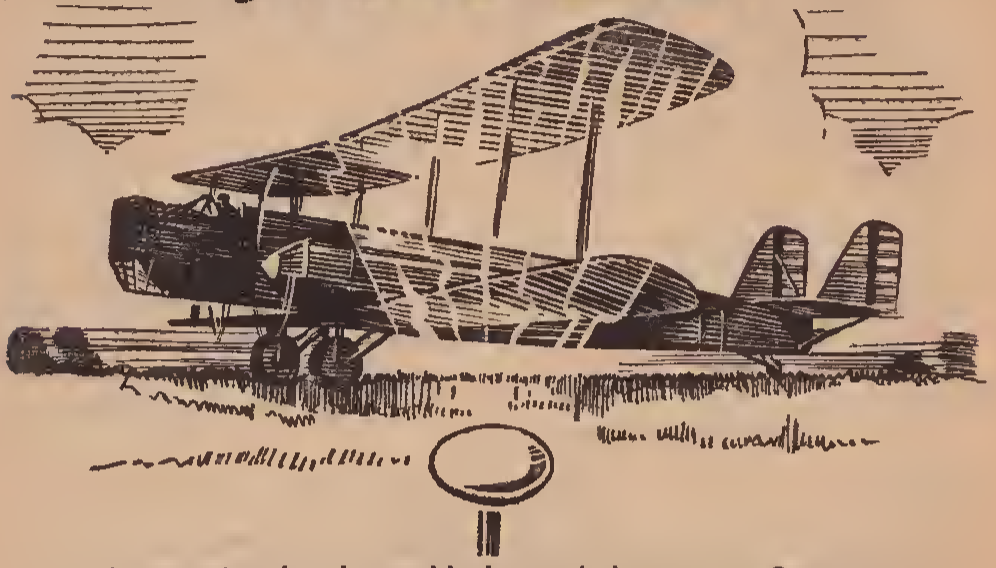
By LIEUT. JOHN PEASE

The Invisible Bomber



A mysterious bomber suddenly wrecks havoc on a Government proving ground. Secure in his secret, Phil Winter delivers an ultimatum to the President of the United States.

"BUT, Colonel, wasn't it fortunate that we had all knocked off for lunch just before that bomb landed on our howitzer?"

"Yes! Yes!" the Commandant testily replied, scowling sternly at the young officer who stood writhing at attention at the other side of the Commandant's desk. "But the fact remains, Captain Melton, that you've just muffed a perfectly good chance to pin something onto Phillips Flying Field. Here I've been warning them again and again not to let their bombers fly over the water-range on the way back from the panels.*

And now that they've finally gone and dropped a bomb on the most valuable experimental gun in the whole of Aberdeen Proving Ground [Aberdeen, Md.], you stand there like a ninny, and admit that neither you nor any of your gun-crew remembers seeing the plane that did it."

"But there *must* have been a plane, Sir!" Melton interposed.

"*Of course* there must have been a plane. But what kind of a plane? I can't very well call up the Flight Commander and say: 'Something blew up one of the howitzers at my water-range, and it must have been one of your

**Water-range:* The emplacement from which test guns are fired into the waters of Chesapeake Bay. *Panels:* Screens of lath and cheese-cloth, each about the size of a man, set up in a circle, into the midst of which a bomb is dropped to determine how many panels it can smash, thereby denoting its wartime effectiveness.—Ed.

planes.' I've got to be ahle to say: 'One of your Bellanca's' or 'One of your Curtis Bombers did it.' "

"But I've hrought you some of the bomb-fragments which we picked up around the crater, Sir." He pointed to a basketful of hits of metal. "One of the fins is intact. Why not check it against some of the hlueprints upstairs."

"I get the idea," said the Commandant, smiling for the first time.

The measurements indicated that the fin was prohahly from a 100-pound Mark IV homb. A peremptory phone-call to the Flying Field developed the fact that a Lieutenant Sanders had been dropping 100-pound bomhs at the panels that morning, and had flown back just before lunch.

Sanders *claimed* to have emptied all of his racks at the panels, and to have carefully avoided the water-range on his return flight; but the Commandant grimly remarked to Captain Melton, "I wouldn't take an Air Corps man's word under oath. Undouhtedly he dropped the bomb accidentally as he was flying over your hattery, and prohahly it had a defective fuse which delayed the burst until after he'd flown on out of sight. That would account for the fact that none of your men saw any plane at the time of the explosion."

THAT evening, as Captain Melton was sitting reading in his room in the Bachelors' Building, there came a knock on the door. The door opened and there entered a young man of ahout Melton's age, with a distinctly military air in spite of his civilian clothes.

"Cadet Phil Winters, hy all that's holy!" Captain Melton exclaimed, jumping up and warmly clasping his friend's hand. "I haven't seen you since you inherited all that money in your senior year, and resigned from the Point. It was a shame, too! You stood at the head of our class, and would have gone a long way in the Army. What have you heen doing ever since?"

"Physics research and aviation," Winters succinctly replied. "For example, this noon I flew over your battery, and dropped a 100-pound bomh on it."

Melton gasped. Then sputtered. "You dirty pup!"

Unperturhed, the civilian continued, "You didn't see my plane, did you?"

"Er—no."

"Of course you didn't," laughed Winters. "You couldn't. It was invisible."

"But, hut . . .?"

"Because I bave an invention which will make America invisible—I mean, invincible. I *had* to do something sensational to attract the attention of the authorities!"

"But why pick on us?"

"Because, old fellow, I bappen to know that you have a drag with the Secretary of War. Friend of your uncle's, Colonel Hatch, wasn't he? Phone him right now. Tell him about the hombing. But not about me, yet. Hint that there's something of international significance to it. Guardedly, mention the Japs. Suggest that he put a busb order on your Commandant, and that he direct you to proceed to Washington at once, *with* the homb fragments, for a hearing before a special board of inquiry."

"But what is your invention? I can't very well phone the Secretary of War unless—"

"You'll say nothing ahout my invention until we reacb Washington, and then it'll be I who'll do the talking!"

After considerahle argument, Captain Melton finally gave in, called the Washington residence of the Secretary

of War, and made the suggested arrangements. Ex Cadet Winters spent the night in a spare room in the Bachelors' Building, and the two friends took the early train the next morning.

The Secretary warmly greeted his protege, and accepted Winters as a friend and classmate of Melton's; but became frankly worried and annoyed at Winters' ingenuous admission of having bombed and destroyed valuable government property. However, his indignation changed to interest when Winters insisted, and Captain Melton corroborated, that the homhing plane had been ahsolutely soundless and invisible. He became annoyed again when Winters flatly refused to reveal his secret to anyone but the President of the United States.

The Secretary of War argued, but the inventor remained obdurate. Finally the Secretary gave in, and arranged an immediate conference at the White House.

As they left the State-War-and-Navy Building, Captain Melton admiringly whispered to his friend, "Well, you certainly are working your way up in the world!"

THE President received them in the Blue Room. Captain Melton opened the conference by giving a vivid account of the sudden destruction of his howitzer at Aberdeen the day before, the narrow escape of himself and his gun-crew, the total absence of any plane, and Winters' confession—or rather boast—that he had been responsible.

The President's kindly face clouded, as he ran his eyes up and down the inventor. "Young man," he sternly declared, "this is very serious."

There was a glint in Winters' eye, as he replied, "Mr. President, it has put me in touch with you inside of twenty-four hours; no lives have been iost; and the property damage is trifling, compared to the value which my discovery will be to America. For I have discovered that the universe is *laminated!*"

The President and the Secretary of War exchanged hurried glances.

Winters stiffened with annoyance, as he continued, "Did you ever read 'Flatland', Mr. President? It's a fanciful yarn about a two-dimensional state of existence, with no up and down; only north and south, east and west."

The President nodded and smiled a slightly puzzled smile. Yes, he had read the book, hut what did that—?

Winters continued, "Suppose there were another flatland a few millimeters away from the first. The inhabitants of either would never even guess at the existence of the other. There could exist an infinite number of these flatlands, piled one on top of another, like sheets of paper or strata of rock structure. You could even move the whole pile steadily upward at the same rate of speed; and yet, in spite of the fact that each two dimensional space would successively occupy the position formerly occupied by some other two-space, this would not at all mean that the peoples of any one plane of existence would ever experience any plane of existence other than their own."

"I *think* I follow you," the President interjected in a rather doubtful tone of voice. "But just what has this to do with hombing an 8-inch howitzer at Aherdeen Proving Ground?"

"I'm getting to that. We human beings live in a *three* dimensional space, of which time has sometimes heen called the fourth dimension. But did it ever occur to you, Mr. President, that we do not *extend* in time. We never experience any other time than the present.

Our so-called space-time existence is thus seen to be a mere three-dimensional layer, or lamina infinitely thin in the time direction. There could exist another three-dimensional space, just a second or two away from ours, and we would never know it."

"But don't we move tbrough time?" the President objected, warming to the subject; and now it was Captain Melton and the Secretary of War who interchanged eyebrow-lifting glances.

"Yes, Sir," Winters replied. "But the fact that our space is moving in time, doesn't ever put any of us into any other space which may be moving along just ahead of us."

"But what has that to do with bombs?" The Secretary of War somewhat testily interjected.

"If a flatlander could elevate himself ever so sligbtly above his two-dimensional lamina of existence," Winters explained, "he would be out in an absolute void, occupying no space whatever, as be knows space. He would be invisible to his former world, and it to bim. Similarly if one of us could shove bimself ever so slightly forward in time beyond our three-dimensional level of existence, he would be out of space entirely, in a visionless void. I know. I bave been there!"

He paused dramatically.

"What!" exclaimed the three others.

"It takes tremendous electrical power, but it *can* be done. After years of experimentation I finally accomplished it about six months ago in my laboratory just across the District line in Kensington. First I tried it with small objects. They disappeared. But several hours after the electric field had been shut off, tbey reappeared. Then I risked myself witbin tbe apparatus. Gentlemen, I cannot begin to describe the sensation of being absolutely nowbere, in darkness as intense as the blackened inside of a hollow sphere. But I too eventually reappeared."

"How do you account for these reappearances?" asked the President.

"It's like pushing the lever of a controller just beyond a notch. The tendency is to slip back into the notch."

"And if you were to push it beyond the mid point between two notches?" the President hazarded, a quizzically intense look on his broad features.

Winters smiled. "I see that you are getting the idea, Sir. It would probably slide forward into the next notch. Experimenting with small objects in my electric field, I have found that, after an excess of current, they do *not* return. Undoubtedly there is another state of existence just ahead of ours in time, and that is where they bave gone. Some day I plan to sbip myself all tbe way forward to that state of existence, taking with me enougb electrical equipment to insure my return; but in the meantime I am being very careful to limit my current."

"Where do you buy your current?" the President inquired.

"From the Potomac Electric Power Co. Why?"

"Oh, nothing, nothing. Go on."

"Early this spring I enlarged my apparatus so that it would hold an airplane. I devised a reverse-field capable of picking up light waves from the immediate past—thus I can see the present world when I am out in the void of time which lies just barely ahead of us. And I enclosed the bomb-rack of my airplane in a reverse field, so that I can loose the bomb into the present world. Thus equipped I can fly around unseen and unheard in the void of time, and yet see and destroy objects in the present world. That, Gentlemen, is how I bombed Captain Melton's howitzer."

The Secretary of War and the President stared grimly at each other.

"With that invention," the Secretary solemnly declared, "America would be safe against foreign attack."

But the President sadly shook his head, and a tired look passed across his kindly face. "With that invention," he declared, "this cockeyed world would he utterly *un*safe for any nation. One of my dearest amhitions is to keep the world at peace."

"But Winters is giving it to *America!*" Captain Melton interposed.

"Not *giving* it—*selling* it," Winters corrected. "And yet my price is a very reasonable one: One million dollars cash, and the deposit of a million more in government honds, the interest on which is to constitute my salary as chief consulting expert of the new Air Service which you will develop."

"Pretty steep terms," suggested the President, his eyes narrowing. "What if we reject them?"

"Then, much as I regret it, I shall have to peddle my invention abroad."

"I was afraid of that," the President dryly remarked, an inscrutahle smile playing ahout his firm lips.

The Secretary of War laughed harshly. "But, of course, gentlemen, this is all absurd. Why are we wasting the President's valuable time with all this talk of cohwehs and moonbeams. No one could do what this young fellow says he has done."

"He bombed my battery without any visihle plane!" Captain Melton interjected.

"Yes," the President asserted thoughtfully. Then smiling a friendly smile, he turned to Winters with, "Young man, it's a deal. I will assume the responsihility of signing a contract with you on hehalf of the United States. There are contingent funds available for unemployment relief, which we can divert to this purpose. I will give you a check for $100,000 down to hind the hargain, the contract to be conditional on a demonstration of your plane to the satisfaction of the Secretary of War and myself." He held out his hand, and clasped the hand of the inventor across the tahle. But there was a sad distant look in his kind eyes. "Does anyone else know of your invention?"

"No one else than I know its *details*," affirmed Winters positively. "You three gentlemen are the only others who even know of its *existence*."

"But how can we hush up the investigation at Aherdeen?" Captain Melton interposed.

The Secretary of War grinned. "There is on my desk a request from a Lieutenant Sanders of Air Service that I overrule General Westover in his refusal to transfer Mr. Sanders to Honolulu. You have my permission to tip off Mr. Sanders confidentially that, if he will admit dropping the bomh, it will not be held against his record, and I will approve his transfer."

"Excellent!" exclaimed the President, ruhhing his hands. He then took a small portahle typewriter out of a drawer and placed it on the desk, with the explanation: "This is what I use to type personally my messages to Congress, when I wish to make certain that there shall be no leak. There will be no leak in *this* case, Gentlemen."

So the contract between Philip Winters and the United States of America was typed and executed. An appointment was made for a meeting at Winters' hangar, located a mile from the Aberdeen Proving Grounds, a week later. The check for $100,000.00 was requisitioned, and the President promised to hring the check with him to Aherdeen.

A week later the four men met at Philip Winters' hangar as arranged. The President, accompanied by the Secretary of War and Captain Melton, entered the hangar. The Secret Service guards remained outside. The President delivered the check to Winters, who took his copy of the contract out of an inside pocket, placed the check in it, and returned the contract to the pocket. The President keenly noted this move, and nodded appraisingly to himself.

Then the inventor pointed to a large airplane, surrounded by a maze of electric wires, mercury-vapor lamps, huge lenses, and shining condenser-plates. Hung beneath the fuselage was a 100-pound bomb, surrounded by a miniature of this same electrical apparatus. A periscope on the plane was similarly shrouded. On the wall of the hangar was a switchboard.

The President glanced at his watch, cleared his throat, and said, "Mr. Winters, one of the terms of our contract is that you will make your take-off and drop your bomb at times to be set by me, so as to avoid any trickery by confederates of yours. You will please set that control-clock and your watch by mine."

Winters did so.

The President continued, "It is now five minutes before three. Can you take off exactly at five minutes past?" Winters nodded. "Then do so. Just before you take off I will give you your instructions as to when and where to drop the bomb."

Winters set a dial beside the control-clock, closed a leaf-switch, swung open the doors of the hangar, spun the propeller, and clambered into the cockpit. Throttling down the motor to a purr, he leaned out over the side, and shouted, "All ready, Mr. President. What are your wishes about the bomb?"

"Fly one mile straight east, just within the confines of the Aberdeen Proving Grounds and release it there. Not later than three fifteen o'clock."

"Right, Sir." Winters glanced at his wrist watch, and waved his three visitors back away from the plane. Then fixed his eye on the clock on the wall.

As the hands reached 3:05, there came a click, followed by a blinding sizzling flash. Motor-generators hummed, sparks zipped, the mercury lamps glowed, and a dense black fog formed within the maze of wires, completely obscuring the plane. Even the sound of its motors died to nothingness.

Then there came another click. The snapping ceased, the motor generators slowed to a stop, and the mercury lamps paled. The black fog gradually cleared, disclosing an empty maze of wires where the airplane had stood.

The President's shoulders were slumped, and he seemed very tired, as he stalked out of the hangar and toward his car.

"Aren't you going to wait for the explosion?" asked the Secretary of War in surprise.

"There will be no explosion," the President listlessly replied.

"What do you mean?"

"You shall see." He leaned heavily against the side of his car, and waited.

Three fifteen; no explosion. Three twenty; no explosion. Three twenty-five; no explosion. Three-thirty; no explosion.

"Well," said the President, "let's go home."

"What *could* have happened to Phil?" Captain Melton exclaimed.

The President transfixed the young officer with a steady gaze. "He *could* have passed over the hump to the next

notch—to the next three-dimensional space just ahead of ours in time. If so, then the menace of his invention to the peace of the world is at an end. And, as he has his contract and his check with him, the Government will never have to fulfill the contract, the check will never have to be paid, and we three can forget the entire episode."

"But, Sir, couldn't Phil substitute himself for the bomb, and use its electric field to send himself back into our time."

"I thought of that too, hut I doubt if the engines of his airplane would produce sufficient power for such a long time-trip as he would *now* find necessary. Besides I took particular note of the coils which surround his bomb; they are not large enough to hold a man."

"But how could Phil have pushed himself so irretrievahly far forward in time? He took great precautions never to use too much electric power."

"And I," said the President with an air of finality, "took great precautions to send for the head of the Potomac Electric Power Company, and give him strict instructions to quadruple the voltage on Mr. Winters' line, from five minutes past three o'clock until twenty minutes past three this afternoon!—We planned it that way," he added, with a ghost of a smile.

««What Should Science Fiction Be?»»

SINCE 1926, that type of literature known as science fiction has gone through an evolution that is nothing short of amazing in itself. Prior to that year, the only scientific fiction was the work of the pioneers, Verne, Wells, Service, Rousseau, and a few other hardy and daring writers who possessed imagination. How avid the reading puhlic was for imaginative works is proved hy the reputation as "classics" those first stories gained, and possess to this day. Who can forget "The Time Traveller," "A Trip tn the Center of the Earth," "The Ship of Ishtar"?

Now we have passed twelve years of science fiction as a monthly portion of the fiction presented to the reading puhlic. It has grown until it is no longer something daring, hut something everyday, commonplace, and accepted without question. Even the movies film fantastic fiction, each effort proving more and more popular. Thus, it is safe to assume that science fictinn will continue to grow. But how?

It is quite evident that imagination alone is not the answer. It is becoming increasingly difficult for the author to amaze his readers And in trying, some nf them have gone too far. They've assaulted the reader with a harrage nf rays and incredihle science that has left him with a distinctly had taste in his mouth and a growing resentment at the thought that someone is actually trying tn "make him believe that tripe."

When the old "classics" appeared, the readers knew instantly that they were good. They truly enjoyed it, and clamored for more. Aside from the old adage that the customer is always right, it's certain that homo sapiens knows what he wants.

Thus, AMAZING STORIES wishes to present the present prohlem to its readers. Just what, in your own opinion, do you like, in science fiction, and what do you *want?* The editors have their own opinion as shown hy our selection of stories featured in this issue. But do you agree?

If there is anything you think ought to he done to improve science fiction, if you have any idea as to what it *ought* to be; if you think there is anything wrong with the present type—we want tn know it.

With this issue we've begun to set up a standard of performance hy which we will expect our writers to ahide But this standard is hy nn means complete AMAZING STORIES is published for your enjoyment, and thus, a voice in that standard is quite necessary to achieve that purpose.

Therefore, we invite you to write your own opinion of science fiction, and what it ought to he, so that we can set up a standard nf excellence which will assure the entertainment value of the stories we present for your enjoyment.

—THE EDITORS.