

BLACK MONDAY

By Leslie McFarlane

CHAPTER ONE The Calendar

The house, no doubt, had once been considered magnificent. Now it was hideous. The architectural bad taste of the Gay Nineties manifested itself from the iron dogs on the lawn to the ornate turrets and cupolas on the roof. There was a great deal of fretted woodwork, like the frosting on a wedding cake, and the glass of the front door shone barbarically in diamond panes of red, yellow and blue.

A taxi slithered off down the drive, back toward the city. Don Lucas, on the verandah, his club bag at his feet, felt that the maid who answered the ring of the old-fashioned door bell was out of character. She should have worn puffy sleeves and a high collar; her hair should have been in a pompadour. Instead, she wore a neat black short-skirted dress with a white apron, and her hair was bobbed.

"Colonel Bland is expecting me," said Lucas. "I am his nephew."

"Will you come in, please. I'll tell the colonel you are here, Mr. Holt."

Don Lucas stepped into the gloomy, heavily carpeted hall and the maid ushered him into a parlor that looked as if it were only opened on Sundays. It reminded him of the quiet, formal parlors of his boyhood.

The shades were drawn and there was an odor of dust and old leather. The carpet was thick and of an atrocious design; the wallpaper was an offense to the eye, with huge impossible red flowers against a yellowish background; the room was cluttered with inhospitable horsehair furniture, a grim sofa, straight-back chairs, precarious little tables, and an old organ in one corner. Here and there the wallpaper was hidden by steel engravings in enormous frames, and one glossy oil painting of a dead fish and two deceased ducks.

"All we need is a coffin and a few wreaths," reflected Don, as he looked about him.

The house was silent, bearing out the funeral atmosphere.

He sat on the slippery sofa and gazed at the engravings, which unanimously represented scenes of battle and sudden death. He meditated solemnly on the moral of the gaudy, framed motto: "Honesty is the Best Policy." He wondered why the generation of the Nineties felt that a parlor was incomplete without a sea shell and a family album.

Then, although he had not heard a sound, he became aware that someone was looking at him. He glanced toward the curtained archway leading into the hall and there he saw an old lady.

Lucas was startled. The old lady had appeared between the curtains as silently as a ghost. She was very small, with sharp features and bright eyes; her skin was like wax; she was clad in an old-fashioned dress of black silk, with a high collar, and she wore a little cap on her white hair. The old lady became a part of the room and Lucas felt as if he had slipped back into another decade.

"Are they coming?" she asked, in a whisper, her bright eyes fixed anxiously upon him.

Lucas stood up. "I beg your pardon, ma'am?"

"Are they coming?"
"I'm afraid I don't understand"
"You know," said the old woman, impatiently. "The Germans. They can't be far away now. Oh, dear. Oh, dear." She sighed and shook her head. "I don't know what's to become of us all."

She must have been nearly ninety years of age, stooped and wasted by the years, but still imbued by a vital force. Her high, cracked voice was plaintive.

"Germans?" said Lucas, blankly.

"No hope. No hope, now" went on the old lady, mournfully. "We are lost. Millions of them. Millions and millions." She patted the little white cap with tremulous fingers. "I don't know what's to become of us all. I really don't."

The black skirts rustled and then disappeared beyond the curtains into the gloom of the hall.

Lucas gaped, wondering if he had imagined her, and sat down again.

"Millions and millions of Germans!" he muttered. "What the heck?"

The heavy silence of the house oppressed him. After a while he heard quick, nervous footsteps in the hall, and a moment later a tall, ascetic old gentleman, with snow-white hair, swept aside the curtains. The old gentleman looked very fierce and military, with stern eyes beneath shaggy brows, drooping mustache beneath a hawklike nose, and he fumbled at a black string tie.

"Sorry! Sorry!" he rasped. "Didn't mean to keep you waiting. I'm Colonel Brand. You're the chap from the Devenant Agency, aren't you?"

"Lucas is my name, sir."

"Not in this house." The old gentleman chuckled, and tugged at his mustache. "Your name is Holt—Frederick Holt, and you're my nephew from Chicago. Think you can remember that?"

"Yes, sir."

"Too bad I must use subterfuge to get you into the house, but it seemed best. You were highly recommended by Mr. Devenant. But you had better come with me. This is a ghastly room. I don't know what that fool girl was thinking of, to show you in here. Come to my study. It's more comfortable there. Never mind about the bag. The girl will bring it up to your room. Come!"

Colonel Brand turned on his heel and Lucas followed him out of the parlor and down the hall to a bright, comfortable little study redolent of tobacco smoke, and furnished with deep leather chairs. There, when their pipes were glowing as they sat before the fire in the grate, Lucas learned why he was in the house, posing as Colonel Brand's nephew.

"This is not my house," explained the old gentleman, abruptly. It belonged to Jacob Gardiner, an old friend and comrade of mine, and I have lived here for the past twenty years with Jacob. He never married. Neither did I. Just two old bachelors—friends. I lost the best friend I ever had when Jacob died last year."

The colonel shook his head, sadly. "He provided for me rather handsomely, I may say, in his will and insisted that I was to retain my quarters here as long as I wished. The real heir to the estate, however, was his brother a

Jonathan."
"Is he living here now?"
"Yes. We get along very well together. A fine man, but—if I may say it—a bit eccentric. The reason I asked Devenant to send a good man out here is because Mr. Gardiner's—ah—eccentricities have taken a more serious turn, of late."

"Do you mean he is becoming—" Lucas tapped his forehead meaningly.

"No. Not that. I'm quite sure it isn't that. Somehow, I believe there is a definite reason behind his actions." Colonel Brand looked toward the closed door. He lowered his voice. "As a matter of fact, I have come to the conclusion that Jonathan's life is in danger. If I thought otherwise I wouldn't have called in a private detective."

"What basis have you?" asked Lucas.

"No basis beyond an extraordinary change in his manner, and the fact that he has been receiving some very strange communications in the past few weeks. However, I'll tell you about it from the beginning."

"When Jacob Gardiner died he left the greater part of his estate as I said, to his brother. We had considerable trouble finding Jonathan as he has been more or less of a wanderer and had not been in touch with the family for a good many years, but he was finally located in Nebraska and immediately came back home to claim his inheritance."

"He is a man of about sixty-five and I imagine he has seen a bit of the world in his day, but at the time we located him he was engaged in business in Omaha. As a man, I liked him very much indeed. He has many of his brother's good qualities, he has been the soul of kindness to me and he has even sent for a nephew and a niece to come and live here."

"The girl's name is Jane Gardiner and the young man is Jacob Wirth—both in rather poor circumstances, I understand, and they have been living here and attending university in the city. I tell you this to show you that Jonathan is really a kind man and a good man."

The colonel puffed furiously at his pipe.

"Within the past month a great change has come over him. He has lost weight, he seems in bad health and he has become very nervous and irritable. More than that, I happen to know that he has taken to carrying a revolver and that he locks the door of his room every night. And then, there are the letters."

"You said that he received some strange communications," remarked Lucas. "Have you seen any of them?"

Colonel Brand leaned forward and opened a drawer of his desk. He produced a small slip of paper and handed it to the young detective.

"What do you make of that?" Lucas looked at the paper with interest. It was nothing more than a page from a calendar pad. The date of the previous Saturday, the nineteenth of the month, was marked by a neat little cross in red ink. More noticeable, however, was the heavy black square that completely blotted out the date of the coming Monday, April the twenty-eighth.

"It came by mail," said Colonel Brand, "Last Saturday, and it came in this envelope."

He handed over a cheap, commonplace envelope with a typewritten address. It had been posted in the city on the night of the previous Friday. There was a blob of black wax to seal the

flap. The envelope was addressed to Jonathan Gardiner.

"Nothing else but the calendar page?"

"Nothing else," replied the colonel. "And now, take a look at this."

His lean hand darted into the drawer again and he produced another calendar page. It was a trifle larger in size and had evi-

dently been torn from a different calendar, but the page was for the current month of April and the date of the coming Monday, the twenty-eighth, was completely blotted out.

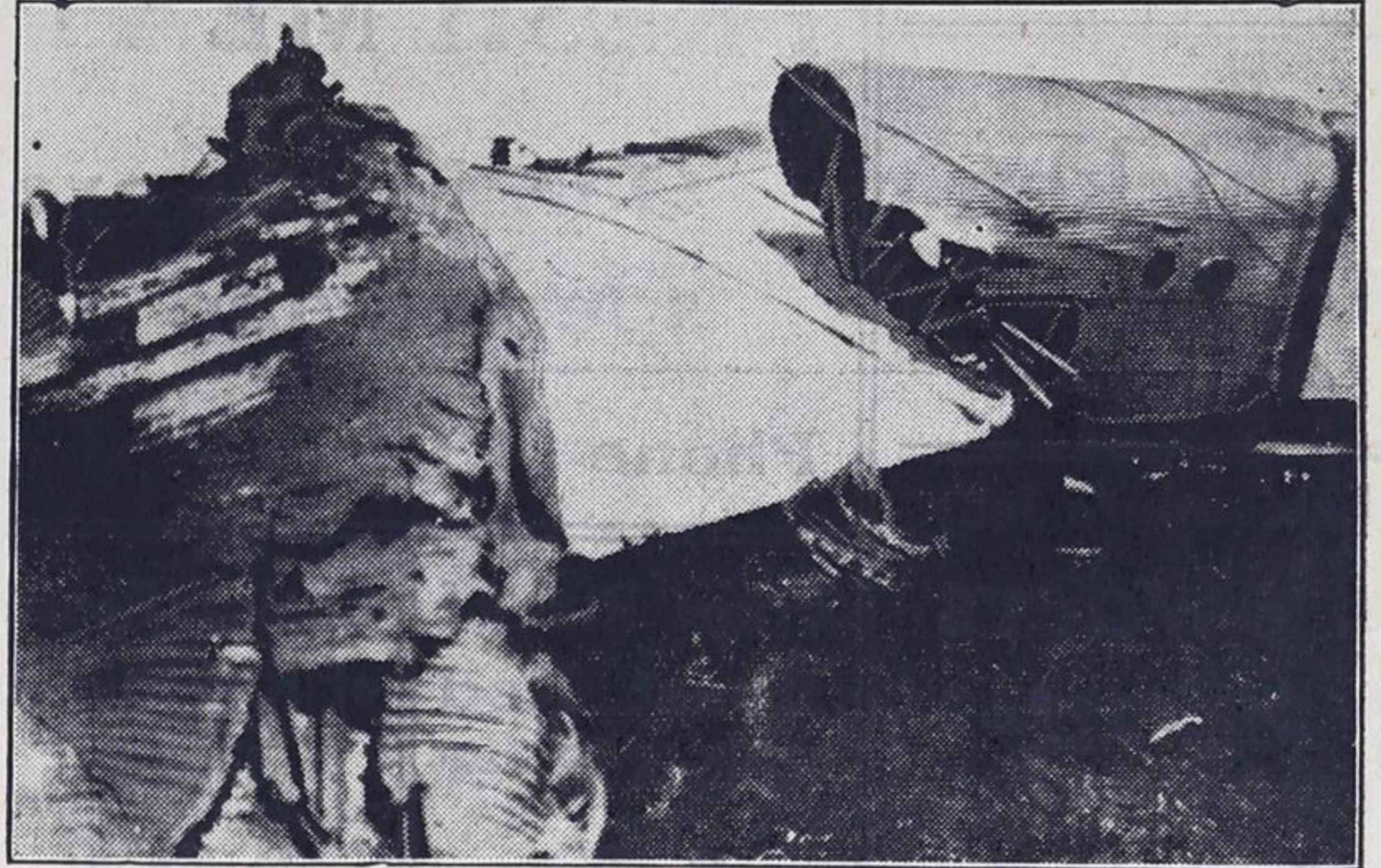
"That," said Colonel Brand, "came on Tuesday of this week."

Lucas saw that the date of Tuesday, April the twenty-second was marked by a neat cross in

red ink.
"Do you mean," he said, "that Mr. Gardiner receives one of these calendar pages every day?"
"Every morning," declared the colonel, firmly. "And on each and every page the current date is marked in red ink while the date of next Monday is blotted out in black."

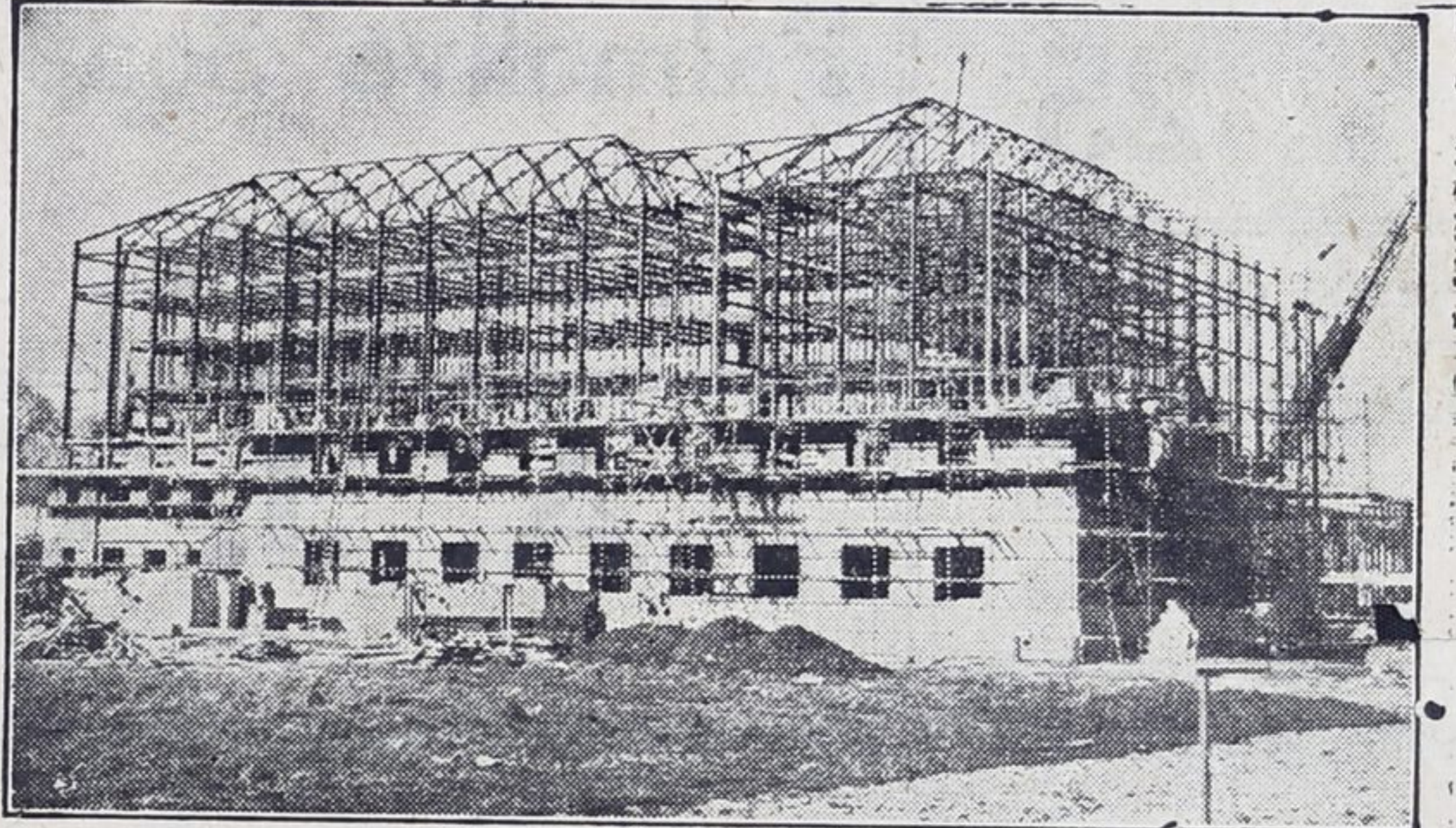
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WHERE SIX WINNIPEG ATHLETES DIED IN AIR CRASH



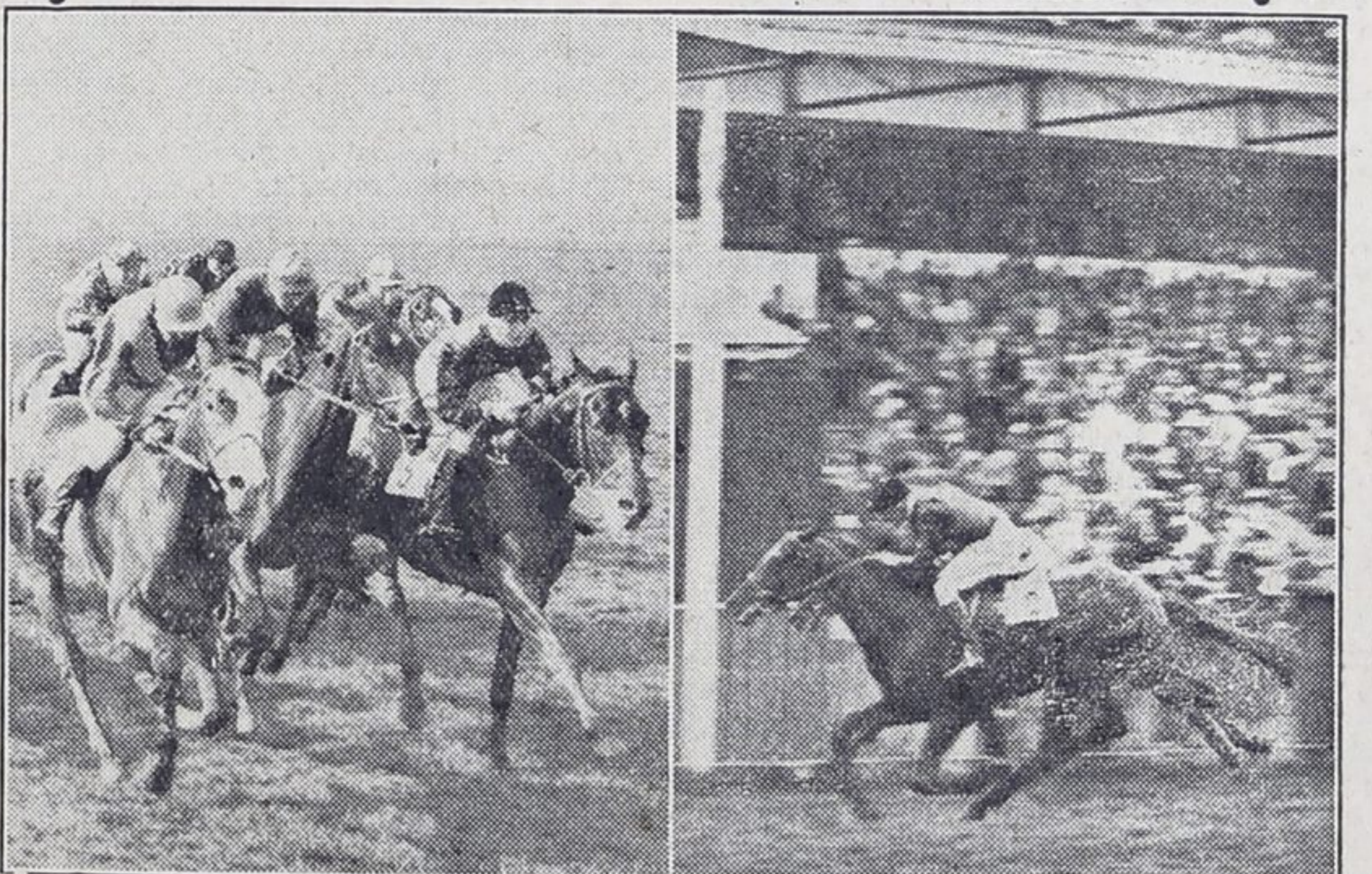
Here is the battered wreckage of the tri-motored plane which crashed at Neodesha, Kansas, killing six and injuring eight of its occupants. Ten of the victims were members of the Winnipeg Toilers, championship Canadian basketball team, who were returning from Tulsa, Oklahoma. The tragedy occurred on the second anniversary of the crash that killed Knute Rockne, famous Notre Dame football coach.

CAMBRIDGE'S NEW LIBRARY TAKES SHAPE



Our picture shows the progress which has been made in the building of the new library at Cambridge University. When this huge library is completed it will house about forty-seven miles of book shelves.

TWO ROYAL VICTORIES AT OPENING OF THE RACING SEASON



His Majesty the King scored two early victories with a couple of his racing horses at the beginning of the racing season in England. Our picture on the left shows the King's horse "Fox Earth" (extreme left) leading in the Swaffham Plate race at Newmarket which he won easily. The picture on the right shows the second win for His Majesty when the royal horse "Limelight" won the Newbury Spring Cup in a close finish with Solenoid.

The Family Next Door



SAT

Commendable Economy