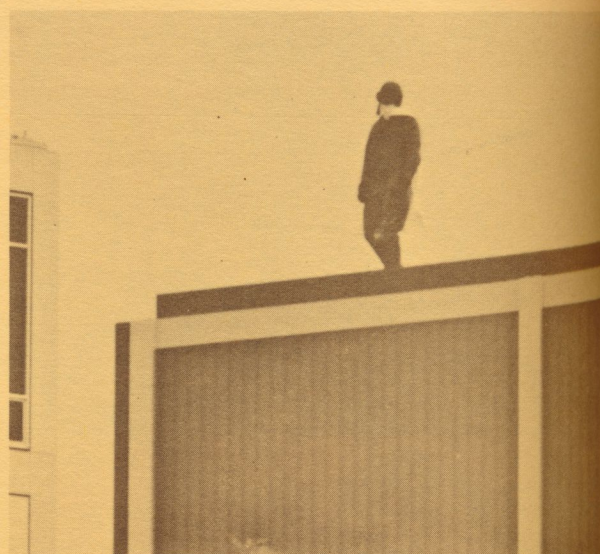


# Talon

THE CADET MAGAZINE OF THE U. S. A. F. ACADEMY

VOLUME 16 NUMBER 2 OCTOBER 1970





# WHO

## IS THAT MASKED MAN?

By R. Martin



Snoopy? . . . The Red Baron? . . . Lucky Lindy? No, no, no. The apparition you have seen is none other than Bedcheck Charlie. Bedcheck Charlie: perhaps the most misunderstood ghost of all times, and yet probably the most interesting and colorful figure in the Academy's short history. Just who is that masked man with the long white scarf?

No doubt you have noticed 'ol Bedcheck at some time or other. It might have been on top of Mitchell Hall as he reviewed the troops before a football game — checking to make sure the Wing's spirit was high. Perhaps he was atop some other building watching over a pep rally or team send-off — apart, but his spirit oozing through the crowd. He must always make sure that the spirit of the Wing is at its peak.

At football games, Bedcheck really gets to do his thing. The lonely and mysterious figure appears with long white scarf blowing in the wind right before the opening kickoff and calmly leans against the goal post, letting his compatriots both on and off the field know that he is ready for victory. The rest of the game Bedcheck will be seen rushing up and down the Air Force sideline, pacing to and fro, full of overflowing spirit — encouraging the men on the field and the fans in the stand to obtain the victory. Though he speaks no words, his very actions and mannerisms are spirit personified — or more correctly, ghostified.

Bedcheck's wardrobe is easily recognized: the long, flowing white scarf, the oversized calvary boots, the riding breeches, the leather flying jacket with the furry



collar, the leather helmet and gloves, and his peering goggles. He fully represents the World War I flyboy. Of course his mere appearance makes this representation apparent, but even more are his ardor and enthusiasm which were characteristic of our early flyers. It is almost as if one of our comrades from the past has rejoined us in order to cheer the Falcons on to victory.

Now that we know a little more about Bedcheck, it will prove interesting to see where he originated. Despite certain rumors that link him with World War I or II figures, or with a figure from the Korean Conflict, our Bedcheck springs from the pages of a comic strip. During the early 1960's, George Wunder did a sequel about the Air Force Academy in his "Terry and the Pirates" comic strip.

The melodramatic plot ran something like this: a young friend of Terry's, Bucky Warbow, gains an appointment to USAFA, then with another Doolie friend, Dudley Darby, they get into a bit of trouble with a Firstie—Cadet Major Rampart. It seems that Rampy was being literally chased by a female, Hildy Tome, who was in search of a husband, and the Doolies kindly offered him some advice. For this breach of the "system", Rampy gives a difficult task to Bucky and Dudley as punishment — they must start an Academy tradition. As Rampy puts it: "Anything your massive minds can concoct, gentlemen — just as long as it's one that generations of cadets yet unborn will cherish!"

Well, as things would have it, Hildy devises a scheme which not only aids the Dools, but also gains her revenge over the Rock—Rampy. Bedcheck Charlie is born: the ghost of a World War I pilot who has returned to aid the Fourth Class with its bedtime inspections, giving advance warning of approaching upperclassmen. The whole affair almost backfires as the appearance of the ghost receives nationwide attention — even the Pentagon becomes concerned. An explanation has to be found in order to save the Academy, but Rampy will not put the two doolies in jeopardy. Instead, he will sacrifice his career in order to save them and USAFA.

It really looks bleak until Hildy shows up at the big football game, scares the hell out of the opponents, and the Falcons emerge victorious. Then the whole thing is exposed as a manifestation of spirit—thus saving face for everyone. All is resolved, and a tradition is born.

Bedcheck did not appear on our campus, however, until 1966, when a venerable, bitter, and notorious '69 Grad decided that the Academy was in need of the friendly ghost. Consulting with the celestial sphere, he brought 'ol Bedcheck to our campus — symbol of spirit and truly one of our better traditions. Since then, Bedcheck has had numerous friends who have helped him along. This ghostly figure will always remain with the Wing, for he has indeed become a distinguished tradition at USAFA, and as long as there is something known as school spirit in our midst, it will be found in its highest form in the lonely yet ardent figure of Bedcheck Charlie. □

