likely enough, the head of the man he sought was turning in the smoke at the end of a tapa cord! Like a flitting shadow, Koko reached the canoe-house, where plaited pandanus mats hung between the grotesque posts. Silently he moved the edge of the mats and peered into the dimness within.

A BLAZE leaped into his eyes at the sight of the man who crouched by the wood-fire, turning the suspended head. The devil-doctor was not sleeping; he was at his horrible task of curing an enemy's head, to be hung up as a trophy. From the beams above many such trophies hung, dim in the shadows.

Koko's brown hand touched his bush-knife. If the head that turned and turned in the smoke was that of the mate of the Dawn—

But in the faint glimmer of the smouldering fire he saw that it was a black bushman's head. And his keen eyes, searching, picked out two figures that lay between the fire and the canoes—two bound figures—white men, bound hand and foot. And Koko drew a deep, deep breath of relief as his gaze lighted on Kit Hudson and Peter Parsons—prisoners in that den of death, but yet living.

And as he saw them he felt a

touch on his bare arm, and a thrill ran through him as he turned his head and found a brawny black man at his elbow, staring at him questioningly.

Evidently the Black Islander took Koko for one of his tribe, and only wondered why he was there, peering in at the entrance of the canoe-house. But as Koko turned the black man knew him for an enemy, and his mouth opened for a yell that was never uttered.

For as Koko turned the bush-knife flashed, and a fuzzy head spun a yard away from a body as it crumpled to the earth.

"That black feller go finish plenty too quick!" murmured Koko.

He dragged the body into the shadow of the canoe-house, lest other eyes should see it. He gave one swift glance round, then lifted the edge of the mat again. The wizened old wretch by the wood-fire was undisturbed at his task. Koko pushed the hanging mat aside and stepped silently in.

Silent as he was, the movement caught the attention of the devil-doctor, who rose, and stood staring at him, speaking angrily in a sharp, croaking voice. With a single bound the giant Kanaka leaped, and the devil-doctor of Suna-Suna was in his grip. One yell from the wretch would have alarmed the whole village and brought a hundred foes swarming round Koko. But the devil-doctor of Suna-Suna had no chance of uttering it.

(Continued on opposite page)

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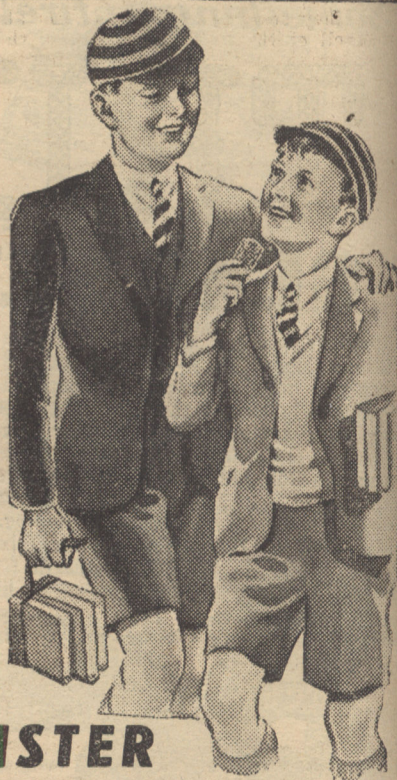
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Brawny hands choked him into silence—a silence that was broken only by the crack of a snapping neck. The boatswain of the Dawn dropped the sagging carcass into the heaps of dead ashes by the fire.

"White master savvy this feller Koko?" he whispered.

Kit Hudson stared up at him, stupefied.

"By James!" Dandy Peter's voice came cracked and husky. "Am I dreaming, or is that Ken King's nigger?"

"Koko!" breathed Hudson. "Koko!"

His brain was in a whirl. Staring up at the giant Kanaka, reeking with the mud of the swamp, he could scarcely believe what he saw. A helping hand in that den of death and horror—a chance of life!

Koko was on his knees beside him now. The razor-like edge of the bush-knife was drawn across his bonds. In a few seconds Hudson was free.

Dandy Peter watched the Kanaka with eager eyes. Koko turned to him more slowly. He had no love for his white master's old enemy. But he drew the knife across the cords, and the sea-lawyer was a free man.

Hudson sat up, chafing his stiff, aching limbs. He was free—free! There was a chance of escape—a chance of life! His heart was bounding. Koko left him and stepped silently to the hanging mats in the doorway, and peered out. All was silent and still. There was no alarm—yet! He came softly back to the mate of the Dawn.

"King of the Islands?" breathed Hudson.

"White master belong me, sar, stop along boat, along swamp. White master plenty too much glad altogether, sar, along he see you, eye belong him!"

Koko waited with stolid patience whilst the two white men rubbed their cramped limbs. At last Hudson touched Koko's brown arm.

"Come!" he whispered.

"You follow along this feller Koko, sar!" Koko drew aside the hanging mats, and they crept silently out of the canoe-house.

KOKO flitted like a shadow in the gloom. Behind him stumbled Hudson and Dandy Peter, dragging themselves along by sheer determination. They breathed more freely when they were in the black shadow of the bush. The darkness was intense, and they could no longer see their guide.

They stumbled on behind him almost blindly. The smell of the mangroves came to them, and they found their feet squelching in soft, clinging mud.

There was a sudden, sharp call in the darkness. Koko thought of the bunch of blacks who had passed him on his way. If they were still on the path in the swamp—A shrill voice called, and another answered. Koko came to a halt. Hudson gritted his teeth with rage. "They're between us and the sea, Koko!"

There was a gleam in the gloom. The long bush-knife was in the hand of Koko. Pattering feet in the mud—bare feet that spattered the slimy ooze—could be heard. Nothing could be seen—but there were five or six unseen figures ahead in the blackness of the path. Koko's left hand closed on Kit Hudson's arm.

"This feller run along sea, sar; you run along this feller!" breathed Koko. He rushed on, half leading, half-dragging the mate of the Dawn, and a yell rose in the darkness as their footsteps were heard. The next moment shadowy figures, wild, rolling eyes, and gleaming spear-blades were round them, and Koko was slashing right and left with the bush-knife, hewing a terrible way through reeling, shrieking enemies. In a few seconds they were through, leaving wild and fearful yelling behind them, and running on in the darkness for the waiting boat.

A voice shouted from the black night—the voice of King of the Islands. Hudson shouted back, and dragged at his arm, in Koko's grip.

"Parsons!" he panted. "Stop—"

Koko, unheeding, dragged him on headlong to the boat. Behind them, from the blackness, pealed the shriek of Dandy Peter, struggling in savage hands!

But they're not out of the deadly swamps yet—and they won't be until King of the Islands takes part in the terrific fight! That's Next Saturday's exciting story by Charles Hamilton, who says (and I agree with him!) that it's ONE OF HIS BEST!

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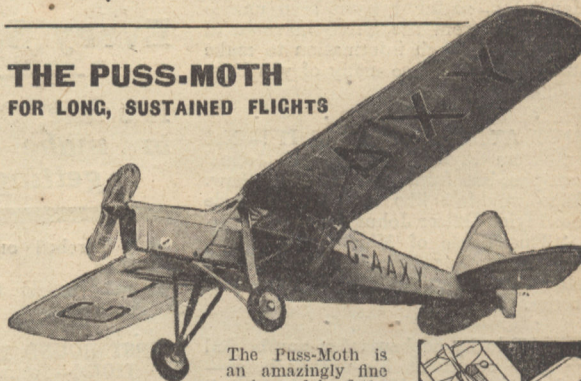
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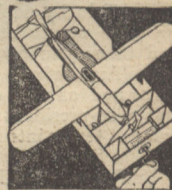
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