

# *Sketch*

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*Volume 15, Number 3*

1949

*Article 8*

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## A Guy You Can't Figure

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# A Guy You Can't Figure

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## **Abstract**

The bull-horn blares its raucous message, :Calking, F. H., Aviation Ordinance man third class, report to Lieutenant Langston;s stateroom immediately.”

## A Guy You Can't Figure

**T**HE BULL-HORN blares its raucous message, "Calking, F. H., Aviation Ordinance man third class, report to Lieutenant Langston's stateroom immediately."

You throw your wrench to the platform of the engine stand and, disgusted, wipe your hands. You curse as you climb over the edge and start down the stand's ladder. And you hate Langston's guts. What does he want you for this time? Another chewing-out—that's all he's good for. Lash your men with words, drive them, don't give them a chance to sit down and think—that's Langston's theory. Discipline and efficiency, efficiency and discipline—those words are his creed.

So maybe he has got more time in the forward area than anyone else in the squadron—you've been out here damn near as long as he has. And anyway, being out here doesn't give a man the right to become a louse. He doesn't have to be so damned fanatic about everything.

He wouldn't think of slipping his crew a bottle on Christmas—no! It's against regulations. Besides, you might lose the war if you had a couple of drinks—decreased efficiency, you know. You mutter your thoughts to the wind as you move slowly forward on the weather deck.

He's a phony, too—tries to make an impression when he figures you're so low that another tongue lashing would blow the whole works. Like the week before you left the States and Zoll's wife got sick. He needed some dough, but every guy in the crew was broke. So Langston loaned him three hundred bucks and tried to get him some leave. He knew damn well they weren't giving leave to anyone on their way out, so what could he lose? Big shot. Always thinking of the crew's welfare.

And the day Phillips got hit over Formosa. When you finally got back to the ship you heard that Langston went below and sat alongside Phil's rack in Sick Bay. He sat there all night until Phil died the next morning. And he looked like he was busted up 'cause Phil got it. The louse was probably worried 'cause

he'd have to get a new flight engineer. If that slug had come through a little nearer the nose it would have got Langston—you wish it had.

Him and his discipline—it helped Phillips a lot, didn't it?

You move into "Officer's Country" and you figure that Langston's probably sitting in his stateroom, gloating over that leave that's coming up. You'll be in Pearl in two days, and then he'll shove off for a juicy thirty days in the States. You remember his face when he told the crew about it, yesterday. One man in each plane crew will get thirty days leave in the States while the ship is in overhaul—the man who has the most time in the combat zone. It doesn't make any difference whether you're an officer or an enlisted man, he said—strictly by the record. What a joke—he knew damn well who was gonna get that leave. And all of a sudden your belly feels loose. You think of Margie—the baby is due in about two weeks—your baby. You'd give your soul for that thirty days. But you don't feel sorry for yourself because all you can do is hate—hate Langston and his discipline.

You stop in front of a stateroom and rap your knuckles on the metal bulkhead. A voice barks, "Come in!" You push the curtain aside and step in. Langston is sitting at the table studying service records. He swings around and points to another chair. You sit down. He looks at you and you wait for the blast of words.

"We'll be in Pearl in two days, Calkins."

"Yes, sir."

"I understand your wife is expecting a baby soon."

"Yes, sir—that's right." What's this louse going to do—stick the knife in and twist it too?

"The yeoman is typing up your leave papers now. Report to the squadron office and give him the necessary information on your leave address. That's all."

You stand up and move toward the passageway. You mumble something that sounds like, "Thank you, sir," and push the curtain aside. You walk toward the squadron office and you're thinking—it's a crazy world. And there's some guys you just can't figure.

L. V. Altz