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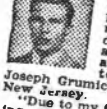

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Vol. 113, No. 3 for July, 1945 Best of New Stories

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SHORT STORIES

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BE OUT ON JULY 11TH ◆ ◆ ◆

Cover painted for Adventure by V. E. Pyles
Kenneth S. White, Editor

IF YOUR COPY OF THIS MAGAZINE IS LATE—

We regret that, due to the difficulties of wartime transportation, your *Adventure* may sometimes be a little late in reaching you. If this should happen, your patience will be appreciated. Please do not write complaining of the delay. It occurs after the magazine leaves our offices and is caused by conditions beyond our control.

—The Publishers.

THE CAMP-FIRE

Where Readers, Writers and Adventurers Meet

JOHN BEAMES' "Timber Tough" is a segment from his forthcoming book, "North Wind Country" which is, to a considerable extent, autobiographical. About the passages which we have excerpted the author writes—

> I was one of the boys who hopped and hung on the white spruce getting on for forty years ago. I've broken tight jams where the key log was down under a twelve foot face of jackstrawed logs, spouting white foam. Once I was fished out of the drink on the end of a peavy so full of water they had to hang me up by the heels.
>
> The only reason I wasn't drowned that time, as the push on the rapids gang explained it, was that I was destined to be hanged.
>
> The same explanation may account for my getting off with only a cracked head when a full load of logs, ten feet high and fourteen feet wide, broke away on a hill, and went all to hell at the bottom. They dug me out from under the logs just before I smothered to death in the snow.
>
> Apart from that nothing much happened to me beyond almost getting blown up by a charge of dynamite that drifted under the ice that I happened to be walking on, falling off a sixteen foot lumber pile, and being chased by a bad butt that split a tree I was sawing on.
>
> After I got washed up as a bushwhacker, got married and settled down, I started to write stories about the things I had seen when I could still hit a man hard enough to make his ears flap. Writing is fun, but doing is much better fun.
>
> So the stuff in this yarn is genuine enough: I knew those boys though I've changed their names: and the places, though I've changed their names, too. I don't suppose it matters much now, for the ground I logged over is mostly farmland or second growth rubbish today, and no roaring drive crew breaks jams on the rivers I drove.
>
> Rough and tough as they were, there was something about those days that I like to remember. I'd give a good deal to hear my old mates let out the wolf howl: "Hop an' hang all summer on the white spruce. WHEE!"

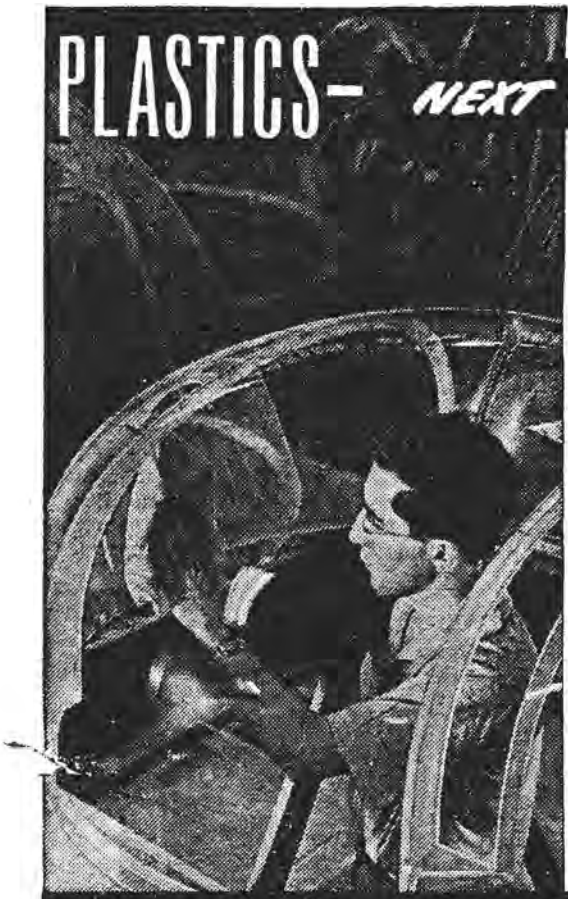
Mr. Beames, who hasn't been with us since 1929 (our January 15 issue) when he gave us "Beyond Trails"—a story of the Mackenzie River country—promises we'll be seeing more copy from his typewriter from time to time now.

THREE recruits to the ranks of our Writer's Brigade this month. John Reid Byers, who gives us "Charge-of-Quarters" on page 122, writes—

> I'm afraid I can't make myself sound very exciting for *Camp-Fire*. I'm just a guy who, after quite a few years with logging and construction outfits in the Northwest, suddenly decided that he wanted to be a writer. I thought it would be easy, and that there'd be good money in it. Chances two; errors two. But I'm still at it in a lazy man's fashion. (I almost won the title of laziest man on the Pacific Coast a few years back. But I made the mistake of yawning and the judges regarded it as unnecessary motion.)
>
> "Charge-of-Quarters" is practically a chapter out of my autobiography. In July, 1942, I was one of the baffled elderly gents that the Army scooped up for reasons best known to itself. (That same Army turned me down in 1918. I suppose this proves something.) I landed in the Signal Corps, down at Camp Crowder, Missouri, and after looking me over and clucking softly to itself the Army decided to make me an instructor of Basics. So I spent a few months explaining map-reading, the use and abuse of the field telephone and similar subjects to bunches of sleepy recruits. I think the high light of my instructing days came when I was working on a bunch of southern boys with the maps. "Now, what appears in blue on a map?" asked Acting Corporal Byers brightly. Somebody said water and got a pleased smile from the

(Continued on page 137)

Photograph courtesy Rohm and Haas Co., Inc.



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DISCOUNT TO DISCHARGED VETERANS—SPECIAL TUITION RATES FOR MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES

NEW GUINEA GOLD

By

THOMSON BURTIS

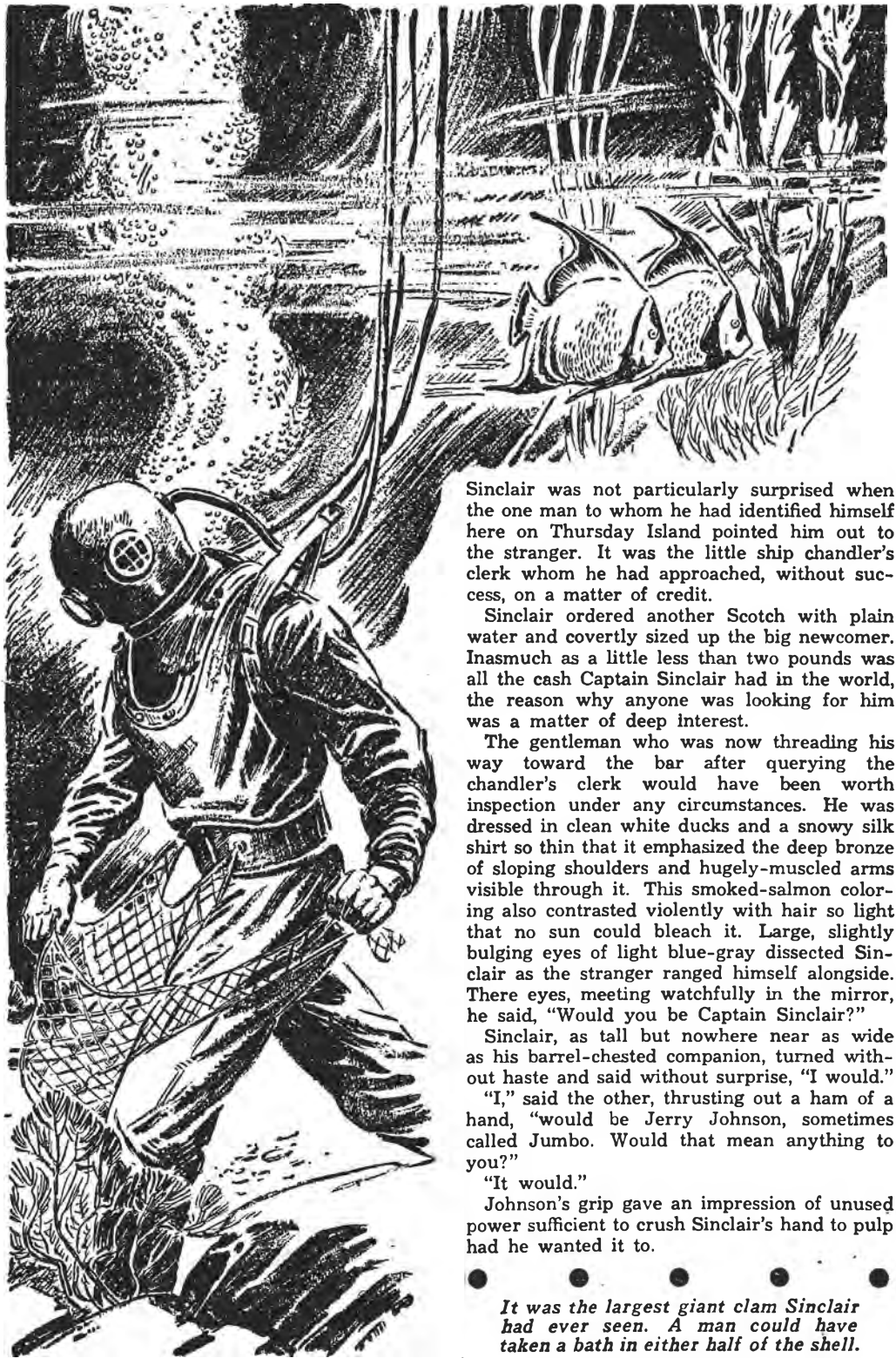
CAPTAIN ANDREW SINCLAIR, facing the huge mirror behind the fifty-foot bar, saw the man come in. He noted the wake of semi-silence which followed the towering newcomer as he drifted among the tables on the far side of the hundred-foot-square room. When the blond giant stopped to ask a question, the man addressed often stood up to answer, and if there were waterfront girls at the table they simpered with respectful coyness, as though frightened at their own temerity and without any real hope of being noticed—which they never were.

Up and down the bar of Mickey's Mite— incongruous name for the enormous, bare-walled pub—other men who had identified the new arrival spoke to their neighbors with their mouths behind their hands.

Strangely enough, the hackles along Andy Sinclair's own spine stirred into a subdued tingle of life, but his reaction was one of instant wariness.

Being somewhat of a mystic, as even men with a scientific turn of mind often become after years of thoughtful solitude exposed to nature and mankind in their more primitive aspects,

ILLUSTRATED BY V. E. PYLES



Sinclair was not particularly surprised when the one man to whom he had identified himself here on Thursday Island pointed him out to the stranger. It was the little ship chandler's clerk whom he had approached, without success, on a matter of credit.

Sinclair ordered another Scotch with plain water and covertly sized up the big newcomer. Inasmuch as a little less than two pounds was all the cash Captain Sinclair had in the world, the reason why anyone was looking for him was a matter of deep interest.

The gentleman who was now threading his way toward the bar after querying the chandler's clerk would have been worth inspection under any circumstances. He was dressed in clean white ducks and a snowy silk shirt so thin that it emphasized the deep bronze of sloping shoulders and hugely-muscled arms visible through it. This smoked-salmon coloring also contrasted violently with hair so light that no sun could bleach it. Large, slightly bulging eyes of light blue-gray dissected Sinclair as the stranger ranged himself alongside. There eyes, meeting watchfully in the mirror, he said, "Would you be Captain Sinclair?"

Sinclair, as tall but nowhere near as wide as his barrel-chested companion, turned without haste and said without surprise, "I would."

"I," said the other, thrusting out a ham of a hand, "would be Jerry Johnson, sometimes called Jumbo. Would that mean anything to you?"

"It would."

Johnson's grip gave an impression of unused power sufficient to crush Sinclair's hand to pulp had he wanted it to.

● ● ● ● ●

It was the largest giant clam Sinclair had ever seen. A man could have taken a bath in either half of the shell.

Funny, Sinclair thought. He had been ashore less than ten minutes when he had heard mentioned the fact that Jumbo Johnson was just in from Lae. He had also heard the name in various ports of call between here and Tahiti. He had been almost certain of Johnson's identity from the moment he had come through that door like a tiger through a section of jungle which he ruled, but only at the cost of unceasing vigilance.

"Drink up," Johnson said with a grin. "Nice boat you've got."

"Work fast, don't you?" Andy Sinclair smiled.

"When you do business over several thousand square miles of jungle, islands, and the kind of seas we have down here when the wind blows, which is often, you've got to work fast," Johnson said as he raised the drink the bartender had placed before him. Then, as Sinclair raised his glass, Johnson said, "To our partnership!"

Sinclair did not betray his surprise or his thoughts. Being a rather well-trained student of theory as well as a veteran practitioner of the practical, his judgments were frequently more accurate than he himself realized.

Immediately he was thinking, *He's deliberately using his somewhat overwhelming personality and physical presence to rush me off my feet. I wonder why?*

This curiosity became of immediate importance because there had been few occasions in Sinclair's life when his sales resistance to a business proposition had been lower.

Johnson's mahogany face was turned away a little—just enough to conceal the width of an aquiline nose which had obviously been hit with considerable gusto more than once. Thinned in profile, a face which was square and ruggedly handsome from the front became that of a powerful bird of prey.

He exuded confidence in himself, but it was not the careless authority based on permanent foundations not easily subject to change. It was rather that of a wild stallion which is leader of the band, but which only retains that status by overcoming a continuous series of challenges from a never-ending succession of enemies and aspirants to the throne. The cords on the backs of his hands and an effect of looseness in the flesh around his eyes indicated middle age, whereas the rest of his body seemed to be in its powerful prime. Up to now, the eyes themselves had showed nothing, told nothing, missed nothing.

Slowly, Sinclair set down his glass. He was too old and too experienced and owned too good a boat to be swept off his feet. But he might have to watch himself, at that.

"If you're *the* Jumbo Johnson," he said, I presume I—or my boat—have just had quite a compliment."

"That's what a lot of people would think," Johnson allowed. "Don't get me wrong though, Sinclair. A man has to earn a partnership."

"I don't like partners."

Johnson swept this away with a laugh which was a little on the loud side. He seemed aware that the line of men along the bar constituted an unobtrusively interested audience.

"I knew you were a queer duck," he stated, glancing briefly into Sinclair's eyes. "What have you got ag'in an occasional trip in double harness?"

His speech, Sinclair noted, was not characteristic of any one part of the United States. It was without regional slang, drawl or slur. He might have been raised anywhere or everywhere.

"When you have partners," Sinclair said with that serenity which seemed to be gradually smoothing Johnson down, like oil spreading on a restless sea, "one gets greedy, and another gets supersensitive, and another gets fatheaded, and any given combination runs down whoever isn't there. I learned that for the last time on a big plantation in Tahiti."

"This is different," Johnson said crisply.

Abruptly, the peripatetic god of a half dozen farflung trading posts became all businessman. He leaned his elbows on the bar and motioned Sinclair to bend closer.

"I know you picked up that boat at Tahiti with the next thing to your last dollar," he stated. "And I know you paid off your crew an hour ago and put 'em on the *Island Queen* for home with practically your last nickel. Now what do you want along the Strait—north or south?"

"A hundred thousand dollars, to be exact," Sinclair said calmly, then added, "Not that it's any of your business, you know."

"The hell it isn't," Johnson said. "Come on outside."

THEY passed between the tables and went out on a terrace from which the last hundred feet of the slope fell away to the harbor. Offshore, a bobbing mass of pearling luggers and bêche-de-mer boats lay inside the harbor reefs. Behind them, becase it was the long season of the southeast winds, the slope which was wildly verdant during the northwest rains was now parched to a dim brown. One pearler was sailing home into the turquoise peace of the harbor. Beyond the reef was a five-knot rip of the open sea, compressed by the land masses of Australia and New Guinea, eddying and whirling around the numberless islets and coral reefs of the treacherous Strait. Tramps and freighters from the seven seas dotted a line of smaller vessels ranging from a gray patrol boat of the Australian Navy to cockroach-ridden coastal cockleshells and two, long, twelve-man native canoes.

Almost in the center was the *Seeker,* shining sixty-five foot two-master which was more than just Captain Andrew Sinclair's new property. It was his home, his business, his world and his hope. And the apple of his eye.

He felt Johnson studying him as they walked to a bench and sat down. Ready for anything, he mentally organized what he had heard here and there, over thousand of miles between Tahiti and the Strait, about this uncrowned king of many a half-lost bit of land.

It really wasn't much. Just the picture of an adventurer with the heart of a lion and a shrewd eye for a dollar who fought when weaker bodies ran, and dared when feebler financial hearts quailed—or perhaps more accurately, gambled when a sound businessman would have been horrified at the risk.

In the harbor was the Seeker, *shining sixty-five foot two-master, the apple of Captain Andrew Sinclair's eye.*

This gambling was not merely for the hell of it, as some said, for Johnson won a surprising number of times.

In addition to his farflung trading posts, he was rumored to have grubstaked a large number of prospectors prowling the Owen Stanley Range in New Guinea, and to have investments in various pearling luggers and pearl fisheries along the Torrey Strait. No one to whom Sinclair had talked had any idea of the real size or extent of his financial stake in the South Seas. All they knew was that he covered a vast domain like a trapper constantly patroling his line of traps. At each of his island trading posts, it was said, he had a comfortable residence, presided over by imported Polynesians, mostly female and comely. Perhaps that accounted for the gossip that no waterfront woman from Samoa to Singapore had never had a drink with him, and that a considerable number of well-heeled and attractive female tourists who would have been receptive to a serious campaign, matrimonial or otherwise on his part, had never been able to inveigle him into a cup of tea. Or themselves into one of his houses.

Of course, Sinclair reflected, Johnson was the kind around whom legends formed like mist around the peaks of New Guinea, sometimes with as little substance.

"I can make us twenty thousand pounds apiece within two years," Johnson was saying. "Quicker with an average run of luck."

"Why hand a stranger anything like that?"

"Because men with the proper qualifications are scarce. And besides you're not a stranger."

"How come?"

"I see lots of people, passing through, and they talk. My trade agents are picked to listen, too. Why are you after twenty thousand pounds, no more and no less?"

Sinclair considered and answered: "Because I want to spend five, maybe ten, years in the States, without working."

"Studying?"

Sinclair's head turned like that of a puppet suddenly jerked by a rope.

Johnson grinned. "Saw your library aboard the *Seeker,*" he stated calmly. "More brain-breaking books than a Japanese pearl lugger

has cockroaches. And your diary. That upper Amazon stuff couldn't have been any picnic. Ethiopia—different but likewise. I didn't have time for the Gold Coast stuff."

Sinclair stared at him. When he spoke it was with even more deliberation that usual, his voice softer than normal. "I gave a policeman a small sum to keep an eye on the boat while I was gone."

"And I've known the said policeman for fifteen years, I fell in love with your boat, your diary was in plain sight, and I planned to do us both a favor," Johnson said impatiently. "Furthermore, I didn't need to tell you I'd dipped into your past."

It would be fairly silly, Sinclair reflected, to become annoyed. The circumstances might be said to be a bit unusual.

"So let's proceed to this favor," he said. "Does your offer involve something illegal, so dangerous, or such a gamble that you couldn't find anybody but a newcomer to fall for it?"

"None of the three," Johnson said. "And I'm laying it on the line because I know that when you got fed up with your partners in Tahiti—"

"Business often makes me a little ill."

"Particularly that plantation business, eh? Anyway, you got out, practically threw the dough you had coming to you back in their faces, and gambled the stake you had left on your boat. If you and I can't do business, the score will still be no hits, no runs, no errors. But I don't want to waste my time."

"Shoot."

"I spend money on research—of a different kind but for the same reasons—just as any big corporation does. And I've discovered a wonderful bed of pearl oysters in a new spot. Never been fished. Depth ranges from ten to thirty fathoms on a gradual slope—no big shelf, coral conditions normal, sea floor not too difficult.

"The point is that no one can tell yet how big it is. I don't want anyone else fishing it. Figure it like a gold strike, where the discoverer is entitled to keep it secret until he can file his own claims and find out what he's got.

"I want an honest white man with a good boat who can keep his mouth shut. Also handle natives, keep his eyes open, and learn this country. With decent luck on pearls, plus what we get for as fine shells as ever came out of these Straits, that man can make copra trading and the catch of some of those stinking luggers down there that I've grubstaked, look like sweatshop wages. That's Number One."

"What's two?" Sinclair asked noncommittally.

"As big as all New Guinea, with ten thousand square miles of ocean and islands and all they hold," Johnson said crisply. "I've got faults, but I've got size. Your boat's a honey. Your experience, if a chum of mine from Tahiti is right, is honey of a higher grade. Humanly speaking, you're a pearl without price down here. It might be that I could use you in stuff that'll turn out to be a combination of Kimberley and the Comstock Lode."

"I don't like to be used," Sinclair said quietly. "I like to use myself."

"I'm talking a possible partnership," Johnson said harshly. "I don't waste time. You did all right on the Gold Coast, for instance, so you've got the fiber that won't rot in the South Pacific.

"If you went for native women, you'd have done it a long while ago, and if you couldn't handle Kanakas, who are about the same all over in certain respects, you'd never have got into, to say nothing of having got out of, the places you've been."

Sinclair unwound his lean length like a relaxed snake stretching. "I'll take two long drinks in yonder saloon and think it over. Alone."

He smiled. "Concentrating on pearl-fishing, about which I know little if anything, what's the deal?"

"Your boat and services. I supply government grant, new beds and crack crew—Kanakas, not Japs. I furnish diving outfits and all gear and supplies. All money advanced and government fees come off the top. Remainder fifty-fifty."

Sinclair knew that it would be useless to bargain.

"And unlimited prospects," Johnson said harshly.

He was pressing a little now, as though challenged by Sinclair's ability to keep his feet on the ground.

"A hundred thousand, and I'm long gone," Andy reminded him.

"That's what you think," Johnson said, laughing without humor. "Would it surprise you to know that I went to school myself back in the States, and that I have a nodding acquaintance with your pals on the *Seeker*? Pythagoras and Santayana and Newton and Jeans?"

"No."

There could be no question about it. Jumbo Johnson was trying to sell himself—and the deal—to Sinclair.

"This part of the world is different from where you've been. Down here you'll learn what I did fifteen years ago. Those guys wondered about life. Thing to do is live it," Johnson said. "According to the classes I slept through, being a football player, none of those lads ever had sense enough to discover that there's nothing to it but good health, good food, good liquor, good sex and good opposition to keep you on your toes, with power enough to have 'em when, as, if and how you like 'em." He paused, eyeing Sinclair keenly.

"All right—I'll give you fifteen minutes. I'm shoving off for the government station on Daru this afternoon."

SINCLAIR strolled back into the bar and ordered another Scotch. Waiting for the drink he gave himself an order to take it easy. To one of his conflicting impulses, and in view of the characteristics of Mr. Jumbo Johnson, the decision he had to make was not as easy as might first appear. As he stood there, trying to analyze the situation, a certain percentage of the men in Mickey's Mite looked him over speculatively.

What they saw was a slender, trimly proportioned man, small-boned for all his six-feet-one. His nose was long and, like Johnson's, had once been broken, which added an individualistic bump and a tiny spread to its exact center. The left eye had once been punched to such effect that there was just a trace of scar tissue at the wounds. The square jaw just escaped being of the lantern variety, and gave the effect of being just a trifle off-center. Above this long face, crisp hair of a tinge justifying the nickname "Sandy" was parted a little left of the middle. A tuft of it curled down over one temple, completing an ensemble of quizzical, almost humorous off-sidedness.

It was an appealing and deceiving face because of the level, slate gray eyes, and the fact that no line in it but could have been made by a smile. And it had character. The large number of New England whaling captains who were sturdy limbs on his mother's family tree, and the equally long line of scientists on his father's side, doubtless had something to do with that. Until he had joined the Royal Flying Corps in 1915, the opposite pulls of his ancestry had neutralized each other, left him at an uneasy dead center. He had become an M.D. at twenty-four, but had never had the urge to practice. Instead, he had wasted a lot of time on half-baked, innocent little explorations in Canada, Alaska and Central America.

During the war a long spell in the hospital, and then, within a few days after his return to combat duty, being shot down over Germany, had given him enough unused pay to finance the start of his wandering. Thereafter he had become an out and out adventurer who reverted to microscope and study whenever he could, and indulged in an orgy of reading for a few months every time he came out of the bush. Gradually a few thousand dollars had adhered to his bank accounts as a result of his experiences and discoveries in hitherto uninvestigated areas, and because he had no expensive civilized tastes. He never stayed in cities long enough to make them a habit.

So, in his middle thirties, he was a doctor whose experience had been limited to occasional back-country emergencies, mostly involving surgery; a qualified master mariner who was commanding his first boat; an oc-

Johnson was the kind around whom legends formed like mist around the peaks of New Guinea.

casional scientific observer whose total of three articles in more or less learned and inconspicuous journals had aroused passing attention; and an out-of-doorsman of sufficient reputation to get a job as practical head of various expeditions whenever he sent out word that he was available.

He was also a restlessly dissatisfied man.

Until recently, the years had made him more and more the physical, and less and less the intellectual explorer, in the sense that he was always doing the former, and only playing around at the latter. For the last few months, however, a hunger within him had been growing for all that home meant: the companionship and stimulus of his own social and intellectual kind. Along with it was an increasing compulsion to express himself mentally. He even felt that he had something definite to say about extra-sensory perception in the peoples and animals of the jungle and atoll and forest, plus certain speculations based thereon concerning what seemed to be happening to civilized people and the world they lived in.

He might need the lore of a thousand books, and years of study and application, to organize it properly, but he felt that unless he made the attempt he would forever despise himself for having been untrue to himself and the blood of his ancestors. And he had honesty and objectivity enough to admit that if circumstances, events, or his own lack of willpower tempted him to continue much longer the life of a dweller in the South Seas, he might cast aside forever a higher destiny. He liked primitive peoples even savages much better than the civilized brand, unless they stank too much, which they mostly did. The Polynesians, however, who spent half their lives sporting in the water, often smelled like flowers.

So when he found the boat of his dreams, at a price which was another miracle, he had bought it. As its master he planned to trade himself into a stake which Jim Barry, formerly of the R.F.C. and now an investment broker in New York, would help him turn into the larger capital he needed for the years of study and research he contemplated back in the States.

Soberly, he admitted that to refuse Johnson's offer would be stupid. With equal clarity, he realized that the fabulous Jumbo might spread before him a series of temptations which would weld him forever to the life his body loved, and that he might die with his highest future behind him and his basic thirsts unquenched.

Of only one thing was he certain—that Jumbo Johnson had revealed less than half of what he had in mind.

Which that gentleman proceeded to confirm when he rejoined Sinclair at the bar.

"If everything turns out to be what it seems," Andy said, "I'll try out the deal for a few weeks at least."

"Few weeks!" the grinning Johnson scoffed. "Man, don't you think I heard a hell of a flyer what you were in the war? Don't you know that already airplanes are revolutionizing the gold mining business in New Guinea, and will change the whole picture around the Pacific? Don't you think I count on that, as well as on your master's papers, your boat and your general savvy?" He downed his drink and said abruptly, "Come on out here."

Again they were on the terrace, and Johnson waved at the cozy little settlement clinging to the slope and ringing the bay. In a spacious gesture, he encompassed the Strait.

"A hundred miles over there, you'll figure you're coming into a hell Dante never imagined," he boomed in his deep voice. "Mud and slime and storms and mist, and delta natives that look and act as though they'd just climbed out of the ooze for a few hours each day. But upcountry, boy, there's a land that His Majesty, King George V, might some day want to hang on to in preference to India, and that's the country I'm going to rule a piece of—if I can get the men!"

Johnson would have been completely bewildered, Sinclair thought with an inner smile, had he been told that he was almost talking himself out of his own deal.

Again, however, this South Seas edition of a Viking made that abrupt change from personality boy to businessman.

"Not a word to anybody," he said incisively. "We meet at sea, transfer gear, supplies and crew there with no one the wiser. If anyone

knew I'd staked a boat like yours and a man like you to go pearling, they'd be thicker around you than seagulls around a fishing boat. Let's get down to your schooner now and we'll settle the details. Pretty even from here, isn't she?"

As they walked down to the waterfront the eyes of both men were focused on the shining white craft which stood out in the welter of harder-working vessels like a brand-new motor car in front of any automobile graveyard.

And for the first time, really, the diamond-hard Scandinavian came alive to the observant Sinclair, like an actor dropping a stage characterization as he relaxes in his dressing room. He was like a horseman speaking of his Derby winner, or Pygmalion watching the statue of Galatea come alive, as he murmured to himself, "Oak for the hull, ash for the masts, mahogany in the saloon, and teakwood for the decks. Designed by Stevens, and damn the expense. With all sails set, running before this southeast wind for my private pearling grounds, she'll be as pretty a sight as a man would want to see."

Of all the crowded moments of his life, it was to be Sinclair's fate to remember this one most clearly, because for many a bitter month it was to be the only actual event upon which his mind would concentrate for more than a moment at a time.

CHAPTER II

CAPTAIN SUCKER OF THE *SEEKER*

ALMOST exactly one month later, Sinclair tumbled out of his berth in the saloon of the *Seeker,* in a familiarly unsettled frame of mind. Where other men burned the bats out of their belfries by whingdings of historic dimensions, Sinclair had discovered that only intense physical action relieved him of any indigestible lump there might be in his spirit. That this restless discomfort often foreshadowed trouble made release even more necessary.

The hold of the boat held a satisfactory catch of gold-tipped mother-of-pearl, and the mantles between shells and meat had furnished an above-average catch of lustrous pearls. But otherwise it had been a month of blazing sun, of cockroaches taken at Thursday Island nibbling even the horny flesh on the bottoms of his feet when he tried to sleep, and incredible monotony broken only by his practice dives with the auxiliary diving outfit.

He felt fairly at home in ten fathoms, now, although the first few times his overcontrol of the air valve had resulted in an involuntary and inglorious ascent, feet first, to the unrestrained glee of the crew. And there had been trading trips to the green gems of islands, and one dugong hunt. After watching a native leap on the harpooned carcass of the Torres Strait version of a sea otter and drown the beast, he had tried it himself. That had been fun, if unsuccessful. Otherwise, it was the stench of the boat, intolerable sunlight, and a growing uneasiness which gave even the multicolored miracle of the seafloor a jaundiced appearance.

This morning his depression was black and unfathomable. No scientific analysis of it, nor philosophical detachment about it, helped in the slightest. Why hadn't Johnson appeared as agreed? Why had he transferred diving equipment and supplies from his own boat to the *Seeker* at sea, out of sight of even an island?

Why did Bordai, the native diver who had just enough Japanese blood to slant his eyes, treat Sinclair with outward respect, but look at him as though in contempt because of some inner knowledge which the white fella captain did not possess? Why did the Kanakas, efficient seamen all, dart looks at Bordai after Sinclair had given an order, as though asking whether it was all right to obey? Was it because Bordai meant Jumbo Johnson to them, and hence the bigger white fella?

Or, more probably, was it all just imagination?

He ate a can of beans and wolfed some coffee for breakfast. Bordai was already down in ten fathoms, at which depth he could stay indefinitely with an occasional rise to the surface for a breather, and to empty the net of shells. Even this proof that the diver had completely recovered his health, which should have been excellent news, had no effect on Sinclair's feeling of unease. Two days before, working in thirty fathoms, Bordai had stayed down longer than the allotted three minutes, and been hauled up a paralyzed wreck. They had submerged him for hours at ten fathoms and then raised him, a fathom every hour, to the surface. The Papuan had snapped back to normal like a deflated balloon pumped full of air again.

The outwardly tranquil and untroubled Sinclair ordered the dinghy overboard, and with a crew of two and some beads, cloths and one axe set forth on the pretext of trading for garden produce. There was a small island which he had never visited nestling behind the nearest, larger one. Perhaps contact with the laughing natives would lift the smothering fog from his mind.

The islet was like all the rest, really: dazzling white beach merging into jungle through which the palm-thatched huts were visible, and a slope covered with waving palm fronds to its low peak. The natives gathered on the beach, as usual, to pull the boat ashore, singing, "Cheeses loves me, dis I know." This proof of missionary influence, for which Sinclair ordinarily had a tolerant disapproval, now seemed

something to loathe with a belligerent hatred.

These islanders, like the others he had seen, obediently wore the lava lavas and Mother Hubbards furnished them. Most of them, however, wore the Mother Hubbard unbuttoned. Sometimes the opening was in back, sometimes in front. Inasmuch as they had discarded the tiny aprons of bark, cloth or foliage ordinarily worn front and rear, the pictures presented by the widespread garments billowing in the steady southeastern trade was not precisely that contemplated by the men and women of God. Ordinarily, this Arcadian strip-tease and its ironic implications tickled Sinclair's risibilities, but not now.

Few white men ever visited this remote spot, so the natives traded eagerly. Most had an Hebraic or Spanish cast of countenance, evidence of the activities of at least some of the crews of the countless galleons which had come to grief hundreds of years before on the treacherous shoals and reefs of the Strait. There was little unique about these Kanakas, they did not arouse interest enough to lessen Sinclair's fretting boredom.

ANDY had been absent from the boat three hours when the returning dinghy rounded the lee of the larger island and came within sight of the *Seeker*. Far off, a white speck on the water, another boat was disappearing northwestward, all sails set.

"Him fella Johnny!" one oarsman exclaimed.

That it could be Johnson's *Pirate* was unthinkable. And yet—

Bordai, mission-educated into a reasonable facsimile of English and aware of his high estate as diver, lolled against the rail as Sinclair came aboard. Two of the Kanakas finished scraping out their shells, last of Bordai's catch, and with their suddenly furtive crewmates starting tidying up the deck. They seemed gripped by some inner excitement, and were watching Bordai and Sinclair like curious monkeys.

"Mr. Johnson, he come, he go," Bordai said with a toothy smile. "Leave this for you."

Sinclair was in a state of suspended animation, physical and mental, as he said carefully, "How long did he stay?"

"Few minutes, maybe more," Bordai said nonchalantly, with the native indifference to time. "He hurry—great business all over."

The penciled scrawl was unaddressed and unsigned. It read: *Catch worth close to a thousand, maybe more. See me in Mickey's around the first.* •

Slowly, Sinclair's hand crushed and rolled the slip of paper.

"He took the catch?" he asked.

Bordai nodded, and then explained, "Me feel bad down below. Plenty for today. Maybe tomorrow better."

"Why didn't Captain Johnson wait until all the shells were cleaned, and take them along?" Sinclair asked.

Those Oriental eyes in Bordai's black face suddenly did not belong to the thick-lipped savage at all. When he shrugged his shoulders, it was the pessimistic fatalism of the East. When he smiled, it seemed to Sinclair that it was with sneering pity.

"Big hurry, all over," he repeated. "If Johnson fella no tell captain fella, how should black fella know?"

Sinclair hurled the pellet of paper overboard. What he wouldn't give to be ashore—even to have a storm come up. Once before when he had felt like this in Honolulu—and with good reason, it had turned out—he had substituted in the boxing ring for the scheduled opponent of one Bat Covrino, a tough Filipino. The future light heavyweight champion of all the world had knocked him cold in the fourth, but it had been lovely while it lasted.

Why should Johnson have been unable to wait an hour or so for him? Why hadn't he cruised close to the islet and signaled Sinclair? Why—

"I'll go down myself," he said very softly, which was a bad sign.

The subdued crew brought out the spare diving gear, while he went below and put on two complete sets of heavy underwear. That was another thing, he thought. Without consulting Sinclair, Johnson had met the rendezvouz at sea with an auxiliary diving suit which fitted Andy like a glove, and could not possibly be worn by Bordai.

"A guy like you wouldn't miss exploring the bottom," Johnson had laughed. "It's a simple trick, and many hands make light work and heavy dough."

Sinclair had been grateful for the thought, and enthusiastic about the idea. Now it occurred to him that Bordai was always in charge of airhose, life line and compressed air while Sinclair was down. Any time the diver cared to be expertly inept at handling the equipment, there were a dozen ways to make certain that Sinclair never reached the surface alive. And Bordai was so much Johnson's man that he had stayed too long on the thirty-fathom level to snatch an unusual shell—

"Half of the profit of it being mine," Sinclair told himself disgustedly. "Take it easy, and don't be a damn fool."

He forced himself into physical relaxation, as the boys wound a heavy sash several times around his abdomen, and assisted him with leggings and two pairs of socks.

Sweat poured from him as he put on the waterproof suit and two crewmen forced his hands into gauntlets which gripped his wrists tightly. A metal corselet weighing twenty pounds, followed by boots weighing still more,

and they helped him overboard and held him there, half-submerged. There they loaded him, front and back, with fifty pounds of lead, which had proved the proper amount for his particular buoyancy. A large net was attached to his waist. Then as the air from the cylinder, compressed by the engine exhaust, hissed into the helmet they clicked it into place on the corselet. With Bordai overseeing the attendants on lifeline and air tubes, Sinclair sank slowly into the ten fathoms of sunshot water below.

He had to admit, Andy reflected, that Johnson had not exaggerated the potentialities of the new pearl-bed. At thirty fathoms its richness had tempted Bordai to overstay the ordinary three-minute dive, and here at ten fathoms there was much shell on an almost level ocean floor.

Regulating his buoyancy by the air valve, with the incoming air concentrating around his waist, he signaled with the lifeline. Soon the boat was towing him slowly over the ocean floor. Rainbow-colored small fish darted and played around him and coral of stunning beauty, its colors flashing in blinding reds and blues and greens even at that depth, was a fairy jungle of miniature proportions. Shell after shell came loose from the ocean floor, for Sinclair had had enough practice now to attain the perfect coordination and perception necessary for a tow job. Nor did he make the mistake of stimulating the oyster shell to snap closed at the wrong time. Gradually his net filled.

Now that the specters he had conjured up, self-made or not, turned the dive into an adventure, some of that inner tightness was relaxing. A large new shadow crept over the surface of the water. Might be a cloud, or another boat. If the latter, Johnson had undoubtedly decided to return. Or perhaps another boat had found the secret of the *Seeker*. He didn't want to go up yet—

Suddenly a small object hurled itself like a torpedo through the eerie green water. It was a small shark, and as it passed within inches of him, Sinclair received a hazy impression of a great gash across its one visible eye socket. Fleeing madly from something, and possibly blinded, it crashed into a hillock of multi-colored coral less than two feet to the diver's right.

Then it seemed that the coral itself had come to life. There was a movement so swift that it was barely visible, and needed the air bubbles and eddies which arose to verify the fact that it had happened at all. Sinclair was motionless, leaning against a powerful underwater current, strong enough to neutralize the gentle pull of the lifeline. He found himself staring at the headless carcass of the shark being born away by the flowing water.

Three long bodies, like submarines chasing a skiff, whipped past the diver. They were out of sight when the water became roiled with their battle for the body of their smaller brother.

Sinclair stood absolutely still. Gradually the outlines of one of the deadly traps of the sea emerged, apparently out of nothingness.

It was not the first but it was the largest giant clam he had ever seen. It was all of four feet long, and a man could have taken a bath in either half of the shell. It would weigh at least a thousand pounds, and its yawning mouth would measure a yard across. The snap of that

crenellated shell would have severed his leg as neatly as it had the body of the sand-shark. Already blended with the colors of the seafloor in such masterly camouflage as to be almost invisible, that shadow cast from the surface of the water had made it absolutely so. The sand-shark had saved his life.

Sinclair would have forced himself to stay down longer, but he was delighted to receive a peremptory signal via the lifeline to come up. As more air hissed into his helmet and he floated slowly to the surface, the reaction flowed through him like an opiate. The nervous tension which had been torturing him all day was gone.

It was a completely relaxed Sinclair whose head bobbed above the surface. The boys, particularly Bordai, seemed frightened and nervous as they took off his heavy gear and helped him aboard.

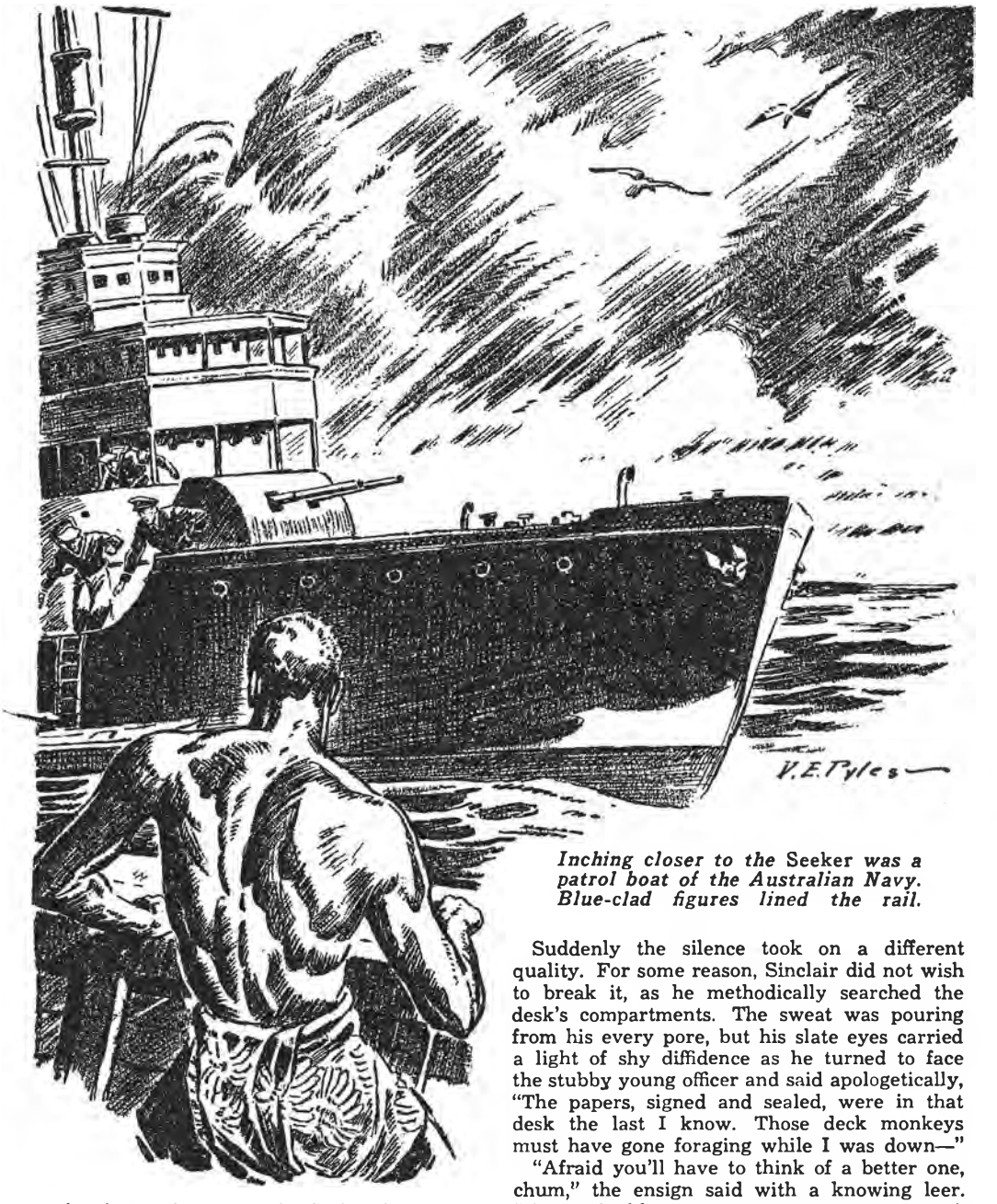
Only then Sinclair could see why. He found himself gazing across the deck of the *Seeker*, and twenty feet of intervening water, at a patrol boat of the Australian Navy. Blue-clad figures lined the rail as the long gray craft inched closer to the converted yacht.

THE lieutenant-commander was on the tiny bridge, and a squat young ensign with a snub nose and a ribald green eye called conversationally, "Routine checkup, Captain. Just a look at your papers, you know."

"Right. Come aboard and have a drink while I get this gear off," Sinclair returned.

The Kanakas, as though trying to work off their nervousness at the appearance of the white man's mysterious law, fell to work on the shells with unaccustomed promptness and vim. They spread the stinking canvas which protected the deck and inserted knives carefully between the jaws of the shells and cut the abductor muscle. They darted quick, animal-like looks from under their brows as the ensign and two sailors came aboard with sidearms.

Down to his underwear, Sinclair said, "Come on downstairs for that drink."



Inching closer to the Seeker *was a patrol boat of the Australian Navy. Blue-clad figures lined the rail.*

The bronzed ensign shook his head. His bright little eyes gleamed at Sinclair as he followed Andy down the hatch into the saloon.

"Better wait a bit," he suggested.

One sailor stood at the top of the hatchway and the other took station at the bottom. While the ensign admired the cabin Sinclair, feeling a fool in his costume, walked to the small wall desk and opened a drawer.

It was empty.

Suddenly the silence took on a different quality. For some reason, Sinclair did not wish to break it, as he methodically searched the desk's compartments. The sweat was pouring from his every pore, but his slate eyes carried a light of shy diffidence as he turned to face the stubby young officer and said apologetically, "The papers, signed and sealed, were in that desk the last I know. Those deck monkeys must have gone foraging while I was down—"

"Afraid you'll have to think of a better one, chum," the ensign said with a knowing leer. "Ensign Sarkby, R.A.N., at your service. And, begging your pardon, Captain, you're under arrest."

Sinclair gave an effect of increasing relaxation, amounting to helplessness, in precise compensation for the increasing activity of his mind, and the savage nature of the ideas it was generating.

"Until I find the papers, you mean?" he asked.

"Take it easy, chum, these things happen every day," Sarkby said airily.

"How does it happen you came by just now?" Sinclair asked.

"Faster action than usual," Sarkby admitted. "We only got the tip yesterday, and happened to be coming in this direction anyhow."

"You got a tip?" Sinclair repeated.

"Righto."

"I wonder," Sinclair said thoughtfully, "whether Johnson has an enemy—or whether he's really doublecrossing me?"

"You can drop the act, old boy," Sarkby said.

"It isn't an act," Sinclair said carefully. "Mr. Gerald Johnson, or Captain Jumbo Johnson, as you prefer, delivered me the necessary documents, signed, sealed and paid for, along with the diving gear—"

Sarkby surveyed him judicially. "That is a very good tale, and you could do worse than stick to it, chum," he stated. "Fact is, you know, that there's no record ashore of any government grant to you or the *Seeker*—"

"The boys will tell you," Sinclair said slowly, and had little time nor stomach for wondering whether that would do any good.

Instinctively, he realized what must be the truth.

Johnson had selected a greenhorn with a fine boat, precisely because he was new around the Strait. He had insisted on secrecy, and made the transfer of gear and papers at sea, because the papers were not genuine. He had aimed to save himself the government fees, at Sinclair's risk and expense. There had been an item on the statement of preliminary costs. Evidently he had been forewarned of the visit of the patrol boat and had come by to pick up the pearls and steal the only evidence against himself which would surely stand up in court. If he hadn't had the good luck to arrive where the *Seeker* lay at a time when Sinclair was ashore, making his doublecross easy, he'd have found some other way to manage it.

It was a long-cultivated faculty of Sinclair's to become almost placid in an emergency wherein most of the facts were known and there was little element of uncertainty. So, as he dressed, he was able to listen with normal interest to Sarkby's cynical remarks.

"Rum thing, way we all want to beat the government, eh what?" he said casually, riffling a copy of Bernevette's *Studies on the Sea Floor*. "Sometimes you win, sometimes you lose. All smugglers at heart, what?"

"But I'm not, you know," Sinclair said diffidently. "The boys—"

"The commissioner can listen to all that," Sarkby said offhandedly. "You ought to learn a little more about our ways down here before you start out to gouge us, what? You Americans—great nation, chum, great nation. Lots of the old fortitude."

"Well, let's go up and see what they say."

"Pack a bag, chum. You go with us, no matter what they say."

"What about the boat?"

"We'll bring her in, chum, following in file."

Without a word, Sinclair packed a small bag and changed to a white linen suit. He was even able to laugh at himself now. He had been afraid that Jumbo Johnson was taking him up on a mountaintop and showing him so many of the riches of the earth that he would be diverted from attempting a larger role in the world. What Johnson had wanted was a sucker, and Andrew Sinclair had been—and was—it.

They went topside. Bordai was carefully cutting away a protuberance on the shell he was working on. And this was odd, for Bordai himself never performed the common labor of cleaning shells and looking for pearls. Under a dozen interested pairs of white men's eyes he brought forth the largest and most lustrous pearl ever brought aboard the *Seeker*. It was one of the comparatively few which form between the mantle and the shell, and are coated with an extension of the shell itself.

"Looks as though the government might be well repaid for its trouble," Sinclair said wryly.

He looked at the dour lieutenant commander who was leaning against the railing of his tiny bridge.

"I should like permission, sir, to have the Kanakas informally verify the fact that Mr. Gerald Johnson delivered me gear and certain papers at sea and that he must have taken the papers when he came aboard an hour ago."

The lieutenant commander shrugged his shoulders. In common with the other sailors, he was admiring the converted yacht.

"Bordai, did Johnson fella hire you and the black fella, and bring you to me at sea, and hand me papers?"

"Johnson fella say good job alonga you. Me know no more."

"You really are his man, aren't you?" Sinclair said as though to himself. Then he went on, "Was Johnson fella aboard alonga this boat today?"

"He come. He go quick. He take pearls, leave paper. Me know no more."

Nor would he admit to more. The crew was as informative as so many frightened monkeys.

It was Sinclair's first bitter lesson about the Southwest Pacific natives. In the twinkling of an eye they could change from friend to foe with no more reason than a child might have. And the moment white men quarreled, respect for the one who lost was gone. Some respect for all white men disappeared.

The Australians were very decent. Sinclair ate at the officers' mess on the way in, and was warned that anything he might say would be held against him. The following day he stood before the Resident Commissioner, and then

sat down while Bordai's testimony did more to convict than acquit him.

The shallow, saturnine commissioner ordered the defendant to stand once more before him, and said conversationally, "The administration of the Mandated Territories is one of the most difficult law-enforcement jobs in the world, for two reasons. One is that tens of thousands of childlike natives with bloodthirsty tastes are involved. The other is because the nature and richness of the country lures so many white men of the wrong sort to this vast and often unexplored region.

"Even if every word of your fantastic tale about Mr. Johnson—who will be examined in due time—were true, ignorance of the law can be no excuse for a white man. At best, your status is that of a conspirator and accomplice."

Then the words came slowly, as though the jurist were swinging a hammer.

"It is the sentence of this court that you serve six months in jail at hard labor, plus, of course, the mandatory penalty of the law: that the boat with which the crime was committed shall be forfeited and confiscated to the Royal Australian Government. The prisoner may stand down."

CHAPTER III

BEACHED

A LITTLE more than five months of road work on the mainland, and Sinclair was given back his clothes, his books, his freedom, and the few pounds in cash which had been found on him. The next day he was on Thursday Island, walking into the dingy offices of the ship chandler with whose clerk he had a slight acquaintance. The stooped, old-young man who had pointed him out to Jumbo Johnson in the pub five months before was still behind the counter, and Sinclair waited in the shadows for him to get through with a customer.

Andy's body was really whipcord and steel covered with leather now. If there had ever been an excess pound on his rangy frame, it had been burned away by hard labor under the Australian sun. There were other changes, too. His mouth was thinner and straighter, his eyes narrowed and less luminous, and there was a new quality of firmness in his expression.

One of the conclusions he had reached in the past five months was that the petty larceny of saving government fees had not been Johnson's principal objective, or any objective at all. Rather, perhaps, a device. By now Sinclair was positive that Johnson himself had caused the government to be notified that the *Seeker's* papers were not in order. It was the final irony that Johnson had escaped cutting his own throat by only the brief interval between his own visit and that of the patrol boat.

The clerk peered through his spectacles and acted embarrassed, hawing and stuttering at a great rate.

"Who bought my boat at the government auction?" Sinclair asked him for the second time.

The clerk polished his glasses furiously. He looked about the smelly shop fearfully as he answered, "Chap nyme of Fats Jakle—er—sir."

"Who's he?"

"Er—superintendent, as you might s'y, of a warehouse in Rabaul."

"Whose warehouse?"

The clerk gulped, then he half-whispered, "Jumbo Johnson's."

"What does a warehouse superintendent want with a boat, and how could he afford to buy one like mine?"

The clerk was wringing his hands. After all, Jumbo Johnson was a big customer. But the clerk owned no part of the business, and was a good enough fellow at heart. His eyes gleamed cunningly as he took the big jump.

"'Asn't a shillin', sir, and they do s'y as 'ow Jumbo 'imself is s'ylin' 'er from Samoa, where she is now, on to Hawaii and maybe on to the mainland, come winter!"

"Thanks," Sinclair said, and a little of the

color slowly drained from his eyes. "Any idea where Johnson is now?"

"Cap'n Everett of the *Mermaid* said 'e was in Port Moresby a bit ago, sir, and seemed to 'ave settled down in the 'otel for a st'y."

"Thanks again. I'll be seeing you," Sinclair said.

Eyes narrowed against the sun, he walked along the waterfront. So that was it! Johnson had wanted the *Seeker* at a government auction price. And he had realized that Sinclair would not sell voluntarily.

Now, Sinclair knew, his course was fixed unalterably, and there was comfort and release in the thought. One step followed another with remorseless logic. First he must track down Johnson, and by any methods necessary prove his innocence through the trader's testimony and confession. Regaining the boat would then be a matter of red tape only, and the attaining of his objective in the South Seas a matter of hard and intelligent work. That done, nothing he could conceive of, except death, could keep him from returning to the States and the work he had laid out for himself.

Regaining the *Seeker* was, in his mind, the symbol and core of all these things. Finding and mastering Johnson were the preliminaries to it, and the other things would follow from it. And so the shining boat became the focal point of his life, representing revenge for the past, and hope for the future.

That night he found a missionary boat which would, after innumerable island stops, put in at Port Moresby. The senior missionary was more interested in Sinclair as a repentant sinner than as a handy man around a boat. When he discovered that Sinclair had a resonant baritone, and remembered most of the hymns, the deal was closed.

So Sinclair set forth on what was to become a saga of the South Seas, leading the natives of many islands in sessions of sacred song the while he perfected the plans which would probably end in the regrettable necessity of killing Jumbo Johnson.

SIX months later, Sinclair was on the edge of the bush behind the trading station on Santa Cruz Island. In his hand was a longish knife with an unusually heavy handle which Milo Bradford, the general storekeeper, had helped him tailor to order. Milo had also supplied Andy with decent, if slightly worn duck, some singlets and odds and ends of clothing—on credit. He had been thrown off a Portuguese tramp on which he had stowed away from the Solomons, and which was proceeding to Singapore anyway.

Sinclair drew back his right arm—it came forward—and the knife was a blinding streak of light. Its quivering point ended less than six inches from the small square of paper affixed to a palm tree forty feet away.

The methodical Sinclair had an idea that artistry with a hidden knife might come in handy in the process of finding Johnson, or even after he had found him. After missing the trader in Port Moresby, and beating around the East Cape to Lae on a coastal schooner, he had acted as emergency cook on the patrol boat of the Papuan Police around to Mailu. He got on to Daru and back to Thursday Island as tutor for the son of a yachtsman.

In some places Johnson had stayed a shorter time than was his custom. Twice, when Sinclair had stayed put waiting for Johnson to arrive, the trader had omitted his scheduled stop. It seemed certain that he was avoiding the meeting, although he had cleared himself with the authorities. His testimony had been that he had bought certain equipment for Sinclair, at Sinclair's request, and delivered it at a profit aboard the *Seeker* at sea. He had likewise supplied the crew as a favor, and bought the pearls in good faith. No papers were involved—that had been Sinclair's business—and Johnson had naturally assumed that formalities had been complied with.

Sinclair had a hunch that he would finally catch up with Johnson in the interior of New Guinea. From various sources had come rumors, and some evidence, that the big Scandinavian was arranging his affairs so that he could concentrate on gold. It was thought that he might be on the track of a new deposit, for his percentage of known locations was small.

Not that he had lost his eye for a trading dollar. On Mailu Island, in fact, the elusive gentleman had established a new trading post only three weeks before the plodding Sinclair had hitch-sailed in there. He had made a deal with the Hanauabada tribe to take their entire output of pottery. Instead of running their canoes up to the delta country to trade, they were to deliver the beautiful and useful clay vessels on Mailu.

"Jumbo run into some tourist owns a bunch of stores from Honolulu to London and went crazy over the stuff," the half-caste Dutchman whom Johnson had installed on Mailu had said. "It's really the only stuff coming out of Papua—the coast tribes ain't got the clay, and inland they ain't got the savvy. You might say now that Johnson is top god of the Hanauabadas."

Sinclair plucked his knife out of the palm tree, laid it down and picked up a boomerang he had acquired on Thursday Island with some of the cash left over after he had acted as substitute bartender in Mickey's Mite in order to eat. He wondered how the New Guinea tribes would react to a weapon that went over their

heads and then came back to chase them from behind. He was already a fairly competent bushman. With that persistence so strong that it took on the quality of Fate, he had set himself to learn from every competent teacher, white or black, with whom he had the opportunity to spend even a few minutes. The Papuan police officer and traveling magistrate, together with his crew of native police on the patrol boat had taught him much theory, and given him considerable practice.

Sinclair threw the boomerang a few times with satisfactory control and then wandered down to the beach and sat himself on a stone alongside the old wooden jetty leading out into the harbor. A rakish schooner, looking a bit battered even at that distance, beat around the point and headed toward the harbor. There were several boats anchored close inshore and their native crewmen, glad to be home again, lounged around the beach and chattered endlessly of their various adventures around the Pacific.

He was the man, Andy reflected wryly, who had been afraid, a year before, that he would be making too much money and having too much fun to leave for home. Now he was a South Seas tramp, literally without a pound to his name or an outfit of clothing suitable for lunch in a white man's home in Moresby. He realized that he could take a job, save a little money, ship home and forget his boat and the South Pacific and Johnson. The idea was unthinkable.

He did not realize how much he had changed, but he did know, without particularly caring, how severe the ordeal had been. Lae, and Nick Brandon had been the worst, but the subtle mannerisms of even native village constables looking at a white man who was an ex-jailbird, and was now rumored to be following a lunatic quest for a man like Jumbo Johnson, were a continuous series of slaps in his spiritual face. But every verbal blow around the South Seas aimed at reducing his self-esteem had only hardened the surface, and solidified what lay below.

Nor since his day in court had he allowed any accusation against Johnson to pass his lips. Rather, he tried to conceal his purpose. Milo Bradford, here on Santa Cruz, was his one confidant. Milo's rum punch was very potent.

SINCLAIR had become aware of the change in himself that day in Lae. At the flying strip he had watched hundreds of pounds of machinery, plus a wide variety of bulky supplies, loaded aboard a tri-motored German Junkers. The crew chief was making a last

inspection of the all-metal plane when the figures of a man and a woman, in flying clothes, emerged from the lean-to office next to the hangar.

The man was swinging his helmet and goggles, and his hair literally flamed in the flooding sunlight. No one else in this world could have that same crimson thatch, plus bowed legs and a torso so like a barrel, except Nick Brandon, sometimes Major Brandon of the Royal Flying Corps.

The woman was tall and slim and blond with a proud tilt to her head and a spring in her long stride like that of a man. Perhaps her face was a little too long, her mouth too wide for beauty, but when she laughed down at Brandon the radiance of her youth and health blinded the hungry Sinclair to details of individual features.

He lounged against the loading truck in freshly washed, but permanently stained ducks and a cheap white shirt he had just bought. As Brandon caught sight of him, the ex-major's jaw dropped a little and his forefinger brushed upward against his ferocious mustache. Ten years hadn't changed his habit of trying to make each hair of it thrust fiercely forward, like the quill of a porcupine, in the best British military tradition. Brandon had always been a nice enough fellow, if a bit on the stupid side and reared within the boundaries of the most stodgy traditions of the English country squire.

"Remember me?" Sinclair drawled. "It didn't take the Boche long to pop me, but—"

"Of course, of course," Brandon said gruffly, pale blue eyes darting uncomfortably from Andy to the girl. "Er—Miss Hope, Mr.—er—Sinclair. Knew each other ten years ago. Haven't seen each other since, eh?"

"That's right," Andy said, bowing to the girl and shaking Brandon's limp, perspiring hand. "Still flying, I see."

The girl's hazel eyes studied the floundering, harrumphing Brandon, then flooded with recognition and understanding as they shifted to Sinclair.

"Yes, yes—er—quite so," Brandon floundered. "Bad stuff, too—mist comes down over the peaks any old time. Have a small interest in the New Guinea Gold Company though—makes it worth while."

"You knew Nick ten years ago? Why, that must have been during the war," Miss Hope said.

"That's right," Andy agreed.

Then no one said anything. And suddenly in the awkward silence everyone knew everything.

Stolid, hidebound old Nick Brandon was not only deliberately passing up the opening to identify Sinclair as a fellow pilot, but afraid Sinclair would refer to it. Nevertheless, his eyes were pleading for understanding as he said hastily, "Never think of the war. Beastly bore—best forget it."

The girl's hazel eyes studied the floundering, harrumphing Brandon, and shifted to the suddenly more erect and glacial Sinclair. Recognition and understanding flooded them. One Mercedes motor burst into a roar as the crew chief started the warmup. The girl said something into Brandon's ear, waved and smiled at Sinclair, and walked rapidly back toward the hangar.

Brandon motioned Sinclair farther from the ship. He gestured at the girl. "Sandra's the president's daughter," he said. "Flying her up to the mines for a chin-chin with the pater. Broke his leg. Look here, Sinclair—" He mopped his perspiring, round face with a khaki handkerchief. "If it's a job you want," he said, "there really isn't a thing I can do. If five pounds would help—"

"Thanks, Nick," Sinclair said softly as the motor died to an idling whisper. He could feel the muscles of his face draw, and felt as though his mouth worked on tight strings. "Lots of people aren't that considerate of jailbirds."

"Not at all, not at all, old boy," Brandon said, his vast heartiness reverberating emptily. "Rum country. We all make mistakes. See you maybe, if you're still around when I get back, and damned glad I'll be to get back, too. I'm sweatin' blood already."

Sinclair's mouth was still hot and dry, but he'd be damned if he was hurt, or if he was, would show it. So he lingered long enough to say politely, "Particularly bad trip? With the girl along—"

"Not so much that. Fact is, you know, up there in the mountains we've got a regular settlement around the mines, includin' smelter. Been tryin' to get through for a month—ruddy mist drove me back every time. The bullion has piled up. Takes at least eight weeks to make the trip on the ground—if you could make a trip with bullion on the ground. Only an hour in the air. Fact is, old boy, I'll be flyin' out of there with this crate so loaded with New Guinea gold that if I lose it the jolly old company will get a near-fatal blow in the old pocketbook. Pardon me if I'm a bit on the absentminded side, will you? I want to give a look at the old crate myself."

"Of course. Adios, au revoir and cheerio, Nick. I'm shoving off south soon."

The relief on Brandon's beetlike face was ludicrous. There was something likable in this embarrassed son of the Empire and bearer of the white's man's burden as he said furtively, "Mind a bit of advice, Sinclair? Why not shove off for good? Bit of illegal pearling's bad enough, but that business of trying to shove it off on an old-timer like Johnson—not quite cricket, eh? Tough on a man not to be able to introduce a fellow officer in the R.F.C. to his chums, what? But what can I do? I'm doing all right, and if a bit of the ready would get you back to the States—"

"No, thanks," Sinclair said, a little sadly. "I don't talk much, but it might interest you to know that Johnson bought in my boat and has it laid up in Samoa for some changes before he eventually sails it to the States on a vacation. I sort of plan to be on it—with or without Johnson."

Brandon looked at him, "haw-ed" twice, and shrugged his shoulders.

"Happy landings and all that," he said as he turned away.

CHAPTER IV

THE MOUSE AND THE DOOR

SANDY'S flyer's heart had stirred as he watched the Junkers take off, and now, months later, here on Santa Cruz, there still remained an empty feeling at the memory. Perhaps the girl had something to do with it. Perhaps a part of his draw toward home was his need to have dinner and dance with a white girl again. He wondered what Sandra Hope and Brandon would think if they could look down at him now—on the beach, for fair.

But perhaps not for long. For if ever a boat looked as though it could use a competent extra hand, it was that battered craft edging to an anchorage offshore. Her fore-topmast was missing, her rigging snarled and in a bad state of repair, and the two crewmen who were visible looked as though they had fought five fast rounds with a buzzsaw. They had really been knocked about and sported a variety of bandages and limps. Two fagged-out-looking white men were in better shape.

The quartet had difficulty stowing canvas and securing the ship. The two sailors, at that distance, could have been Japanese, Chinese or Malayans, or a mixture. They must have come down from the China coast or Singapore, Sinclair decided, and had either started extremely short-handed or lost some men en route.

His spirits lifted a little as a familiar warning sang along his nerves. That boat would have to go somewhere to refit, and anywhere it would be likely to go for that purpose would carry Sinclair closer to where he wanted to be, which was the mainland of New Guinea.

The white men stepped ashore from the dinghy, and headed straight for Milo's store and trading station. Sinclair wondered why the two Asiatics had been left on the boat. He

waited a decent interval, inspecting the schooner with expert eyes, then drifted into Milo's. The native Number One boy jerked his head toward the office. There was no real disrespect in the casual gesture, but it lacked something which should have been there.

As though to confirm Sinclair's respect for his own premonitions, Milo Bradford's rich wheeze penetrated two thicknesses of bamboo curtains.

"Aklo! Find Sinclair fella—he come alonga me."

"Sinclair fella alonga me, Taubada," Aklo called.

Sinclair yelled, "Coming!" as he made his way through the office and trading room and through another curtain to Milo Bradford's sanctum sanctorum.

This was a three-sided lean-to, the fourth wall being composed, when desired, of palmleaf matting which could be dropped between the room proper and the sea. Here, on the remains of an elegant and ugly Victorian chaise longue, reclined Mr. Bradford in his accustomed position. This was resting on his colossal beam with bare heels hanging just over the edge of the couch. Close to his hand was a rope, flung over the rafter, with which he was wont to assist himself with the task of pulling his three hundred and twenty pounds to a standing position.

In the bamboo chair sat one of the white men off the *Susan,* and out in the patio the other paced up and down, head bent in thought and a glass in his hand. The patio was walled by halfgrown palms, planted in straight lines and intertwined with creeping vines. Bradford's Polynesian wife, whose love increased with every pound added to Milo's Oriental type of beauty, had brightened the small compound with scarlet poincianas and frangipani.

Bradford waved a bare forearm as big as Sinclair's thigh at the gin bottle, limes and soda.

"Captain Sinclair, meet Algernon Sykes," he wheezed.

The barrel-chested man with the mouse-colored hair and thickly tattooed arms leaped to his feet and pulled at a scraggly forelock as he said, "'Appy indeed, Cap'n—that I am."

He thrust out the same hand which had pulled the forelock and smiled sidewise at Sinclair. Black shoebutton eyes gleamed merrily and unshaven cheeks crinkled in a half-apologetic grin. His nose was short and had a pronounced curve, his chin receded at the exact angle of his forehead, and an absurd little mustache stuck forth under his nose in two little tufts of bristling spikes.

They completed the impression of a jaunty rodent, full of pert impudence but always prepared to skip back into its hole if it had gone too far.

Sykes waved at the pacing figure and his mustache quivered like a rat's whiskers as he said airily, "The Dook'll come out of it in 'arf a mo'. 'Ave one for a long and pleasant *and* profitable acquaintance, eh, Mr. Bradford?"

Sinclair smiled a little, and the tingle of the neat gin chased another sort of message along his private grapevine. There were warning signals, too, which increased in power as the pacing man freed himself of his thoughts, looked at his empty glass and lounged gracefully across the sand and up the three steps.

With poise amounting to arrogance, he frankly and silently inspected Sinclair. Then he said, in a cultivated voice and Oxonian accent, "I say, when I forget for several minutes that the old bowl isn't flowing, I must be off my feed, what? Captain Sinclair, I fancy?"

He was pouring himself three fingers as he spoke, and drank as Sinclair said, "Correct," and then bowed, without offering to shake hands.

"I'm Daubrey. Well met, old boy. Groping with an idea, you know—bit off my usual run, eh, Mousy?"

Mr. Sykes answered ecstatically to his nickname. "The Dook's a rum 'un," he told them admiringly. "A bloke as never is through a-figurin' and a-twistin' of things about. Or drinkin' or wenchin' or raisin' bloody hob, neither. That he is. Yes, sir, that he is."

"With you in a shake," the Dook stated, and resumed his pacing.

SINCLAIR had not failed to put down in his mental notebook the last speech of Mr. Mousy Sykes—one which he was to find held the master key to the peculiar relationship between this frowzy, pert Cockney spawned on the Limehouse docks and Vivian Daubrey, third son of Cecil, Lord Cranston of Cranston. The mixed feelings of Sykes for the Dook, and the totally unmixed reactions of Daubrey to Sykes provided a constant friction capable at any moment of exploding the large content of dynamite in them both.

"Got it," stated Daubrey unemotionally, coming back up the steps. "Let's place the old cards on the table, what?"

The taciturn Sinclair went over the man, line by line, as they disposed themselves about the table in chairs of split bamboo.

Daubrey was obviously black Irish from light blue eyes and raven hair to the touch of a charming brogue and a snub nose gone wild. It turned up at the end at such a pronounced angle that the nostrils were almost indecently visible. This short, broad, piglike snout was thrown into relief by a bony face so fleshless that it was like a death's-head, lighted by burning eyes set in hollow sockets like lamps shining from the depths of caves.

It was, except for that nose, the long face of a British aristocrat, burned fleshless by some inner fire.

Very possibly, Sinclair reflected, a whole life's history might be based on that ugly organ projecting from the fine head like that of a toad from a vase wrought by Benvenuto Cellini.

Daubrey was dressed in a worn but clean and well-pressed linen suit wrinkled from being folded in a sea chest. Slightly curly black hair had receded so far from the high forehead that the widow's peak gave the effect of an Indian's scalp lock.

Sykes was arrayed in a loud crew shirt composed of alternate bands of blue, green and white, plus faded-blue linen pants and grass sandals.

"Daubrey," Bradford said in a high rich wheeze combined with a nasal New England twang, "I should suggest that you begin at the beginning—tell the story just as you learned it. The captain here got stuck on a Dutch trader that took him around the Solomons for a spell, just got here on a Portegee tramp and we're both way behind on the news."

"Quite so." Daubrey nodded. "Dashed peculiar go, really. Occurred in the interior of New Guinea, learned about it in Singapore, and here we are discussing prospects on Santa Cruz Island with a chap we only met five minutes ago. Here's the best."

He took a deep draft, before he continued.

"Three months ago, just at the start of the rainy season in New Guinea, a big plane—trimotored Junkers—belonging to the New Guinea Gold Company took off from the mines. Dashed valuable cargo. President's daughter, and so much bullion that the chaps speak of it in whispers."

Sinclair wet his lips. He hated to admit, even to himself, how often the picture of that rangy girl with the proud tilt to her head and the charming clipped speech had risen to haunt him, more as a symbol than a person, in the months gone by.

"Her name wasn't Hope, and the pilot's Brandon by any chance?" he asked casually.

Suddenly Mousy Sykes was as alert as the animal for whom he was named, and the lights deep in the hollows of Daubrey's face were hooded into bright pinpoints.

"You know about it?" Daubrey asked, taking a weedy cigar from a slightly moldy leather case.

Sinclair shook his head. "I knew them. Miss Hope for a moment—Brandon from years back."

"Ain't the slightest idear of what 'appened to 'em?" Sykes asked.

"Not the slightest. What did?"

"They never got to Port Moresby," Daubrey said. "They never seem to have got anywhere. Neither did search planes and parties. Down in the bush. No place to land. Unexplored country. Headhunters, cannibals, and all that. Gone. But gold, Captain Sinclair—even the Kanakas can't eat that, and they'd rather have shells. You catch the drift of my remarks?"

"I do. But they might not be dead. Arriving in an airplane—on the very slim chance that they could land and walk away from it—might make them gods to the natives. No searching planes spotted anything?"

"Up to a month ago," Daubrey said, "results of inquiry and effort so barren the whole ruddy thing was written off. You're a pilot, Captain. How heavy a load could that Junkers carry?"

"I'm not up to date in the air," Sinclair said. "Offhand, I should say a payload of a ton and a half."

"All gold!" caroled Mousy Sykes. "At better'n four pounds the ounce. 'Ow about it, Cap'n? Warms the cockles of a bloke's 'eart, don't it now?"

"Not mine," Sinclair said.

"Why not?" Daubrey asked.

'The plane came down in jungle so thick the wreck was invisible from the air, for one thing. That means a hundred-to-one the passengers were killed instantly. In the second

place, it means the wreck will never be found except by accident. In the third place, I've got other things to do."

No one said anything, so he added carelessly, "Didn't mean to jump the gun and assume that I was being approached."

"You are, old boy, you are," Daubrey said. "Furthermore, your analysis of the impossibility of putting the old finger on the treasure trove is interesting, and point well taken. More important is this: the impossibility of anybody *else* but us finding it makes our own little go at it a more sensible enterprise. After all, old chap, I'm not quite fool enough to start to comb Papua with a rake in the hope of turning up some pieces of eight, what?"

SINCLAIR shrugged, asked Bradford's permission to pour another drink, made it the first cousin to limeade, and said during the process, "Not knowing, I cannot say."

"In other words," chortled Sykes in high good humor, "plyce the bloody cards on the ruddy table, what? But the Dook's got 'is own w'y o' doin' things. That he 'as."

Shaking his head in awed but hilarious admiration of the mysterious Dook, Sykes wiggled his mustache as he sniffed his glass to make certain it had the proper content of gin.

"I'll give you the background," Daubrey conceded. "Year or more ago, Officer and Local Magistrate Perkins of the Papuan Police found among the Ge-wai in the North Central country a tribe of cannibals sporting quite a crop of tails. Fact. The old chief, who looks like a black miniature of the picture of Moses in my childhood Bible, had one six inches long and covered with hair.*

"They brought him to the coast, and while he was in durance vile along with several of his tribesmen for eating a brace of white men, the chief started learning to talk. Dialect built on the basic Mo-tu-an. Took him around and about museums in Australia, and all that. By this time, the old boy could wag his tail and talk some pidgin. Brought him to Singapore for additional scientific observation.

"Follow me carefully now, old boy. I was a bit of a specialist in anthropology at Oxford. Came out here as such. Roamed a bit around New Guinea. Gave it up—bit of a bore, really. But my old interest came to life a bit, and I toddled around to see old Matsua and see if I could put a little salt on his tail, what? Don't mind admitting I'd been going badly to seed like the rest of us, but I still had a friend or two who'd give me a lift back on the old road, so to speak."

He finished his drink, mixed another consisting of half a water glass of gin and a half thimbleful of lime, and resumed his narration.

"The old boy liked me—really did. Then a rumor of this lost gold came to Singapore. Talked with Matsua about it. And what did I worm out of the old boy?"

"Leave it to the Dook!" Sykes proclaimed. He was getting a little drunk.

"I visited him every day—coddled him like a baby," Daubrey explained. "Matsua's brethren are one of the few semi-nomadic headhunting tribes. They were on the prowl a hundred miles or so, as I make it, west of their usual diggings. Another tribe from many miles west were on the prowl east. The two collided, and old Matsua was captured. Seems he's a bit of a sorcerer as well as chief. He was captured and taken on west to be fattened up for some big banquet. He escaped, and was smart enough to go on west because his captors would think he'd light out east for home.

"He finally got home, which is a miracle. But while he was in the western country he heard the story of what must have been our airplane which had come down and crashed—under certain conditions, old boy, and in a particular set of jungle circumstances."

"What are they?" Sinclair asked.

He was mildly interested in the far-flung tale, but extremely interested in being aboard the *Susan* when it left Santa Cruz.

"We aren't saying right now, old chap," Daubrey said.

"How does it happen that it's taken so long for the story of the lost gold to leak out?"

"Fact that the airplane was missing was known and admitted publicly right away, of course. And that there was the normal amount of bullion aboard was understood. But the company didn't want to admit the really terrific amount of gold lost until recently—sensation, scandal, and all that if it was known before they'd put their house in order."

Sinclair nodded. He remembered Brandon's statement in Lae that the bullion had been piling up at the smelter for a long time.

"Here's the point," the Dook said, pouring himself another generous drink. There was something terrible in his swift, methodical consumption of alcohol, as though he felt that he might die before he got drunk. "By chance I know a lot about you, Sinclair. Used to read a bit. Remember your piece on that white tribe near the Amazon for the *Anthropological Review*, and your *Geographic Journal* report on human sacrifice in Ethiopia, and—"

"That's enough," Sinclair interrupted quietly but tensely.

"We aren't what we used to be, what?" Daubrey said casually. "So let's be sensible. Bradford here says you're still a navigator, a good bushman, a handy man with a Kanaka, and besides that, I know you had a medical education."

"I have some business of my own," Sinclair

**Discovered by Officer Keith Bushnell of the New Guinea Police.*

said flatly. "I appreciate your proposition, but there are so many ifs—"

"Don't be hasty, old boy," Daubrey advised. "In fact, we'll get over the most important *if* in a second."

He took a much-used map from his pocket, and as he unfolded it said matter-of-factly: "Government regulations say that if we come upon the gold we get one-third, the State two-thirds. Easy to hide a goodish bit of the gold before we come out of the bush, and then sneak back from time to time, or have a pal do it, and get the rest without divvying with His Majesty, what?"

Sinclair had become so accustomed to being taken for granted as a rogue, he did not even wince. He wasn't interested in this jerrybuilt treasure hunt anyway.

"Look here," Daubrey was saying, the greasy map spread on the table before him, "east half of New Guinea. You're the flyer. You start here."

HE PLACED a finger on a spot deep and high in the Owen Stanley Range, east and west backbone of the great land mass. The coastline, from the extreme north around the East Cape and on west beyond the great deltas of the Puarari and Fly was laced by innumerable rivers.

"You're bound southwest for Port Moresby. Sudden storm—half tornado really, with terrific wind and blinding mist—pops in fast from the east and southeast. You can't get back to the field. You can't go south. What would you do?"

"Fly west and try to go around the storm, and land at the first opportunity."

"Righto." Daubrey nodded. Sykes was leaning forward, his beady black eyes intent. "Not a yard of ground, probably, free of vegetation, or even level. What do you do?"

"If I have to come down, come down in quiet water, close to shore."

Sykes slapped his thigh. Daubrey took another drink.

"Bingo! Flying due west, or perhaps a bit northwest, hurrying before the storm, you might come down where?"

Sinclair gazed at the map.

"Depending on the time I could stay in the air, the Upper Skirton, or Lake Murdoch, or perhaps conditions would be such I'd have been driven north far enough to have to pick the extreme upper Florel—above Lake Murdoch. Or whatever streams feed Lake Murdoch. The map doesn't show them but there must be some."

Daubrey leaned back as the silent Bradford chuckled.

"And one of those streams, old cock, is exactly where the old chief says as 'ow the big bird fella landed!" Sykes exploded. "Even if

A half dozen sharks were milling madly about in the wake of the Susan. *"Both overboard," Sykes announced calmly.*

'e's a bit off on the exact plyce, we got only one stream to follow for a blinkin' big plane in 'wide water,' and if we can't find it—"

"Precisely," Daubrey interrupted. "No secrets between partners, eh, Mr. Sinclair? We may not have told you all the truth—strangers yet, you know, but you get the drift. We aren't children. But neither are we the bushman you are. Don't pretend to be navigators, explorers, good men in the open. You're all we want. Lost our captain among others, overboard on the *Susan*—dashed lucky we ever got here. Typhoon. A Malayan knew enough to get us here.

"We've got money enough to outfit, and we've got a boat that will pass, due to the kindness of a couple of the old lads around Burma and Malaya. All things being equal, we'd like to include you. You're field boss, and captain, with all that implies. We share and share alike—one-third each."

Sinclair poured a drink from the crock. It was a real drink this time, which he had rarely allowed himself lately, even when he'd had the opportunity.

"Sorry," he said. "As Milo knows, I have some important personal business. And after all, the tale of a childlike native in Singapore—"

"Carries little weight, what?" Daubrey interrupted. The lights were glowing more brightly in those cavernous eyesockets now. "Well, old boy, I'll go all the way with you.

Don't mind saying that ever since I laid out in No Man's Land at Ypres for two days with my guts practically hanging out, I have a horror of being hurt and having no medical attention. Carry morphine pills against pain to this day, 'pon my soul I do. Did something to me. I want you along as a doctor. So I'll tell you something that would make the ordinary man turn down the proposition. To a chap like you, what I say ought to increase the attractiveness of the project."

"Now," Milo Bradford wheezed, "we come to the point, Andy."

"Rum thing to admit," Daubrey said, while Sykes snorted derision, "but I got too drunk in Singapore. Night before we left, as a matter of fact. Found myself telling my story to one of the hardest blokes in the South Seas. He'd just pulled in with his boat a wreck. Can't be refitted yet.

"Next morning he comes to the *Susan*, and says he's seen Matsua. He wants to join us—that's how much he thought of the deal. Turns out, though, that he's got the impression the gold is on up the Skirton beyond Lake Murdoch, which it isn't. I turn him down, because he wants too much, but pretend to admit that he's got the right location.

"That chap, Sinclair, will be on the prowl for the treasure as soon as his boat's fixed. If this laddy believes it, it means that Matsua's story is true. When you hear his name you'll know why."

Sinclair's mouth was hot and dry.

"Well, do I know him?"

"You ought to. Chap name Johnson—Jumbo Johnson."

Very slowly, Sinclair's gaze shifted to Bradford. Was all this just to lure him on?

"They don't know anything about how much or little you know Johnson," Bradford said comfortably.

Sinclair drained his glass and said, "Gentlemen, let's have another drink."

"To the three of us and the gold?" Daubrey asked.

"If it's good enough for Johnson," Sinclair said, very quietly, "it's good enough for me."

CHAPTER V

SHARK BAIT

AN HOUR later, with supplies sufficient to get them to Port Moresby for refitting, Sinclair was superintending the process of getting under weigh, and on out through the reef to the open sea. The two Asiatics were of little help, half-crippled and somehow mentally beaten as they were, but Sykes and Daubrey worked like demons and the two boys they had shipped on at Santa Cruz knew their business. Sykes was the best hand Sinclair had ever seen. Daubrey had bought several bottles of saki, the Japanese rice wine, from Bradford, and once beyond the breakwater Sykes jovially ordered the two Singapore seamen to forget work and drink.

Sinclair let it go. In Moresby he'd get his papers signed, including certain stipulations above and beyond the usual status of captain. Right now he would not disturb the relationship existing between the two white men and the crewmen who had survived the typhoon.

At midnight he turned in, with Daubrey and Sykes standing watch until dawn at their own suggestion.

A cry must have awakened him, for as he listened, there came another, muffled and far away, but pulsing with anguish.

Barefooted and naked except for a towel around his waist, he climbed swiftly to the deck. A hundred yards behind the cruising *Susan* the phosphorescent wake was broken by a wild swirl in the water. A half dozen sharks were milling madly back there.

"Blimey, if that wouldn't frost your eyeballs!" came Sykes' voice.

The Cockney walked past the deckhouse amidships and Daubrey, a vague shadow at the wheel, said, "Both overboard?"

"Both of 'em," Sykes said. "They come up on deck with a bottle of saki, drunk as Lords, Cap'n. I lets 'em go, because the blokes really took a hawful beatin' on our trip over—that they did. Then all of a sudden they're in a fight, and they both got knives. Before I could get to 'em—they're fightin' like mad at the rail. They both fall hoverboard. The sharks 'ad 'em before they 'it the water, and that's the Gawd's truth!"

Sinclair forced himself to shrug his shoulders fatalistically.

"Liquor in the foc'sle is dynamite on a boat," he stated. "I'm going down there now, and get any that's left."

Perhaps Sykes and Daubrey did not realize that Sinclair had noticed that both the dead Orientals had been right-handed, and that one had a sprained right wrist and the other could barely move his right shoulder. Coupled with the fact that they had been snoring in a drunken stupor for a good hour before Sinclair had turned in, a knife fight between them was completely incredible.

The Santa Cruz boys lay inert on their bunks, mouths open and breathing heavily. Sinclair picked up a half-emptied bottle of saki, and then leaned over the native on the lowest bunk. He shook the sailor, without response, and then rolled back one eyelid. He went through the same process with the other.

Neither had liquor on his breath, but both had been stupefied with morphine.

(End of Part I)

CHAMP AT HEART

WALLY GREER, his nice-looking face still flushed from the shower's steam, was fixing his tie when Al Burrage came into the dressing room. Al said, "The boy was a toughie. I am lucky to get the nod." His meridian was rosy from the hard lumps he had taken and there was a cut on his mouth that still bled, despite the careful first aid administered by a handler. It hurt him when he grinned at Wally.

"The higher you work up on these fight cards, pal," Wally said, "the more you got to take. My meatball was made to order, Al. The colored boy is the kind who takes only two when he should wait until nine. He was still walking in his sleep when I let my best one go."

"You'll fight that one I just finished with, sooner or later, Wally," Al said. "It's a good thing I can tell you how it should be done."

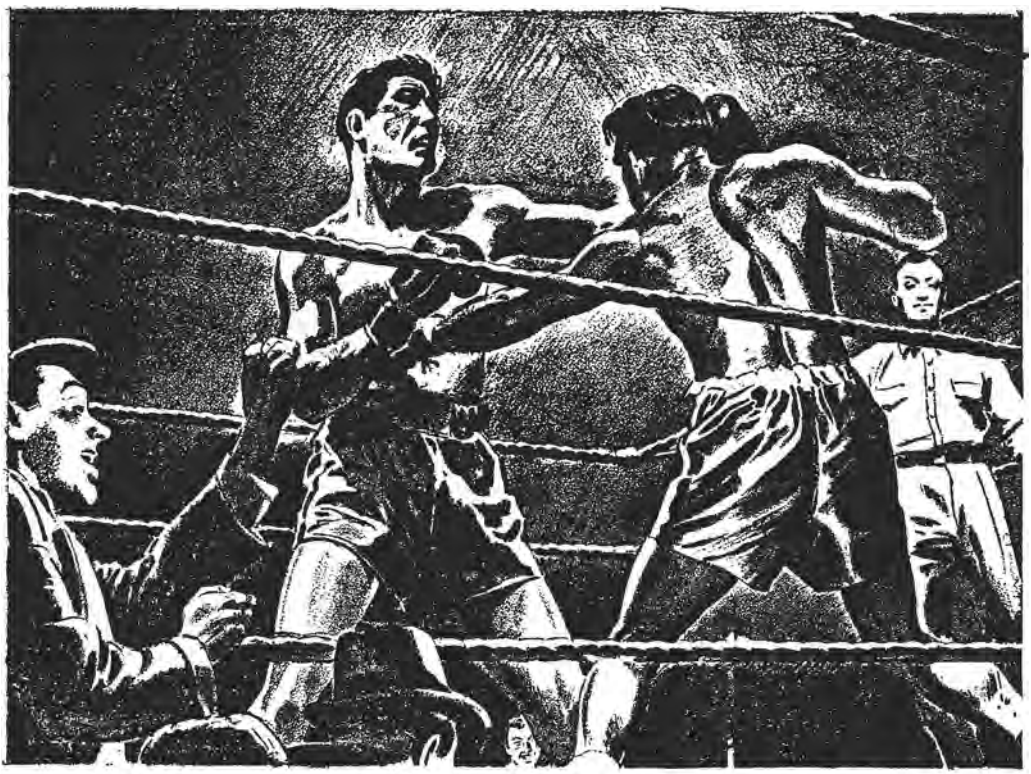
"Oh, yeah?"

They were middleweights, these two men, young and ready and both on their way up. They came from the same town, had the same manager, and promoters were dreaming of the night when they would climb through the ropes and fight each other. Wally Greer and Al Burrage knew this but never talked about it, never wanted to think about it. They had boxed together many times but were not sure which one would prove the better man when the chips were really down.

A little man with a thinning scalp and bearing the tell-tale marks of service in the ring, banged a pail down and said, "You got t' remember t' keep that left higher, Al. He nearly clipped you twice for keeps."

"It's what I keep telling him, Ossie," Wally said.

"Yeah?" Al Burrage snapped. "When are you goin' to learn what to do when you get on the ropes? That colored boy nearly murdered you in the first round, Wally." He stretched out on the rubbing table and let Ossie work on him some more. Jake Pool came in with a



The fight mob clamored for a knockout as Wally Greer moved in. Wally could see that Al's legs were shaking and that Al's grin had to be frozen on his face . . .

By JOE ARCHIBALD

writer and asked his fighter how the cut was.

"It looks like it'll need a seamstress," Wally said, grinning, and examined the worn cuff of his sports coat. "Did you get our dough?"

"No, Junior," Jake sniffed. "I was up seein' Mike Romaine about a dog. Tonight you both were strictly gorgonzola, you know that?"

Wally grinned. That was Jake. When you got a little too cocky, he would level you off. Jake had been managing fighters as long as Ford had been making automobiles and everyone knew he did not fool too long with bums. A meatball had the right flavor, you knew, if Jake Pool went for it. He'd had two champions and he wanted another and the wise ones knew he figured himself good for a fifty-fifty chance of getting one with Wally Greer and Al Burrage going along so smoothly.

The majority of the experts liked Al over Wally for he packed just a little more weight and so had a stiffer punch. This attribute, they agreed, compensated for Wally's slight edge in ring finesse, something a guy named Corbett once popularized in the houses of modified mayhem.

The only worry Jake had was the stuff he had been reading in the newspapers, about a war that threatened to drag Uncle Sam away from his easy chair and his slippers almost any day, and Wally and Al were just ripe for such a brawl, both having been exercising their right to vote for only a couple of years.

"Get dressed, Al," Jake said. "I want you and Wally should see some of the main go. Someday you will fight that challenger for the middleweight title. One of you—"

"Or both," Wally said.

A few minutes later they were out in the arena watching a very efficient fighter named Harry Denning show the crowd why his manager should get him a shot at the title. Harry was a master along the ropes and he had a punch carrying Novocain. Watching his footwork made you think of Fred Astaire.

"We're not quite in his class," Wally Greer said. "What do you think, Al?"

"I'd fight him tomorrer," Al countered.

"And the next day you wouldn't get out of bed until maybe six o'clock," Wally grinned. "The champ is down there watching and he looks worried, too."

"Let's go and get a steak," Al Burrage said.

THEY went out into the crisp air of the autumn night and walked across the wide street.

In front of a quick lunch place they were accosted by a woebegone, reedy-looking kid. Al Burrage said, "Beat it, bum."

ILLUSTRATED BY JOHN MEOLA

. . . While he was trying to let the heavy one go, the bell rang. Al said, "Sucker," and turned to his corner.

"Look, guys, I haven't had a bite since yesterday," the kid said. "I come here with the promise of a job but it didn't click. If you could spare a buck so's I could get some coffee and bus fare back—"

Wally Greer said, "O.K., never mind the spiel, kid." He grinned, shoved his hand into the pocket of his sports coat and took out two halves of an old-dollar-bill. "Here, I was goin' to paste 'em together myself. You'll find they match, pal. When you get rich send Wally Greer a thousand, huh?"

Al Burrage made a harsh sound with his nose and said, "You're the biggest sucker in the world, Wally."

"Wally Greer?" the grateful recipient of the torn bill said, his eyes widening. "Say, I was just lookin' at that fight card in the window there. You was in that six-rounder. Some day—"

"Beat it," Al said.

The kid looked at Burrage, his lips tightening. He swung his eyes toward Wally Greer, smiled and said, as he walked into the lunchroom, "I'll send you the dough—somewhere."

Al Burrage said, "You'll end up behind the eight-ball, Wally. You got to learn to hold on to your dough."

"The kid looked O.K. to me," Wally said. "I've been hungry myself, Al. A buck will never keep anybody out of a poorhouse. You know when you do something like that, you get a swell feeling inside— No, you wouldn't know, Al."

Here was the difference between Jake Pool's two middleweights. There was very little charity in Al and he never asked for any. Wally Greer was known to be a soft touch by his friends and he had little to show in the way of earnings gleaned from forty-odd fights. There was that night in Saginaw when he had knocked out a has-been and had gone to the promoter's office afterward and given his share of the brawl to the beaten man. He'd said, "I got a lot of years and a lot of fights ahead of me, sailor, an' I can always make another hundred bucks."

"Thanks, pal," the old veteran had grinned. "I'll see you git it back soon as I get on my feet."

Wally never saw a dime of the money. He could not honestly say that any of the geezers to whom he had played the good Samaritan had ever tried to clean the slate. But he always said to Al, "I get paid off—right here," and would tap his knuckles against his chest right over his heart.

And Al would say, "Try eatin' that thing sometime when you haven't got the price of a pork chop, Wally."

They had their steak, went to the hotel and found Jake Pool waiting for them. There was another man in the room who sat back in a chair against the wall and chewed reflectively on the cold remnants of a cigar. Jake looked nervous. He mumbled to his fighters and walked up and down.

"It's a natural, Jake, and you know it," the man said. "My offer is a fair one. That club will hold seven thousand and we can get top prices—"

Jake said, "Wally, Al, meet Ernie Kyle. He puts on fights in Saylesville."

The fighters nodded and Kyle said, "Nice to meetcha, boys," discarded his cold stub and pulled a fresh cigar from his vest pocket. "Ask them what they think, Jake."

Al Burrage said, "I was expecting this, Kyle. So was Wally. You want we should fight each other."

Kyle grinned.

"I don't know," Wally said. "Me and Al—"

"This is business," Jake Pool snapped. "We gotta remember that, Wally."

Al said, "What would we get? Now that we're talkin' business?"

"The winner gets a grand," Kyle said.

"It isn't just the dough," Wally Greer said, and looked at Al Burrage. "It's just that we have—"

"For a grand," Al said, "I can forget I ever knew you for about thirty minutes, Wally. It's all right with me, Jake."

Wally Greer went to the window and looked out. Then he turned, went over to the bed and sat down. He looked at Al and then at Jake. They were not smiling. They were trying to do business.

Then Wally said, "O.K., Jake," in a hollow voice.

The fight club in Saylesville was packed. Wally Greer could hear the roar of the crowd shouldering along the corridor outside the dressing room as he had his hands taped. Across the way Al would be getting ready. This was the first time they had not prepared for a fight together. Ossie was saying, "You gotta forget how you an' Al are buddies, kid. You throw everythin' you got, Wally."

"Yeah." The cold sweat was in his armpits and under his knees and there was a heaviness in his chest.

"Box him, kid," Ossie said. "Look out for his right. Let him come to you."

Wally Greer did not appear to be listening. He wished Al would come to him now and say he couldn't go through with the fight. But Al never came. He didn't see Al until he climbed through the ropes twelve minutes later. Al grinned at him.

Ossie said, "No palsy-walsy stuff, Wally. Not until after the fight."

Jake Pool was sitting seven rows back, letting his handlers take over the business of advising his fighters. Jake was very solemn as he eyed the pre-fight ceremonies. When Al and Wally met in the center of the ring for the ref's talk, Jake noticed that Al was not smiling now. Wally was.

THE lights dimmed and the bell sounded. Wally Greer came out cautiously and circled Al, his left cocked and his right glove pressed against the pit of his stomach. He let it go, caught Al on the nose and mouth in rapid succession and the crowd started talking it up. Wally kept boxing at long range, watching Al's eyes when it was safe to do so. Al was all business. Wally knew it close to the end of the round when a right from Al belted him over the heart and nearly shook his mouth guard loose. He came back to Al, bobbing and weaving and landed his own right high on Al's head. He got a shot to Al's ribs just as the bell rang.

Ossie said, "Watch that right hand," and fanned Wally with a towel. "This round was yours but not by much."

"He can hit," Wally said, and looked over at Al. Al was talking to Snuffy Bragan.

For three more rounds Wally kept boxing Al and the crowd began to leave him. They wanted heavy artillery and started asking Al to give out with it. Coming out of a clinch, Al said, "We gotta give 'em a show, Wally."

He didn't say anything. He was fighting his own fight. This was business and he was out to win. He kept away from Al until the sixth round and then when he missed with a short left hook, Al was in on him and giving him the lumps. Al's wet gloves made sounds that delighted the crowd as they thumped against his meridian and made him grunt. Wally Greer felt the ropes saw against his angel bones and knew he had to get away. He clipped Al on the side of the head with a short right hook and shook the guy up long enough to enable him to work into the clear. Backing away from Al, keeping his long left out, he felt the soreness at his ribs. He tasted salt and it angered him more than Al's gargoylish sneering grin. He was maneuvering for a shot at Al's jaw when the bell rang.

Wally Greer spat into the pail and Ossie began to patch up the cut on his lower lip. There was a lump on his cheekbone that felt as big as a pear and his face felt all out of shape. Ossie said, "You're doin' O.K., kid. Keep boxing him next round. Watch his left foot as you mostly can tell by that when he will throw a right."

He remembered Ossie's instructions but soon found them off the beam. Ossie was wrong about Al's left foot. Halfway through the round, in a rhubarb on the ropes, Wally Greer brought one up from his knees and caught Al on the point of the chin. Al went down. The ref had to push Wally Greer toward a neutral corner before he started counting. Al was stung. He was on one knee at six and shaking his head. At the count of eight he was grinning toward Wally and at nine he was up and beckoning for Wally to come on in. The fight mob clamored for a knockout as Wally Greer moved in. Wally could see that Al's legs were shaking and that Al's grin had to be frozen on his face. He jabbed Al off balance and started to let the heavy one go, but hesitated too long. Al pitched forward, wrapped his arms around him and while he was trying to get loose the bell rang. Al said, 'Sucker," turned and walked to his corner.

"You had him," Ossie ground out. "You give him a break, Wally. You'll never get nowhere—"

"Shut up!" Wally said. "The cut's bleedin' again."

He knew when he was out there again that Al was going to try and floor him for keeps. He took to the bicycle and made Al use up a lot of precious wind and he kept jabbing his left in Al's face. In his own corner, his chin digging into Al's shoulder, he heard his stablemate say, "O.K., Softy, you had your shot and threw it away. I got to beat you, Wally."

Al Burrage fought. He dropped Wally for a short count just as the ninth round got under way. He bulled Wally to the ropes and punished him downstairs, then broke away of his own free will and waved Wally in. He threw his right when his man obliged and it grazed Wally's jaw and sent him halfway across the ring with latex in his slim legs. Al Burrage followed up the punch, got Wally against the ropes and let loose with both barrels just as the bell clanged.

It was all Wally Greer could do to stay through the tenth and final round. It was not because he did not have a lot of vital sap left in him. He and Al had been pals for a long, long time and pals should not fight. He hit Al with a couple that looked good to the crowd but he knew how much sting he had really put into them. The big crowd set up a favorable roar when the fight ended with Al Burrage mauling Wally in a neutral corner. A few moments later the ref pointed toward Al and the decision was fair.

Wally Greer went over, lifted Al's right glove and pumped it. "Nice goin' Al," he said.

"You're still a sucker," Al grinned.

Jake Pool took his fighters over to a night club an hour later to give them some fun and help them forget their lumps. After ordering some beers, Jake looked at Wally. "You nearly had Al, kid."

Al Burrage grinned. "He gives too much away, Jake. He'll end up a bum."

THEY were in Peoria the day the news came. The night before they had won their fights against two good men and the road ahead looked very bright—until Jake Pool burst into the hotel room with the news that

the Japs had thrown the low punch at our navy.

"It's war," Wally said. "We're fighters, Al."

Jake knew these men. He sighed deeply and heard the whistle of the gravy train get very faint beyond the horizon. "I won't tell you what you should or shouldn't do, boys," he said. "I know what I'd do if I was young."

The army took Wally Greer but turned Al Burrage down. Al had a bad ear and his eyesight was not quite good enough. Al raved one whole night, threatening to see his congressman, and not until the morning of the day Wally left for the induction center did Jake calm him down. "Forget it, Al. There'll be a lot you can do back here. You can get a war job and fight in benefit shows. The army and navy we got to build will need so many things—"

"When I come back," Wally said, "you better have the title, Al."

Wally Greer went to the Pacific, came back two years later with some shrapnel in his leg just in time to watch Al Burrage go against Harry Denning in the main event of a fight card in Buffalo. Denning had fought the champ, had lost a close one and now he was looking for another shot at Pete Sarno's crown. He still looked good, this Harry Denning, Wally thought, but Al had come along, too.

He sat close to the ringside with Jake and Jake was telling him about a new boy who had come out of the midwest and who was knocking over all the good talent. His name was Elby Park. "Al's got to get at Sarno first, Wally," Jake said, "before this new guy muscles in. He hits like a light-heavy, they say."

"Yeah," Wally grinned. "This is something like the war I'm fighting now, Jake. First you got to take a little island, then another and still another before you get to the big one that counts. Al looks pretty good tonight."

Denning was good, too. When the final bell rang, Wally Greer knew the judges had something to stew over and when they played it safe and called it a draw, the majority of the customers seemed content. Afterward, on his way to the dressing room, he passed a man whose eyes were much too bright. There were little healed scars on the fan's porky face and lumps of unhealthy tissue over his eyes. His clothes were threadbare. Wally asked Jake, "Say, wasn't that old Jim Murthane?"

"Yeah, Wally. A moocher—a bum."

"Go give him this, Jake. He wouldn't take it from a man in uniform," Wally said and handed his manager a ten-dollar bill. "In this kind of war they should take care of old soldiers, too."

"Don't be such a patsy, Wally," Jake said. "Put this back—"

"Do like I say, Jake. Tell him it's from a friend. One who never forgot how he used to fight."

"And how he used to guzzle, Wally."

"That's beside the point," Wally said and went in to see Al.

"This Denning should be in the Marines," Al said, and threw a boxing shoe against the wall. "Now I got to try and get by him again."

"You tried too hard," Wally said. "You kept forcing the fighting and that's what he likes. Next time make him come to you a little. I wish I could see the return match but I'm going back in a few days, Al. My leg is as good as new."

"Wally, you been fightin' much at all? Of course I mean with the gloves."

"Every chance I get," Wally said. "Look out for me when I come back."

"I've wondered sometimes," Al Burrage said and put a hand on Wally's shoulder, "if you've ever given a Jap a break."

"That, Al, you cannot do."

Jake Pool came in and jerked a thumb at Wally Greer. "Al, this geezer is handing out ten-dollar notes now. That bum, Jim Murthane, tried to kiss my hand—"

"Easy come," Wally grinned. "easy go."

IT WAS not until another year and and a half had gone by that Wally Greer was finished with the war. He came east on a fast train and didn't stop too long in Saginaw, for Jake was now operating with the big names in New York. He read in the papers that Al Burrage had tangled with Elby Park in Philadelphia the night before and Elby had taken Al by a technical kayo in the ninth round. It had been a good and blistering fight, one expert had written. Elby Park had packed the heavier punch and that had been the difference.

When Wally Greer walked into Jake Pool's office, he looked five years older than he really was. Jake put both arms around him, swallowed a lump in his throat and said, "Wally, you'll always be the greatest fighter I ever handled."

"It's nice to hear you say that, Jake. Now I know you'll get me a fight."

"Now look, Wally. You've been away for—"

"I'm as good if not better than ever, Jake."

Jake sat back and appraised Wally Greer for several moments. Finally he said, "If you need some dough . . ."

Wally Greer said, "Save it, Jake. You're gettin' along. And Elby Park kind of set you back the other night."

"Yeah," Jake said. "Sorry, kid."

"I'd like to get a shot at Sully Davis," Wally Greer said. "I've enough left on the ball to belt him out. I got a right to start where I left off, Jake."

"No, Wally," Jake said. "You better start a little lower." He turned his face away and began riffling papers on his desk.

Wally said, "So you're one of those geezers

won't give a returned soldier his old job back, Jake. What if I made a smell about it? I could write to my congressman—"

Jake twisted around in his chair. "All right, I'll try and get you the fight but you've got to promise me something, Wally. If you find you haven't enough left, you'll quit for good."

"You have my word on that, Jake. Get me the fight as soon as Sully puts his name on the line. I—"

The door opened and Al Burrage came in. Al had adhesive over his nose and his lips were swollen. Wally knew how much it must have hurt Al to give out with that big grin. He got up and hugged Al. "You look like you got finished with a worse war than mine, palsy."

"Ah, it's good to see you, kid," Al said. "Yeah, Elby Park is tough. He's the best of them all. Better by three miles than the champ. What are your plans, Wally?"

Jake Pool said, "Al, his plans are to fight Sully Davis."

"You're crazy, Wally. The colored boy is too good for you right now. He took Elby all the way," Al Burrage said.

Wally grinned. "I'm fightin' Sully, Al."

Just six weeks later, Jake Pool and Al Burrage and twenty-two thousand other fans sat in the Garden and watched Wally Greer slam out a technical kayo over Sully Davis in the eleventh round. It had not been a pretty spectacle. Wally had hit the floor twice and his face was lumpy and bleeding when Jake finally climbed in and wrapped the old blue robe around his shoulders.

"I win, Jake," Wally said.

"You forgot how to box in that army?" Ossie yelled at him.

"Nobody will lick Elby Park with boxing alone," Wally countered. Jake winced, caught hold of a rope and hung on. 'You won't ever fight Elby Park," he snapped. "Let's get out of here."

In the dressing room Jake said to Al Burrage, "Did you hear him, Al? He wants to fight Elby Park!"

"You got to get some more fights under your belt, Wally," Al advised. "You took a lot in there."

"I guess we GI's had a road country to practice on before we fought the Nips, huh?" Wally flung back. "We went in without much gym work and didn't we knock their brains out? After all, Elby won't be allowed to carry a Garand against me."

A nicely-built man, walking with the grace of a big cat, came in with two writers. It was Elby Park. He held out his hand to Wally. "Nice fight, kid." You could see he meant it.

"I read about your fight with Al here," Wally Greer said. "You must have got in a lucky punch, Elby." He grinned.

Wally Greer had come back after three-and-a-half years. He was an ex-soldier and had won a Purple Heart.

"Yeah, could be," Elby said. "Say, we should get better acquainted, Wally. If you get what I mean."

"I think I do. I'll talk it over with Jake."

"It'll be a pleasure," Elby Park said in a nice purring voice. He waved to everyone there and walked out. Wally Greer kept watching the door Elby had shut behind him and did not know why.

"What are you sayin'?" Jake Pool yelled at Wally, then picked up a boxing shoe and flung it against the wall.

"Elby wants to fight," Wally Greer grinned. "You don't catch on very quick these days."

THE Greer-Park fight captured the imagination of the fans. Wally Greer had come back after three-and-a-half years and had knocked out Sully Davis. He was an ex-soldier and had won a Purple Heart. Only Al Burrage had ever beaten him and then by not much, and many wise ones remembered a punch in that fight Wally could have let go but didn't. Be that as it may, the big town's boxing fraternity was more than pleased with the match and proved it by the advance ticket sale. The Garden was packed the night of the fight.

Just before Wally left the dressing room with Ossie and Bragan, Al said, "Luck, kid. If you get by him you go against Sarno and he's ripe for picking."

"Yeah?" Wally said forcing a smile. "But it'll be a nice purse, won't it?"

When Elby Park climbed through the ropes he was on the long end of only five-to-three odds. It had leaked out that Elby had hurt his hand in training and the rumor persisted even though the medics had given him the stamp of approval earlier that afternoon. When three of the rounds had been used up, the crowd sensed that Elby *was* favoring his favorite right duke. He seemed to be saving it until he got an opening where he couldn't miss, and meanwhile, Wally Greer piled up vital points.

Wally was a little puzzled with the proceedings himself, yet very pleased with it all. His left jab was working like a well-greased piston and it hit part of Elby's face every time he threw it. In the fourth round he got careless and tried to belt Elby out and got a hook in return that put music in his ears. Look out, sucker, he told himself. That bum duke is a booby trap. That baby is full of tricks!

During the rest period, Ossie said, "You're goin' nice, Wally. Ain't he, Jake?"

Jake nodded, but kept his fingers crossed. He pinched himself and did not wake up. Yeah, Wally was still in there and leading on points. "Keep away from him, kid," he cautioned.

He tried very hard. Elby got him right in the sixth with a bazooka shell that exploded against his chin. Wally buckled at the knees and reached wildly for a piece of Elby but the contender was not there. Wally could hear Jake yelling plainly enough. He toppled near his own corner and laughed a little. He had taken Elby's punch solid and had ridden it out.

The count was at six when he got to one knee and grinned at Ossie. At nine he was up and moving away and popping Elby with his left. Elby grinned at him. This was a very nice fight, Wally thought, as he worked Elby to the ropes. This was the kind he and Al should have had. He slammed punches to Elby's boilers and made him grunt. Elby brought up a left and scraped his jaw with it, then got into the clear and shook his head. Elby still smiled at him. It didn't make any sense at all . . .

Elby Park squirmed away from the ropes and clipped him on the chin and he felt it all the way down to his ankles. He fired back and grazed the contender's chin with his own right. Then they both had their heads down and fired shot after shot to each other's midsections until the bell.

"Keep goin', Wally," Jake said, coming in. "You can beat him. You took his best punch. I've never known from nothin', Wally."

"He isn't kiddin', Jake. Elby's right hand is under wraps," Wally said.

"Still a sucker, huh, Wally?" Jake Pool sniffed. "Watch that baby's right hand."

"I'll watch, Jake."

He kept watching it, all through the ninth and tenth rounds. Once he forgot and that

right landed and seemed to shake all his teeth loose. He danced away with the ring boards seeming to undulate under his feet and there was a buzzing in his ears the like of which he hadn't heard since that last bunch of Mitsubishis had come over a certain atoll. Elby crowded him and he slugged back until his head was clear. He had Elby Park on the ropes again, belted him a nice one to the heart just as the bell rang. Falling into his chair, he asked which round was coming up.

"Eleven, Wally. You got him even if they ain't robbin' us."

Wally Greer knew he had lost the round after he had unintentionally hit Elby a trifle low. He apologized quickly and the crowd roared their approval. He heard only part of the noise for Elby slipped in under his stabbing left and belted him alongside the head with a left that seemed to have a whistle on it. He made with the footwork and sweated out the punch and when he could talk with Jake again, his eyes were clear. "He must be savin' that right," he said. "Have they rationed kayoes, Jake?"

"Al says to box him and you're in," Ossie said through the swabs he held in his teeth. "How's that eye feel, Wally? There's a mouse under it."

"Give it a piece of cheese," Wally Greer said and strained forward when the buzzer sounded.

He knew he got the thirteenth round and was certain the fourteenth was even. And still Elby had not thrown that murderous right that had brought him to the door of the champ in a few short years. Wally figured he would get it in the fifteenth. That bum! Carrying him, maybe, because he'd been to war and wore the Purple Heart. The bum!

He told that to Jake just before the final round. "I don't want no favors from anybody, Jake. I'll beat out his brains or he'll beat out mine."

The crowd set up a great clamor when the fighters moved out for the fifteenth. Wally Greer rushed Elby to the ropes, swinging with both hands. "Let me see all you got, Geezer!" he grunted. "Let me see what makes you such a big shot!" He smashed one deep into Elby Park's stomach and the younger man grunted and fought like a tiger to get clear. The ref pulled them apart and Wally Greer stalked his man and remembered those nights in the Pacific. You went into the rhubarb bent low and watching for snipers. This Elby Park was a Jap and he held a grenade in his right hand. Once he ducked that grenade, Wally would go in and finish it—but fast.

Elby Park threw his right hand through a likely opening but Wally went under the wet glove and whipped up with a right of his own that caught Elby under the heart and softened his knees. There was a pained look in Elby's eyes as he stumbled clumsily backwards and Wally Greer, instead of driving in there, stood for a brief instant and watched Elby, as if his mind was no longer on the fight but trying to remember something it had long forgotten. It was too late when he tried for the haymaker. Elby Park was young and could recover quickly. He came in and swarmed over Jake Pool's fighter and had him backed against the ropes when the final bell set up its racket.

Wally Greer walked heavily to his corner and gasped out, "What you think, Jake?"

"Close, kid," Jake whispered and studied the faces of the working press. Wally dropped onto his stool and looked over at Elby Park. Elby was looking back at him and he was smiling.

The referee got the judges' slips and then lifted his arms. "The winner . . . Greer!" He stabbed a finger toward Wally and a few moments later Al Burrage and Elby Park were in close and Elby said, "A nice fight, Wally. The next time—"

"You fight Sarno, Wally!" Jake Pool yelled above the crowd's roar. "You'll be champ."

Wally Greer couldn't say anything. He watched Elby Park and entourage leave the ring. Elby was waving to the crowd and he still kept his smile. Jake kept saying, "Come on, Wally. Let's get out of here."

LATE the next morning, Wally Greer looked to see if there was any mail at the hotel desk. The clerk handed him a letter which carried no postmark. On the hotel envelope had simply been written WALLY GREER—PERSONAL. Wally opened the envelope and took out part of a dollar-bill. He said to Al, "Let's go back upstairs."

There was a short accompanying note. Each word of it drove deep into Wally Greer's mind and made it backtrack.

Dear Wally:

That was a lucky buck you slipped me that night in Elkhart. I took it into a lunchroom and there I met a friend who staked me, but good. If it wasn't for that buck I wouldn't have been in there with you last night. You'll always be a champ to me, no matter what, even after I take the winner of the Sarno-Greer fight.

Elby Park.

Al Burrage read it, then he grinned at Wally. "A sucker, huh? I guess I know what really pays off now, Wally."

Wally grinned and was about to say something when Jake Pool came in with the morning papers.

Jake yelled, "Hello, champ!" and sat down on the bed. "Look, Wally, I picked up your end but I want you to let me take care of it for you. Al, you know he'd maybe walk up and down Broadway handing out twenty-dollar bills to every bum he met!"

"Yeah," Al said, grinning. "The sucker!"

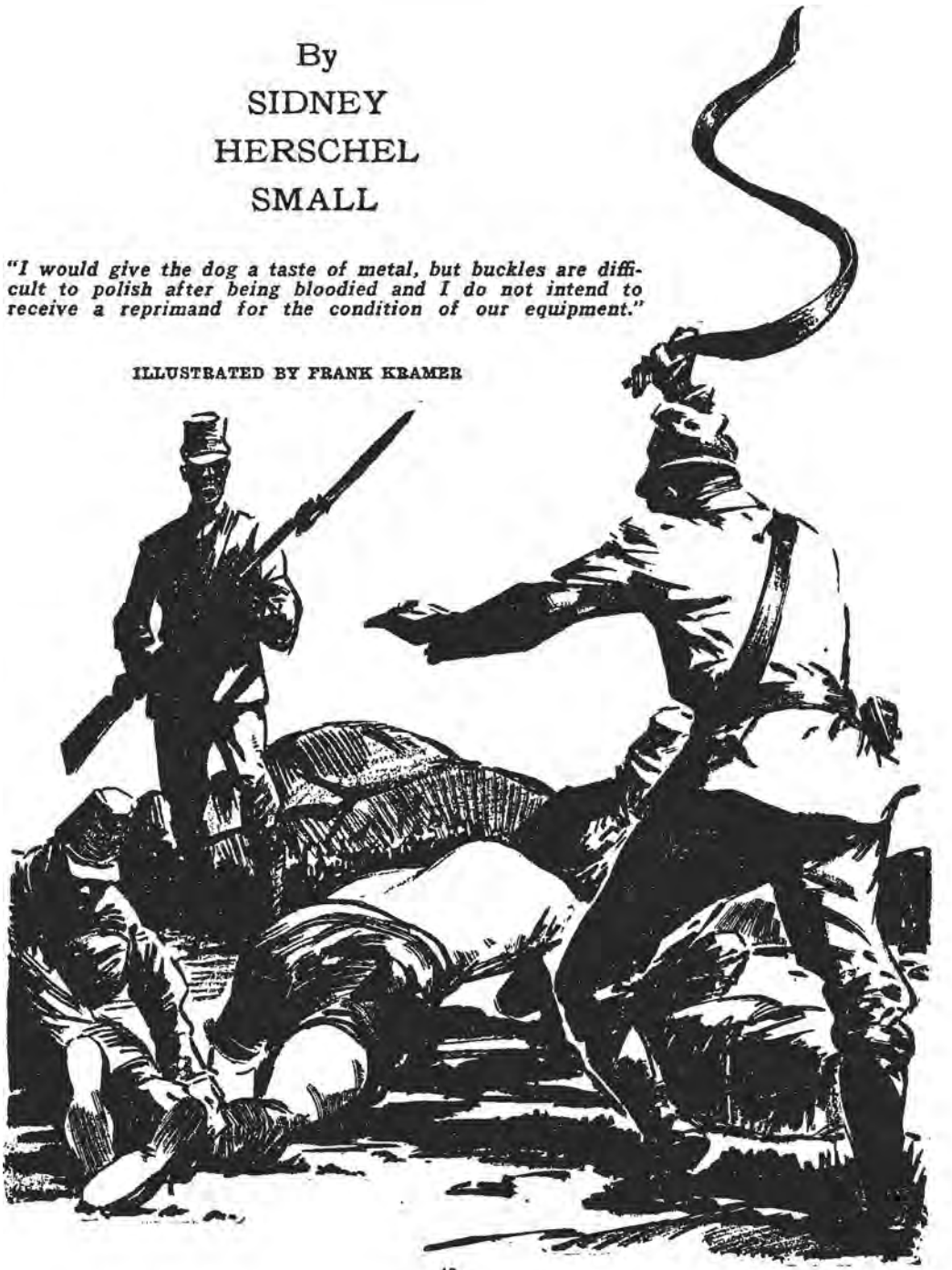
THE LAST BANZAI

An Adventure of "Koropok"

By
SIDNEY
HERSCHEL
SMALL

"I would give the dog a taste of metal, but buckles are difficult to polish after being bloodied and I do not intend to receive a reprimand for the condition of our equipment."

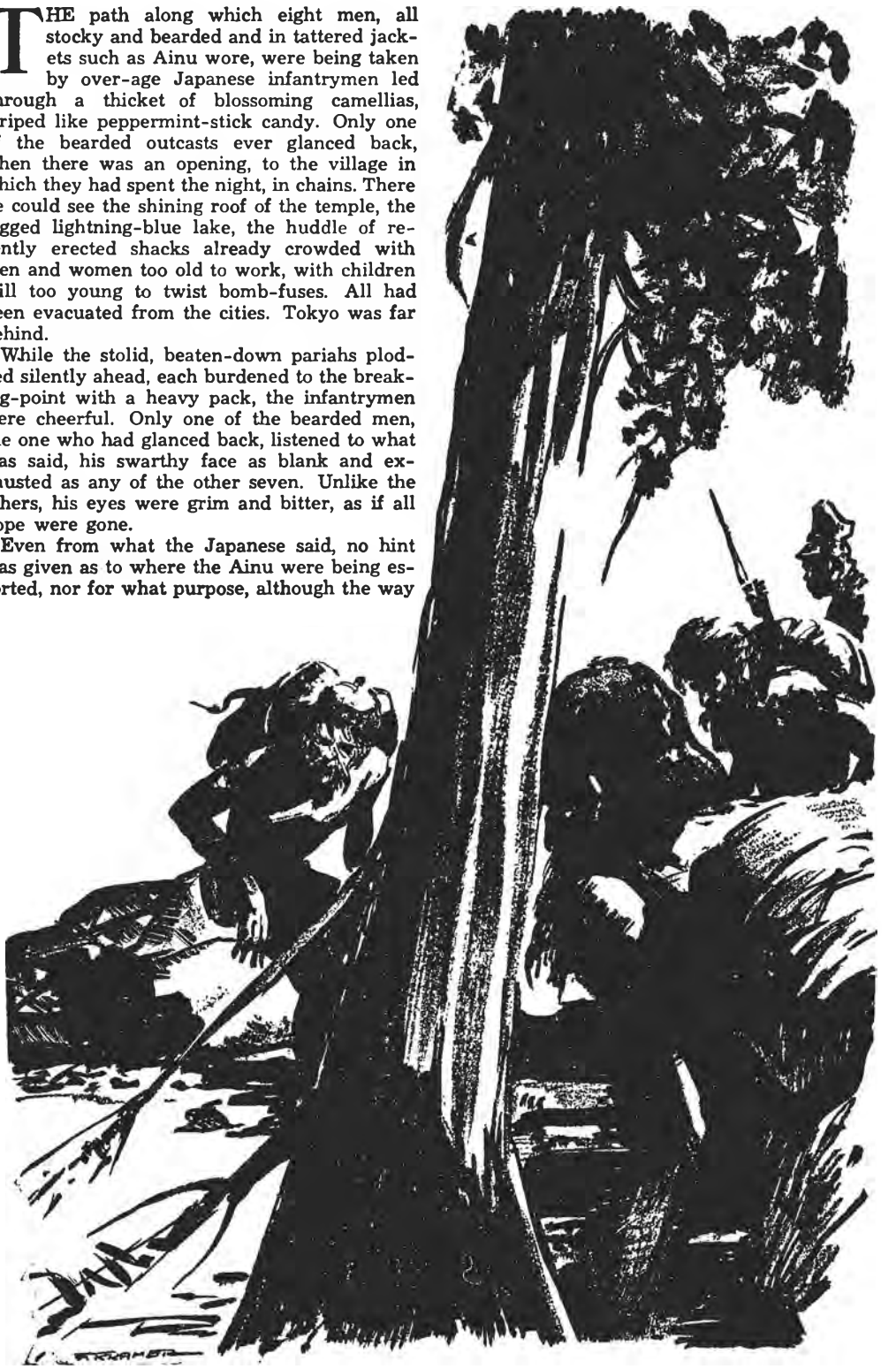
ILLUSTRATED BY FRANK KRAMER



THE path along which eight men, all stocky and bearded and in tattered jackets such as Ainu wore, were being taken by over-age Japanese infantrymen led through a thicket of blossoming camellias, striped like peppermint-stick candy. Only one of the bearded outcasts ever glanced back, when there was an opening, to the village in which they had spent the night, in chains. There he could see the shining roof of the temple, the jagged lightning-blue lake, the huddle of recently erected shacks already crowded with men and women too old to work, with children still too young to twist bomb-fuses. All had been evacuated from the cities. Tokyo was far behind.

While the stolid, beaten-down pariahs plodded silently ahead, each burdened to the breaking-point with a heavy pack, the infantrymen were cheerful. Only one of the bearded men, the one who had glanced back, listened to what was said, his swarthy face as blank and exhausted as any of the other seven. Unlike the others, his eyes were grim and bitter, as if all hope were gone.

Even from what the Japanese said, no hint was given as to where the Ainu were being escorted, nor for what purpose, although the way



Middle-aged infantrymen muttered prayers before the shintai, *the mirror that was the symbol of the sun-goddess.*

was always up, higher and higher into the central Japanese mountains. But it would be a remarkable location, Sergeant Tsumikawa shouted, as he kicked a stumbling pariah, in which human dogs could die miserably, and undoubtedly would. For loyal Japanese infantrymen, laughed the bow-legged sergeant, it would be a post of luxuries and comforts, to which they had been ordered instead of joining the ranks of those who killed thousands of *Amerika-jin* sea-fighting Marine devils; and although these orders were repugnant to soldiers who would delight in slaying Americans, one obeyed the commands issued in the name of the Tenno and never complained. For while the sea-devil Marines had learned to parry the honorable tricks of Japanese warfare, there were some clever and beautiful tricks which the *Amerika-jin* stinking-skins had not found out about . . . and all of the Japanese laughed loudly when the sergeant said this, as if they knew what these tricks were.

None of the pariahs changed expression, not even the sturdiest of their number, who had glanced back so grimly and bitterly. He shambled along with the others, bent cringingly to his load, as if he were merely another of the hairy men instead of an American, the one American not a prisoner in Japan but on duty. Lieutenant Llewelyn Davies, known to Ainu and Japanese alike as "Koropok."

He had been in Japan since the outbreak of war to do what he could to disrupt the Japanese war effort. Why he and the seven pariahs were being taken to the central Japan mountains he had no idea; he only knew that each footstep took him that much farther away from Tokyo, Osaka, Nagoya—where he could do something. As the son of a medical missionary who had lived for many years with the Ainu, he knew that whatever the Japanese had in store for the seven Ainu and himself would not be pleasant. He was half surprised that the infantrymen hadn't mentioned what this would be, on the Japanese theory that it was clever to frighten victims whenever possible.

Whatever it was, Davies decided, when the narrow trail began to twist down a dark ravine, it couldn't be much worse than the Formosan camphor camp where he had been last year. Everyone except the natives had been shipped out of Formosa now that American bombers were within range, and fighters from carriers. Japan, now as always, was terribly spy-conscious. What would happen to Koropok, if ever his disguise were penetrated, would make whatever lay ahead of the pariahs seem like a festival. Death would not come fast.

Davies did know this much: work assigned to the pariahs was always such work as the Japanese refused to do. Slaughtering of cattle. Mending of *geta.* Cleaning of latrines. Lew, as Koropok, had done all of these things; and while he had been doing them he had caused the Nipponese plenty of trouble, and had gone undetected. Where the Ainu were being taken meant degrading and possibly dangerous work. Davies had hopes that this might be related to the war, and that the isolated location might mean secret fabrication or experimentation, in which case he would have a chance to foul matters up for the Japanese. After what Sergeant Tsumikawa had said, this was very unlikely. Why would such a place be a hell-hole for the outcasts, and yet a luxurious spot for the Japanese?

The next long hour was spent in negotiating the ravine, so narrow and wooded no man could see ahead. At first the way led down in short zigzags, but after the descent the climb began again. Not until a little man-made broadening in the path was reached, with forward vision blocked by trees and the massive rock formation on the opposite side as well as where the path was cut, did Davies receive the first hint as to where he might be going.

In the flat spot there was a small shrine before which the soldiers bowed low. It was no more than a wooden platform covered with leafless branches. In front of a mirror on the platform, a mirror of steel edged with red lacquer, were offerings of gray, green, and black cloth horses, rice in both the grain and in the ear, scummy bowls of saki, squares of yellowing silk.

Davies knew that the mirror was the *shintai,* the symbol, of the sun-goddess; he had never seen one with the red-lacquered edge before, and if he had dared he would have turned it around to see what characters or design might be on the reverse side. He did finally understand, from the prayers which the middle-aged infantrymen were muttering, that the symbol

was a true-fire-mirror, and represented the dreaded mountain fire-god, Kagu-tsuchi.

With this knowledge, it was easy for Davies to realize that the party was nearing the volcanic hot springs district of central Japan. The sergeant's remarks concerning luxuriousness was proof; for the Japanese, there is no greater luxury than soaking themselves in steaming mineral water until their faces became purple. But why should such a place, if the Ainu were going to it, mean misery for the outcasts? Because of what their tasks might be when they arrived? This didn't seem sufficient reason to Davies. There had to be something more.

He puzzled over this, because he didn't want to believe that his usefulness in Japan might well be at an end. If this should prove to be true, *I won't take one damn thing more from the yellow devils,* Lew decided.

AS the Japanese, devotions finished, kicked the pariahs to their feet to indicate that it was time to move ahead again, Davies made himself consider what could be in store for the outcasts, for himself. Suppose there was a hot spring resort, where Japanese bathed luxuriously, to which the Ainu were being taken. Suppose also that it was a place where generals and admirals went, according to Tokyo gossip, in order to rest and recover a proper valiant fighting spirit—at least those officers who hadn't ripped their bellies open after defeats. Wouldn't it be logical to conclude that nothing would be believed better for these *samurai*-descendants' war-courage than to have some pariah dogs to boot around?

Japanese farmers, clerks and schoolboys, turned soldier, were taught to bayonet Chinese civilians in order to develop a killer instinct and to build morale. Japanese noncoms were encouraged to slap white women around and thus develop a feeling of superiority. The treatment of prisoners at Bataan was largely for the purpose of showing common Japanese infantrymen that the once-feared Americans were weak and cowardly opponents. All of this was in line with what Davies was thinking.

But, *if they start torturing me just so some Nips can get all pepped up and go back to fight,* decided Davies, *and if I'm dead sure I can't do anything and have no chance to get away, nobody can blame me if I get me a Jap or two this time. There is a limit to what a fellow can stand.*

This notion grew and grew and took such complete possession of the man who had been so alone in Japan for so long that when Sergeant Tsumikawa began amusing himself by picking up rocks along the path and offering to bet his corporal as to the exact spot on a particular Ainu he could hit, and whether the rock would knock the pariah down or merely bring blood, Davies' hands clenched.

Tsumikawa saw this.

"Jitsu ni negattari kanattari de gozarimasu," snarled the sergeant. "This ugly dog Koropok is an enemy as well as a slave. He desires to prevent me from grenade-throwing practice. *Ho!* We will see about that!"

The sergeant jerked off Koropok's pack. For one infinitesimal fraction of time there was nothing of the Ainu pariah in Llewelyn Davies' haggard, bitter face, in his tensed body. Everything he had suffered, everything he knew American prisoners had suffered, was waiting to explode.

Then, swiftly, he looked exactly like a submissive outcast again. Like Koropok. Why take only a dumb sergeant with him when he went?

He was thrown to the path, face downward. One soldier held his wrists, another grabbed his ankles, getting in a quick, sly twist of muscles for his own enjoyment. The sergeant ordered a third soldier to unbuckle his belt and hand it over; Tsumikawa sighed gustily with pleasure as he gave the belt a few preliminary swishes in the air—and then brought it down on Koropok's bared back.

The leather was like a brand being applied. Searing. Expertly wielded. But even as Davies' teeth came together, to hold any sound of pain back in his throat, he wondered why he didn't feel the agonizing bite of the buckle.

As if in answer, Tsumikawa shrilled, "I would give the dog a taste of metal, but buckles are difficult to polish after being wetted with animal blood, and I do not intend to receive a reprimand for the condition of our equipment. Because I am unable to beat him properly," the sergeant growled, bringing down the belt in a savage crisscross slash, "I will add this incident to the account of this foul, whiskered dog. I will not forget him! No!"

The belt came down again.

"It was thus," boasted Tsumikawa, "that I beat an *America-jin* prisoner. Oh, how he screamed aloud and pleaded with me!" Up went the belt, and down. "And how clever are our superiors, who have enticed the Americans back to Bataan in order to seize more of them, thus ending the war gloriously for us." Slash, slash, slash. "Even a pariah dog," panted Sergeant Tsumikawa, taking a deep breath and a different grip, "has more courage than the *Amerika-jin.*"

The taste of blood from his own gnawed lip was in Davies' mouth. *You idiot,* he was accusing himself, *this serves you right. You gave yourself away. If you'd been trying to accomplish something, you'd have failed. Maybe a damned good beating will knock some sense into your thick Welsh head.*

That same head was beginning to spin, and numbness was spreading down from it to his whole body. Davies knew he dared not lose consciousness; but could he prevent it from happening? If he passed out, Tsumikawa might

decide that Koropok was not worth being carried by the already-burdened Ainu, and would merely tumble him down to the rocky bottom of the ravine; and that would be that.

Fighting to retain his senses, feeling little pain from the continued beating, Davies stared ahead, to where he could see the rock wall through the trunks of the trees. The rock itself was black. Lew's eyes fastened on the one variation in color, a greenish circular patch, an indentation, but a green unlike any grass that ever grew. It seemed to brighten to a more vivid green, and then to change to a coppery blue, which was suddenly shot through with yellow and silver.

I'm seeing things, Davies thought desperately. *I can't let go. I don't dare let go!* The silvery yellow was becoming a whitish mist before his eyes, like fog, like steam, like forgetfulness. *I've got to hang on,* he kept trying to tell himself; but he didn't see color at all now, but only the mist, and the slashes didn't really hurt at all, and he was getting sleepy . . . sleepy . . .

Tsumikawa, excited by the punishment and pain he was inflicting, and because a man was prone and he was standing, armed, above him, screamed, "I will beat him until he begs for mercy, or I will kill him," but Davies heard none of the words. "I will slash away his nose and ears until he resembles one of the very *raibyo-yami* we can soon mock and laugh at. And," the noncom said grimly, withholding the belt, "I intend to flay this Koropok, and then use a round piece of his Ainu hide in order to protect myself against contamination. If a man has such a charm, and purifies a different part of his body nightly with salt and water, and spits in the face of every *raibyo-yami* he sees, he will remain strong and healthy."

In Davies' head was only, *He talks too damn much.*

"We go where there are *raibyo-yami,* lepers?" asked Corporal Ashiuni, whispering because of the frightening information. "Oh! I thought we were to enjoy ourselves guarding prisoners. We all thought this. Lepers! Oh, terrible!"

"*Shiranu koto aro monka,*" cried Tsumikawa. "If you spent your money in Number One waiting-houses, you would know what goes on. *I* knew." Standing straddled over Koropok, delighted with such a position of dominance and with a wide-eyed audience, the sergeant continued, "And do not wail, 'Oh, terrible!' You should be shouting, 'What a magnificent secret weapon has been contrived by Japan!' "

The private who was holding Davies' ankles looked up. He said, "I do not understand. What weapon, please?"

"You are a cow-faced peasant," the sergeant yelled. "Listen! *Amerika-jin* prisoners have been taken to the hot springs where lepers are given treatments. There is an entire colony of *raibyo-yami* where we go. The enemy soldiers are to care for the lepers now. Is that plain, stupid one? The Americans will sicken, will become miserable *raibyo-yami* shortly. Then we will send them back to regular prison camps, so they will contaminate other Americans. When this is learned in America—the fate of white devils who dare to bomb Japan and to sink our ships with their fiendish underwater boats—then no cowardly American who hears of this will so much as fly over Japan again, nor go to sea in a submarine, and we will win the war. Do you understand our cleverness now, manure-brain?"

Davies' head had cleared just enough to tell him that this must be the boastful fool sergeant sounding off; but could there be any truth to what Tsumikawa shouted? Lew's back felt as if hot metal were pressed against it. Would there be more beating? And how much of the harangue had he missed?

"Now," said Tsumikawa, taking a fresh grip on the belt, "I will get on with the business of beating this hairy Koropok to death."

CORPORAL ASHIUNI, bold because Tsumikawa had borrowed a few coins from him when the sergeant had returned, without so much as a single *sen,* from the licensed quarter, said, "If you beat him too badly, how will you get a good piece of skin for your charm against uncleanliness? And I should like a bit of hide, also."

"I can cut off a piece before I cut him into red ribbons," chuckled Tsumikawa. "Give me your bayonet."

For a fraction of time, not much longer than it took for the corporal's bayonet to rasp from its sheath, Davies was witless. Would it do any good to put up a feeble fight which the Japanese would enjoy? Was he going to die here, uselessly?

Nothing in his life had ever been so difficult as to review, lightning-fast, a situation which demanded a head in good working order, and Davies', while Tsumikawa stropped the bayonet on the belt, was momentarily as dull as Koropok's own brain was supposed to be. Then . . .

A round piece of my skin, thought Lew. *As a charm against leprosy. What've I ever heard about* raibyo-yami? *And where?*

Through his head flashed something which Tsumikawa himself had mentioned. A waiting-house.

Koropok had worked at a famous one, Number Nineteen.

I remember, Davies thought. *That Jap doctor who came all the time. Tsumikawa got his dope from overhearing the same guy. How much do I remember of what the Nip M. D. said, and how much can I make up? Well, here goes . . .*

As the hands holding him down tightened, and as Tsumikawa plucked up Koropok's swarthy skin preparatory to making an in-

cision, the American mumbled in clipped Ainu accent,

"Oni ha sot'
Fu' ha uch',
Whoever becomes bloody
And meets a leper,
Himself will be unclean
For a thousand years.
He becomes unclean,
His wife becomes unclean,
His sons become—"

"Where did you hear such lies?" shouted Tsumikawa, bayonet poised. "How dare you repeat them? How dare you plead to live? Speak!"

"Shinj' shinj'nai w' hito j'yu d'su," Koropok whined. "Oh, lord, it is what I heard at Nineteen—"

"Liar! What do you know of Number Nineteen?"

Koropok said, "I worked there, lord. It must be written in my papers. You have my papers, lord. I worked at Nineteen, lord. I—"

"You talk too much," said the sergeant; but he did not touch Koropok with the bayonet, and he did not kick him. Instead, he looked at the bloody belt. Then he looked at his hands. "Dry," he muttered. "No blood has touched me."

The soldier whose belt had been used had turned and was bobbing up and down as he prayed in the direction of the shrine they had passed. Tsumikawa had dropped the bayonet, and was staring at Koropok's papers which he had taken out. The corporal had retrieved his bayonet.

"He was at Nineteen," Tsumikawa grunted. "That much is true. He could have overheard what he repeated. It was at Nineteen that I myself overheard a few things, as I have told you." The sergeant began to grin. "I am a fortunate man," he remarked. "I am going to live, strong and clean, until I kill many Americans. What is it to kill a pariah dog? Nothing! Yes, I am a lucky man, and—"

"But what about me?" whimpered the soldier whose belt had been bloodied.

"Take the belt by the buckle," ordered Tsumikawa, "so that no blood touches you. Go to the bottom of the ravine and wash the belt. Make sure that the leather is well cleansed. And when you come back," commanded the sergeant, "see to it that you walk far behind us until the belt is dry. Then I will examine it —with my eyes, of course. Go! Why do you wait?"

"I could drop the belt into the ravine—"

Tsumikawa cried, "What? Do you want to waste material needed in the war? Do you want to have me reprimanded because you have no belt? Oh, what a selfish person you are! *Kataku ii-tsuketa zo!* Obey your orders!"

When the private climbed nervously down

As the private climbed down to the bottom of the chasm he kept eyeing the belt as if it were a venomous snake.

the rock side of the chasm, to where water ran at the bottom, he kept eyeing the belt as if it were a venomous snake. He was trembling so violently that he had difficulty in keeping his feet.

Tsumikawa looked down at Koropok. "I am a kind man," said the sergeant. "I allow you your life."

Koropok said, "Yes, lord," and squirmed on the ground just enough so that he could touch the talkative sergeant's dusty shoe with his forehead. "I am your dog," whimpered Lieutenant Davies, exactly as a pariah would have done.

"I will see to that," grinned Tsumikawa.

I'll bet you will, thought Lew. *You won't forget that fear, because of what I repeated about lepers, stopped you from the fun of killing me.*

The path, before long, began to reveal what the hot spring country would be like; a thin coating of old volcanic ash rose, agitated by the feet of the party, and soon everyone was sneezing. As the trees thinned, Davies got his first real glimpse of a wild land. He could see stupendous red cliffs, scarred and lined, rising higher and higher; above the tops of the peaks

were wispy cloud-mists. It took concentration to stare ahead, while seeming to be only a shambling pariah, because the pack on Koropok's back, rubbing up and down, felt as if it were pulling off the skin between the slashes made by the belt. But, even so, he was alive.

As a great boulder, seemingly poised on a shelf of the rock wall above the path, was passed, the scene ahead became visible, all at once. There was a deep and narrow valley, far down, with a village beside the lake which reached to the base of the surrounding cliffs, mirroring the hot spring town, the cliffs, and the clouds. From hundreds of steam-vents in the precipitous slopes issued torrents of steam and sulphurous vapors. From these, to Davies' ears, came the sound of a dull booming, like soft and distant thunder.

SOON the path crossed the chasm on a narrow, swaying hand-bridge, reaching the volcanic side of the ravine. The odor of sulphur grew stronger with every footstep. It was not long before the Japanese and Ainu, and Koropok, were threading forward slowly between hissing vents, each having a patch of rotten-looking yellow ground about it. At times the openings in the rock were so close that jets of steam concealed portions of the party, and Tsumikawa would command a halt until all of the pariahs were accounted for. The roaring never ceased, and made the already-aching head of the American dizzy with pain. Now and again the earth underfoot squirmed and shook; now and again a fine ash, like a fog, sifted down from some erupting volcano deep in central Japan's uneasy mountains.

"Jigoku," the soldier just behind Koropok kept repeating, between prayers to the fire-god. *Jigoku.* Hell. The Japanese word for the hot spring country.

And hell for the Americans who are there, thought Davies.

For a full half hour this continued; then the real descent to the village, the lake, began. Again and again the ravine had to be crossed, once on a bridge strung on what looked to Davies like a piano wire, so hard was the granite to which the suspension had to be made; and it twanged like taut piano wire, too, when he flipped his finger against it. Finally the path became broader and showed signs of being well-traveled, as if used by the villagers to reach the charcoal-burners' huts niched where there was room enough. Then the party reached the flat of the valley, walked under a huge red *torii,* and Tsumikawa gave the order to halt at the guard house.

The acrid smell of sulphur was overpowering. Clouds of steam hung over the central portion of the village called Tatsuto-zo; it came, Davies guessed, from the baths. He glanced about carefully, knowing that the slightest sign of interest, even from a pariah, would arouse the suspicions of the Japanese. He had time only to mark the series of bamboo pipes to his right, through which water must reach some of the bathing places, when the shrill challenge of the guard brought a chubby and youthful lieutenant from the guard house.

Tsumikawa had drawn up his platoon on each side and to the rear of the pariahs. The guns of the men were pointed at the head-hanging Ainu. Tsumikawa saluted sloppily.

"Second Class Sergeant Tsumikawa, Decoration of the Sixth Order, reports with eight Ainu as ordered," he said.

The chubby lieutenant glanced at his watch; and Davies, seeing the insignia on the strap, knew that it was American. "You are late," the lieutenant announced. "I have been kept here waiting for you."

"Regrets," bowed the sergeant.

What he's thinking, Davies was too sure, *is that I'm responsible for the delay. I'll get the works before long.*

"Thore tha ikamathen," Lieutenant Omuko lisped. "What is your excuse? I suppose that you were enjoying yourself somewhere?"

"No, lord." Tsumikawa jerked his head toward Koropok. "That dog caused me some slight trouble, which I rectified."

"Rectified! You talk like a teacher or a priest! And you probably lie. I—"

A deeper voice grated, *"Ara! mata hajimatta!* There you are, at it again! Omuko, will you never learn not to discipline a soldier in front of low persons such as Ainu? The next time this take place . . ."

With the major's warning in the air, the lieutenant bowed his head; but, as he did so, Davies caught the baleful look shot in his direction.

So he doesn't like me, either, thought Lew.

The major's slitted eyes slid from one soldier to another. Suddenly his voice rasped, "You, there! Number five, right rank! What is the matter with your belt? Have you been sleeping in the mud like a Filipino ox?"

The private's mouth popped open. He blinked as if he were facing a firing squad; but he was unable to say a word.

"Sergeant," the major said, "have you given your men the idea that they come to Tatsuto-zo to enjoy themselves at the baths? Do they believe there is no need to maintain their equipment in proper order, nor—"

"Major," a different Japanese voice broke in, coming from the side of where the lieutenant and major were standing, "this is not the place to conduct inspection. I would expect such action from a raw *shiganhei,* but not from a senior officer. What would you think," the gray-haired colonel snapped, "were I, the commandant here, to speak so improperly when there are inferior dogs standing around? Answer that! No! Do not answer. Send those pariahs in to me, one by one, and I myself will determine

what shall be done with them. I will miss my dinner, but I cannot trust so simple a duty to anyone. *Ai!* It is annoying. I do not like it."

The major bowed deeply, smiling all over his face as if he had been complimented; and, as he allowed his eyes to flick toward Davies, the American knew that the major had heard how Koropok had been mentioned. That the major had no love for him, he was sure. *I'm going to get the works,* Lew realized, *unless I can do something about it. And if there is one single thing I might accomplish around here, I've got to be alive in order to do it.*

"Bring me the papers of these animals," Colonel Sakirumu ordered. "My food will cool while I do what others should be doing."

He's the only one who doesn't want my hide nailed up, Davies decided. *How can I do anything to keep him on my side?*

There was one possibility, Davies felt, remembering exactly what the colonel had complained about; but when the lieutenant touched Sergeant Tsumikawa secretly on the arm, and whispered in his ear, Davies guessed from the way in which Tsumikawa half-turned in his direction, that whatever Lieutenant Omuko was saying must involve Koropok the Ainu. And he was right.

There was fear in Tsumikawa's eyes as he forced himself to obey the lieutenant, as he saluted the colonel, bowed, and saluted again.

But Tsumikawa, as before, had plenty of words when once his mouth opened, in spite of his nervous fright in addressing such a high officer, even if the lieutenant had ordered him to do so. "Lord," said the talkative sergeant, almost bleating, "I apologize for speaking before you. But there is nothing in the papers of the pariah named Koropok to indicate that he is unpatriotic and dangerous, though he is an evil person. He caused trouble on the way to Tatsuto-zo, lord-colonel. He is responsible for everything which has happened—"

"What has happened," snapped Colonel Sakirumu, "is that my dinner is spoiling. Do you think, Sergeant, that I am afraid of a pariah? Oh, do not start to tell me again. You are as noisy as the radio. Koropok? Well, send him to me first, and I will take some of the dangerousness out of him."

And so Koropok, head hanging, stood before Sakirumu's desk.

Take it easy, he told himself. *The old boy has what passes in Japan for a sense of humor. That is, he'll joke when he sticks a knife into you.*

CHAPTER II

THE SULPHUR BATHS

"KOROPOK," the colonel said. He rubbed his hands together. "I am going to give you a choice. Would you prefer helping the *Amerika-jin* bathe the lepers, or would you like to be used for bayonet practice?"

Davies mumbled, "Neither, lord."

"What? You refuse to name a choice?"

"I have never been in a Presence before," said Davies, and fell on hands and knees. *And does he love this fawning!* Lew was willing to bet, from the way he could hear the colonel's indrawn breath and the following gusty exhalation and Japanese-fashion spitting. "Lord," Koropok continued pleadingly, " is there no way in which I can serve a Greatest One?"

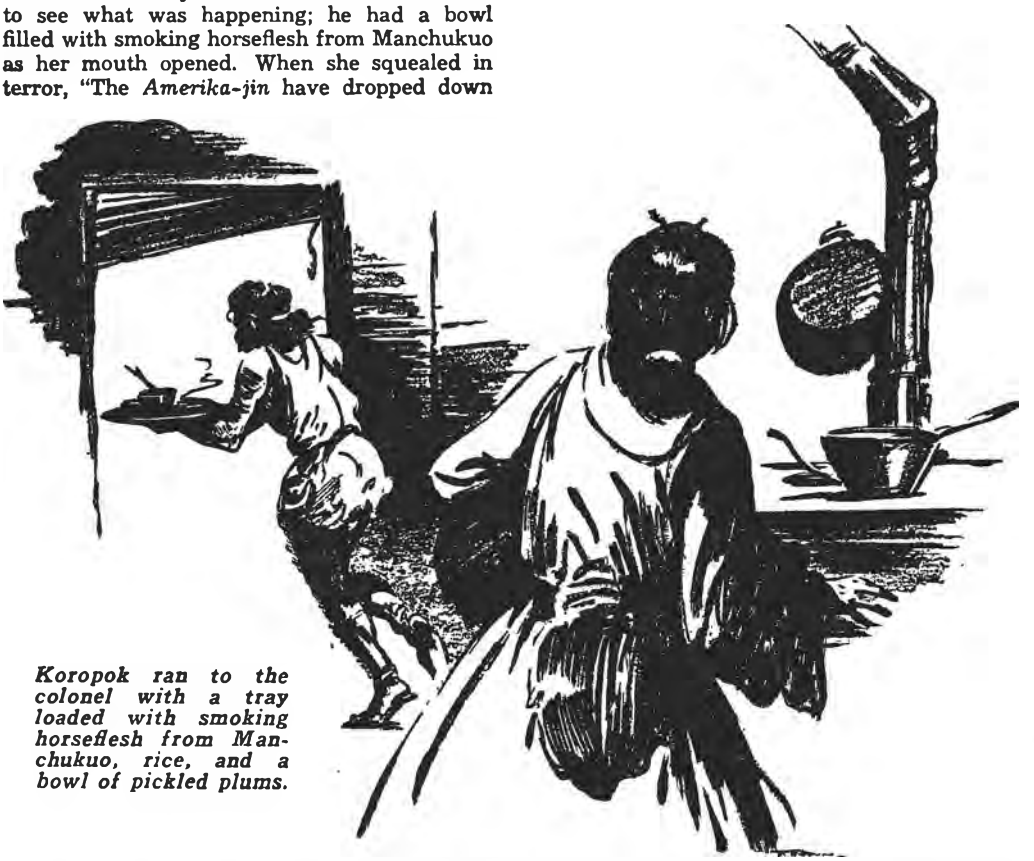
Colonel Sakirumu said, "*Nani?* What are you talking about? You are a pariah, a slaughterer of food-animals, a stinking less-than-nothing." The colonel paused, and then asked, "What service can you give?"

Monkey-curiosity got him, exulted Davies. He said, "Lord, I was a servant at a famous place. At Number Nineteen in Tokyo. I can clean, and I can scrub the back. I can also scratch the back for itching. I can accompany *geisha* and *ne-san* safely to your presence for your enjoyment. I can bring food so quickly that there is steam rising when I set down the rice. I can—"

"Bring it, then," shouted the colonel, "and we will see."

If he had expected that a foolish Ainu would goggle and ask where the kitchen might be, thus giving the colonel a delightful story to repeat, Sakirumu was mistaken. Davies, instinctively, because he had to be always aware of everything, had already examined the office, and figured out where the sleeping-room must be, and where the room in which food was prepared. He had leaped to his feet before the Japanese finished speaking, and, running as he had run at Number Nineteen, with bearlike but fast gait, he was on his way to the kitchen . . .

He was ladling rice from the pot before the old woman's rusty kimono hissed as she turned to see what was happening; he had a bowl filled with smoking horseflesh from Manchukuo as her mouth opened. When she squealed in terror, "The *Amerika-jin* have dropped down from the sky!" he had pickled plums heaped on a plate and the chopsticks beside them, and he could hear, as he picked up the tray, the howl of laughter from the colonel, because of what the cooking-woman had screamed.



Koropok ran to the colonel with a tray loaded with smoking horseflesh from Manchukuo, rice, and a bowl of pickled plums.

Davies would have liked to have called, "Funny as hell, isn't it? The old cook thinks that whiskers only grow on Americans. She's probably never seen an Ainu." Then he thought to himself, *I wonder which of you is the dumb one. And can I put it to use?*

Sakirumu called out something to prevent the cooking-woman from rushing outside and giving an alarm; he examined the tray critically when Koropok placed it on the desk before him. Koropok squatted beside the desk, jumping up to pick up a plum-pit which the colonel spat out, racing to the kitchen to bring fresh, hotter water for tea, waiting until a blazing match almost burned his fingers so as to have a light ready for the colonel's cigarette.

It was as good as a play, the colonel decided. This Ainu, Koropok, coming from Nineteen, was well-trained; and while regulations forbade Japanese servants, nothing had been said about pariahs. *The dog has taken a liking to me, for one reason or another,* decided Sakirumu; and, being a Japanese, he couldn't wait to find out why. He approached the subject in truly Oriental fashion.

"Why do you wish to serve me instead of Major Sompuji?" he inquired. "Do you know what a major is, Koropok?"

Koropok bowed. "At Number Nineteen," he said, in clipped Ainu dialect, "there came colonels and generals and admirals, lord. That is how I knew."

"Yes, yes," Sakirumu said, " but why did you select me?"

Koropok lowered his head again. "I dare not answer," he said.

"Come! I am a kind man. You may reply. If you do not reply," said Sakirumu, "I may not be so kind."

"If I answer, I will be beaten," whined Koropok. *Play the game, boy,* Davies was telling himself. *He's hooked.* "I dare not speak against an officer of His Imperial Majesty, lord. If I do—"

"Answer!"

"Lord," said Koropok, making his voice shake, "I could hear how envious were the other officers, and the major-officer, and how they hastened to decide everything before you appeared, and so I knew you were a Greatest One, and—"

Colonel Sakirumu blinked. He said only, *"Naruhodo!* I see!" but Davies guessed what the colonel was thinking. Not until Sakirumu finished another fat Egyptian cigarette, from Singapore, did the Japanese speak again. Then he said, "I will take my bath in the evening, Koropok. See to it that you are there with fresh towels and a bran-bag and my bottle of whiskey."

He fell for it, Davies realized. *He's got himself a servant for free, making him a smart guy. And he's got somebody so dumb that he can safely ask him to do things, including checking on other officers.*

To Davies, this meant more than escaping death, or a horrible task in the leper colony. It meant a chance to get around.

While Koropok cleaned the colonel's sleeping-room, after finding the towels and bran-bag for scrubbing, and the bottles of excellent Scotch—the labels of which made Lew remember Manila, and home—he began the first preliminary to any planning as to what he might do: he began to figure on how he could contact the American prisoners. It was safe to assume that as long as he was the colonel's servant, and brought him food, Sakirumu wouldn't permit him to be exposed to either the *raibyo-yami* or the Americans who were around them. Not Sakirumu.

Davies slid over this latter. It was a barrier to be surmounted only after he decided, if decision were possible, what could be done.

By the time Lew wrapped the towels in a clean piece of cotton, and pinned the allow-to-pass badge on his tattered jacket, he was beginning to wish that troop-carrying transports, such as he had heard officers returned from Manila talk about, might fly over Tatsuto-zo. Then after fighters and dive bombers had leveled the village, the prisoners could be flown off. Such a wish told Davies clearly that he was unable to figure out anything to do. Suppose, for example, he were able to get the prisoners away: where could they go? Or suppose he managed to get guns to them, on the theory that it would be better to die fighting than to suffer, as lepers, for the rest of their lives? This, also, meant the finality of death. *A fellow can kill himself, if it comes to that . . . although it'd be better to go out, as I thought of doing, by taking some Nips along with me.* The masquerader knew that to reveal himself, without being able to help, would bring a torturing let-down to the suddenly-hopeful prisoners. *It would be hell,* thought Davies.

Tatsuto-zo was built, on the narrow valley floor, with rock cliffs on the close sides, in terraces. Koropok, challenged often, sometimes held while a guard bleated for his corporal, passed the tea-house on the first terrace, seeing, inside, a few girls and many officers. Next came the series of wooden houses in which the Shinto priests lived; and why it was so near the tea-house Davies could guess. The Shintoists' vows of celibacy were never seriously carried out. Davies, as Koropok at Number Nineteen, knew plenty about that.

From the houses of the priests a flight of stone steps led up to a wooden gateway, on which were carved flowers and symbols of the fire-god and beards and animals impossibly mated. It was necessary to walk through the courtyard, so narrow was the village and so few the paths, and past the temple itself, with its gilded ascending and descending dragons on either side of the entrance. A pair of stone fire-breathing lions guarded the bronze-studded wooden doors. And priests, at this late hour of no-prayer, were beginning to amble in groups toward the baths, towels slung over their arms. They smoked and laughed and gossiped as they walked, all of them, now that the Buddhist priests had lost power, contented and fat and comfortable men. The war was good to them. Women made many offerings, in order that their husbands and sons might return victoriously and safely.

KOROPOK fell in behind one of the groups, wisely not walking ahead of them. He listened closely, too. A fellow never knew when he might pick up some delectable bit of gossip which could be retold to the colonel, along with whatever variations might be helpful and suitable.

Davies thought, *But I mustn't kid myself, or the poor devils who are imprisoned here. On one hand, here's a military installation, damn well guarded, right in the heart of Japan. On the other hand, so what? Me. One guy. A pariah.*

What else was there? Lepers.

Davies' head was bowed low as he walked, but not because he was playing his part as an Ainu. His hopes were equally as low.

The only thing about which the priests grumbled was the lack of young acolytes; the war had taken them off, and it was necessary for the priests to ring their own bells, prepare their own food, pour their own liquor. Davies' ears pricked up when he overheard one

paunched Shintoist say that surely some of the lazy *Amerika-jin* prisoners could be spared from standing around and doing nothing in order to serve religious men, which was pretty fair proof that the Japanese hadn't made up their minds as to what should be done with the Americans here. Better proof, Lew was sure, than what the talkative sergeant had said.

Soon Japanese officers, many of them old, joined the priests. Almost all of the officers walked with legs wide apart, and their faces twisted with pain as they advanced slowly and with curses.

"My blisters are so thick," one old captain complained, "that I would consider leading my company in a charge more pleasurable than getting into the water. But I keep telling myself that one must not question the orders of our superiors. I tell you," he muttered, "that the acid in the water bites into me like pincers! It is a good thing we are a race of heroes, or we could not cure ourselves so painfully. But it is worth while to suffer," he added, beginning to grin, "for the enjoyment of being patted dry by American officers. Yes!"

Davies was wondering if this statement of the captain, plus the presence of lepers, wasn't responsible for the story which the sergeant had heard at Nineteen. If so, the prisoners here weren't too badly off, not when compared to the fate of other prisoners. And, if so, he ought to have a chance to see the Americans closely. The thought of an American face was enough to make his heart beat faster. He had been in Japan for a long time . . . friendless.

He was passed by guards through a final gate, and came to the platform inside the bath-house where officers and priests undressed to nakedness. Beyond the raised place was the pool itself, sulphurous yellow and acid green, with greenish steam rising from it and hanging above, like fog. The fog was thickest at the hot-water inlet, thinnest where a bamboo pipe allowed just enough icy mountain water to drip down so that it was humanly possible for bodies to stand the heat of the curative baths. Standing against the walls, like recruits waiting for an order, were lines of bandy-legged Japanese, big-bellied Japanese, scrawny Japanese, and, Davies saw as he peered through the steam, Colonel Sakirumu.

Koropok edged carefully along the pool's edge until he reached his master, and then crouched down at his feet.

The bath-master shouted, "*Mo yoroshii ka?* Prepare!"

Each of the naked Japanese, as if mechanical men, turned, and took from the wall behind them an eight-foot-long board, a foot wide, and came again to attention at the edge of the pool.

"Prepare the bath!" the bath-master ordered.

Each Japanese dipped an end of his board into the pool, and began splashing the water from right to left, much as if they were digging with spades. They brought the board down with a smack after lifting it, and as they splashed the water they chanted in unison, directed by the bath-master:

> *"Sama wa tennin!*
> *Otome no sugata:*
> My maid is willing!
> I see her form
> In the baths . . ."

When the song became more obscene and ribald, the priests, instead, chanted:

> *"Sama mo kokoro mo*
> *Kawaru kana!*
> Form changes until
> Your tears fall!
> You must enter the pool
> Of the Divine Reflection of the sun!"

Slap, smack, splash. Bodies swayed in unison. The sound was deafening, as, according to the bathers' belief, air was being driven into the water of the pool. Soon the Japanese were glistening with sweat; soon the bath-songs were forgotten, and a wild chant came from both officers and priests, which concerned the victory of Japan over the rest of the world.

At the moment that the last bull voice hoarsened, the bath-master gave the next order. The boards were replaced, and the seven Ainu who had been with the party came from the outside with a heavy beam, which was laid from one edge of the pool to the other. They shuffled off to return with another beam, and with more, until the pool was divided into lanes just wide enough to accommodate lines of bathers. While this was being done, the Japanese had knelt down, pouring dippersful of water over their heads, and gasping at the heat of the water. Envious eyes saw that Colonel Sakirumu's Ainu servant was performing this necessary duty for him.

"Enter!" commanded the bath-master, after the temperature of the water had been finally tested, and the drip of the cold water carefully checked.

Down into the pool went the Japanese. A long moan went up, an *"Aiiiii!"* of torture rose with the thick steam. Koropok enjoyed the sound. *I hope you cook, the lot of you,* he thought, staring down at the rows of slowly purpling dark faces. *I hope you cook, and then I'd like to split you open, like lobsters.* The grim and tight lips of the officers marked them from the open-mouthed and gasping Shintoists as the hot acid water bit into their blistered, sore-covered bodies.

The lamentation died down after the first minute of the three-minute immersion. At first Koropok heard only the ticking of a clock; then he could hear, from a pool beyond, a similar moan rising, and, from the orders of the bath-master there, knew that the next bath-house must be for lepers.

From the temple a file of priests began to amble toward the baths.

HE HAD no time to think about this; into the bath-house here, in a single file, came men with towels and wads of soft cotton. White men. Thin. Soldiers guarded every four Americans. The latter were ranged around the pool, and stood waiting for the bathers to leave the pool and be dried off.

The second minute began to tick away. Davies, as if merely staring stupidly at the rising steam, glanced up.

There was a dreadful fascination for him in the mere presence of the men behind him; that they could grin at the spectacle of the Japanese in the near-boiling water was one of the swellest things Davies had ever thought about. Swell. None of these men was licked. Far from it. No wonder that the Japanese, aware at last of the caliber of the foe they fought, sought wildly for some means by which they could frighten America away from Japan—no wonder Japan was worrying about the belt of steel which was tightening about Nippon.

"Three-minute eggs," Davies heard one of the men say.

He waited for the blow which usually fol-

lowed anything said by a prisoner, but the guards paid no attention to what was said. So Davies, as Koropok the Ainu, stood up slowly, towels hanging over his arm. He shambled a few steps to one side, so that he was between the near group of four men, and at the greatest distance from the guard on either side.

"Santa Claus," a prisoner said.

"Maybe a Russian," said another.

A third American argued, "Koreans wear beards, don't they?"

"He's pretty young to be a grandpa," grinned the man who had first spoken. "I wonder if his gal makes him shave on his birthdays?"

Davies said, voice low, "Nuts to the lot of you! Keep talking and don't stare at me."

The clock was ticking . . .

There was, as Davies feared, a fraction of time in which every one of the four near him was silent. He himself dared not glance at either of the guards to see if they had heard

The bathers' bodies were purple-red, puffed and parboiled from the steaming pool.

him speak. Then one of the prisoners said, "Hell," and there was utter disbelief in his voice. Whether this came because of what he heard, or thought, Davies didn't know.

"It's the heat," a prisoner said. "Or the humidity."

Davies was about to speak again when the bath-master shrieked, "Slowly! Up! Out! Three minutes!"

The bathers' bodies were purple-red, puffed. Up and out they came, parboiled in spite of the cold water which had slightly tempered the steaming pool. Koropok began to pat Colonel Sakirumu's body gently. He said, above the puffing of the officer, "I have not the bottle, lord. Someone saw me with it. Someone said, 'How can a dog of a pariah have a bottle?' and took it from me, lord. Oh, do not beat me!"

Sakirumu said, "I can believe it, with so many envious men here!" before thinking. Then he growled, "Of course I will beat you!" but Davies was reasonably sure that there would be no beating at all.

Dutifully, he waited until Sakirumu was ready to return to the platform and begin dressing; the colonel did not hurry, knowing that all of his subordinates must wait until he left. The priests, hungry and noisy, were held to no such custom, and were first out of the bathhouse. When Sakirumu finally departed, accepting salutes from everyone, the prisoners and their guards were already gone.

Outside, refreshingly cool after the steaming bath, a junior officer approached the colonel, halted, and saluted.

"Sir," he said, "it is reported that your servant spoke words wtih the *Amerika-jin* prisoners."

So they let the prisoners talk, and then try to pick up things, thought Davies, cold as ice. *The guards understand English.*

"What damned gabbling fool reported such a thing?" snapped Sakirumu. "Major Sompuji, doubtless?"

The intelligence officer said, "Sir, it was reported directly to me by a guard. Damning words were spoken. This Koropok spoke of machinery—"

"What?" bellowed the colonel. Into his head, as into all Japanese heads, suspicion buzzed; but when he looked at Koropok, standing with open mouth and attitude of complete Ainu ignorance, he began to snort. "Machinery? Lieutenant, have you lost your senses? What does this animal know of machinery? Nothing! What machinery did he mention? Tell me that!"

The intelligence officer stood his ground. "Sir," he said, apologetically but firmly, "he spoke of a piece of metal with a screw thread known as a nut—"

"You are a damned fool!" Colonel Sakirumu snorted. He began to laugh. "What a guard who lived in America must have heard," said the colonel, delighted to parade his own superior knowledge before an intelligence officer, "was the word 'nut'. Oh, I am not one to boast, but even I, in my few months in Washington, learned such a word. And it was not the pariah who said it. Certainly it was one of the prisoners. I am sure of that. Now go away and do not bother me any more. If," Colonel Sakirumu ended sharply, "you wish to perform your duty, go and find who stole my bottle of *Scotchu whisuki!*"

"Did this one drink it?" asked the intelligence officer unwisely, glaring at Koropok. "And did he tell you a lie—"

Again Sakirumu's Japanese-fashion suspicion made him, also, look at Koropok. "I do not remember his telling me *what* the thief looked like," said Sakirumu. "*Ho!* You drank my *whisuki*, dog!"

"No, lord," whimpered Koropok. Solemnly, simulating a trembling, he described Sergeant

Tsumikawa exactly, ending with, "Oh, lord, I am very afraid of him!"

"So long as you are my servant," said the colonel, remembering that the newly-arrived sergeant had been assigned to Major Sompuji, "nobody but a colonel dares to beat you. Bah! There is gossip and envy around this place until it is all like a priest's apartment! I am sick to death of it!"

Koropok followed him, thinking, *I've got to be careful. That's twice I've slipped. The third time I may not be so lucky.* Somehow, he must warn the prisoners about what he himself should have considered—that the Japanese would have guards who understood English, and would use whatever was overheard to Japan's advantage. Somehow, this had to be done, and soon.

His new kennel was in the open, behind the colonel's kitchen. As he lay there, that night, he was tortured by the odor of the colonel's cigarettes. It was midnight when the officer's snores sounded like the escaping steam of the baths; it was past midnight before Koropok the Ainu, at full length on the ground, smoked the first of Colonel Sakirumu's cigarettes.

A GAME began in the morning. First after the colonel departed on inspection duties, several American prisoners were escorted to the colonel's house on the pretext that Colonel Sakirumu would enjoy having his floors scrubbed by American officers. The guards saw to it that Koropok, the pariah, had many opportunities to speak to the prisoners; Koropok went on with his work as if the Americans were not there. Nor did the prisoners speak, except among themselves. Davies could not be sure if they had caught his warning signal of tightly compressed lips, not easily seen because of his black beard, or if they were on guard for some other reason. Not a word passed between pariah and prisoners . . .

But many words were spoken when Colonel Sakirumu returned. The Japanese was so furious that Davies was afraid the old boy would have apoplexy.

"Sompuji!" the colonel kept repeating, half aloud, half to himself. "Sompuji! There is a person who covets my position! One of these days he will overstep himself, and when I am finished with him the only recourse he will have will be to slit open his belly. Oh, how I distrust that man! How he gathers satellites! I am sick and tired of him! Some day I will cook his goose—"

Davies was perfectly willing to help in roasting Major Sompuji, provided it would serve his own purpose. And as the days passed, one much like another, he began to learn that Major Sompuji, victim of every losing-of-face that the colonel could manage for him, not only had no love for his commanding officer, but none for his colonel's servant, either, mainly because Koropok continued to serve Sakirumu exactly as a favorite guest at Number Nineteen in Tokyo would have been served; and the colonel liked his comforts. Once a word-of-mouth message was brought to Koropok, when the colonel was away on duties, brought by a sly-eyed noncom from Sompuji's command, ordering Koropok to go immediately to the leper's bath-house as an attendant. *And if I do,* thought Davies, *that's where I spend the rest of my life.* The honorable colonel, his master, Koropok told the noncom, had insisted that he, Koropok, was not to leave the house.

The abbot of the temple had requested that Koropok be offered to the shrine.

Once again, the abbot of the temple requested that the stocky Koropok be offered to the shrine, which would be proof of Colonel Sakirumu's devotion—proof to the enraged colonel that somehow Major Sompuji had wormed his way into the confidence of the oily priests.

"Perhaps with Scotch he stole from me," raged Sakirumu.

It was all amusing to Davies; but it was accomplishing nothing. Yet, when a fellow stopped to think, what *could* be accomplished here? Free the prisoners? No use. Where could they

Koropok stretched out on the ground before his kennel and smoked one of Colonel Sakirumu's cigarettes.

go, except to death? Do something to stop the flow of propaganda about the terrible fate of flying officers and submarine officers when captured? Impossible. As a week, and another, went by, Lew felt that his first fears—that his usefulness had ended—were being borne out.

Colonel Sakirumu was his best, his only hope of getting away. If the comfort-loving colonel should be transferred, Koropok the Ainu intended to go along with him. Anywhere would be better than here. And so Koropok, more slyly and vastly more shrewdly than Sompuji, played the game . . .

The one thing which was happening was that Koropok, permitted to cook his own food in the kitchen, was in better shape than he had ever been since he had come to Japan. But what was the use of that, Davies asked himself, if he couldn't do anything?

The jealousies around him were typical military jealousies, the sort always taking place in a back-wash installation far from actual combat. Davies was careful not to do the things which, as Sakirumu's servant, he might have done. Undoubtedly he could have sought errands which would allow him to contact the prisoners; no good would result. No accomplishment.

He was stretched out behind the kitchen, half asleep, when a hand touched his shoulder. Instinctively, perfect in his masquerade after two slips, Koropok cringed, but with body tensed and ready.

"Hi, boy," he heard, so softly that it sounded like a waiting-maid at Nineteen awakening an honorable-guest from drunken sleep. "Lew!"

For a long moment the *sssssssss* of steam somewhere in Tatsuto-zo came to Davies' ears loudly, and hissed into his head.

He rose to his elbow. Staring.

Then he said, "Charley. Charley Crane."

Hand gripped hand.

"Long time no see," said Crane. "This is the first chance I had to get out of the stockade. I can get back O.K. I—"

Davies whispered, "Lie flat. Two o'clock guard. There's a moon."

The two Americans were motionless as the ground on which they lay, until the guard had passed. Then Crane whispered, "I crash-landed at Iwo Jima. Remember when you left Manila, Lew? For Japan. And—"

"How about the guys?" Davies whispered back, news-hungry. "How about—"

"Listen, boy. It's swell to talk. But I didn't come for that. Listen, and get it straight, because I don't dare try coming out again. If the Nips nab me, O.K. But they mustn't suspect you. You've got a job, fellow, a hell of a job, if you can get away from here. Can you?"

Davies said, "Yes."

"Roger. I—"

"Roger? What about him?"

Crane laughed in his throat. "I meant O.K., Lew. I forgot how long you've been away. Listen! We've got a G-2 fellow with us. You don't need details about what happened, but he had a job to do in Japan, and couldn't get away with it. So—we get chances to talk safely sometimes—I told him about you, when I knew who you were, and I've got all the dope from him, Lew, if you can get away to do it. It's really something . . ."

"Shoot," said Davies.

Then he listened. Once or twice he asked quick questions. At the very end he grinned. "Could be," he said.

"We'll kick up a fuss when word gets out that a pariah has escaped," said Crane. "That should keep too many rice-bags from being sent after you, and—"

"No," Lew said shortly. As he said, grinning again, "You'll know when I'm gone," he was thinking, *I must've had getting away in mind all the time. I can manage it. And pay off some scores at the same time.* "Now," he said quietly, soberly, "I'll repeat what you've told me."

Once more the men gripped hands.

When he was alone, Davies thought, *No time to waste. The sooner I get going the better.*

He began to grin. *Yes, the gang'll know when I leave.*

He was glad that he had never taken advantage of his position as the colonel's servant, and glad also that the other seven Ainu, true beaten-down pariahs, had not caused the slightest trouble at Tatsuto-zo, something which would have reacted on him. And he was delighted that the feud between Sakirumu and Sompuji still continued. Lastly, his own physical condition would make possible a real try at what the G-2 officer wanted done . . . And so, the rest of the night, Davies slept happily, like a log, like a stupid and unthinking, unworrying Ainu.

CHAPTER III

TRIAL BY FIRE

HE knelt beside Colonel Sakirumu's *zabuton* in the morning, with tea. The colonel's uniform was freshly pressed, the colonel's shoes shone. The colonel's first cigarette of the morning was waiting for the colonel's fingers.

"Lord," said Koropok, as Sakirumu sucked down tea and smoke at the same moment, "A little something has entered my stupid ears—"

"So?" said Sakirumu, recalling other bits of information which had come from the pariah. "You have my permission to speak."

Koropok bowed.

"Lord, it has come to my ears that the priests have made a writing. The honorable second-to-you lord Sompuji asked them to make the writing. I heard that it concerns you, my master. I—"

Sakirumu's face began to purple, as if he were being parboiled in the baths. "I wondered how long it would be before he tried something like that!"

"If it is the desire of your lordship," said Koropok, "I can steal this paper. It is in the abbot's sleeping-room, and—"

"Ah! Get it for me, Koropok, and you will be rewarded! Yes! Perhaps I can buy a wife for you. Perhaps I— Get it, dog, or I will beat you until you cannot stand. Koropok, I have always treated you well, and . . ."

"I will get it," promised Koropok. "Have I permission to absent myself from the baths this evening, lord?"

"You will steal it when the priests bathe! Excellent!" Sakirumu almost said, in his mixed anger and pleasure, "You have more sense than the Imperial Intelligence Office," but refrained with difficulty. He did say, "It was a fortunate day when I selected you as my servant," which made Davies hide a grin in his beard.

That's step Number One, thought Lew. *Now for Number Two.*

Koropok began to pat Colonel Sakirumu's body lightly with the towel.

He waited for the colonel to leave before taking an unfrequented path to the rear door of Major Sompuji's house. Sompuji goggled at him, but said only, "Have you brought a message from your master?" as he decided that here, indeed, was something to report! A pariah dog, an Ainu, entrusted with Imperial orders from the commandant!

Koropok said, whiningly, "Lord, I am to tell a lie about you—"

"What?" Out of Sompuji's mouth popped what he thought: "He stops at nothing, that old hog." Then, suspiciously, he asked, "What is this lie you are to tell about me? If you do not speak instantly, I will turn you into less-than-a-man."

"I am to say," said Koropok, "that you often have words with the prisoners. I am to say that when the war is over you have arranged to go to America. I am to say that you will receive, there, a large sum of money."

Sompuji's face turned a dirty gray ash. "How do you know this?" he muttered. "And why do you tell me, since you are the colonel's dog?"

"I know because I heard," Koropok whined. "The colonel drank much *whisuki,* and talked much. I tell you because . . . you will laugh at me, lord."

The major had never been so far from laughing in his life. He knew too well what even a false accusation from his commanding officer would mean for T. Sompuji. In a chattering voice he insisted, "Speak!"

"I am a pariah, lord. But Japan is my land. The Tenno is my god. What my master demands of me is not—not . . . I cannot say large words, lord."

"Not patriotic," said Sompuji mechanically.

Koropok bowed in assent.

"*Sa mo nakereba,*" the major said, thinking aloud. "It is not so, but . . . oh, how damaging! Oh, who will believe my only proof, which is the unbelievable word of an Ainu pariah? Oh, how he has me!"

"Lord," said Koropok softly, "I could help you."

"You will say that the colonel has ordered you to tell this lie? *Ho!* How can you match wits with him? How can you answer the questions of Intelligence? You will be trapped, and when you are tortured you will confess that you talked with me, and I will be more deeply involved than ever. I—"

"Tonight," said Koropok, "this very evening, before bathing, I am to be at the well-guarded spot from which water comes to the pool, lord. Before the colonel, my master, trusts me to speak to the Personage about you, I must repeat my story to my master at the last moment, so I will make no mistakes in what I say about you. I go to the large rock near the thick bamboo, lord, at the place of water-emerging-from-mountain. You, and some Great One whose words would be believed, could hide and listen. What the Great One hears would be your proof."

"The abbot Gonzozumo," said Sompuji. He began to smile broadly. "The word of a hero-priest who refused to listen to the pleas of the *Amerika-jin* priests at Bataan will be believed in Tokyo. *Aaaaa!*"

The major patted Koropok's shaggy head.

"Give me your writing-permission to go to the guarded-spot from which the water comes to the pools, lord."

"Why? You go on orders from your master."

Koropok said, "My master says, 'Go here,' and 'Go there.' Suppose, this time, I am stopped before I reach the spot? Suppose my master finds out about this, and, after a delay, I do not repeat the story for you and the Great One to hear? Suppose my master becomes suspicious and arranges a different meeting-place at the last moment, of which I cannot inform you? Suppose—"

"Your father must have been Japanese," grinned Sompuji, clicking his teeth. "I see what you mean." He pulled paper toward him, and began to write the pass for Koropok the Aniu. "And I intend to reward you," he promised.

Sure, thought Lew. *By killing me, after you've heard what you think you'll hear, so I can't do any talking about it in the future.*

Koropok took the pass; and that was step Number Two.

Number Three was easy. He would need food, enough so that he could avoid every village on his way back to Tokyo. This came from the kitchen, and to it Davies added a package of the colonel's fat cigarettes. He thought about putting some Scotch in a small bottle, because he would probably need it later, but finally decided against this. The smell on him, if he were picked up after the job was done, if it could be done, would be incriminating.

He needed a few other things. Being able to amble around, he was able to secure what he wanted. Where he got them didn't interest the Japanese. He was the colonel's servant.

When afternoon came, and the sun left the gorge and Tatsuto-zo, Davies was ready. *Before,* he was thinking, *I could plan things in advance. Now, it's whatever comes up. That's because we're closing in on the Nips. What I'd like,* thought Lew, *is to live long enough to see a landing. But what's going to happen, if the G-2 boy is right, will be something!* As Davies half-closed his eyes, he was almost seeing what might result if he accomplished his job. And so he was smiling as he left the colonel's house, slowly, always shuffling like a pariah . . .

The exodus toward the evening-bath had already started. Colonel Sakirumu would be there early, Lew was sure, so that the old boy could have the pleasure of looking at Major Sompuji and thinking how the major was getting the works at the hands of a pariah who, probably at this very moment, was stealing the papers at the temple. But Major Sompuji wouldn't be at the baths—and Sakirumu was going to worry about the absence. Sakirumu would send a messenger to find the major, but the messenger would first go to the temple, providing Sompuji left word where he was going; and, after that, nobody would know where abbot and officer had gone.

Except me, thought Lew. *I know where they're going.*

HE began walking toward the great rock and clump of bamboo, behind which water was piped, hot and cold alike, to the pools, always watchful to see if Sompuji had anyone following him. But when he came almost to the post where a guard challenged anyone advancing further, Koropok left the path swiftly and, body low, darted toward the patch of bamboo leading away from the village. When he reached the clump, he dropped to his knees and snaked his way along, cursing under his breath each time the bamboo leaves rustled, because there was no wind.

He had something wrapped in cloth in his hand, and when he could see, through bamboo, the darkness of the rock, he removed the covering. The metal of the wrench felt good in his hand. Hard. Cold. His fingers were metal about the handle, and his eyes, now that he saw

The abbot, in his black robes, looked like a perched vulture beside Sompuji.

the two crouched Japanese hiding by the rock, turned as metallic and cold as the steel.

The more of a mess there is in Tatsuto-zo, Davies thought again, *and the greater the puzzle seems to the Japs, the surer I am that they won't bother about what happened to Koropok, except what appears to be obvious. Not,* he told himself, *that I need any excuse for what I'm going to do now.*

He crept forward. Beside Sompuji's khaki, the abbot's black robes seemed even darker. The black robe looked like a perched vulture.

The two Japanese were silent. So was Koropok's approach. Six feet away, Davies rose to his feet. His mouth formed, "*Bataan!*" as, wrench swinging, he leaped ahead. He struck once. Struck twice. Into the blow went everything he had seen, everything he intended to accomplish. Swiftly, coldly, he pulled first one and then the other of the bodies under the thicket.

Wrench in hand again, he circled the thicket until he came to the big wooden pipes, side by side, which carried hot and cold water to the pools. No need to wonder which was which, Steam escaped where the bamboo pipes were

mechanically jointed; below the man-made joints, on the ground, were discolorations, vitriolic blues and coppers and thick incrustations of yellow flowers of sulphur.

Listening, Davies waited. Soon he heard the shouts and singing, and the splashing cadence of the boards beating on the water; and then, grinning, he uncoupled a joint of the cold-water pipe. Water like frost, icy, instantly spattered to earth, so cold that the touch of it, which tempered what was almost liquid steam in the other pipe, seemed actually to burn Davies' hand.

Fellows, thought Lew, as a slow grin parted his beard, *all you've got to do is watch what happens, and you'll get the first hint that I'm on my way. Watch how they cook, fellows! Not one Jap officer'll dare scream or get out as the water grows hotter and hotter . . . and if old Sakirumu pulls out first, he'll lose plenty of face, or so he's thinking right now . . . The whole damn lot'll be hospitalized, if they don't boil to death.* Although the Japanese might wonder who had killed Major Sompuji, the colonel would swear, if he lived, that the jealous major had engineered the performance in order to remove his hated commanding officer. *And Tokyo's apt to believe it, too,* Lew decided.

Keep looking, fellows, Davies kept thinking. *Maybe they'll beat you later, to prove they're Japs, but what you're seeing should make it worth it. See 'em cook!* It made Koropok a little sorry that he himself couldn't see it, that all prisoners couldn't see it, that Chinese and Koreans couldn't see it. *And they don't dare get out, because they're all heroes, all Japs!*

Next, it was time to take care of Koropok.

In this, even as the shouts of the guards inside the bath-house rose, indicating that some of the officers in the pool must be actually dying, Davies was fortunate. He raced back to Sakirumu's quarters, unseen as he avoided all guard-posts; outside of the colonel's he saw a stocky figure. He identified it as Tsumikawa's, the sergeant who had been assigned to Major Sompuji after arriving at the village, and now here, Davies reasoned, at Sompuji's orders, to nab and dispose of Koropok as soon as the pariah returned from the supposed meeting.

At the exact moment the sergeant realized that the yells from the bath-house were no longer the impassioned pre-bathing choruses, Davies smashed him over the head, and carried him into the empty house.

The dishes in which Koropok would have served the cold mushroom soup, custard-topped, the pickled eggplant and sliced raw fish from the lake, were all ready, taken from cupboards by the old woman who did the cooking. She was long gone; Koropok, after serving the colonel, washed the plates and bowls—and Koropok, now, went swiftly to work. The place would burn beautifully. The wood was dry and old. A good dash of cooking-oil here, a pouring of oil on the sergeant's body, a lighted match—and Davies grabbed up his already made-up bundle . . .

It was not difficult to reach the high wire fence on the Tokyo-side of Tatsuto-zo undetected. It was less easy to wait, hidden, until a guard cried, *"Kwaji! Kwaji!* Fire!" and all guards' eyes turned toward the village. Then Davies was over the wire and, making use of all concealment, on his way.

Gone was the shambling Ainu gait. He walked easily and swiftly, his pack light on his shoulder. He tingled, at what was past, at how he felt now, and at what was ahead. When he turned back, flames from the colonel's house rose straight and high, hot yellow and hot scarlet, in the windless valley; and there was a rush of black, oily smoke shooting through the fierce color of the fire.

You'll hear that an Ainu burned to death, fellows, thought Davies, *and you'll hope it isn't so. Keep on hoping.*

When Davies came to the wire-supported bridge, he wondered if he should destroy it. It would be easy to send it crashing down . . . but, although this would slow a pursuit, if anyone suspected that it was not the pariah's charred body which remained in the gutted house, yet it would be damnable evidence of an escape.

Davies had made his plan. He had to stick to it.

Once he was forced to hide, off the path, while charcoal-burners, with their big sacks, staggered on to their huts for the night. Once he had to tighten his body against the rock wall, thinking he saw in the darkness a movement which might be someone approaching; but a moment later a long hooting told him that it was only the shadow of a *ho-to-to-gi-su* bird swooping down the chasm after food.

The gorge was dark; soon it became black. When Davies came to the diabolical plateau where the earth shook, only starlight on the jets of steam from the yellow vents told him what to avoid. Death was all around him, the deadlier because of night; but it was at night that he must travel, and he knew it. During the day he had to keep out of sight. He was Koropok the Ainu, and the only paper he had was a pass from Major Sompuji, and it, if discovered, would be more than enough to kill him. But he wanted to keep the pass. He might need it.

On the fourth evening, as he ate food from his dwindling store in the pack and prepared to move on again, toward Tokyo, he saw the sky turning bright, eastward, at an hour when no sun rose, and in a direction where no sun set. How great, how damaging, was the raid which caused the fires Davies had no way of knowing; but after he was striding along a tree-bordered road, always ready to hide in

one of the fields should a Japanese appear, the flaming heaven seemed as if a volcanic eruption must be under it. Destruction.

Nobody'll worry about one pariah now, thought Davies with satisfaction. The G-2 boy had known what he was talking about. Things were happening. One of these days, Lew was beginning to believe at last, Americans would be storming ashore on Japan's mainland, and to hell with Formosa or landings in China. Hit the Nips where they really lived! *And if I use ordinary care,* Davies told himself, *maybe I'll be alive to see how we bust the Japanese myth of impregnability.*

He did not enter Tokyo at all, when at last he neared it. Instead, he kept far to the southwest of the belt line, through country and past Shinjuku and Yoyogi, past Meguro, always heading toward Yokohama. He was worried about crossing the bridges over the canals, but did it unchallenged. What kept him moving rapidly, always at night, was billowing smoke from the city's outskirts. Not factory smoke, but factories burning. And behind him was the tremendous column of smoke, from another attack, where portions of Tokyo still smouldered.

Davies wondered what would be docked in Tokyo Bay, and beyond the Yokohama breakwater, as he neared the end of his journey. The G-2 man was right again; Japan had too much to think about to worry over one person now, not when there was daily reconnaissance and nobody knew when bombers would sweep over the cities to start Tokyo blossoms, fire, to blooming again.

IF an American, as badly disguised as the G-2 fellow would have been after he was set ashore, could get away with this, Davies felt, *it ought to be a cinch for me.* The American Intelligence officer's disguise wasn't dumb; he was prepared to be caught on what was a wild gamble for high stakes, and had been, but had appeared to his captors as a crashed flyer. The G-2 man had planned to hide in the marshy, deserted stretch on lower Tokyo Bay, where Davies was now, and just about opposite the town of Futtsu, above the channel, until the time for action. Davies, however, saw no reason for doing this himself and so Koropok shuffled into a small village called Sasamosa, also opposite Futtsu on the channel into the bay, and presented the permit from Major Sompuji. Although the permit would have been a death warrant if Koropok had been apprehended near the hot springs, it was far different now. To the police officer in Sasamosa, it was something to bow before.

Koropok had to eat. But the village had plenty of need for a pariah to curse as the Ainu dog humbly begged for *geta* to repair—and the Ainu dog found plenty of time to shamble along the sea road, too, in his search for customers.

On the sea road, at the narrows, the channel into the bay, Davies saw what he had come to see. On the far shore, near Futtsu, a sand spit, exposed at low tide, reached out into the dirty water. Only small boats could pass over the spit. Along it was a heavy wire fence, strung along poles driven into the sand and down to the mud beneath. Where the sand spit ended, and the channel began, was the anti-submarine net, of which Davies could see the row of buoys, metal canister buoys, by means of which the net stretched out to a small, anchored tug. A second, and larger tug was some five hundred feet nearer to the shore where Davies stood. Between the two craft, fastened to the bottom by many hawsers, was the opening to the net. From the near tug, the net continued toward Davies, to shallow water, where another wire obstruction had been built.

Davies, always moving in case he was observed from either shore or tugs, studied the operations there, and found them exactly as the G-2 officer had said they would be. Reconnaissance certainly had been damned good.

Signals flashed in code from a control tower told of the approach of identified Japanese ships. For them, the net was opened, and then

quickly closed again. Prying submarines were not wanted in Tokyo Bay; and now that the undersea craft were slipping along the very coast, with Japanese convoys forced to seek the shelter of the rugged shores of Japan itself, the net had assumed greater and greater importance. Should it be destroyed by a bombing attack, all bay shipping would be alerted, and all defenses readied. But . . .

There were shore patrols, when convoys moved. Davies had been told about that. When there were American planes overhead, the patrols rushed out in force. Koropok kept away from the shore at such times.

As days passed, Davies wondered if the carefully-conceived plan of G-2 had been abandoned. And yet the G-2 officer had said that sooner or later it was going to be carried out, and that he himself had been warned not to become impatient. Koropok, already years in Japan, needed no such warning. He waited,

and he learned; and more and more often Tokyo was bombed, and Yokohama, and that was wonderful. It was worth waiting for.

On the afternoon that the two village policemen began running around informing everyone that on this night no one would be permitted to walk on the streets, Davies wondered whether the time had come. Obviously, a huge convoy was going to pass the net gate. Coming in? Going out? Either way, it would be destroyer-guarded, and well protected from American subs. Obviously also, what G-2 had planned was the sort of thing which would work only once, and so must be worth while; and, even then, there had to be complete coordination and luck.

When the police officer saw Koropok in his usual place, huddled over a pair of worn-out *geta* as he crouched against the side of an abandoned hut in the center of the village, the Japanese did not so much as stop to give any

Lew didn't wait for the Japanese. Axe swinging, he met them.

orders to the fool of a pariah. What use was it?

Davies worked away on the clogs. Afternoon became evening. Was this the night? No lights burned in the village; but that was as always. Someone sang a long-winded fisher-song:

"Ichiban bune e tsumi-kondi,
Kawaguchi oshikomu o-yagoooo . . ."

Then the *oooooo* grew and grew and became a low engine roar and, clearly, Davies heard the *tat-tat-tat* of a fighter plane's guns. While it might be some Nip plane being tested over the

marshes beyond the village, it could also be the first signal . . .

It was. From a second plane, high up, a starry spatter of light appeared, and, as Davies counted to ten, a second. That was the second signal.

I wonder what the Nips make of it? thought Lew, quietly putting down the *geta* and standing up. *I'll bet they're getting ready for another raid.*

He had no difficulty in leaving the village at all. When he came to the marsh, he ran. He fell headlong once; ran all the faster once he regained his feet. When he reached the shore, he waded into the ooze, looked swiftly from side to side, saw no sign of the shore patrol yet, and then began to swim toward the anchored net vessels. The current was strong even before he neared the channel. The G-2 fellow was right again; a man, to do this, had to be a good swimmer.

A light flashed directions to the net-gate ships; acknowledgment blinked back. Then darkness settled down . . .

Davies swam to the last buoy supporting the immovable portion of the net, between near ship and shore, and, clinging to it, took a deep, lung-filling breath. Then, looking toward Tokyo and Yokohama, he waited again. He was ready to go completely under water in case searchlights swept along the water, the net supported by his buoy . . .

Minutes past before faintly, and very high, Davies thought he heard the sound of engines, with the peculiar high, whistling note which marked American fighters; but he wasn't sure. Perhaps it was only the water lapping against the buoys and the ship. But it could have been aircraft.

What he heard next was the net-gate being opened. Almost before it was wide, a destroyer boiled through it, with its wash banging Davies against the buoy. A second sliced through the opened net. Davies hadn't marked their approach, having been looking up the bay, and not oceanward; and the vessels were entering, not leaving. The G-2 man's word to Lew had said nothing of the direction from which ships might come, or why.

Davies saw now the bulk of great ships. Troop-carriers. Transports. Luxury liners of peacetime days. In line they came, beam-directed in the black night, behind the destroyers. They were flanked by more destroyers and by a horde of escort craft, each on edge to drop depth bombs, and forming a perfect screen against any undersea attack. As Davies saw the number of the transports, as well as their size, it came to him that Japan was at last moving troops to the mainland. It came to him that Japan was now preparing for an attack directly on Japan!

G-2, Davies saw, had certainly spotted Japanese procedure during convoying. As soon as the escort craft passed through the net-gate, each dashed away from the big ships, darting toward the docks. The transports were believed safe—and the escort craft needed to refuel hastily in order to return to patrol duty along the American-infested coastline, where there was danger to Japanese shipping . . .

The boys on our side who're in this, Davies thought, *have guts.* Wash from the enormous transports swept over him. *Damned if I'd try it,* Lew told himself. *Compared to what they're going to try, my job's a cinch. All I've got to do is give 'em a few minutes—and there never was a Jap yet who could do anything when taken by surprise. He's got to be set.*

THE last of the troopships ploughed through the net-gate. The control blinker began to wink its yellow eye again as the escort craft behind the transports hurried through the gate. Davies slowly relaxed his grip on the buoy, took a quick look at the near gate-vessel, and began to swim under water. He rose once, and twice; then he reached the dozen hawsers at the gate-ship's stern, and waited.

Can the boys see me? he wondered. *Are they watching?* It was too dark to see anything as small as a man's head, and Davies knew it. He knew, also, that listening devices would tell when the winches clanked and the net was being drawn together—and when, and if, the action ceased . . .

The last escort craft passed through the gate. The convoy was safe in the great bay, with its thousands and thousands of combat units. Someone on the gate-vessel above Davis shouted, "*Banzai!*" and then Lew began to pull himself up on the hawser. Slowly. Carefully. Reconnaissance had to be right about everything, or this was the finish of Llewelyn Davies. The absolute finish.

Aerial recon was right. A Japanese sailor, a winchman, stood beside the winch as it began to draw the net shut. A Japanese sailor. One sailor.

Davies' hands closed around the Japanese' throat with such force that there was a little crackling sound, as if bones broke. The clank of the winch covered the tiny noise. Instantly, Davies held the Jap's body as in a vise, keeping the dying sailor between him and the wheelhouse . . .

Clank . . . clank . . . clank . . .

Davies, reaching down, did exactly as the G-2 officer had said he should do. The winch clanked away, but no longer was it drawing in the cable to close the net. The cable slipped constantly instead.

Clank . . . clank . . .

It was nice of the Japanese to copy American machinery, Davies was thinking. It made things easier. It made this possible.

Were American subs passing through? The black water, still moving from the wash of the ships ahead, and slapping against the side of the gate-vessel, told Lew nothing. But no orders were being yelled from the wheelhouse, proof that Japanese listening devices must be useless with so many screws turning in the bay. A minute or two was all the sub boys had asked for. Just a few scant minutes!

The blinker on the far gate-ship began to blink. Here was danger; Davies knew it. The man stationed at the winch there, which was allowing the cable to run out—or where it should be running out—must have reported to his officer that this was not happening. In moments, someone on the ship where Davies was concealed behind the dead sailor would come running to see what was wrong.

But certainly two or three minutes had already passed. Had the subs gone through the net-opening? And if they had, how would they get out?

G-2 said they'd get away in the excitement. That was good enough understanding of the Japanese. G-2 said also that if they didn't get away, a good bag would make it a worthwhile sacrifice. G-2 said—

There was a great flash in the harbor. A sudden roar. In the blinding light, a transport, loaded with troops, seemed to be blown into the sky; and almost before Davies' eyes could tell him how the ship had exploded, there was a second wild brilliance, brighter than the first, as torpedoes struck home, as more torpedoes streaked to their target.

Tokyo Bay was illuminated as it had never been before; and as if the white fire rocketing toward the black heaven were a signal, bombers began to roar in from the sea. Coordination! The bombers were high, fighter-preceded; some separated themselves from the huge ones and began to scream down.

Dive-bombers, guessed Davies. *The sort of ship I've never seen.*

And they were after the net-vessels, so that the subs, *Pike, Sturgeon, Shark,* would have a chance to escape. The deadly avenging fish, with deadlier fish inside their slim steel hulls. The avengers.

"Get away as soon as you can," had been the G-2 officer's advice. "That is, if you can."

Bombs missed. Bullets sprayed the wheelhouse.

Hell, thought Lew, as those Japanese not hit scrambled out, *I'll give you a few seconds more, gang.* He dropped the dead sailor and grabbed up the fire axe fastened to the cabin. He didn't wait for the Japanese. Axe swinging, he met them.

What the Japanese saw nobody could know. Certainly not a docile, beaten-down pariah. A bearded American, perhaps. Perhaps one of those deadly Americans who didn't shave throughout a voyage. Or perhaps something demoniacal. A devil out of the ocean. A devil whose body became a ruddy color in the light as it charged from white to the hue of flame, and at whose instigation the sea and the ship rocked with explosions in the bay.

One of the Japanese turned and ran. Another leaped ahead, shrieking. *"Banzai!"* but only half the word was uttered, because Davies' axe took him across the mouth. A third, the ship's junior officer, stood like an ox awaiting slaughter—and the Ainu were the slaughterers-of-animals . . .

Davies took one final look at the magnificent sight he was seeing. Sheets of fierce fire. Black smoke billowing up and up and up. He couldn't see the thousands of heads bobbing in the water, any more than he could see the thousands trapped on the ships. All he could see was flame, and smoke; and it came to him then that the fire had actually started in central Japan, when he himself had ignited Colonel Sakirumu's quarters. That was where it had started.

One final look. Then Davies, although he knew he ought to slip into the water, in case anyone from the other gate-vessel might be looking, dove in squarely. He was laughing as he swam, because he was already wondering just how Radio Tokyo was going to tell the world how Japan had won the first battle of Tokyo Bay.

ILLUSTRATED BY
CHARLES CHICKERING

Bull Mason laughed, a thin, sneering laugh that brought the color to Adams' cheeks. "Remember, Mason," the sergeant retorted shortly, "you can't win all the time."

WILLER THE WISP

By H. S. M. KEMP

BULL MASON was pretty well an Ishmaelite—his hand against most every man's, and most every man's hand against his. Bull realized this himself, but if you'd asked him, he wouldn't have put it just that way. According to Bull, the world was cluttered up with a lot of muggs who looked for trouble and who generally found it. And when he referred to muggs, he was thinking particularly of the Mounted Police.

Always, it seemed to Bull, he and the police had been at war. It began back in the old days of ten-eleven years ago, when Bull had tried to turn an honest dollar by running bootleg liquor down the Saskatchewan and peddling it off at The Landing. The police had got wise to him then and had laid traps for him. Once caught, they had let him know, it would be just too bad for Bull Mason.

But Bull Mason never did get caught. There were too many backwaters, too much river to watch. And when finally, one calamitous night, he had to dump his load overboard in a hurry and escape with his skin and his empty canoe, Bull charged it all up to profit-and-loss and went into the moose-hunting business.

That the hunting was done in the closed season meant little to Bull Mason. So long as his customers, a half-dozen boarding houses and Chinese fly-traps, would take the meat, Bull would go out and hunt it. And why shouldn't he? The bush was flush with game, and Bull had to make a livin' somehow.

But making that sort of a living carried additional dangers. As well as the Mounted Police, he now had to look out for Game Guardians, Forest Wardens and the like. These watched the salt-licks and the game-trails, haunted the muskegs and the red-willow draws where the moose bedded down. The result was that Bull's output of fresh meat was seriously disturbed. It needed concentration to follow a moose down-wind, and Bull couldn't concentrate if he had to be looking over his shoulder all the time.

But he might have stayed and persevered if the police hadn't fetched in a couple of tracking-dogs. They were German Shepherds, gray, wicked brutes as big as timber-wolves. Bull had had a brush with them once, and ten years afterwards he still shivered when he thought about it. For a mile he had crashed through the bush with the twin hounds o' hell right behind him, and it was only the grace of Providence and the Spruce River that had saved him from total destruction. That, and the additional half-mile swim to where he had cached his canoe.

That finished the moose-hunting. Morose, savage and sour, Bull turned north. Fundamentally a woodsman, trapping came to him naturally. And if he prospered exceedingly at it, there were those who claimed that some of the credit should go to Bull's foresight in building his camp a short half-day from the Thowaldie Game Preserve.

Now the Thowaldie Preserve was up in Chipewyan country and a good five days north of the Mounted Police post at Grassy River. Adams, the sergeant in charge, did his best to nail Bull Mason within the confines of the Preserve, but Adams' efforts weren't good enough. For one thing, his district was far too large, and for another thing, Bull Mason could read the weather. Snow, Bull told himself, covered tracks. Ergo, set your traps before it snowed, and visit them just before it snowed again.

By results, the system must have worked. For in mid-December, Bull stopped his six Brochet huskies at the Hudson's Bay store at Grassy River, threw back his wolverine-fringed parka-hood and stepped inside. After the dazzle of sun-on-snow, the place seemed shrouded in semi-darkness; but he recognized

old Red McDonald and his clerk behind the counter and Adams, the police sergeant, sitting on an upturned box beside the glowing heater. Bull nodded to McDonald and the clerk, mentioned something about zero-stuff and the ears of a brass monkey, and asked Adams about the crime situation.

Adams, blond, thirty, crisp-looking, showed his annoyance. "Up till ten seconds ago, it was good. But now—well, I'm not so sure."

Bull Mason grunted, bared his teeth in a crooked grin, and turned to McDonald. "Gimme a cigar. Ain't had a smoke for the last four days."

He shed his mitts, pushed the otter-skin cap to the back of his head and began to claw icicles from his tangle of beard. This done, he selected a cigar from the box the trader offered, told Red to take one himself and pass 'em around.

Save for the clerk who didn't smoke, there was only one pass to make, and Adams was already dragging a well-burned pipe from his upper tunic pocket.

Bull Mason's lips curled in sneering contempt.

Yeah, he told himself, they were all alike, these cops. Bunch of soreheads. If a guy slipped one over on 'em, they got peeved about it. Well, let 'em get peeved. Bull would give 'em lotsa chances! Then scratching a match on the stovetop, he got his cigar alight.

HE TOOK a couple of satisfying, lung-filling drags and squinted down at Jim Adams. The policeman wasn't smoking. Just sitting there with the dead pipe gripped between his teeth. Bull could feel the animosity radiating from the man, and, with grim humor, decided to twist Mr. Adams' tail.

He turned to McDonald. "How's fur? Meanin' the price?"

"Holding up good. And how," countered McDonald, "are things at Thowaldie Lake?"

Bull removed his cigar and spat in the general direction of the stove. "Like the cop said about crime 'round here, good!"

Adams colored. The pipe went rigid between his teeth.

"Sure," added Bull. "Real good. That's what fetched me in today."

Suddenly he went outside and began to loosen the lashings of his toboggan. From the canvas wrapper he produced three bulky sacks and lugged them into the store.

"Yours, Red," he told McDonald. "If the price is O. K."

Fur—and a showing that almost made McDonald drool. There were the coarse hides of timber-wolves, the elegance of marten, mink and otter, the brilliant sheen of colored foxes and the satiny richness of a couple of silver-blacks. Spread along the counter, McDonald graded each skin separately while Bull Mason sucked at his cigar. Finally the clerk calculated the total. "Eighteen hundred and sixty-four bucks."

The police sergeant, Adams, sauntered over. He removed his pipe, glanced from the fur to Bull Mason.

"Nice going. Especially," he added, pointedly, "with the rest of the boys making practically no hunt at all."

Bull showed his teeth in something that could have been a snarl or a grin. "Well," he allowed, "it depends."

"Depends on what?" demanded Adams.

"On if you can trap, an' where you trap."

"Particularly," emphasized the policeman, "where you trap."

"Oh, sure," agreed Bull Mason. "That's the most important point!" Then he laughed, a thin, sneering laugh that brought the color to Adams' cheeks and up to the roots of his wavy, blond hair.

Slowly, the sergeant put the pipe in his pocket. "One of these days . . ." he began. "One of these fine days. . ."

Bull Mason scowled. "Well, out with it! One o' these fine days, what?"

"Skip it!" retorted Adams, shortly. "Only remember, Mason, you can't win all the time."

Bull laughed outright. "You oughta know!"

Quickly, McDonald glanced from one man to the other—from the bearded, hulking Bull Mason to the lithe figure of Jim Adams.

"How about this fur, Bull?" he broke in. "Price O.K.?"

Bull turned, to lean against the counter. "I guess so. You're prob'ly robbin' me, but what can I do about it? Credit her up to my account."

McDonald took a hoop of baling wire and began to thread on the skins. At the sixteenth fox he glanced across at Jim Adams.

"This is the guy to catch that will-o'-the-wisp for you, Jim. Ask him to show you how it's done."

The policeman gave a short grunt but seemed in no mood to discuss the matter. Bull, however, was interested.

"What d'you mean, Willer the Wisp? Some guy you can't catch up with?" He shook his head. "No guy of that name 'round here."

Adams smiled at the trader. "Will-o'-the-wisp," he told Bull, coldly, "is a fox."

"A fox? Willer the Wisp a fox?" Bull snorted. "Namin' 'em now, are you, so's you can keep tracks on 'em?"

Once more McDonald took over. "You don't get it, Bull. Will-o'-the-wisp, or anything else you like to call him, is a fox that Jim's been trying to trap all fall. But he's a wise one; at least, too wise for Jim."

Bull gave a grunt. "That don't make him wise. I mean, because a cop can't catch him.

Lotsa cops I know couldn't catch a cripple in a blind alley! An' a fox ain't no cripple! Not the ones that I ever caught." Then he asked, "Where's this fox at, anyway?"

The policeman held his temper. "Across the river, back of the church. And the difference between this fox and those you trap," he told Bull, bluntly, "is that this one's on his own. He isn't 'protected' and he knows it."

Bull could afford to chuckle. "Yeah, they get wise, hangin' 'round the settlement. But why," he asked, "don't the Nitchies go after him?"

"Nitchies?" echoed McDonald. "What Nitchies? There hasn't been a Nitchie around here since freeze-up, and there won't be till they start to head-in some time next week. No, this fox of Jim's has had the run of the place to himself."

Bull Mason nodded, glanced through the window to the white-mantled Indian houses across the river; to the church, and the deserted mission.

"Beats everythin' the way they all dig out. Guess they hafta. Can't be no fur 'round here."

"Only," smiled McDonald, "Jim's fox."

For some moments Bull Mason said nothing, then he looked at Adams with a crooked smile on his bearded lips.

"Guess I got to go after that baby myself. Just to show you how it's done."

The policeman smiled, too, and his smile was equally crooked.

"Guess not, Mason. Guess you can't show me much about trapping foxes. I put in a few years at it before I joined the Force."

"Yeah?" Bull's eyes crinkled. "Did, eh? Then why did you quit? Get starved out?"

"No," Adams answered, airily. "I just quit. In time, too. Didn't want to get bushed—like most of the guys in the game."

Bull read the insult, but couldn't take it up. Taking it up meant playing the obvious. So he fell back on dogged bluster.

"Some trapper you musta been, if one blamed fox can fool you. I ain't run into the fox yet that can beat me!"

"Possibly. But you haven't run into my will-o'-the-wisp."

"Him!" Bull almost hooted the word. "Old Willer the Wisp! If I couldn't have his hide on the fence in three-four days, I'd take up preachin' for a livin'!"

Behind the counter, McDonald laughed aloud. "Not preaching, Bull!"

Bull backed up. "Well, mebbe not preachin'. But if either of you guys would like to bet fifty simoleons that I can't produce that there fox by Saturday mornin', I got another fifty to cover it!"

McDonald scrubbed his chin, but it was the policeman who spoke.

"I've the fifty. At least, Mac's got it in the books. Now then, where's yours?"

"Mine? In the books, too!" Bull Mason turned to the trader. "Fifty simoleons, outa that fur!"

McDonald nodded, glanced from one man to the other. "Is it a bet? A fifty-dollar bet between you? And the bet says . . ."

"What Mason said—that he'd produce that fox by Saturday morning."

Bull nodded, too. "That gives me—lemme see—four days? Well, I guess I can stay over that long. Been quite a trip down here, an' the dogs can do with the rest. Yeah, four days. Endin' Saturday mornin'."

Neither man offered to shake on it, but Adams had something further to add. "You know, Mason, I don't cherish any illusions regarding your honesty."

"What's that mean?" growled Bull.

"I mean, if you fell down on this particular fox, it wouldn't jar your conscience much to try and ring another one in on me. But I'm afraid you won't be able to do it."

Bull glowered suspiciously. "Why?"

"Because my fox is sort of branded. I've tracked him plenty of times, and I know he has only one toe on his right front foot. Meaning, of course, that he's been trapped before." The policeman grinned wickedly. "Makes it just a little bit tougher."

"Tougher, nothin'!" snorted Bull. "I'll catch him if he's short all of his toes, an' his tail!"

AT RED McDONALD'S invitation, Bull drove his six huskies down to the Company's bunkhouse, turned them loose and carried his duffle inside. He cooked a meal for himself, fed the dogs a dozen of McDonald's fall-hung whitefish and set about preparations.

He had two Number 1½ traps out on his toboggan. Originally he had had twelve. The other ten he had set out along the trail from Thowaldie Lake and would pick them up on his return. Well, two traps would be enough. More'n enough, by the time he had baited 'em with chunks of fish and a scrapin' of beaver-castor.

So carrying the traps, a light hatchet and his bait, Bull crossed the river. According to Adams, the fox had certain regular habits. Nightly it came down a narrow wood-trail behind the church, poked through the deserted village, then followed the shoreline into a deep, rocky bay. Bull decided that somewhere along the trail would be the spot to make his sets.

He found the trail, followed it for a hundred yards or so into the tangle of spruce and poplar, stopped at last where fox-tracks led to and from the base of a towering pine. Here, beneath the protection of the wide-spread limbs, the snow was not too deep.

Bull knelt down, brushed the snow away and dug a depression in the center of the space he had cleared. He bedded this with a handful of well-rubbed, dry grass, then spent considerable time setting the jaws of the trap to his satisfaction. This done, he placed the trap on the grassy hollow and covered it with a sheet of paper-thin bark from a nearby birch. The chain of the trap he secured to a three-foot length of heavy stick, buried stick and chain, and covered the trap itself with a sifting of powdery snow. Chips from the near-rotten fish and a pinch or two of the persuasive beaver-castor completed the job, and Bull stood back to survey his handiwork.

"Good enough," he decided. "We'll see how old Willer the Wisp likes that!"

By the time he had completed his second set, the sun was sinking; but it had scarcely cleared the trees the following morning when he returned. If the fox were still in its old locality, Bull entertained no doubts as to the outcome of this bit of trapping enterprise, but if it had moved on, Bull would be out of luck to the tune of fifty dollars. Adams was the sort to accept no alibis, and a bet was a bet.

But his fears proved groundless. Not only was the fox clinging to its old haunts, but it had spent considerable time around Bull's traps during the night. Both traps were sprung, and the bait was only a remembrance.

Bull grunted when he came across the first trap, swore when he saw the second. No wonder a punk like Adams had fallen down. Old Willer the Wisp knew a bit about trappin' himself.

"But he don't know it all," Bull muttered. "I'll fool him!"

He recrossed the river and went into the Hudson's Bay store. McDonald and his clerk were there, arranging the shelves in anticipation of the Christmas rush.

"How about lendin' me a few traps?" Bull suggested. "One-and-a-halves, and twos?"

McDonald gave a grin. "Going to need 'em?"

"Mebbe," allowed Bull. He added, "Looks like old Willer ain't no pushover."

"That's what Jim Adams said."

"Adams?" Bull Mason spat in contempt. "What's he know about it? If he ain't no better at catchin' foxes than he is at anythin' else he goes after, old Willer don't need to worry. But how about them traps? Do I get 'em?"

He got them, eight of them; and when the time came to set them out, Bull did so with meticulous care. He used his own two traps and the original trap-sites, but at each set he followed the same procedure—one trap in the middle, and four more at the compass-points surrounding it. The middle trap was not too well camouflaged, but Bull allowed it'd take a medicine-man to discover where the surrounding traps were located.

"That'll fool him," he promised. "An' I won't need to bum around here till Saturday mornin'."

He put in the balance of the day between the bunkhouse and McDonald's store. Most traders, according to Bull's personal convictions, were a bunch of gyps, but Red McDonald was better'n most of 'em. For a Company man, he paid pretty fair for fur. Moreover he didn't try snoopin' around and figurin' where it come from. Red left that to the likes o' Jim Adams.

Thus he accepted McDonald's invitation to the house for supper. Later he played three-handed rummy with McDonald and the clerk and finished up a dollar and thirty cents ahead.

But his mind wasn't on rummy. Its focal point was the big pine tree behind the church. So he was up before dawn, although he had to wait till nine o'clock till it was light enough.

But disappointment was in store for him once more. The fox had called at the sets, gone again, and the whole ten traps were sprung and scattered.

He dropped to his knees at the second set to puzzle the thing out. A couple of minutes' scrutiny, and he got the whole picture. He saw the fox creeping in, crouched low; saw it sweeping the ground with tentative little strokes; saw it uncover the edge of a trap, dig delicately beneath it and flip the thing over. And he saw something else—concrete, conclusive—the scornful christening the fox had given the middle trap before he ran off with the bait.

Bull stood up, scowled. Insult added to injury! Then he grinned in sheer admiration.

Old Willer was good! Yes, sir, *good!* For a fact, it reminded Bull of a stunt he had once pulled down at the Landing. The cops had been layin' for him to haul in a load of liquor one dark, foggy night. They hadn't caught him, so outa pure cussedness or hellery, Bull took a crock of the hooch and left it on the Detachment table while the police boys were all away tryin' to sniff out his trail!

Insult added to injury! Sorta rub their noses in it and make 'em like it! Well, old Willer had rubbed Bull's nose into it, but Bull didn't like it at all. Not even though the grin was still on his face.

But the grin died and the scowl returned.

"I ain't messin' with you!" Bull promised. "You ast for trouble, an', by golly! you can have it!"

He picked up the traps, the two of his own and the eight of McDonald's, and cached them in the snow behind the big pine.

BULL'S ethics were as elastic as his regard for the law; so if old Willer the Wisp couldn't be taken in an honest manner, Bull would have to get him any way he could. Which meant by poisoned bait.

As Bull knew only too well, the use of poison was illegal, yet for years past, Bull's strychnine bottle had been one of his tools of trade. Bull couldn't see no sense in givin' himself a lot of work when a pinch of strychnine in a ball of lard would do the work for him. Of course, the dope was mean to handle. A feller wouldn't want to poison his own sleigh-dogs or get in a tangle by poisoning the dogs of his Indian neighbors; but at the right spot and at the right time, a strychnine-pill was both swift and certain.

Here, in the village and in the case of the Willer-fox, Bull would have to be extra careful. Adams, the policeman, was not only nosey but he was interested in the outcome of the trapping venture to the tune of fifty dollars. Let him find out that Bull had resorted to poison, and Adams would lean on him hard.

But dropping into the Company's store for some butter to smear on his noonday bannock, Bull received heartening news. There had been a shooting fatality down the river, and the police sergeant had been called away. He would return, McDonald gave out, on Friday night so that he would be on hand to collect the bet come Saturday morning.

Bull grinned, said nothing, and sauntered back to the bunkhouse.

Once inside the place, he moved quickly. From his packsack he dug a bottle of strychnine crystals and two or three tail-feathers of a partridge, then gouged a lump of grease from a lard-pail. Into the grease he dropped enough of the crystals to cover the point of his jack-knife and worked the grease into a marble-like ball. Then he went out, washed his hands in a snowbank, came in and finished his dinner.

It started to snow. Bull scowled, hoped it wouldn't keep up. Snow was good stuff to cover traps with, but while it fell it would pin foxes pretty much down to their dens. This was Thursday, and if it turned into a two-day storm, Bull's chances of connectin' with old Willer the Wisp and the policeman's fifty simoleons didn't look so hot.

But his worries proved groundless. The snowfall quit in an hour, the wind swung north, and the temperature lowered against a cold-green sky. Finer'n silk, grunted Bull. New snow for trackin' over, and the sorta weather the foxes liked for movin' around.

The setting of the bait was a simple procedure. Bull merely walked fifty yards beyond the spot he had used for his second trap, took the bait from his pocket and into it shoved one of the partridge feathers. Then he flung the thing from arm's length before him.

It spun like a maple-seed, like a shuttlecock, and landed in the snow-covered trail a good thirty feet from where he was standing. The feather would be a marker, and there were no human footprints near the bait at all.

But he came in for considerable ribbing when next he saw McDonald. For the sky-hooter of a trapper he claimed to be, McDonald figured that Bull was spending more time on the river than any place else.

"What's the trouble?" he asked. "Restless? Or rat-trapping on the side?"

Bull could afford to grin. "No. But like I told you, old Willer ain't no set-up. I just tried a new stunt on him. It'll prob'ly work."

Bull decided that he might as well get his outfit together in readiness for leaving. It meant a full sleigh-load, and there was little to be gained in waiting till the last minute.

"Anyways," he pointed out, "if I connect with old Willer, there ain't no sense in me stickin' around here. That there cop won't be home till tomorrow night, but you can get the dough off him an' credit me up in the books."

So until supper, McDonald and the clerk worked on Bull's requirements. The list ran to three hundred dollars in value and four hundred pounds in weight. When it was filled, Bull skidded the outfit down to the bunkhouse.

Again Bull ate with the traders, again he beat them at rummy; then for the third consecutive morning he crossed the Grassy River. But this trip, he told himself, would be the last.

He was even more convinced of this as he started up the wood-trail. Following the short-lived storm, everything that dwelt in the forest seemed to have been up and around. Squirrel-tracks led to nut-caches, rabbit-tracks interlaced through the elders, and further tracks in the snow showed the movement of weasel, mice, and an occasional mink. Bull almost ran to where he had left his bait, and once within seeing distance of it, stopped dead.

The bait was gone!

Bull, in his time, had killed more foxes than he could ever hope to remember, but in no instance had he felt such a thrill as now. For the jig was up, the game finished. Anywhere within a radius of a hundred yards he would come across the frozen carcass of Jim Adams' Willer the Wisp fox.

It would be a red one. He could tell that by the shed hairs he had seen previously around the traps. Now, more reassuring than hairs, were the tracks the animal had made only a few hours before. They came down the trail toward the bait, stopped, turned, and went back again. When he caught up with them, he studied them with particular interest. And in one spot, where the going-and-coming tracks overlapped, he saw just what he was expecting—the mark of a front right paw that could only boast one toe.

He stood up, looked around. The tracks continued up the trail and into the deeper forest. Keeping an eye open on each side for a red splash of color, Bull followed them.

But not far. Less than fifty yards beyond where he had set the bait he came on it again.

There was the partridge-feather sticking up in the snow, and, attached to it, the ball of frozen grease.

Bull grabbed the thing, glared down at it, then broke into a stream of picturesque cursing. This wasn't any fox—not by a holy jugful! No fox would have brains enough to pick up a bait, tote it for a spell, then spit it out. It musta been a whiskey-jack. Or one of them squawkin' ravens!

But Bull knew he was only kidding himself. Neither here nor back there were there any claw- or wing-tracks. Nor had the bait been removed by some spiritual agency. Boiled down, the whole thing meant that the Willer-fox had trimmed Bull Mason again.

BULL quit cursing after a while. He ground his jaws and stared helplessly around him. Then he began to kick himself.

He'd been a sucker, all right. Just because he'd trapped foxes by the carload lot, he figured there wasn't one of 'em could fool him. Well, here was one that had fooled him. Just like it had fooled Jim Adams. And Adams had had more time to put in at it.

Four days. And just about three of 'em gone! That meant that if he was going to make his bluff stick, he had only twenty-four hours to do it in!

But what to do? Traps wouldn't work. Old Willer knew all about traps. So much so that he laughed at 'em, fouled 'em up, and just hooked the bait. Poison? That was a bigger laugh. Look what old Willer had done this time! And that left . . . well, nothing!

Bull pocketed the lard-ball and stared around in desperation. He could almost imagine the fox squatting on its hunkers over the hill and jeering at him. It probably was, and Bull didn't even have a gun. Suddenly Bull stared at the trail, blinked, then hit across the river for what seemed to him the hundredth trip.

McDonald was there to razz him as usual, but Bull gave him scant attention. He barged into the bunkhouse, dug into one of his boxes of supplies and ferreted around in it till he came up with a roll of brass snare-wire. Bull had bought the wire against the time when fish or meat for the dogs would be hard to procure and they'd have to live off rabbits. Well, they'd get their rabbits, but in the meantime, things bigger than rabbits were at stake. These were a devil-fox named Willer the Wisp, fifty bucks in cash, and Bull Mason's loud-mouthed, personal pride.

The snare, of course, was just as illegal as the poison that Bull had endeavored to use, but when completed and set up, it was a piece of sheer artistry.

Bull had now learned a lot about the fox's habits. Old Willer came trotting out of the bush down the wood-trail, climbed a little rise in it making straight for the village or anything else that might interest him along the way. So Bull took a walk over the little rise and up the trail for a good two hundred yards further on. He knew that the fox, crafty and suspicious, would pause where his tracks ended and returned. Should he set the snare at the end of the tracks, old Willer would find it; but once get him accustomed to following Bull's tracks in the snow, and he would keep on coming. So Bull completed his two hundred yard tramp, and returned to the crest of the little rise.

For strength, the snare was double-twisted. Bull wound the free end around a three-foot stick of dry poplar and set it up beside the trail. The noose he ran out to the trail, held it open with a couple of little twigs, and camouflaged it neatly by allowing a few wisps of dried grass to droop over it from each side. The dull brown of the grass blended perfectly with the brass of the snare, and from half-a-dozen yards, the snare itself was well-nigh invisible. At night it would show as nothing at all.

Bull knew that this was his last chance. Tomorrow would be Saturday, and deadline. If the snare failed, he'd be out fifty bucks. The fifty bucks didn't worry him so much as the thought of Jim Adams. If he didn't produce old Willer, the cop would crow over him for all time to come.

Bull's flesh crawled, but he refused to entertain such a possibility. A snare, properly set, had never failed him so far, and, by golly, this one wouldn't fail him now!

But the hours till the next morning were about the longest Bull had ever put in. He was nervous, more irritable than ever. He kept away from McDonald and shut himself up in the bunkhouse. McDonald's kidding jarred him at any time, but under the present strain it might prove explosive. Nor were his nerves soothed much when, at a little before midnight, he heard the crash of dog-bells going down the trail behind the post. He recognized the bells as Jim Adams', and though they were musical enough, they sounded to Bull like the crack of doom.

But the night passed, and the time came for Bull to draw his final card. Only sheer willpower prevented him crossing the river on the tight run, but he broke into a shambling trot once he was out of sight of the Company's buildings.

In the bush, things looked good. There were no fox-tracks, sign that old Willer hadn't come down this far. And when he finally reached the crest of the little hill, all Bull's dreams came true. The snare was gone, and leading off into a nearby patch of scrub were the tracks he wanted and the trail of the dragging length of poplar.

Mason strode toward the fox. Old Willer sprang up, struggled helplessly. "Keep still, yuh jughead!" Mason blared. "Or I'll feed yuh to th' ravens!"

Old Willer! Old Willer the Wisp! Only he wouldn't be "Willer" for long. He'd just be a skin on a stretchin'-board!

Fifty yards away, hung up in the scrub, Bull found him. He saw, first, a quick movement, caught a bit of color, heard a rattling kind of a choke.

"By golly!" panted Bull. "He's still alive!"

THE fox was alive, but when he came up to him, he was about the sorriest-looking picture that Bull had ever seen. Bull had expected a gorgeous red fox, jet-black ears and a heavy brush of a tail. What he saw was a scrawny old derelict with a dirty, gray-brown coat, half-glazed eyes and broken yellow teeth.

"For th' love o' Jenny!" breathed Bull. "Somethin' the moths have been at an' the cat dragged in!"

He stood for a moment, staring his amazement. The thing in the snare was undoubtedly old Willer. He was big enough, and old enough, but when Bull thought that this had been his headache for the past half week, he wondered who'd dealt him a joker.

Suddenly, the fox made a lunge.

"Too bad, Willer, old kid," grunted Bull. "You had yer fun for a spell, but you can't win all the time." Bull frowned as he looked around for some sort of a club or a weapon.

You can't win all the time. Somewhere he'd heard those words before. Sure, Adams had used 'em. Used 'em on Bull himself. And now Bull was passin' 'em along.

Bull gave a deeper scowl as he tried to locate his club. Well, he didn't need to pass 'em along. Even though the idea was the same; the circumstances the same. And the circumstances sure were! Both Bull Mason and old Willer had taken the same chances, dodged the same old traps, swiped the same old bait, laughed up their sleeves while they did it! Come to think of it, too, at one time or another they'd both had the same old enemy, Jim Adams. Difference was that Adams had hounded Bull Mason 'round Thowaldie Lake and he'd hounded old Willer down here.

"Yeah," snarled Bull, "and he couldn't catch neither of us!"

A small, half-green poplar tree stood nearby. Bull crossed over to it and tried to break it off. It resisted his first efforts, so Bull went at it again. Never too sweet-tempered, the thing's stubbornness frayed his nerves. He fought it, tugged at it, and by some psychic phenomenom, the rage he generated at the tree directed itself against Sergeant Jim Adams.

"That punk!" he stormed. "He couldn't catch nothin'! Been after me for ten years and after old Willer all winter! An' when he couldn't c'nect with old Willer, he gets me to finish the job!"

This was hardly according to the facts, but Bull was in no mood to quibble over trifles. He brushed the sweat from his forehead, glowered at the poplar tree, looked around to see if old Willer was still there.

Old Willer was. Calm for the moment, but mouth agape and breathing with difficulty, the fox watched Bull with fearful eyes. Bull looked at the doomed thing, and something like pity stirred within him.

Yet it wasn't exactly pity. Bull had lived by the hunt too long to have any feelings of compassion. It was something else, too nebulous to define. Perhaps a touch of fellowship, of camraderie. But boiled down, it seemed to Bull that he and old Willer were sorta brothers under the skin. At any rate, brothers in devilment. That slob Adams had tried to nail the both of 'em. He hadn't made it stick, and that was because he wasn't smart enough.

"And when," snarled Bull, "he falls down on the job, I'm s'posed to help him!"

He gulped, ground his jaws at the sudden enormity of the idea. Bull Mason helpin' a policeman, takin' over where a yaller-legs quit! Bull Mason and Jim Adams gangin' up together to kill one snaggle-toothed, lousy old fox!

He glared at Willer, thumbed his chest in outraged virtue. "Ain't that sweet? Ain't that really somethin'? Me—a stool-pigeon! Me—Bull Mason!" He shook his head as words just about failed him. "But, by golly, I found it out in time!"

He strode from the tree toward the fox. Old Willer sprang up, struggled helplessly. Another gargle came from his throat, red-tinged saliva drooled from his jaws. Bull made a grab for him, missed. "Keep still, yuh jughead!" he blared. "Or I'll feed yuh to th' ravens!"

He drove in again, yanked a bit tighter at the noose and seized the half-conscious fox by a fistful of neck. But it was with rough-handed tenderness that he worked loose the twisted brass strands and set old Willer down in the snow.

For a moment the brute stood there. He was too weak to run, too far gone for fear. He swayed, swung his head, looked up at Bull with drunken stupidity.

"Take your time, feller," Bull told him. "Don't hurry account o' me."

The human voice seemed to arouse the animal's dormant instincts. Willer backed up, stiffened, gave a throat-clearing cough. Finding himself free, he began to stagger away on rubbery, wobbly legs.

"Atta boy!" encouraged Bull. "Yer doin' all right!"

The stagger broke into a run, a run that was headed for the trail. And at the trail, old Willer paused. The brute glanced over his shoulder to where Bull Mason was standing, gave another gag that was for all the world like a human grin,

and then loped off into the thickening bush.

Bull, something warm around the region of his heart, gave an encouraging nod.

"Go to 'er, Willer, old kid! Pick 'em up an' set 'em down!" And with a wholly human smile he added, "An' here's luck—to both of us!"

In front of the Hudson's Bay store lay a harnessed string of black-and-gray huskies. They growled wickedly as Bull Mason passed them. Bull recognized them as Jim Adams', spat at them in contempt.

"Go on, growl!" he jeered. "Yer all mouth, you an' the guy you work for!"

At the bunkhouse he shook the snow loose from the cover of his toboggan and harnessed his own six dogs. He loaded up, lashed his snowshoes and rifle on top, and pulled down to the store.

McDonald was inside, with his clerk, and, of course, Jim Adams. The policeman, in parka and moccasins, glanced at the traps Bull was carrying. He gave the suggestion of a smile.

"I see the traps," he commented. "But where's the fox? You know, the will-o'-the-wisp?"

Bull ignored the policeman, chucked the traps on the counter.

To McDonald he said, shortly, "Pay the guy fifty bucks."

But walking out, he had to pass Adams again. Adams was still smiling, but there was no malice in his smile.

"Thanks," he said.

Bull grunted. "So what?"

The policeman shrugged. "Nothing. Only it seems you're not as good a man as you thought you were."

Bull gave another grunt, squinted in retrospection. A bit of a smile wreathed his face. It was a smile that would puzzle Jim Adams long after he crossed the river to investigate Bull's efforts for himself.

"Not as good a man?" echoed Bull. "Dunno. Mebbe. P'raps just a little bit better."

The boy thrust the sword into Longspur's ready hands. "I knew you'd save us, sire," he gasped.

THE MIRACLE OF ST. MERROW

By

HENRY JOHN COLYTON

ILLUSTRATED BY L. STERNE STEVENS

THE new baron of Strettonmere, Sir Hamon, held his lands of King Stephen, and oddly enough, he was an honest and hard-working man. He spent his first summer repairing roads and bridges, chasing outlaws, and rebuilding his castle wall. He collected his rents personally for a time, gathering cheeses and hams, meal and eggs, so that his subjects growled; but when he tossed the seneschal of the Earl of Gloucester and his party out of the Strettonmere deer forest and hanged six notorious thieves on his new gallows, they saw that a strong hand held the barony, and submitted themselves resignedly to his rule.

Sir Hamon never took his harness from his back that summer. He had to keep his own toll house by the repaired bridge and, with his own hands, shake the toll money out of the wallets of pack-merchants taking what they fondly supposed was the cheap way to Bristol. He lost weight and temper.

When at last things seemed to be settling down, and he could get through his dinner in peace, a peddler came puffing into the great hall, shouting that Longspurs was back—Longspurs, the famous robber knight—and had himself taken toll of a large crowd of peddlers and pilgrims, thus depriving Sir Hamon of his lawful revenues. Sir Hamon uttered a loud bellow, leaped to his feet, and the peddler prudently stepped aside.

"Damn his soul!" raged Sir Hamon, his long red mustaches twitching. "His neck'll be inside a noose before sunset!"

He was somewhat optimistic. It took him and his men six days of steady hunting, with beaters and hounds, through the thick forests and moorlands, before at last he confronted the robber knight, trussed up tightly and much the worse for wear, in his castle hall. And even then, he was balked.

"Hand over what you took, you villain"—he crossed his legs and nodded with assurance—"or you'll swing without a priest to shrive your black soul!"

Longspurs bowed his sleek dark head to conceal the smile that curled his mustachioed lip. Since he was over fifty, his dishonored pate should have been gray, or bald. But he was lean and graceful and rather handsome despite his rags and bruises. And, as always, courteous.

"I'm desolated to say it, messire, but I must correct you," he murmured. "Firstly, I am no villain. I am a knight of good family. Secondly, you can't hang me, for I can read my neck verse, and I plead benefit of clergy. And thirdly, it does not matter a damn to me whether a priest mumbles at me or not."

Sir Hamon heard horrified murmurs and shuffling feet among his good liegemen, and he himself felt nervous. After such blasphemy, an outraged deity might cave in the castle about their ears! He refrained from crossing himself only with an effort.

"How would it suit you," suggested Longspurs softly, "if I gave you my knightly word which I've never broken to leave these parts forever? If I had known you were lord of Strettonmere now, I would never have ventured."

Sir Hamon swelled slightly.

"You see," went on the robber, fixing his large dark eyes on the baron, "I was here over a dozen years ago. The baron of that day and I worked together very profitably. I'd rob the travelers, then he'd ride up and rescue 'em, and for saving their lives, they'd have to give him all I had left to 'em. It worked well, until he grew over-greedy. . . Now—" He paused suggestively. The baron gripped his chair arms, and his eyes bulged.

"This is too damned much!" he exploded. "I swore you'd have justice. Justice you'll have, too. Take your choice of hanging or entering a monastery. Either way," he nodded grimly, "your loot'll do you no good!"

Murmurs of satisfaction rose all around. Longspurs smiled faintly.

"I'll take the cowl, if you please. My skin is so delicate I can't think of a rope around my neck." He wriggled in his tight bonds.

A LONE robber is likely to be a philosopher. Otherwise Longspurs might have found his early days at St. Merrow's Priory rather trying. It was not that his hair was badly shorn, that he went barefooted, clad in a long gown of coarse gray woolen that scratched his delicate skin, or that his meals were few and scanty. He had had to disguise himself and live on short rations now and again in the course of a solitary and successful career. It was the monotony that irked him. With the brothers, he arose at midnight for the first service. Then followed a weary round of chores and prayers, broken by two wretchedly cooked meals, and when, at sunset, he stretched himself on his hard pallet in the dorter, he was bone-weary, offensive to his own nose, and bored to distraction.

He had no notion of continuing long in his new career. The priory was new and poor, and had no rich plate to interest him. But its forest lands stretched up into the hills, where a man could take refuge until any baronial search might cease. Then, after reclaiming his hidden loot, he could find his way to Bristol, and thence to France, where opportunities were so numerous. That he had taken the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience did not bother him at all. He feared neither man, God nor devil; and moreover, he had not given his knightly word to remain a monk, so he did not consider himself bound.

He was mildly amused by the awed disapproval of his brother monks.

"Most of them find it easier," he reflected one morning in the horse barn, "to eat St. Merrow's bread, such as it is, than to go out and fight for their own. There are two who are plainly crazy, the prior is a cold fish of a man, and the novice-master is a bully, if ever I knew a bully."

There were only two novices. One was an aged nobleman, sent to St. Merrow's by his children to end his days in piety. He was doddering and half-blinded, dribbling food down his kirtle. The other was a scrawny boy of eleven or twelve, filthy in person and vacant of eye, whom the novice-master beat at least once a day.

"No wonder he's half-witted, poor beast." Longspurs shook his cropped head and stroked the inquiring nose of one of the great workhorses.

"Messire—I mean brother?"

Longspurs looked up. There was the boy novice himself, squirming in the stable door, one hand behind him, one bare bony foot rubbing the other.

"*Salve, frater,*" grinned Longspurs, who was tired of talking to himself. "Enter freely."

The boy sidled in, staring at Longspurs with dark eyes no longer vacant, and Longspurs stared back. There was something familiar about the boy's dirty face. At last, recovering his courtesy, he addressed his visitor.

"A message for me?"

The boy crimsoned and stared at the big manure heap.

"N-no, messire—I mean brother," he croaked. "I—I thought maybe you were used to b-better food, and—and so I thought . . . here, messire!"

Into the astonished hand of Longspurs, he thrust a small very hot roll of bread and ran out of the stable. He fell over his own feet and went sprawling in the mud of the byre. He got up and shambled off, shivering in the autumn wind that tossed the leafless branches in Merrow wood and made odd noises in the stumpy belfry.

"Well, I'm damned!" murmured Longspurs, touched. "I suppose even a robber is a pleasant change after the novice-master." He bit hungrily into the bread. "Now who is he? That face is familiar to me."

He recalled the days of his earlier visit to Strettonmere. The sly old baron, the noisy guests at the huge feasts and drinking bouts, the baron's shy and pretty niece whom he had drawn into the shadow of a window embrasure and taught how to make love. A sweet girl—married and a mother a dozen times by now, no doubt. He sighed and felt his age. Of all those old companions, there was none whose remembered face was like that of the boy novice. But its familiarity baffled him.

It was no trouble for a man of his talents to help himself discreetly to a loaf and a chunk of cheese. When he was sent into the forest with an axe to cut more firewood for the kitchen, and the novice with him carrying a basket for the chips, he took the food along. Together they limped across the stubble fields under a low gray autumn sky. Once in the wood, Longspurs produced his loot with a flourish.

"You left me so quickly yesterday I had no chance to thank you. Let me redeem myself now." He broke the loaf in two and divided the cheese. The novice's eyes grew bigger and darker. The next moment both of them were wolfing down the food.

"What's your name, my boy?" asked Longspurs at last.

The boy swallowed hastily and said, "Guilbert, messire—I mean brother."

The robber laughed. "Oddly enough, that's my name, too. Your face seems familiar to me. I was in these parts some time ago. Whose son are you?"

The boy looked away and turned very red. "I—I don't know, messire. I'm a b-bastard."

"I beg your pardon," said Longspurs quickly. "Although why I should I don't know, for there was once a king of England who shared your misfortune—William, whom they call the Conqueror. A fighting man, he was. No doubt you

will be a warrior, too, when you leave the priory?"

The boy shook his head. "I can't leave, messire. I'm too young to take the proper vows, the prior says, but my mother's uncle put me here when mother died. I'm to be a monk and save her soul from hell." He swallowed. "I would rather have been a knight, though. You are a knight, aren't you?"

"I was, before I left the world," said Longspurs piously. "A pity you weren't given some choice in the matter. . . Who was your mother?"

"She was the niece of old Baron William. Her name was Margaret, messire."

"Good God!" gasped Longspurs. "Why, I knew her! A sweet soul she was!"

The boy bit into the last of the bread. "She died when I was little," he mumbled, and blinked hard. "The old baron was awfully mean to her."

Longspurs was silent. His thoughts were badly confused. "No wonder his face is familiar," he mused. "Haven't I been shaving its like for nigh forty years? . . . Margaret, poor little lass. . . No doubt Baron William is in a good warm place! . . . My son! Probably there are others, but this is the first I've met. . . . Big lad for his age. He must grow on his beatings. He'd make a good fighting man. A pity to make a monk of him without so much as a by-your-leave."

He smiled suddenly at the boy, and laid his hand on the lad's thin shoulder. "Well, now, to this wood, eh? A battle-axe is more in my line."

The boy wiped his nose on his sleeve and smiled back bashfully.

THE vale of St. Merrow, shut in by its hill and forest land, was lost from the world as the winter fogs shut down and the Bristol road became a lone bog. Only an occasional vagabond knocked at the priory gate for shelter from the wet. The bell in the stumpy steeple clanked the hours untunefully through the mist, and the brothers complained of rheumatism.

Longspurs did not complain at all. He was so humble and circumspect in the prior's presence that the prior felt a real pleasure at the rescue of this brand from the burning. Among his brother monks, he was quiet and hard-working. For the lay brothers, the peasants and poor folk who had joined the order to make themselves secure in this world and the next, and who herded the sheep on the distant moorland pastures, he had an occasional bawdy joke or a bit of priory gossip. He fitted so smoothly into his new life that a cheese might walk out of the dairy, or a side of bacon disappear along with a pair of scratchy blankets from the dorter, with nobody the wiser. Longspurs added to his collection at night mostly, as noiseless as a shadow and delicate-fingered as a goldsmith. He stowed his booty in the empty tomb used by the monks during the Easter services, and when chance allowed, carried the supplies to a certain hollow tree in the Merrow wood. He had all winter for the work, and he sang the services faithfully in a loud, slightly sour tenor, his eyes cast piously upward.

Several times he considered taking Guilbert along with him when he left the priory. He liked the boy. However, he decided against it. He had always worked alone; he had wanted no gang of stupid cut-throats about him, getting drunk and blabbing everything they knew. "I've got to be sensible," sighed Longspurs. "The boy's not accustomed to the world; he might talk to the wrong folk or get himself ill, or something. It's a shame, but— Maybe, later on, when I'm secure. . . "

On a cold morning in late December, he was ambling into the church, with a leather bottle of the prior's choice wine inside the front of his gown, when he saw Guilbert, down on his hands and knees before the altar, scrubbing at the flagstones with much sloshing about of dirty water. The boy looked up and beamed, rubbing his red wet hands on his gown.

"There's the sword of St. Merrow on the altar now, messire. The prior's had it brought out. They're bringing a sick man here today to be cured with it. Ain't it a big one?"

Longspurs advanced respectfully toward the altar and eyed the relic with interest. "Just what I need," he thought, holding a hand delicately against his stomach to keep the bottle in place. "St. Merrow's very sword!" he exclaimed aloud. "Then he was a fighting man?"

"Oh, yes, messire." Guilbert had given up the "brother" as almost disrespectful. "He could swing that sword like it was a straw, the sacristan says. And one day he came upon a band of poor folks and monks that had been captured by the heathen, and you know what he did? Why, he charged down upon those heathen, all alone, and he killed 'em and he killed 'em—all of 'em, over a hundred—and he set the people free. Only he was hurt bad, and that night he died. A monk who was watching by him saw two knights in bright armor come out of the woods—it was right near here, messire—and they picked up the body and told the monk to follow. So he did. And right there where the altar is they laid the body down and told the monk to build a church here. You know who they were? St. Michael and St. George! Then they went away through the woods, and St. Merrow walked between 'em, straight to heaven. And that's his sword, messire."

Longspurs looked at the sword more closely. Its great bright blade was two-edged and the bronze hilt was shaped to accommodate the

clutching fingers of both hands. He had seen a Norse pirate in Helsingfors wearing the twin of it.

"It seems sharp," he observed.

"Oh, yes. It is. The sacristan keeps an edge on it, and he lets me drip the holy water on the grindstone."

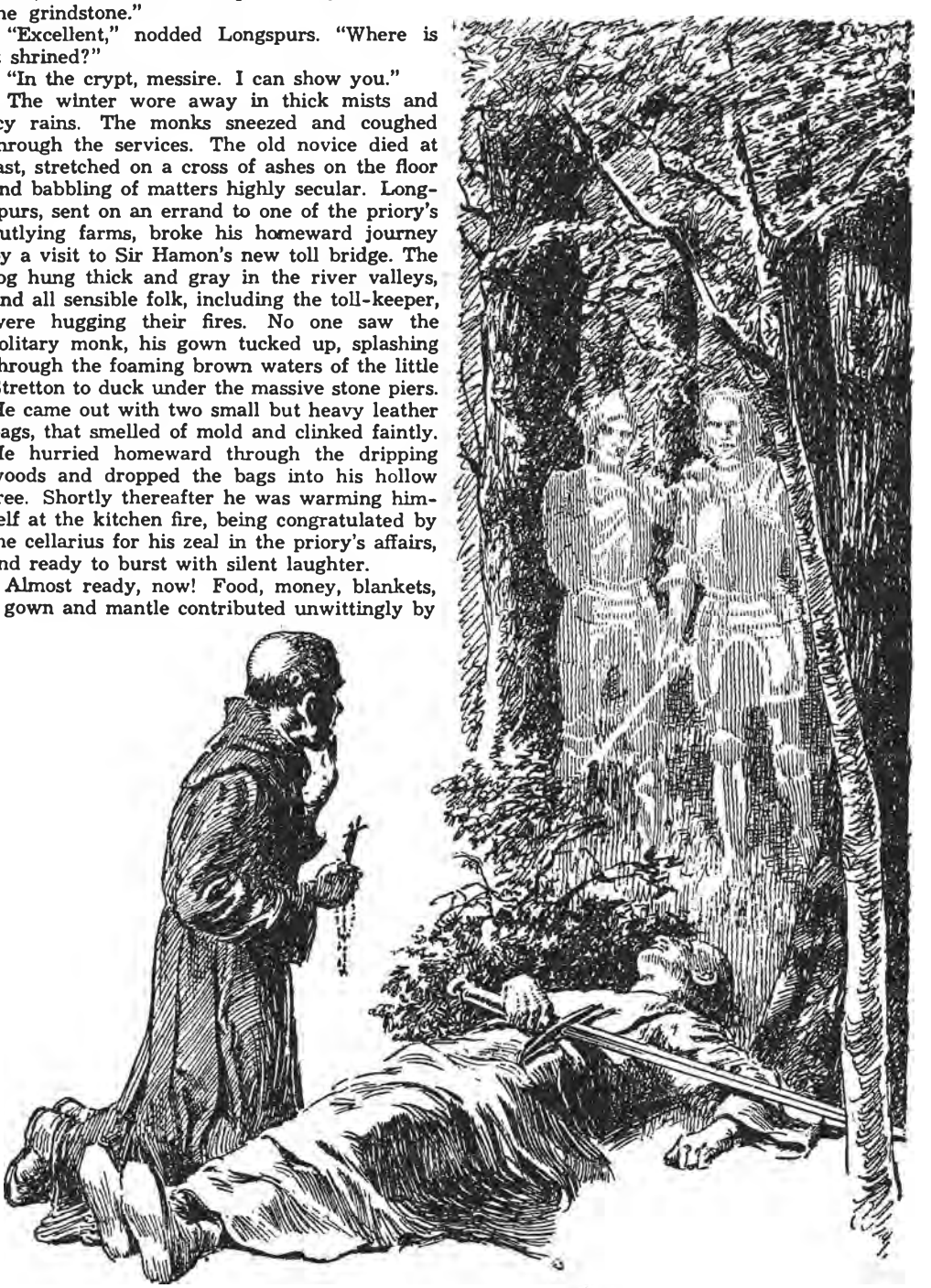
"Excellent," nodded Longspurs. "Where is it shrined?"

"In the crypt, messire. I can show you."

The winter wore away in thick mists and icy rains. The monks sneezed and coughed through the services. The old novice died at last, stretched on a cross of ashes on the floor and babbling of matters highly secular. Longspurs, sent on an errand to one of the priory's outlying farms, broke his homeward journey by a visit to Sir Hamon's new toll bridge. The fog hung thick and gray in the river valleys, and all sensible folk, including the toll-keeper, were hugging their fires. No one saw the solitary monk, his gown tucked up, splashing through the foaming brown waters of the little Stretton to duck under the massive stone piers. He came out with two small but heavy leather bags, that smelled of mold and clinked faintly. He hurried homeward through the dripping woods and dropped the bags into his hollow tree. Shortly thereafter he was warming himself at the kitchen fire, being congratulated by the cellarius for his zeal in the priory's affairs, and ready to burst with silent laughter.

Almost ready, now! Food, money, blankets, a gown and mantle contributed unwittingly by

"The night St. Merrow died, a monk saw two knights in bright armor come out of the wood and take the slain man away to heaven."



the sick man whom St. Merrow's sword had cured—everything but mail and a horse. He could collect them on the way to Bristol, with the help of the saint's sword. All very satisfactory!

He would have been politely dubious if informed that the dissatisfaction of Robert Earl of Gloucester with the claims of King Stephen to the throne of England might possibly alter his plans. In the fogs of Strettonmere, he did not know how Stephen and his lawless mercenaries were slugging it out elsewhere with the earl and his allies, while the throneless Queen Matilda screeched invectives against the wicked usurper, Stephen. Nor would he have cared. Wars interested him only as a chance for bettering his fortunes, and he did not care who fought, or why. It had come his turn to be cook, along with another brother, and he was enjoying himself; his hearty appetite was being satisfied at last. He cooked well; he knew how to season, and he disapproved of the local custom of boiling good cabbage to tasteless pulp. The brethren were pleased, so was the prior, and in spite of the dissent of the novice-master, Longspurs was allowed the aid of young Guilbert, at his request. He stuffed the boy's hollow leg shamelessly, and the boy adored him so greatly that it was embarrassing. Once or twice he had thought of identifying himself, but prudence and a sort of shamed vanity forbade it.

"But of course you know what business I followed in the world?" he asked Guilbert, elbow-deep in dough.

"Yes, messire," the boy answered, unabashed and beaming. "The lay brothers tell how you never once broke your knightly word, and how you robbed the rich to give to the poor!"

A crimson that no oven had engendered dyed the gaunt cheeks of Longspurs.

"My boy," he said sheepishly, "you mustn't believe everything you hear."

"Well, I believe *that!*" The boy nodded earnestly, spilling meal over the floor.

"I've done some things that I regretted," Longspurs said, continuing to knead the dough, his face averted. "But of course," he looked up with a grin, "I've left the world and my sins behind me now."

The entrance of his brother cook cut short the conference; but the memory of the eager flour-decorated face came back to Longspurs rather often, spoiling his meditations on Bristol shipping. It made him squirm, rather. And he knew, because something long forgotten, long thrust away into a dark corner of his heart, informed him of it, that in the after days, when he would once more wear furs and silk, be daintily fed and softly bedded, he would still feel that hateful inner squirming as he remembered the ardent eyes of his son. Deliberately, he shrugged, dismissing the prodding thought.

HE WAITED patiently for the chance to transfer his property from the tree to the security of the hills. Life at St. Merrow's followed a narrow path of prayers and duties, and he could not avoid that path too often without calling unwelcome attention to himself, thus destroying the pious repute he had been so careful to achieve. But some dark night he would evaporate out of the dorter, and they would inform Baron Hamon, and search in vain. He would wait for the right moment.

A chance came that might have been specially designed for him. St. Merrow's was a small place, its lay brothers few and the choir monks busier than they would have been at a larger foundation. Lambing time came, and the shepherd lay brothers, scattered over the moorlands with their flocks, sent a frantic appeal to the prior, who spoke of the problem in chapter.

"We will send them help," he said, addressing the brotherhood. He sat on his stone bench, a lean gray man in a gray habit, the gray light of a rainy morning falling on his chiseled, somewhat dirty countenance. "But we wish to help, not hinder them with ignorance. Our flocks are not so large that we can lose many lambs. Therefore, if any brother has knowledge of sheep beyond his neighbor, let him speak."

He surveyed the group. Nobody spoke. If sent, they would go uncomplaining, but nobody wanted to volunteer. A moorland sheepfold in the cold rain of late winter made the dorter seem a cozy place. Respectfully, Longspurs rose, and bowed his head low to hide the gleam in his eyes.

"Most reverend father, I know something of sheep," he murmured. He had indeed taken part in several gay sheep-lifting expeditions in his youth on the Scottish border.

The prior inclined his head. "It is pleasing to us," he said solemnly, "to see our newest brother so zealous in the concerns of our house."

After that mild rebuke, several others volunteered reluctantly. Young Guilbert looked at them wistfully. With the novice-master's eye upon him, he knew better than to offer himself.

In spite of the earnest but bungling efforts of the amateurs, the lambing went off more or less successfully. And the day that ended their labors closed with a sudden hard frost that turned the pasture land hard as iron. The weary brothers, lay and choir alike, huddled together on sheepskins in the wretched stone hut by the lambing pens, pulled other skins over their chilly bodies, groaning of bouts of the rheumatics sure to come, and fell asleep before their prayers were ended.

Whereupon Longspurs opened his other eye

and slid cautiously out from under the sheepskins and out of the shelter. Grinning, he tucked up his robe and loped away from the rimy pasture lands. There was a full moon, though it was hidden by thick clouds newly risen, and in the gray dusk he could see well enough. He would have to hurry. Regretfully, he even decided to abandon a return to the priory for the sword. His long legs and hard muscles would be strained to their utmost to make it back to the hollow tree for the supplies, and then, burdened, forward into the security of the hills before dawn. But he knew what he had to do, and knew that he could count on his tough body to respond.

He had, of course, no idea that the forces of King Stephen had suffered a sharp defeat and were in flight across country.

Over the frozen hills, across icy streams he hurried, by the gray light of the clouded sky. Now and again he stopped to breathe, and to listen to the cold quiet of the night.

"If it turns foggy, I'm a lost sheep," he reflected grimly. "But my luck holds so far. Well, it's nearly over now—my religious life. Interesting while it lasted, although the rations were a bit short. A pity I can't take the sword of St. Merrow, but why run unnecessary risks? I can get me a club, somewhere in the hills. That'll do well enough."

He began to whistle breathily, hands tucked up in his sleeves, eyes watering in the cold. He recalled landmark after landmark; he was making good time. Suddenly he was startled to observe a dull red glow on the horizon.

"Nonsense, it can't be morning yet!" he exclaimed. He stopped in his tracks and stared. "No—it's fire, by God! It's the priory!"

He couldn't refrain from thinking, "What a chance to get the sword, in all the rumpus," and then, with a sick leap of his heart, he thought, "Guilbert!"

He trotted along quickly. He was on familiar ground now. This was the wood where he and Guilbert had shared the bread and cheese, where stood his hollow tree. The red in the sky brightened and spread. The whole priory must be going up in flame. He thought he heard dim cries and shoutings, and the bell in the church tower began to clang suddenly, then as suddenly stopped.

As his eyes fell away from the glare, he saw a dark shape running toward him across the frosty stubble, a shape that held something in its arms and gasped and sobbed. He dodged behind a tree, but not soon enough. The black figure launched itself at him, and fell flat.

"Messire, messire!" gasped Guilbert, struggling to his knees. "Oh, I knew it must be you; I knew you'd come! They're burning the priory, messire, they're a-killing us all. They took the candlesticks off the altar and the new altar cloth, and they—"

Longspurs laid heavy hands on the thin shoulders and hauled the boy upright. "Get your breath, son. *Who's* doing all this?"

"Men. Soldiers in mail. I never saw 'em before. They rode up and broke the gate down, and they killed our milk cows and roasted 'em in the graveyard, and ate 'em and burned the stables and the dairy. And then they rode their horses into the church, and they yelled, 'Where's your treasure, shaved heads? Where's your treasure?' And the prior stood up before the altar and told 'em how we had no treasure—you know we haven't, messire—and they knocked him over the head. I think he's d-dead, messire! And then Brother Ambrose, the sacristan, saw me, and he told me to take the sword of St. Merrow and run for it, and to pray for their souls! I was awfully scared, messire!" he ended, sobbing.

"You've got the sword there, eh?"

"Yes, messire, here it is."

"Well, in that case," sighed Longspurs, satisfied, "you may as well come along with me, and—"

The boy uttered a joyful whoop and thrust the sword into Longspur's ready hands. "I knew if I could find you somewhere, messire, you'd save us! And I won't be af-afraid if you're there!"

"You mean," murmured Longspurs feebly, "that you want to go back? Why, here's your chance. You can run away now, and nobody'd be the wiser. You can be a soldier!"

The boy giggled shrilly. "I guess you don't think I'd be much of a soldier, running away from a fight like that!" He gulped then, and added, "Anyhow, it wouldn't be right. I couldn't act so to my mother, and let her stay in hell after I promised . . . I'm not shaking because I'm afraid, m-messire. It's only that it's so c-cold out here!"

Longspurs drew a long breath, shrugged, and stepped out briskly across the stubble, the sword of St. Merrow in his hand and his son trotting breathlessly beside him.

THRUST into the manure pile behind the blazing horse-barn he found a stable fork.

"A poor sort of weapon, but better than none," he observed, as he gave it to Guilbert. "Your belly won't feel so fluttery when you've something to grip." He cast a disgusted eye on the enemy. "Somebody's mercenaries, I imagine, after loot, the damned drunken fools!"

They capered in the firelight like demons, bawling bawdy songs, waving gnawed beefbones and leather bottles. Three or four squealing sluts capered with them, hair flying, clothes hanging in ribbony rags, exposing their bare bosoms.

"Come along, my son." Longspurs rolled his sleeves high. "You'll guard my back for me."

The chapter-house roof was blazing, and

the stumpy belfry of the church stood out stark in the fierce red glow. Showers of sparks flew over its roof. From within came the faint sound of voices chanting the midnight office, interrupted now and again by bawled orders, and once by a dreadful sick screaming that ended suddenly.

"Trying to get yourselves a martyr's crown apiece, you fools!" snorted Longspurs, striding for the arched doorway. "Why don't you stand up and fight like men?"

limp gray gowns lay quiet in red pools—he did not know who they were. Half a dozen terrified brothers huddled together in the smashed wreckage of the choir, trying to sing the service.

Longspurs ambled noiselessly up the aisle, guessing that these roughs would pay no heed to another gray frock. He came up behind the biggest man of the group who was dealing with the sacristan. Up came the great bright

No one saw the solitary monk splashing through the brown waters of the little Stretton under the stone piers.

The candles were gone from the high altar, but the red glare from without made the nave bright, and all in it visible. A dozen or so big louts in mail and helmets were trying to throw a rope over a cross-beam. Two of them gripped the fat little sacristan by his bound elbows. He was sweating and shaking; his lips moved. At his side knelt the cellarius, blood trickling from a long scalp wound. Before the altar, the long form of the prior sprawled where it had fallen. Several other

blade, shoulder high, held in his two hands. *Whuck! Clank!* The helmeted head rolled to the altar steps, the corpse sprawled at the side of the cellarius, the neck spouting blood all over him.

"Next!" bellowed Longspurs, brandishing the blade. "Next! Who else wants to get his head shaved? Who else wants a tonsure?"

With howls of enraged surprise, the mercenaries dropped the rope and the sacristan and caught up their weapons.

Even in death Longspur's right hand still gripped the hilt of an enormous sword, his left arm flung protectingly over the breast of the young novice.

"Nice stroke, eh, son?" Longspurs took a fresh grip on the double hilt.

"*Yes,* messire!" squealed the boy, brandishing the pitchfork.

"Aim for their eyes and faces, lad, and then shove! Here they come!"

Clang, clang, rang the great sword on steel. Not for nothing had Longspurs ranged over Europe and learned its various styles of sword play. His weapon guarded as well as struck. Were it St. Merrow's or another's, its blade was a miracle of keenness and strength. It lopped away two sword hands and another head. Handled like a dagger, its point drove straight into a recklessly exposed throat. Longspurs breathed lightly. His eyes glowed like coals, his lean arms, dripping blood, tossed the sword on high and caught it again; a juggler's trick, but its easy confidence drew a howl of alarm from the freebooters. Eyes popping, they regarded the maimed corpses, blood spouting from the horrid wounds. They stared at the fighting monk, and as one man, backed off down the nave.

"King's men! King's men! Help! Help us!" they bawled.

Longspurs waved his hand after them. "Any king's a fool who hires such— Out of control, as usual. Well, well. If Sir Hamon, our worthy baron, has seen the fire, he'll be along presently."

"Do you think so, messire?"

"Certainly. Now rest yourself, my boy. You're doing very well. They'll make a rush at us presently."

Behind him, he could hear the chanting of the monks; their song had taken on a firmer tone. The cellarius was fumbling with the ropes that bound the shivering sacristan. Thick smoke had begun to drift into the nave. Slowly, it began to dawn on Longspurs that this was his last fight on earth. Even the sword of St. Merrow could not fight off such a gang forever. He was done. He was a dead man already. He wasted no thought at all upon the future residence of his soul, his philosophic mind having already decided that he did not possess such an interesting appendage. But he thought wryly of his hollow tree, all full of his carefully garnered supplies. He thought, too, how practical he had always been, never drawing sword or risking his valuable neck except when the results would be profitable and certain. And here he stood, defending a huddle of quaking monks by the light of blazing stables and for what? He laughed shortly. Then he heard the grate of pitchfork tines on the floor; Guilbert was rolling up his sleeves, the handle of the fork caught between his knees.

"Ah, well, the hell with it all!" reasoned Longspurs, shrugging. "I can't disappoint the boy, can I?"

He gave Guilbert a slap on the back. "You're doing nobly, my son! I'd like to see you handle a lance—I would so! You'd make a fine soldier!"

The dark eyes blazed up at him. "Do you think so, honestly, messire?"

"Certainly. Now when they rush us, back up into that corner beyond the altar—you know, where the holy water basin is. There we'll have our backs protected, you see. We can hold 'em off a goodish while, and then Sir Hamon will be along, and he'll make stew meat of 'em."

"Yes, messire. I think the church is afire."

Longspurs eyed the thickening smoke. "Doubtless. The smoke will confuse 'em, whereas we know our way about. . . Here they come now. There are more of 'em now. That's because they're afraid of us, lad! Now when they get to the first column beyond the choir, back up into the corner, and watch where you're going."

SIR HAMON of Strettonmere had indeed seen the reddened sky to the northwest as he was making the last rounds of his castle wall before retiring. He uttered an indignant snort. Someone had been careless with fire, or one of his neighbors was making trouble! He began bellowing for his men-at-arms, for his hunting horn, for his horse and his battle-axe. Somebody would pay for this!

His troops clattered across the drawbridge, shouting, and the village below the castle awoke and ran to its doors. They saw the baron and his men go galloping by into the night, toward the reddened sky in the northwest. Now and again Sir Hamon stopped swearing long enough to blow a mighty blast on his hunting horn as they thundered along, and the baron's slumbering vassals rose up and armed themselves and followed after him. The baron was extremely quick to collect fines from his lieges for not coming when called, and it had been a dull winter anyway, with the king and the earl fighting so many leagues away. When they could see the flames shooting high above the priory wood, they applied whip and spur, but the baron got there first, of course.

Sir Hamon came charging up the smoky nave of the church and fell over a corpse.

"Why, the devils!" he roared, gathering himself up. "Killing holy monks, and right in church, too! Why—hullo, this is no monk!"

The corpse wore mail, but no head. Sir Hamon ran forward to meet the group of monks advancing toward him from the altar.

"It's Strettonmere," he yelled. "Are any of you alive?"

The sacristan advanced to meet him, praising God and half-sobbing. In the light of the blazing roof his face was ghastly. "Our

(Continued on page 146)

NO HIDING PLACE DOWN THERE

By RICHARD SALE

FROM where he sat, on a stool of oxygen and assorted gases, at a diminishing altitude of four thousand-odd feet, Lieutenant Andrew Jackson, U.S.N.R., did not like the prospects for a long and happy life. The present was secure enough; his parachute had functioned perfectly. But the future obviously had no future. Deep in the heart of his Hellcat, he had been a poor risk. Now, swaying gently to and fro in his parachute as he was wafted down into the wild blue below, he was no risk at all. He could readily envision the scene which would soon transpire in the ready room of Fighting Squadron Twelve back on the flat-top. The survivors of this perilous night strike would gather to count the score, and when Commander Thomas said, "Anybody see Andy Jackson?" somebody would reply, "Scratch one bricktop. I saw Andy going down. His 'chute worked fine, but he was dropping

ILLUSTRATED BY V. E. PYLES

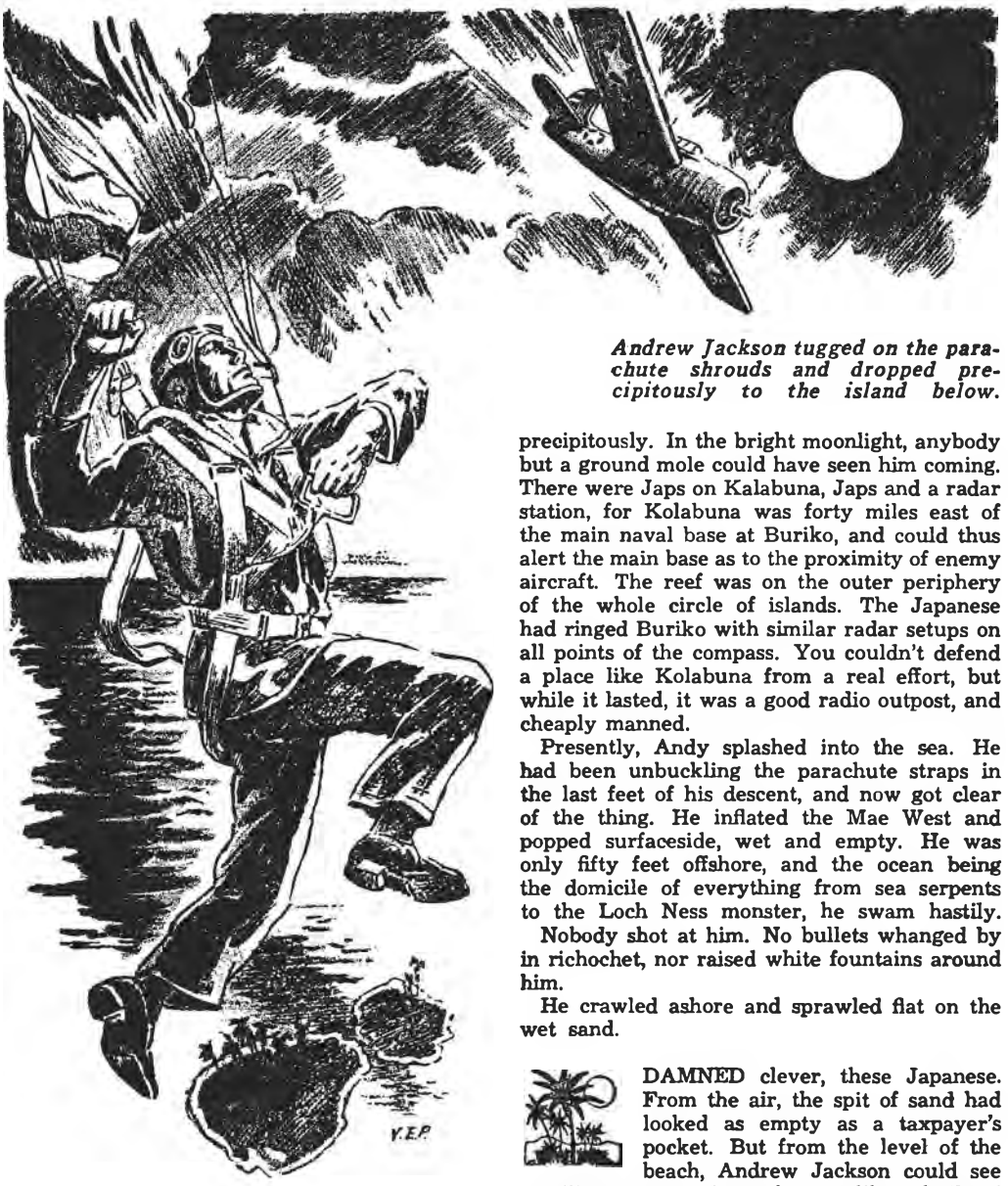
Andy took the dead Jap's rifle and leveled it at Moto San III. They got off a single exchange of shots. The Jap lost.

on Kolabuna Reef and there ain't no hiding place down there. . . "

Which was putting it mildly. He stared at Kolabuna as he plummeted earthward. That stuff you read about islands being emeralds in a sea of diamonds is the malarkey. Kolabuna looked like a crystal of coal in a bevy of rhinestones. The full moon pointed a finger at the place like a kleig light, yet a strange thing happened. The sea flung back the moonlight in a thousand sparkles, but Kolabuna soaked up the glow and lay black and lifeless below.

It was not much of an island. A man standing on one end of its ladyfingers form could always see a man standing at the other end. At no point did Kolabuna rise more than six feet above the surface of the sea. In its heart, there were some tall cocoanut trees. You could count them on two hands. A few palms grew here and there. Otherwise, everything was white sand, with some noisy goony birds which had been thrown in by Creation for local color. It was not without foundation that with a good southerly or northerly wind, a man could spit clean across the breadth of the place. And this was the spot that Andrew Jackson had picked for old home week.

Some fun. You're feeding the motor in your Hellcat and riding the moonlight home to Maw, when all of a sudden, the Pratt & Whitney de-



Andrew Jackson tugged on the parachute shrouds and dropped precipitously to the island below.

velops a bad case of aeronautical bronchitis. You've been shot at and flakked at from here to hellandgone with nary a peep from the engine. But on a quiet journey back from a night strike that had left the Jap naval base at Buriko looking like Fourth of July in Punxatawney, Pa. your engine quits and you hit the silk. Like a sword-swallower dying from sitting on a thumbtack.

Andrew Jackson sighed as he swung, and tugged on the parachute shrouds, for his drift was taking him past the island. He spilled air on the island side of his 'chute and dropped precipitously. In the bright moonlight, anybody but a ground mole could have seen him coming. There were Japs on Kalabuna, Japs and a radar station, for Kolabuna was forty miles east of the main naval base at Buriko, and could thus alert the main base as to the proximity of enemy aircraft. The reef was on the outer periphery of the whole circle of islands. The Japanese had ringed Buriko with similar radar setups on all points of the compass. You couldn't defend a place like Kolabuna from a real effort, but while it lasted, it was a good radio outpost, and cheaply manned.

Presently, Andy splashed into the sea. He had been unbuckling the parachute straps in the last feet of his descent, and now got clear of the thing. He inflated the Mae West and popped surfaceside, wet and empty. He was only fifty feet offshore, and the ocean being the domicile of everything from sea serpents to the Loch Ness monster, he swam hastily.

Nobody shot at him. No bullets whanged by in richochet, nor raised white fountains around him.

He crawled ashore and sprawled flat on the wet sand.

DAMNED clever, these Japanese. From the air, the spit of sand had looked as empty as a taxpayer's pocket. But from the level of the beach, Andrew Jackson could see a pillbox. It was large for a pillbox, built of logs and embedded in the sand. It was also covered with sand so that it blended realistically with the topography of Kolabuna. The top of the pillbox had a mess of flotsam and jetsam on it, and Andy realized that this decadent flora covered a hatch, the only entrance and exit from the hideout. There were slits in the sides of the pillbox, now darkened, to prevent slivers of light from playing across the sands.

The whole Jap area was on the alert, of course, what with the United States Navy air arm still on the prowl after playing tic-tac-toe at Buriko. And the boys at Kolabuna were

probably bedded down inside the pillbox, manning their gear, and praying that their outpost would be overlooked or bypassed by the bombs.

Above the pillbox, Andy could see an antenna. It was a high-frequency antenna of the corner reflector type. Very directive. It was revolving slowly through three hundred and sixty degrees of the compass.

He peered hither and yon, but no sign of a sentinel showed.

He ran like a deer into the sprouting of cocoanut trees and clung to one, panting. There was no cover anywhere. Beyond the fringe of trees, he could see the big stupid birds sitting on their nests or in sand pockets, all asleep.

Now then, Andrew Jackson said to himself, it all seems very simple. D-day with H-hour is a day and a half in the offing. In thirty-two hours roughly, U. S. gyrenes would hit this spit and every other pimple in the whole Jap archipelago like a ton of bricks. All I have to do is to hide out on Kolabuna until der Tag.

Simple. Just hide for thirty-two hours. The problem was primitive and elemental. If you hid from the Japs until D-day, you would eat roast chicken in the carrier's wardroom on D-night. But if you did not hide, and the Japs nailed you on Kolabuna, what with an offensive coming, they would tie you up, pour gasoline over you and then flip lighted cigarette butts at you until you raved like a senator. And the Kolabuna *Bugle* could blare in Japanese headlines, NAVY PILOT TELLS ALL!

Something fell past him from above and hit the sand with a thud that chilled his bones. Andy turned and picked it up. It was a cocoanut in full armor, the heavy husk undamaged. It had missed him by a mere foot.

My gosh, he thought, if that thing had hit my noggin, it would have knocked me colder than an air officer's heart.

It brought his attention to the tree. He climbed without skill or enthusiasm. The top of the cocoanut tree offered the only sanctuary on the spit. It was a hard climb, and the end of it was not a satisfaction. Andy perched in the top, panting, realized there was no cover here either. It was a tall tree, which leaned out over the beach, but in broad daylight the most myopic sentry would easily spy any stranger in the fringe on top.

The only answer was to go underground. On the heavenless bosom of Kolabuna, there was only one hideout, the earth, and you had to dig yourself a foxhole and cross your fingers that it didn't grow up to be a grave.

Andrew Jackson eased himself back to climb down the tree when he noticed a light flash on the sand by the pillbox. It was a xanthic light which was framed squarely as the top hatch of the pillbox opened, and a Jap soldier came out, carrying a rifle.

The soldier was dressed briefly, wore no helmet, and held the rifle casually in his right hand, like an Indian scout. He climbed down from the pillbox roof and began to walk the shoreline. He was obviously doing a reconnaissance, for the sound of a failing aircraft must have been distinctly heard by those in the pillbox. The Jap looked at the sea, and examined the land. Andy crossed his fingers and hoped the discarded parachute had drifted out with the current on the route to Alaska.

The Jap made a complete tour of the island and seemed satisfied that Kolabuna had not been desecrated by the footfall of an American. After which, the Jap's patrol became very casual. He reported in at the pillbox that all was clear. Then he sauntered to and fro along the beach, humming to himself.

For a long time, Andrew Jackson watched from the discomfort of his perch. He named his companion Moto San. He wondered how many Moto Sans there were manning the radio outpost. Not many, surely. He felt his shoulder holster for his pistol, and found it missing. He didn't have a weapon on him. Not that a weapon would have done any good. If he shot Moto San, the other Moto Sans would scour the spit for him.

Still, the night was fading, and he could not remain in the tree. He should never have gone up it in that first rush of panic.

Moto San came close to the tree after a while. The Jap sat on the beach, just outside the range of falling cocoanuts, and rested the butt of his rifle in the sand while he pushed his toes deep in the sand.

It was many a day since Andrew Jackson had wafted a ball through the basket at Washington & Lee University. But on the Fearless Five, the coach had always chosen him for the foul shots. He worked a husked cocoanut loose from its mooring and hefted it. On second thought, he placed it between his body and the tree, and took another one off the branch.

Kiddie, he thought, this has got to be good because you ain't gwine to get but two tries, after which flak will start flying.

Andy cradled the first cocoanut like a basketball, worked it once or twice and then let it go. He got the second one in his hands while the first was arching down. He hefted the second, got it loping down before the first landed. Then he stopped breathing for a while.

The first heave was short. It whacked into the beach with a resonant grunt. Moto San jerked as if a pin had punctured him, and twisted around to stare down at the big husk. He almost bent the top of his skull into the path of the second husk which hit his crown with a ghastly crack and drove his moonface into the sand. Nor did Moto San raise his face again.

Andy came down the cocoanut tree like a volunteer fireman on a brass pole. He started across the sand for the Jap's weapons, then stopped short.

No can do, he thought.

If he took the rifle and bayonet, it would no longer look like an accident. The moment he took them, the beach would become a *situs criminis* and the hounds would hit the trail. As it was, a cocoanut had dropped on a head, and while it was very sad for Moto San, it certainly did not disclose the fact that Andrew Jackson of the United States Navy was vacationing on Kolabuna.

So he couldn't take the weapons. He didn't deny himself the pleasure of opening the Jap's grenade pouch, however. He found three anti-personnel grenades. They were strictly Nagasaki —different from American grenades—conical in shape with a top like the neck and mouth of a bottle. No safety handle; you yanked a string and the fuse started burning. He snitched a grenade and stuck it in his pocket. A single grenade might not be missed.

The dawn was coming up like thunder. He ran to the stretch of land where the goony birds basked, and got down on his knees. Using a piece of flat driftwood, he began to dig. He felt like an infantryman. He dug fast, scattering the sand that came up, so that it would not pile damply around the rim of his foxhole. The night faded fast. The hole was neither deep enough nor wide enough when he decided that he had no more time to expend.

He searched hastily for two straight sticks, found them. He also found a forked stick of strength and grace. He shooed a bird out of one of the big nests which sat on the sand, then dragged the nest to the edge of his foxhole.

Finally, he squeeze down into the hole, braced the two straight sticks across the top, and pulled the bird nest onto the brace of straight sticks. The nest more than covered the top of his foxhole. His knees caressed his chin. His head scraped the bottom of the nest. He groaned at the prospect of passing a full day in this position. Above him there was a rattling of twigs as the disgruntled goony bird settled itself back on the nest.

AT 0800 hours, they found Moto San. Andy heard them leaving the pillbox, and he dared to scrape a thin line of covering sand away from the edge of the pit. He heard their voices, then saw them gathering around Moto San, lamenting. He counted them with a pounding heart. One . . . Two . . . Three. Moto San made four. Andy peered toward the pillbox. Another head had poked through the hatch and was taking in the sound and fury. The last guy couldn't leave his post. A radioman, obviously, who had to stay by the gear.

That made one down and four to go.

The three carried Moto San away to the pillbox, but they did not take him inside. He was dead.

Andy listened to their gibbering and wished vainly that he could savvy the lingo. It would have been a help to know what they were thinking.

They were not sold, apparently, on the accidental aspects of the death. The three men began a search of the island. He watched them and shivered. With gun and Samurai sword through darkest Kolabuna. Those three gunsels covered the spit like a fine tooth comb, and the way they examined the meager treetops made his stomach numb. It made him almost happy to be cramped painfully in the hole beneath the bottom of the bird above him.

Finally satisfied, they went about their routine for the day, and left Andrew Jackson to his agony in the pit.

By high noon, Andy knew he would never last through the day in that position. The pain and stiffness were intolerable. He gazed to the east through his sand spit, praying that the Marine Corps would move up H-hour and come walloping in across the green swells in a bevy of LCI's. But the ocean lay vast and empty before his eyes.

He wondered if it would have been wiser to have taken Moto San's rifle, and to have used it on the three gents who felt so badly about Moto San. Yet two of them had carried ugly machine guns. He would never have been able to knock off the trio without a fist of bullets knocking at his door. And even if he had, there would always be the radioman, safe in the pillbox, knowing he was outside without cover.

What, thought Andrew Jackson wearily, would my illustrious namesake, to whom I have no kin or relationship whatsoever, have done under the circumstances?

He had a pretty good idea what Old Hickory would have done. General Jackson had been a practical guy. He would have leaned back, taken a swig, and said, "I intend to fight it out on this line if it takes all the bourbon in Tennessee."

The general's remark reminded Andy that he was thirsty. Not for the bourbon of Tennessee nor the saki of Kolabuna. Thirsty for a plain and simple glass of water.

Try not to think about water, he said to himself. Think what it does to pipes.

Damn the general anyhow. This was no situation for a hero. This was strictly Huckleberry Finn stuff.

Andy stared at the forked stick he had brought into the pit with him, and his mind began to work.

He felt in his pockets for his penknife, found it, and extracted it with great difficulty. He opened up the main blade and went to work silently on the stick. He whittled the long end of the stick off, and trimmed the forks until they were even with each other. He notched each fork, and admired his handiwork. It was a nice job—a forked sticked, big enough to pin down a rock python.

Andy stuck the forked stick in the bottom

of his foxhole. Using the penknife, he cut the Mae West which still adorned his manly chest. He cut it at both shoulders to get it off, because in his cramped position, he could not maneuver to get out of it normally. When it was off his back, he carefully and slowly cut the rubber in long strips from front to back, each strip an inch or so in width. When he had three such strips, he stopped cutting. He took the three strips, and interwound them, twisting them together until he had a braided rubber belt.

He pulled and stretched. The rubber was lively and strong. Pre-war stuff, he thought. Genuine five-star Malavan.

Finally, he circled each end of the rubber belt to the notched area of the forked stick, tied it as securely as he could.

"Boy!" Andrew Jackson whispered in awe. "What a beanshooter!"

It was no picayune job. David had planted Goliath with much less. The thing was big—Andy knew it was almost too big. In the cramped circumference of his sanctorum he gave it a tentative pull, and found it difficult to hold. The thing had a per-pound pull comparable with a heavy archer's bow; Huckleberry Finn could never have handled it. Nor was Andrew Jackson certain that he could. It really required two hands to hold, and one to draw back the rubber band.

Now that he had a weapon, he thought of ammunition. There were no pebbles in his foxhole, and there were no pebbles in the sand around it. Not a one. He felt about him in vain.

That was the height of something! You build yourself a Long Tom that would startle Leonardo da Vinci, and then you have no ammo to ram into the barrel.

He felt in the pocket of his jacket, brought out a spare magazine for the Colt pistol which he had lost. It was a clip-type magazine, fully loaded with seven forty-five caliber bullets, all of them tracer, their noses smeared with phosphorous.

Beans, he said to himself, for a beanshooter.

He folded the penknife blade, drew out the can-opener part of the knife. Then, taking the cartridges from the clip, one by one, he pried at the brass hulls with the can opener until, eventually, he loosened the bullets themselves from the hulls with their powder charge. Each hull he buried in the sand, wary of them. Each bullet he slipped into his pocket. The bullets had copper jackets, with internal lead. They were heavy, and uniform, and much better than pebbles.

By the time he finished, his watch read 1430 hours. He was in agony. His legs had gone to sleep, his back stabbed him with pain, and thirst scratched at his mouth and throat. It was a long haul until darkness. Andrew Jackson closed his eyes and tried to dream dreams, and wondered if his body would ever follow his will.

HE HAD a plan, and his first elemental wish of survival had passed. It was no good just managing to stay alive. As long as you stayed alive, you might as well accomplish something. There was a war on. There was a D-day, an H-hour. And this garden spot held a Japanese radar station. Not that its radar would stop the U. S. Navy. But if the radar station were out of the picture at H-hour, there was just the possibility that fewer Zekes, Bettys and other Mitsubishi creations might be in the air when Fighting Squadron Twelve roared in for breakfast. And, ergo, fewer pilots of the squadron would get hurt. If you could cover your pals in the air, you certainly could try to cover them on the ground.

He watched. Sometimes he saw the particular Moto San on duty, patroling the spit at a leisurely gait, rifle in hand. What the gents had done with the casualty he had no idea.

He listened. Sometimes he could hear the tread of the sentinel. The pressure of feet on sand, making that strange and nerve wracking grind close to his ear. When steps came close, the earth took a resonant quality like a dull tom-tom. Once the sentinel came close enough to frighten the bird out of the nest above him. Andy heard Moto San II laugh harshly. He drew a breath and awaited the thin, sharp smile of a bayonet through the nest and into his haven. But the steps and laugh receded.

A guy, Andy thought, could get ulcers, worrying like this. It's not good for the health.

Then the heat of the day began to wane. Through the slit, intermittently, Andy could see Moto San II getting restless in his vigil. Time for changing of the guards. And time for a man who was weary of hiding to move. Andrew Jackson had had eonugh of strategic retreat. Perhaps it had been the better part of valor, but even wisdom could be badly tempered by discomfort. Which was a mild word, an extremely mild word, for being wracked with pain and so numb in your legs that you didn't know whether you'd ever walk again. He had counted on nightfall, which was sure enough, but he had not counted that his own discipline would fail. Daylight was dangerous. There were four sound men left to deal with, and his ordnance consisted of the bean shooter and the Jap grenade. He certainly couldn't hope to get the four together where the grenade could hit the jackpot. And now, as he moved to action, he worried about his legs. He would have to move. Were they going to move with him? Or would they leave him there, half out of the hole, a sitting duck?

Andrew Jackson shrugged and felt in his pockets again. He found the matches he had in the waterproof packet, along with his cigarettes. Tough having cigarettes and not being able to smoke one.

He found a love letter, too. From Irene. Two

months old, but it had been a favorite, one in which she had chosen the kind of words that, like a good book, deserved constant rereading. He glanced at the letter fondly, gave it a farewell grin, and lighted it.

Then he thrust it through his aperture onto the sand where it smoked and burned.

Meanwhile, hastily, he set the bean shooter up against the wall of the foxhole so that its forks protruded above the level of the pit. The bullets were in the cup of his lap. His knees he braced against each fork slightly above the spot where they met the center spit. He took a copperjacketed bullet, placed it in the center of the rubber braid, and watched through the slit.

Moto San II did not miss the tenuous chiffon of blue smoke which curled up from the burning letter.

The Jap uttered an unintelligible exclamation and strode up the sand dune toward the nest, his dark eyes tight with suspicion. He was bold, for it was broad daylight, and there was nothing before him but goony birds, nests, and a burning love letter. Andrew Jackson watched the Jap's face. He stared at it hard. Japs were supposed to be inscrutable, but this one's thoughts were plain enough.

How, Moto San II was obviously thinking, *can this letter burn when there is no one to burn it? Did it drop from heaven?*

Andy watched the furrow over the Jap's eyes. He concentrated on it, and pulled back the rubber braid with both hands, cradling the bullet in its center and crouching down to aim, his eyes on a level with the forks.

Not yet!

The Jap paused and stepped on the burning letter. He put out the small flame. The letter smoked thickly.

Not yet. Not yet! The pull of the braid was terrific. Andy knew he couldn't hold it full back much longer.

The Jap squatted down on his heels to pick up the letter. His brown moonface was no more than five feet from the slit in the sand, at which he did not look at all. The letter fascinated him. He reached for it.

Now!

Andy let go the thong. It twanged like a bow. The bullet shot out faster than he could see. There was a remarkable snap when it struck Moto San II. A snap like a breaking twig, sharp, clean and terrible. Andy could see the quick splash of blood over the Jap's right eye where the bullet laid open the flesh before it hit bone and rebounded. Then Moto San II fell sideways, cold as a pickled herring. A blackjack wouldn't have done as well.

Andy raised his hands and shoved the nest above him off the two supports which crossed his foxhole. There was no bird in it now. He pushed out the two sticks, then noticed the gleam of a bayonet across the hole. The Jap had dropped his rifle so that the bayonet had fallen across the pit. Andy pushed it away, tried to rise.

No dice. Not by legs alone. He braced himself with his arms and heaved up. Excruciating pains shot through his legs as he straightened them. He thought of things like gangrene and crutches, but he was standing, and his flesh began to tingle as the blood moved more freely through his body. There was a shout.

Oh my gosh, Andrew Jackson thought.

A third Japanese soldier, unfortunately, had ruined everything by making an appearance. Indeed, Moto San III must have climbed through the pillbox hatch down to the beach simultaneous with the firing of the beanshooter, for he had been running toward the fallen man. When Andy rose from the earth, the Jap stopped short with an ugly cry and dropped to a knee to level his rifle.

Andrew Jackson collapsed instantly into his foxhole once again, groping for his grenade. He hauled it from his pocket as a bullet plucked a fountain of sand from the rim of the hole over his bent head. While the Jap worked his bolt, Andy raised his head, pulled the cord and tossed the grenade.

It exploded with a sharp shattering roar, and he heard the whizz of its fragments passing overhead.

WHEN its resonance dissipated, Andy poked up his head. Moto San III was wounded, but still mad. He was fumbling with his rifle. Andy reached out, hauled Moto San II to the rim of the pit. He saw that Moto San II was dead. Not from the beanshooter. From a piece of flying grenade. Andy took the dead Jap's rifle and leveled it at Moto San III. They got off a single exchange of shots. The Jap lost.

Andrew Jackson sat down then, panting. He felt done in. He had lain inactive too long, and the action had almost exhausted him.

Let's see, he reasoned. That makes three. The cocoanut—the beanshooter—and the grenade. That leaves two. Two of them inside the pillbox. And they knew the score now.

He fumbled hastily in the grenade pouch of the dead Moto San II, found a pair of grenades and fell back into the foxhole. None too soon. A machine gun opened up from one of the pillbox slits, the sand above his head danced crazily, and the dead Jap twitched gruesomely as bullets livened him.

Antenna, Andrew Jackson cogitated. Can't radiate radio or radar without an antenna.

The pillbox was fifty feet away. If he stood up for an accurate throw, they'd cut him in half. He had to waste his ammo. He pulled the cord, threw one grenade blindly in the general direction of the pillbox to pin them down. It detonated with that nasty shattering noise. While its echo hung in the air, Andrew Jackson

stood erect, pulled the cord of his second grenade, and carefully threw it at the roof of the pillbox.

He dropped down, listened to it burst, waited for the smoke to clear, then risked a peek. There was no sign of the directional antenna above the pillbox roof, and no reflective elements. The works had disappeared.

Communication between Kolabuna Spit and the main Japanese base at Buriko ceased at 1709 hours due to enemy action.

Then they pinned him down. It was a stalemate. But only until darkness. Andrew Jackson remembered the moon of the preceding night, knew it would not rise till midnight. The dark was black enough.

Andy crawled slowly across the sand to the Jap who had dueled him with rifle. It was a slow and cautious trek, dragging himself silently, and dragging a rifle with him. Intermittently, one of the Japs in the pillbox opened up with a machine gun and wholesomely sprayed the whole area with lead, to keep it clean. This occurred like clockwork, and at such time, Andrew Jackson kissed the sand and tightened his muscles as if that would keep a bullet from perforating him. He heard them close enough.

He finally reached the dead Jap and cradled himself alongside for cover. In the Jap's grenade pouch, he found three anti-personnel grenades which he took.

When the next protective burst of machine-gun fire had sprayed out from the pillbox, jerking the body which lay in front of him, he rose to a crouch, trusting his legs for the first time, and ran the intervening twenty feet to the wall of the radio outpost.

He stumbled against it and sat there panting, out of the field of fire now. The slits were above his head. He waited patiently. Soon the nervous Jap slid open the steel cover of the slit, and fired savagely. Then the slit was closed and the pillbox became once more impregnable.

Andrew Jackson stood up, just to the side of the slit. He held a grenade in his hand. When the slit slid open a few minutes later, and the machine gun rattled its burst, he waited until it was finished, pulled the cord of his grenade, stuck his hand around the corner, and flipped the grenade through the slit, just as the Jap started to slide the slit shut.

After which Andy stumbled roughly around the corner of the pillbox in case the pineapple got tossed back at him.

It didn't. Its explosion was remote, muffled.

Andy went back to the slit. He risked a packet between the eyes by peering in. It was dark inside. He felt the slit with his hand. It was half open. He pulled the cord of a second grenade and tossed it into the center of the interior. Then he ducked.

This one blew the top hatch clean off.

Andrew Jackson climbed to the pillbox roof and dropped through the hatch. This was the touchy moment, the one he had dreaded. Japanese were hard to kill. They seemed to excel at lying mortally wounded, staying alive long enough to return the compliment of rigor mortis.

He struck a match. The place was a wreck and smelled of bitter gunpowder. He saw a kerosene lamp hanging on the wall which was fairly intact. He lighted it.

The gentlemen from Japan were *non compos corporis.*

It took a long time to clean out the place. By 2300 hours on his watch, the job was done. The slain reposed outdoors to await burial. The bloodstains he neatly covered with fresh sand. The radio equipment was a shambles, but he found a receiver which worked and piped in the fighting frequencies of the U. S. Navy and listened to them. The motor generator worked, so that he had power. He found spare undamaged light bulbs, replaced them in the sockets of lamps. After which he found food, an electric stove and a can opener.

Whereupon he tore a page from the Jap radio log on the operating table and wrote in pencil, *United States Navy forces landed on Kolabuna Reef on the night of the 23rd, and by 2400 hours of the 24th, occupation of the island was complete. Signed, Lt. Andrew Jackson, U.S.N., VF-12.*

And now, he thought cheerfully, what would my illustrious namesake, to whom I have no kin or relation whatsoever, have done at such a time?

A bottle of saki was staring him in the face. He opened it and poured it. He leaned back in his chair and sang, "Whadda you do in the infantry, you hike you hike you hike. . . "

The saki was not bad. Old Hickory would have liked it fine.

Tanking is done at night while the rest of the world's asleep . . .

TIMBER TOUGH

An Off-the-Trail Story

By JOHN BEAMES

ILLUSTRATED BY NICK EGGENHOFER

I

TENDERFOOT WITH A TURKEY

THE train to the lumbering town of Tophet was a mixed local—a string of freight cars, two battered old day coaches and a caboose—and it rambled along over the rough track with interminable stops at every siding. The coaches were full of men going to the woods for the winter, a large proportion of them drunk and riotous.

In the one Hugh Mendip entered first, two men were playing mouth organs while others essayed to dance in the aisle. He moved on into the next coach, hoping for a little less noise, but was disappointed. There a group of men were quarrelling violently over a game of cards in the middle of the car and at the far end a man was picking a banjo and singing, while several others tried to keep in harmony, without noticeable success.

Finally Hugh found a seat beside a man curled up in drunken slumber, who rolled over on him every time the train lurched, and had to be pushed back again. The card game developed suddenly into a brawl. Other passengers took sides and exchanged blows on general principles. Windows were broken and seats wrecked as the battle surged down the aisle past Hugh, and out on to the platform.

Fortunately the whiskey gave out presently and many of the rioters with it. They fell asleep on and under the seats and in the aisle.

It was midnight when the train finally ground to a stop, and the train crew came through the coaches, rousing the sleepers and bundling them out on the platform. "All off, all off!" they bellowed. "This is Tophet, the train don't go no further."

. . . and tankmen are the loneliest workers in the woods—and the coldest.

There was nothing to be seen of the town but a few scattered electric lights overhanging a muddy street. Hugh carried his bag along a narrow plank walk to a building that called itself the Royal Imperial Hotel. In a dark little lobby that stank of bad whiskey and worse cigars, he asked for a room.

"Best I can offer you is a blanket an' the half of a pool table," said the clerk. "Take it or leave it, but make up your mind quick. There's more acomin'."

"I'll take it."

"Hey," said a man crowding up beside him, "I'll give you a dollar for your bed."

"And where'll I sleep?"

"On the floor, I guess."

"Thanks, I'd sooner have the pool table."

"Lucky stiff," said the man enviously. "Hell only knows what's on the floor in this dump, an' some drunk's liable to walk all over you in the night."

Hugh's bedmate was a little man who snuffled irritatingly and reeked of liquor, but was otherwise quiet and peaceful enough. Hugh had hardly dozed off on the hard slate of the pool table when he was awakened by the noise of fighting going on somewhere upstairs. But the uproar quieted in a few minutes, and Hugh was by now so used to disturbance that he hardly took the trouble to lift his head.

He learned at breakfast that two friends had quarreled in their room, and one had hit the other over the head with a bottle and killed him. The survivor said frankly that he regretted his impulsiveness, and gave himself up to the Mounted Police as soon as he was sober enough to realize what he had done.

Opinion on the matter seemed divided, some holding that a man was seldom justified in hitting another with a bottle, and others that a man with a thin skull had better keep sober and so avoid such accidents.

"You know, it's the kind of thing might happen to anybody," maintained one lumberjack.

"You're right there, Buck," agreed another.

HUGH walked out to look at the town. Tophet stood on the banks of a wide and lovely river and was backed by a wooded ridge of considerable height. It had nothing else to recommend it. Three ugly hotels, a few stores and warehouses, a bank and blacksmith shop, were scattered about near the depot, and a huge sawmill and lumber yard completed the prospect. There were a few decent dwellings, but the rest were squalid halfbreed shacks.

"Don't want to stay in this doghole any longer than I have to," decided Hugh. "Wonder where I go to look for a job?"

Knots of men were drifting in the direction of the sawmill and he followed them. He found an office where several busy clerks were hiring men for the bush.

"Handle an axe?" snapped the man he applied to.

"Been clearing land all summer."

"Good. Sign here. Here's your ticket. Take it to the stable and ask for Camp Four tote team. Next."

At a great red barn, a number of tall wagons and four-horse teams were assembled, each surrounded by a group of men.

"Camp Four, right here," said the teamster of one. "Where's your turkey? . . . Your bag, then. Go get it an' hustle back. I'm pullin' out right away."

Hugh ran for his bag and flung it up on the high load. The teams filed off one by one into the forest, the men trailing along behind. There was still a good deal of drinking going on and various fights developed. The teams did not halt.

"Are they going to leave those fellows behind?" Hugh asked the man next to him.

"Aw no, they'll come along when they sober up. The walkin' boss will be along in his buggy an' pick up any feller that's bad hurt. Even if a man lays out all night he won't hardly freeze to death yet."

"They don't seem to take much care of men in the bush."

"Why should they? Men are cheap enough. It's up to a feller to take care of himself. I took me up a homestead an' cut out the booze—man can't homestead and drink both. I'm just in the woods to get me a stake. Wisht I had all the money I blowed in bars an' hookshops, but a feller needs to get sense some time."

"Me too," Hugh said. "I'm after a homestead stake myself. Wouldn't be here if I had enough cash to file my claim and start clearing it."

He soon discovered that most of the men who were sober were homesteaders, just as he was himself, going into the bush to earn money to carry them through the following summer. A few were married, but most of them were unattached young fellows like himself. A good many admitted to no previous experience, some of them being recent immigrants.

"Even though I've never been in the woods before I ought to be able to do as well as most of them," Hugh decided.

About noon they halted at a stopping place kept by a halfbreed. The log cookshack would not seat the whole gang at once, and the men had to eat in relays. On a rough board table with a bench on either side were great platters of beef and boiled potatoes, piles of bread, lumps of half-rancid and intensely salt butter, pies made of evaporated apples, and big pots of black tea.

On entering, each man provided himself with a tin plate, a tin mug, a blunt, broad-bladed knife, a three-pronged iron fork and a spoon, all still damp and warm from a big tub full of hot, greasy water.

Hugh was hungry but wisely decided to ignore the unappetizing fare. Sounding gulps, snorts and long, deep inhalations and gurglings informed him that his table mates were taking nourishment without reserve.

Otherwise there was silence and strict attention to business, for each man was expected to eat quickly and get out to make room for the ravenous gang crowding the doorway and making insulting remarks.

Soon they were all on their way again, arriving at dusk at another stopping place, where a similar performance was gone through. The next problem was finding a place to sleep. The little bunkhouse was jammed to suffocation, men sleeping three in a bunk. The stables were full of horses and hens roosting on the partitions, and the haystack was alive with men who had made little burrows for themselves.

Hugh joined one of the groups around blazing fires in the open. Some had blankets of their own and made themselves comfortable enough, but the rest could only huddle close to the flames, rising at intervals to gather more wood for the fire.

The north wind buffeted the shivering men in the open and whirled acrid wood smoke about their heads. It bent the tops of the tall spruces and whistled about the buildings. The stars blazed like diamonds, and now and then the northern lights flicked a long streamer across the sky. Toward morning the temperature sank almost to zero. Hugh slept by snatches, his head between his knees.

He was roused by a man bawling, "First call for breakfast in the dining car! First call! Come on, rummies, beat them bums in the bunkhouse to it."

With stiff limbs, blue lips, and the blood almost congealed in his veins, Hugh scrambled up and joined in the rush to the cookshack. After hot food and scalding tea within, he came out again to the darkness and bitter cold with a glorious feeling of distension under his belt and a disposition to forget all the miseries of the night. Everybody was now sober and the drunks of the day before were most of them sorry as well.

THE teams pulled on at dawn, and in a little while came to a board nailed to a tree on which was painted *Camp 4.*

Hugh's team turned off on a faint trail that wound among tall trees and through boggy places where the heavy wagon sank deep and had to be helped out by the combined efforts of the gang. By mid-afternoon they reached a row of tents pitched on the shores of a sizeable lake of dark blue, whereon floated big fleets of waterfowl, resting for a day or two on their way south.

A timekeeper checked the tickets of the crew

and the cook fed them at a long table set up in the open. A spare, gray-mustached man came and looked them over, spitting tobacco juice at intervals through a gap in his upper teeth. This was Ted Meagher, from the Michigan woods, the "push" of Camp 4.

He addressed them in a high, strident voice: "Well, boys, this here's a new camp, an' let's make a good one of her. It's gettin' on fall now, an' goin' to be pretty cold damn soon—pretty cold. So the quicker you lads hop to it an' get them bunkhouses up, why, the quicker you'll be under cover, eh? We'll hit her with a smile in the mornin'."

The clerk served out a pair of blankets to each man. They cut spruce boughs for mattresses, and bedded down in the tents for the night.

The push roused them before dawn, and they crept out from under their frost-furred covers, shivering and swearing. A few hardy spirits went down to the lake to wash.

"Huh, before I'll crack ice for a wash I'll poke a hole through the dirt on my face so I can see out. Them gahdamn fools is crazy as Joe Hole's dog," snorted a lumberjack.

After hot food and drink had put some life into his numbed carcass, Hugh went down to the lake. There he found a beefy individual stripped to the waist and soaping himself vigorously. His back and arms were covered with weird Chinese dragons in red and blue. When he had finished washing he proceeded calmly to shave.

"Say, are you doin' that to show off, or are you just plain bughouse?" inquired a lumberjack.

The man replied placidly, "Got the 'abit in the British Harmy."

"Hell of a habit, I'll say," commented his interrogator. "Where'd you raise them pitchers?"

"'Ong-Kong."

"Where the hell's that?"

"China."

"Ain't goin' there—not if that's the way it takes a feller. I may be batty but I ain't plain foolish."

The ex-soldier went on shaving.

Meagher began to shout, "Hurrah, boys, get your tools an' come an' warm up with a little work. Got to get them bunkhouses up before we're all froze to death."

Saws and axes were served out, and gangs were put to work felling selected trees, others to swamping roads, others to clearing the ground for a site. Some of the inexperienced men made pitiful figures with the axe, and one unhappy Cockney cut off a couple of toes an hour after he'd started work. They tied him up as well as they could and delivered him to the tote teamster to take back to town.

Hugh found himself well able to keep up with all but the most experienced lumberjacks, and

presently Meagher beckoned to him. "I want you as corner man on this here cookshack."

"But I never put up a log building before."

"You know one end of your axe from the other anyways, and be damned if the most of these poor toots knows even that. I got to use the best I can get. It's easy enough—just watch what the other feller does and do the same. Come on over with your axe."

SKIDDING teamsters were already hauling long straight sticks of spruce out of the bush, and groups of men with canthooks and axes were laying the foundation logs of the various buildings. Hugh was given the northeast corner of the cookshack-to-be.

Here he saw his first canthook, the "crooked steel," regarded with an affection that almost amounts to reverence by all true lumberjacks. To be good with a hook is the height of a bushwhacker's ambition.

It is the trickiest, oddest looking and most fascinating tool ever invented—nothing but a straight stock with a fantastic steel hook swinging loosely near one end. In the hands of an expert it will do everything but talk; to the novice it is a sorrow and a menace. What the diabolical swinging hook will do next baffles his conjecture.

No two behave exactly alike, and a lumberjack would as soon part with his shirt as with a favorite hook. Lovers of the crooked steel will discourse by the hour upon hooks they have known and the exploits they have performed with them.

The hooks clinked as the foundation logs were rolled into place. Then the cornermen proceeded to cut a V-shaped saddle at each end. Another log was rolled up and notched so that

it would fit down snugly on the saddle. When it had been evenly fitted at both ends, saddles were cut in the upper surface to receive the next log.

Hugh had to work alternately with the men to right and left. When, for instance, the log lay north and south, he worked with the man on the southeast corner: when it lay east and west, with the man on the northwest corner. This was the only really expert axeman on the building, and Hugh almost despaired as he watched him shape saddle or notch with a few quick, sure blows, and turn with an inquiring grin.

He was a gaunt, swarthy youth, with a mischievous eye, a wide flexible mouth, and an exaggerated drawl. The others called him Punch. He was full of gibes. "Say, feller," he would mock, "mind if I take a trip down East while you're tinkerin' with that there end?"

Hugh, laboring furiously to keep up with him, pinched a finger in settling a log. The finger went instinctively into his mouth.

The only really expert axeman on the building shaped saddle or notch with quick, sure blows.

"Tcha, tcha, bitin' nails is a bad habit," gibed Punch.

"Go to hell and be damned!" roared Hugh.

Punch nearly fell off the log with laughter. "Halp, hallup!" he whooped. "Pull him off of me. He's got me down an' is a-murderin' me."

Hugh's angry glare softened into a grin, and the incident passed. With the man on the other corner he had no trouble, both having about equal difficulty in settling their logs snugly.

As the walls rose, long skids were brought into use and the logs rolled up with horses and a decking chain, the hookman serving to steady and direct them. Wall building stopped at nine feet. Now came the more difficult and delicate job of placing roof beams and ridgepole. Then came the sawing out of doors and windows, the laying of floors of rough lumber, and a roof of boards and tarpaper. The bunks, benches and tables were knocked together with odd bits of lumber, scantlings and peeled spruce poles. Everything was rough, crude, unfinished.

The main bunkhouse was the largest building, being about sixty by thirty feet, and about twelve feet from floor to ridgepole. It had only one door and one window, both at one end, and two small skylights in the roof. It was gloomy within even on the brightest day, and there was no ventilation whatever except for what fresh

air found its way between the carelessly chinked logs.

The length of one wall, the whole of one end, and about half the other side were lined with a double tier of muzzle-loader bunks, four by eight feet. Two men with all their belongings were supposed to share each bunk, and quarters were consequently cramped, dark and low—so low that a man could hardly sit upright. There were usually between seventy and eighty men living in the place.

A bench known as the deacon-seat ran along the front of the lower tier of bunks. Close to the door stood a huge sheet-iron stove, with the stovepipe running the whole length of the building, and flanked with racks for the drying of damp clothing. There was also a long table under two hanging lamps, with a bench on each side.

Along the front wall under the window there was a galvanized iron trough containing four tin basins, and beside it the water barrel. Those who wished to wash were welcome to do so, if they brought their own towels. In a corner stood a big grindstone that was kept busy all evening long and most of Sunday with swampers and fitters sharpening their axes.

When the north wind snored outside and the temperature was well below zero, the big stove would glow red hot. Two long rows of damp sweaty socks would add their aroma to the smoke of many pipes and the fragrance of chewing tobacco. Then the atmosphere in the place would asphyxiate anybody but a lumberjack and the lice that invariably swarmed in his unwashed clothing.

The teamsters' bunkhouse was similar but smaller and considerably lighter. This was somewhat offset by an overpowering odor of horse. The office, which was also the "wanigan" or store, housed the push, clerk, timekeeper, and log scalers, and was fitted up with relative luxuriousness, being almost good enough for a dog kennel. There was another little building for the camp blacksmith and the saw-filer. The latter lived a nocturnal existence and could be heard sharpening saws the night through.

The kitchen and dining room were one, and contained in addition the bunks of the cook and his helpers. Here the cook was absolute autocrat, not even the push having the right to dispute his authority. By custom, a man was not supposed to speak above a whisper at meals, since talking takes up time and a lumberjack is expected to be able to eat all he wants in ten minutes. The man who lingers will hear from the cook and may even be cast bodily forth. He has no redress.

Hugh, finding the atmosphere of the bunkhouse a little on the pungent side, boldly invaded the teamsters' quarters, where he helped himself to an upper bunk near the door.

"Are you a skinner?" a man asked him suspiciously.

"Skinner?"

"Huh, then you ain't. A skinner is a man what drives horses, an' this here's the skinners' camp. What you doin' in here?"

"Any of your damn business?" inquired Hugh truculently, fearful of having to give up his comfortable bunk.

The man backed. "All right, all right. Maybe it ain't my business, but wait till Ted Meagher hears of it."

"Go tell him," said Hugh, "and I know somebody who'll get a punch on the jaw."

The skinner retired, but beefed at great length to the other skinners, who are of a jealous race. They cast hostile glances at Hugh, and refused to speak to him, but his size and assumption of truculence apparently deterred them from overt action.

Once the camp was complete, all hands were set to work making roads. With axes, picks and shovels, they drove broad, level highways in various directions, all converging on the lake, constructing thereon at convenient intervals rollways on which to pile the logs the skidding teams would haul out.

October was coming to an end, and the north wind was master of the land. It froze continuously, and the ice daily pushed a little further out into the lake. All the ducks were gone, but as yet no snow had fallen.

THE lumberjacks, in their hours of leisure, played endless games of cards at the long table, mended their clothes, or simply sat on the deacon-seat and scratched, telling endless, rambling tales. These stories had no beginning, no middle, no end, and no point; being concerned entirely with the most trivial detail and the dullest matter of fact. They frequently reduced even the tellers to the extreme of boredom.

But a latecomer to Camp 4 proved to be a born story teller. Lickemup he was called; what his true name was Hugh never learned, and nobody seemed to know or care. He was positively aged for a lumberjack, being all of fifty, stumpy, sturdy, bow-legged and ruddy-cheeked. His snow-white hair and beard were thick and curly, and his large blue eyes marvelously innocent and candid.

He had views of his own upon life and an inexhaustible fund of Rabelaisian tales, chiefest and most beloved being the deeds and sayings of the mythical Paul Bunyan and his crew. On any evening when the mood was on him he could gather around him an entranced circle of listeners, but he was often capricious, leaving a tale half-told and retiring into his bunk.

Hugh made his acquaintance one evening as a sequel to one of the periodical fights that relieved the deadly monotony of camp life. The hostile attitude of the skinners caused him to spend his evenings in the main bunkhouse.

Four men were playing king pedro at the table, one of them being a bulky youth with an absolutely hairless face and head. He was powerful and pugnacious, and strongly resented being called Baldy. His opponent was Stump Beedy, short, massive, and of an irascible disposition.

An argument developed. "See here, you bald-headed bum!" snapped Beedy.

"Take that back!" roared Baldy.

"I don't have to take nothin' back from no feller with a face like a pig's hind-end."

Baldy leaped up on the table and swung a fist at Stump's head. Stump simultaneously led a straight left to the jaw. Baldy lost his balance and fell upon Stump, who was at a disadvantage with the bench across the back of his knees. He went over backward and Baldy catapulted over him. Both heads hit the floor with a loud thud, and they lay still. Friends assisted them to their feet and helped them to their bunks.

Everyone was greatly pleased with this small entertainment, no one more so than Lickemup. "Well, sir," he chuckled, "I been around quite a few, but I will say that there was the quickest scrap I ever did see. No, I never seen two fellers knocked cock-eyed right together before, but I have saw some good fights, boys."

"Go on, Lickemup, tell us one."

"Oh, I don't know. Of course they don't fight these days like what they used to—not bein' the tough-guts like what logged for Paul Bunyan when I was a young feller. I think it was the winter before the blue snow that I seen Bluegut Kelly hook up with Ole Snookersen, the bone-headed Scanderhoovian. That sure was some scrap, what I mean."

"Hop to it, you damned old liar, an' tell us about it."

"Now, boys, I wouldn't never tell you a lie. There's as much truth in what I'm saying as there is in the Bible. Lyin' is a thing I despises, that an' short-change bartenders."

"All right, Lickemup—we'll believe every gahdamn word you say. Now tell us."

"We-ell, I don't just know what it was all about, but Bluegut he ups with his axe an' combs Ole's hair with it. Of course, the axe just bounced, but Ole was kinder peeved anyway. I guess it was the winter the snow fell in windrows, so they had to haul snow from one windrow to the next to make roads. That was a funny thing."

"To hell with that, Lickemup. What did Ole do?"

"Oh, he hauls off with his hook an' takes Bluegut across the side of the face with it. It busts the canthook stock, an' shook Bluegut up quite a little." He paused to scratch. "Must be gettin' as lousy as the rest of you coyotes."

"Well, you been lousy before, so what of it. What did Bluegut do then?"

"Say, maybe I got that wrong, boys, that might have been the winter the fellers kep' meetin' themselves goin' the other way—balled 'em up somepin fierce. I can't just remember, was that the winter Babe got took with a bad cough an' blowed the camp to hell?"

"Aw, Lickemup, have a heart."

"No, I got to get this straight. You heard about Babe, the big blue ox, what was fourteen axe handles an' a plug of chewin' tobacco between the eyes?"

"Yes, we heard about him too much. Come on about Bluegut."

"All right. Well, seein' as how they'd evened up, you'd think they'd quit, but they was tough in them days. Bluegut looks around an' up's with a sawlog right on Ole's bean. But Sowegians has hard heads anyway, an' it didn't faze Ole much—just knocked him clear out through the seat of his pants. There was him out there in the snow with damn little left on him but his socks. Maybe he wasn't sore! I got to laugh every time I think of it." He slapped his leg and chuckled.

"An' what did the Swede do then, Lickemup?"

"He grabs for a pinch bar, thick as my leg, what they used to start the loads with, an' after Bluegut with that. You got to believe me, boys, because this is the truest thing I'll ever tell you, when he hit Bluegut with that there pinch bar that weighed anyways half a ton—maybe it was more than that—I don't rec'lect azackly." He paused and puckered his brow.

"Gahdamn you, Lickemup!"

"Don't be so impatient. As I was sayin', when Ole swung on Bluegut, that there bar just wrapped itself around the derned Irishman's neck like one of them bow ties you'd see on a dude."

"Uh-huh, an' what happened then?"

"Oh, then they got down to real fightin'."

"Yes, but how did it come out?"

"I dangled off after they'd been at it a couple of hours, an' I never did hear how it come out."

THE north wind struck with all the power of its concentrated venom. The ground froze to stone, the lake ice shone in the sun like a burnished metal shield. In the bitter nights it could be heard cracking with long, hollow reverberations. One day snow began to fall, a steady drifting down of feathery white powder. Now the ice roads could be laid down for the big log sleighs to ride on.

Meagher sought out Hugh. "I got a good job for you."

Hugh felt flattered. "What do you want me to do?"

"There's thirty-five a month in it," pursued the push, "an' I want a man who'll stay with the job. Now, if I was to put you swampin' I

could only give you a dollar a day. You ain't got the experience with a hook to go on the loadin' gang."

Hugh was puzzled, and began to be suspicious.

"So you'll be tankman, eh?" said Meagher in a hearty voice. "That's fine."

"I suppose so," said Hugh. "But what do I have to do?"

"Oh, you'll soon get onto that, a smart young feller like you. You'll work with Gus Cruder —he'll put you wise. You're bunkin' in with the teamsters now, ain't you? Well, that's all right if you're on the tank, but if you was put to swampin' you'd have to move to the main bunkhouse."

It was the deciding argument. Hugh was not going to give up his snug private bunk if he could help it, but he was dubious about Meagher's apparent eagerness to make him tankman. He asked Punch about it.

"He seen you comin'," grinned Punch. "Oh, wowee, wowee, he would do you a big favor an' make you tankman. Oh, he's a foxy old dog-raper."

"But what sort of a job is it?"

"It's the lousiest job on earth. A man can't stand it only so long, no matter how tough he is—every tankman either freezes to death or goes bughouse. I wouldn't take it for *no* money —nor no other old bushwhacker. I'd liefer they'd hang me an' be done with it. They have to get aholt of a greenhorn—kill three-four of 'em every winter or send 'em to the nut house. Oh, well, maybe if the weather don't get too cold, you can stick it for a month without losin' more'n a couple of fingers."

"You're stringing me."

"All right, don't believe me then. But I'll see them bringin' you in, one solid chunk of ice, like I seen lots of other tankmen."

Tanking is done at night, when the greater cold freezes the water more quickly, and the passage of the tank does not interfere with other traffic. Tankmen are, by consequence, the loneliest beings in the woods, since they work while others sleep, and sleep while others work.

The appearance of Gus Cruder, the tank teamster, did not add to the confidence with which Hugh took up his new duties. The man was a mere shapeless bundle of clothing, vast felt boots on his feet, a fur coat, fur gauntlets to his elbows, a fur cap; nothing visible of his face but a large purple nose.

"Wrap up warm," he said in a hoarse voice. "This ain't no picnic we're goin' on."

The night was bright and sparkling, the temperature well below zero, and the snow squeaked underfoot. Hugh had seen the tank, but had not been moved to examine it closely. It was a huge wooden box on runners, mounting a funny little gallows on top, with a stovepipe sticking up beside it. He and Gus hooked up and drove back along the main road into the bush.

It was deathly silent save for the chime of the sleighbells, until two little owls perched on tall rampikes spoke to one another in mournful tones of the pitilessness of fate and the folly of hope. Then a coyote cut in with sharp cries of unbearable anguish. Hugh felt a chill run down his spine.

They came to a slough just off the main road. "Well, we get out here," said Gus. "Take aholt of that there axe an' cut a hole in the ice."

Hugh did as directed. Black water bubbled up.

"Bigger," grunted Gus.

Widening the hole sent splashes into the air which froze on Hugh's clothing.

"All right," said Gus. "Guess that'll do. Always make your holes big enough to start with, then you won't get so wet. Now, unhook the ladder, an' put the chain through that pulley up top. Got her set? All right, then get that there barrel in the water. Shove her down."

There was a barrel to the bottom of which was attached a pole by a short length of chain. A long chain ran from the bail of the barrel through the pulley in the little gallows up above. Gus hitched his team to this chain. After a short struggle, Hugh pushed the barrel under water and filled it.

"Hoist away," he called.

"Mind an' dump her when she gets up top," warned Gus.

The barrel ascended the slide. Hugh tipped it too soon. Down poured an icy deluge that he received full in the face.

"Most everybody does that first time," said Gus consolingly. "There's a knack to it—you'll get onto it pretty soon."

It was a big tank and took a great many barrels to fill. By the time that was done, Hugh was encased in ice from head to foot.

"You done pretty well for a first time," observed Gus. "But you don't want to get that much water on you when she turns real cold."

"Damn it, I don't want what I've got now, and I'm cold enough," grumbled Hugh.

"You got to be a tough-gut on this job—that's what Ted hired you for. Now, fire up in the stove. See, in here. That keeps the water from freezin'. An' these here are what you work to start the water runnin'. Start 'em when I tell you an' shut 'em off when I holler. It's simple enough. A tankman's job is all right if he watches himself. I've drove tank every winter for nine years—wouldn't have no other job."

"You've got damn funny tastes," observed Hugh.

"Oh, well, there's more money in it than just skiddin'. I got four kids at home. When a feller's got a family, he damn well takes what he gets."

The tank was frozen in. They chopped the runners loose, then Gus racked the front runners scientifically a couple of times, and the powerful team laid into their collars and started the ponderous load. Hugh opened the valves, laying down a double stream of water that was quickly transformed into solid ice. He was wet and chilly, but got a little heat, a very little, from the stove. Except for that, he felt, he would have fulfilled Punch's prediction, and been brought back to camp a solid mass of ice.

THEY emptied the tank and went back for another load, Hugh adding to his crackling armour another layer of ice. It was with a keen sense of relief that he saw Gus keep on after the tank was empty and pull up at the stable. Putting the horses up, they went to the cookshack, where a generous lunch had been set out under a hanging lamp in the corner. There was a pot of hot liquid on the stove. It mattered nothing to Hugh whether it was tea or coffee. He poured it down his throat in great gulps and felt a little heat creep into his numb carcass.

Then they went into the teamsters' bunkhouse and made up the fire. Hugh put his wet outer garments to dry and pulled on an extra flannel shirt. As they sat there smoking their pipes, and waiting for the horses to finish their feed, a man said suddenly in a loud, stern voice from an upper bunk, "Hey, swamper, come here with your hook."

From a lower bunk a man sighed wearily, "My gawd, my gawd, my gawd, what a hell of a team."

A third cried in shrill anger, "Barney, da-amn you, Barney. Will you get up in there? Ha, there, Nig. Gahdamn your lousy soul. Ha!"

Hugh raised an eyebrow at Gus, who smiled sardonically. "Always like that in a skinners' bunkhouse at night. All skinners is nuts about horses, an' the skiddin' teamsters is the worst. Listen at that, would you?"

"Swa-amper, hey, swa-amper, this here damn log's all limbs," came an indignant wail.

"Get up, get up, get up," said an urgent voice. "Hey, back, back."

"Drive horses all day, talk horse all evenin', dream horses all night," said Gus. "Them's skinners wherever you find 'em. Well, I guess them skates of mine has eat their oats by now, so we'll take another sag at her. Be a little more careful when you go to dump the barrel an' you'll do fine. 'Tain't really such a bad job when you get onto it."

Hugh had decided that it was a thoroughly damnable job, but had too much pride to admit it. He had learned caution, however, and escaped for the rest of the night with comparatively mild douches. But no amount of watchfulness could keep him from being more or less permanently encased in ice.

"Well, you're still alive?" mocked Punch at breakfast.

"Why not? It's a fine job," retorted Hugh.

"Put her there," said Punch, extending a hand. "Boy, you're the noblest liar I ever run up against."

Hugh, Gus, the horses, the little owls and an occasional coyote had the night woods to themselves. The little owls were the most vocal; in the spiky spruces, black against a purple sky, they sang little dirges, except when the north wind drove them to the lower branches to cower in silence. At long intervals, the great white and brown owls uttered their hoarse, foreboding cries, or would drift by with a soft sighing of silky feathers. The coyotes were fond of collecting in little knots on the moonlit ice of the lake and singing glees.

For the rest there was silence, a silence so deep that a tree cracking in the frost sounded like the report of a heavy gun. In the hush, Gus and Hugh talked in subded tones, as if afraid of profaning a sanctuary. To laugh, sing or shout were things forbidden as grotesquely inappropriate.

"Say," said Hugh one night, "I sometimes feel as if I was going melancholy mad."

Gus nodded. "Fellers what works nights in the woods go a little funny in the head most

of 'em. I knowed one what wandered off. They followed his tracks ten miles, an' come to a place where there was all glare ice on the river. They never did find his tracks again nor him neither. Whether he went through some hole or what. . . It's lonesome all right, an' a feller gets to feelin' there's eyes watchin' him. . . . It ain't a good thing to talk about. Best keep busy an' forget about it."

Night after night they tanked the main road until there was a foot of solid ice on the frozen ground. During the day the swampers and skidding teamsters had been busy, and the rollers had piled the logs high on the skidways. The sawyers were moving back further into the bush along the branch roads. One night they were told to get out the rutter, a solid frame with two sharp ice plows eight feet apart, that gouged ruts four inches deep and about six wide. Then they took the tank over the road again to smooth out the ruts.

Now at last the hauling could begin. The log sleighs with their fourteen-foot bunks were drawn up before the first rollway, and the loading gang were at work at daylight, one frozen morning as Gus and Hugh pulled in late to camp—after giving the road a final going-over.

Next to be iced were the branch roads. A light tank and another team were put on to help in that. Gus and Hugh spent most of their time maintaining the main road, continually worn down by the friction of the tremendous loads passing over it.

It was not, as weather in that north wind country goes, a particularly hard winter. It touched forty below before Christmas; it was not often above zero in January, and several times thirty below. In the first week in February it sank to fifty below for the only time that winter. It had blown hard from the north and northwest for two days, and then there fell a dead calm.

"Goin' to be a bad night," said Gus with a sigh, as the sharp air stabbed his nostrils.

Naked iron burnt like a hot coal; water turned to ice immediately on contact with the air; the tank and Hugh were masses of ice within an hour. Though he fed wood into the little stove until it was red hot, he had difficulty keeping the valves open. He froze his nose, cheeks, and two fingers on one hand.

Even the hardy and stubborn Gus was betrayed into complaint. "It's a wonder a feller ain't got sense enough to commit suicide before he takes on a job like this," he observed.

"He don't need to," growled Hugh. "I'll be frozen to death before morning. What I'm kicking about is the hell of a time I have to go through before I die."

"I know well my left foot's froze," grumbled Gus. "There ain't been no feelin' in it for a hour. That's what a man comes to what has to go to the bush for a livin'."

"I'm going to jump this cursed job if I live till morning," gritted Hugh. "Any other damn fool is welcome to it for all of me."

But he did not jump the job, or admit to anyone that he had thought of doing so. He and Gus had entered into a tacit conspiracy to pretend that their job was a good one, and that they prized the virtual independence that was theirs too much to give it up. Their sufferings they kept to themselves.

Altogether Hugh froze his nose several times, both cheeks more than once, the lobe of one ear, one thumb, three fingers, a heel and six toes. Not all at the same time, and none very deeply, but strips of dead skin hung from his face all winter long and he had an aching sore on his heel well into spring. Gus limped about on a frozen foot on which some of the flesh turned black and rotted. There was no doctor nearer than town, so he picked and scraped the dead flesh off and tied the foot up in a rag smeared with lard.

Only two things halted the tanking, blizzards and thaws. When the east wind rolled the snow clouds up from Hudson's Bay and drifted the ruts full, they put away the tank and brought out the snow plow, merely a slight change of occupation, and one that neither welcomed. Then it was the rutter and the tank again.

A week after the coldest day of the winter, a warm Chinook wind came soughing through the spruces. Suddenly the air turned warm and sticky; the burnished yellow plate of the sun that had furnished light but no heat poured out genial rays. The snow turned soft and soggy even in the deep woods, and puddles of water collected in every open spot. It was a pure waste of time pouring more water into ruts that already overbrimmed.

"Well, we get a little layoff until she freezes up again," said Gus. "I'm glad of it. I'm goin' to lay right in my bunk an' see will this here gahdamn foot of mine heal up a little."

HUGH drifted over to the main bunkhouse that evening and heard Lickemup tell the story of Doughgod Peters, patron saint of all camp cooks.

"I won't never eat after a woman cook," said Lickemup. "Don't know what it is, but all their chuck tastes the same to me—like soapy dishwater. Not but what there's plenty men cooks couldn't parboil a turnip for a tramp. But if you want good eatin' you pick a man what knows his job an' foller him up. This here hooshgoo what we got ain't too bad."

"He's a damn crank," put in a man. "Said he'd take his big butcher knife to the next man what opened his trap in the cookshack. Feller only asked another feller to pass the pie. Begad, a man can't reach everything that's on the table."

"All good crooks is cranks—an' fat," pronounced the oracle. "A ga'nt man with a good disposition ain't never worth a damn. Now, you take Doughgod Peters what cooked for Paul Bunyan the winter he logged off the prairies, there was a cook for you. But he was that fat they had to put double doors on the kitchen an' his bunk was made of eight by twelve timbers an' iron angle bars; it took two tents an' a rod of burlap to make him a shirt. He had a disposition that the cows only gave sour milk when he was around." Lickemup paused to shake his head and make clucking noises.

"Slop her out, Lickemup."

"Well, Doughgod's great holt was mulligan. No use talkin'—old man Mulligan himself never made no better. I wake up sometimes in the night an' think of that there mulligan when I got a bellyache from eatin' after some of these here hog-swill mixers."

"Never mind the mulligan, what about Doughgod?"

"Oh, yes, Doughgod. Well, his disposition bein' like it was, he didn't get on so good with his crew. There wasn't a cookee in camp what wouldn't have tied him to a stump an' spit tobacco juice in his eye. So one day he says to 'em, 'Get busy, you poor, pukin' pimps'—that's the way he talked to 'em. 'Get busy with the big pot, I'm goin' to give them bums a mulligan.' Now that there was some pot, you could've put this here whole bunkhouse into it an' left room for a load of logs.

"So they hopped to it, but nothin' they could do would please him, him havin' one of his grouches on. He had them that boilin' mad they could have peppered him an' fried him in lard. They filled the pot up with forty barrels of water an' bags of spuds an' carrots an' onions an' all like what goes in mulligans, an' lights up a couple of cords of wood under her.

" 'Get to work cuttin' up the meat, you lousy shoats,' says Doughgod. 'I'm goin' to lay down. Mind you have her all ready by the time I wake up, or I'll gut every last one of you,' an' he goes an' lays down in his bunk for his afternoon nap. The cookees give one another the wink an' set to work to get even with him. Believe you me, boys, they sure went to it."

"What did they do, Lickemup?"

"Want to know, eh? Well, I guess I got to tell you. By-an'-by Doughgod wakes up, an' right away he commences to sniff. 'What the hell,' he says, 'this here smells sour to me. Gahdamn you garbage rats' he says, 'can't trust a one of you to do a thing if I ain't watchin' you. But I'll make a mulligan of this, sour or not,' he says.

"An' begad, he did just that. 'Mulligan', says the boys right off when they come in the cookshack. 'Don't she smell skookum?' they says. 'Let her roll, we brung our appetites right with us.' Well sir, they went to it, feedin' from both sides, an' first thing you know, the man what was dippin' up the stew with a twenty-foot ladle was scrapin' the bottom of the pot.

"Suddenly he brings somethin' up, takes just one look at it, drops the ladle and out the door. Doughgod he looks around an' sees there ain't a solitary damn cookee anywheres in sight. 'Somethin' fishy here,' he says, an' goes to scrapin' in the pot. You're all young fellers, an' I wouldn't want to put no wrong idees in your heads, but there's some funny things gets into stews different times. Them cookees had been plenty busy, an' what Doughgod found in that there pot was the bones an' hoofs of four dead horses what had been layin' out behind the barn, an' a couple of dead dogs an' a few dozen pairs of old shoes an' mitts an' rubbers. I guess there wasn't never more different things ever went into no stew."

"What happened to the cookees?" inquired a literal-minded youth.

"Well, they kind of suspicioned they might be unpopular, an' they run eighty-three an' a half mile between dark an' mornin' and just caught the train out of town. They never was heard of no more. But that shows you how good old Doughgod could cook."

THE Chinook blew itself out in a couple of days, and the north wind slashed back, striking the trickling rivulets into stone. Hugh and Gus took the tank out once more. But the winter was passing: the noon sun had power to thaw the surface of the snow, and myriads of snow fleas began hopping about. The ruts began to break down under the heavy loads.

A night loading gang was put on, and that wore the roads down worse than ever. All that Gus and Hugh and the other pair with the light tank could do was not enough to keep them in good condition. By mid-March, wherever the roads entered a clearing where the full rays of the sun could strike, they began to wear down to the bare earth.

"Another winter behind us," said Gus one morning. "Listen at that wind. She's a-talkin'." In the hard frost the spruce boughs were frozen into rigidity and made only a sharp rustling when the wind blew through them, but now they had regained their elasticity and were singing the spring song.

They dragged the tank to a spot behind the stable. "We won't hook her up again this season," said Gus. "Maybe if we both live, we'll be back here again next fall."

Word went through the camp that the breakup would come in the morning. The men were all wild to go, to get away from the deadly monotony and dreary isolation. As they packed their turkeys they sang and made plans for what they would do with their money. As soon

as breakfast was over, they packed four big sleighs with themselves and their bags, and headed for Tophet at a trot, yelling like Indians. At about three in the afternoon, they were turned loose in the streets of the little lumbering town, where already two or three hundred lumberjacks were rioting, with more arriving from distant camps every hour.

They flooded the bars, singing, shouting, drinking, fighting, or paraded the streets in companies, waving bottles and inviting all and sundry to drink. Riot blossomed among the halfbreed shacks, where the women reaped a rich harvest—at the cost of an occasional broken head. The men kept out of the way, and those who had decent womenfolk barricaded their doors and stood guard.

In addition, the town was full of gamblers and thieves, pimps and prostitutes, all preying upon the bushwhackers. The real lumberjacks flung their hard-earned money recklessly to the winds, but the homesteaders held aloof, hanging tight to their money and waiting for the bi-weekly train to arrive and take them away. Here and there one was caught in the toils and stripped bare. There was no redress: the two overworked Mounted Policemen stationed in Tophet had enough to do to prevent wholesale massacre.

A man's money might be taken from him while he was too drunk or drugged to resist—that was his own risk. A man might get into a fight and have his face pounded to a pulp, and nobody would interfere. But the Mounted Police pounced like hawks on all lethal weapons.

Though fights were of hourly occurrence and the town's little hospital overflowed with cracked heads and broken bones, not a single shot was fired, and only one man was stabbed with a knife.

Hugh took the precaution to tie his money in a cloth around his waist under his clothes, and then went out to watch the antics of the bushwhackers. Since his nocturnal occupation had made him known to few in Camp 4, he had little difficulty in dodging his camp mates, though he had a drink with Punch and another with Gus.

He was lucky enough to secure a room in a hotel, being among the earlier arrivals, but there could be no sleep in Tophet during the annual spree. He was roused soon after he went to bed by the entry of four men, all drunk. He got three of them out, but the fourth lay down on the floor and went to sleep. Hugh left him there.

Within an hour someone had been thrown downstairs, there had been a noisy altercation accompanied by blows in a room two doors away, and somewhere outside a man began to howl like a wolf. Another man fell downstairs. A woman screamed. Somebody somewhere was apparently trying to kick a door in. Hugh dozed off, only to be aroused by a terrific uproar: sundry thirsty souls were pounding on the barroom door and beseeching the bartender to rise and minister to them.

Irritable from lack of sleep, Hugh rose at the first clang of the breakfast bell, ate, and wandered out into the street.

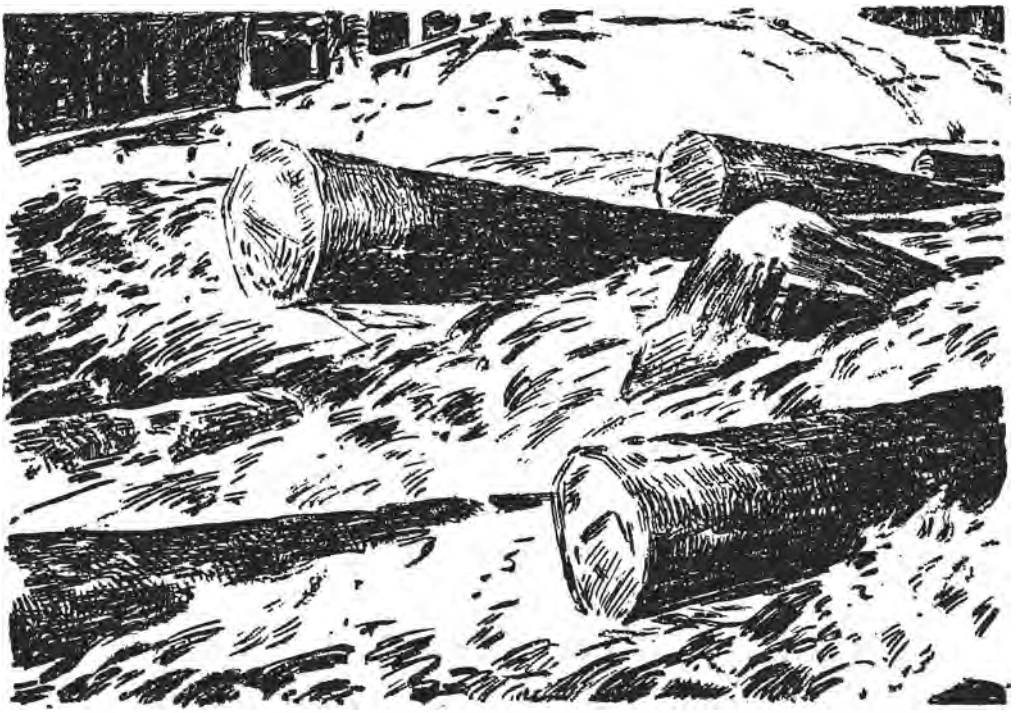
He was verminous, like every lumberjack in every camp in the district. There had been no possibility of bathing, and no laundry. The men who chose might wash their clothes in an iron tub over a fire in the open, and a few cleanly souls, Hugh among them, made a despairing effort to keep clean. But the bunkhouses themselves were crawling with lice, and clean clothing was infested almost as soon as it was put on.

Tophet itself was little better. None of the hotels had bathrooms, but Hugh discovered a barber shop where he was able to secure for fifty cents about three pailfuls of hot water in a galvanized iron tank. He bathed and changed his clothes, but now the problem arose of how he was to keep free of vermin until he could leave town. Another night in a hotel bed would leave him exactly where he was before.

One characteristic of the human louse is that it detests horses, and the knowledge gave Hugh an idea. He went down to the stables and for the dollar he gave the barn boss, secured permission to sleep in a vacant stall, on his promise not to bring in liquor or smoke on the premises. He spent a chilly night, but his sleep was undisturbed.

He was glad to get into the train in the morning and leave Tophet to live up to its reputation in its own riotous way. His last glimpse of the town showed him a lumberjack being pursued by two angry halfbreed women with clubs, while a knot of men stood by laughing uproariously. The coach was quiet enough for the only passengers were sober homesteaders hurrying home with their winter's earnings.

Sitting back in his seat, Hugh found himself looking forward eagerly to the prospect of filing a claim on his own homestead.



The logs hurtled down the chute with a hollow boom to gilpoke to right and left . . .

II

RIVER PIG

"HOW'S chances for a job?" inquired Hugh.

Foreman Remi Bouillon, dark-browed, stout, gray-whiskered, with humorous wrinkles round his sharp little eyes, leaned back in his hotel lobby chair. "You are river-drivaire—good on stoff, hanh?"

"Well, no, not exactly."

"An' you come to me for job. Sacre mojee, can I get not'ing in dis town but dry-lan' drivaire? I want good man what ride toot'pick uphill de rapide to hell. Do you know de rivaire?"

"No."

"Look, my frien', you are damn fool. Why for not get a job on de lan'? De rivaire is for de man what is weak in de head an' strong in hees back. You want be in de wataire up you neck all time, hanh? You want sleep on de wet groun', in wet blanket? You cannot to be dry, nevaire. Ice on de wataire maybe, an' you sheever an' sheever, rattle you bone. What kin' of life is dat?"

"I'd like to try it anyway."

"Want for be toff, eh? File you teet', chew iron bar, spit sheengle nail, hanh? Toff, hah? I tell you if you come wit' me I make you toff or I keel you—understan'?"

"All right."

Bouillon shrugged his shoulders. "Don't say I nevaire warn you den. What you name? Eu Mondip? All right, Eu, you be here eight o'clock tomorrow mornin' wit' you turkey."

Hugh found some forty men assembled at the hotel in the morning, and Bouillon marched them down in a body to where a four-horse team stood ready to pull out. They flung their turkeys aboard the wagon and fell in behind. Hugh, looking his companions over, decided that not more than half were experienced hands. There was an indefinable stamp upon the genuine riverhogs, a curious undulating gait, an air of confident recklessness. They addressed the genial Bouillon as Booya, and frolicked along the muddy trail like schoolboys. They had spent all their money and were destitute and consequently sober.

The new hands were somewhat glum, having heard much of the perils and hardships of the river, and being lured only by the high wages offered. They were not rendered any more cheerful by the tales the riverpigs delighted to pour into their ears.

All that day and most of the next they traveled north, sometimes through second-growth timber, and sometimes across open prairie or desolate *bois brulé*. Snow still lay in the woods, and in the open a raw wind flung gritty pellets of ice in their faces at intervals.

Booya ranged up alongside Hugh for a moment. "Dis wedder is make you toff, hanh?"

. . . and in a moment a whole fleet of them hove in sight, the main mass of the upriver jam.

he remarked with a friendly grin. "But you wait, my frien', until de cold wataire is creep up you backbone. But I t'ink, me, I make good rivaire peeg from you."

They came to a row of mountainous rollways on a little river that was still frozen over. Above the rollways stood a cluster of white tents in a poplar grove. Several long tables were set out in the open flanked by benches, and the first sound that greeted their ears was the welcome solo performed on a triangle by a cookee.

While they ate, a tall thin man, very erect, wearing a pointed chestnut beard, passed up and down looking them over. This was the famous Ernie Carpenter, cradled in the Michigan woods, and regarded as the best bushwhacker in the whole north wind country. It was said he could make his strident voice carry a mile through the woods.

He hardly troubled to raise it when he said, "Hurrah, boys, get your tents up now an' make yourselves comfortable," yet every man in camp heard him clearly.

Booya's gang were given three tents. Hugh found himself working with a young man of middle height and compact build. He had a full beard of a golden yellow, and solemn blue eyes.

"Say, you can bunk in with me if you like," he offered. "I ain't stuck on the looks of these here other rummies. Ain't lousy, are you?"

"Not that I know of."

"Fine. Not that it matters a awful lot—they soon get drownded out. We'll make us a good bed of spruce limbs, an' put one blanket under and the leave on top, an' we'll be warm as nits. My name's Joe Watts."

Hugh introduced himself, explained he'd been in the woods that winter, but needed additional cash to work his land.

Joe, who confessed to being a hard-up homesteader too, undertook Hugh's education in the thorough manner in which he did everything. "I aim to make a real riverpig out of you, so you listen what I tell you, an' anything you don't understand ask me about."

"Go ahead," agreed Hugh. "How is this thing worked anyway?"

"Well, first off they'll likely dynamite the rollways out an' get the logs movin'. When they're well away, the bow crew will pull out to keep 'em movin'. After that the middle gang'll move, and finally there'll be the rear. They'll comb all stray logs out of the snies and off of the banks. I don't know what crew we're in yet, but it'll likely be the middle."

THERE was an inch of dry snow on the ground when Ernie waked them at dawn. They hastily built bonfires and huddled around them to eat their breakfast, the food being handed to them at the door of the cook tent. Afterwards they hustled all the young evergreens they could find and built windbreaks around their fires, for there was no

He'd been cradled in the Michigan woods and was the best bushwhacker in the country.

work to be done until the river ice began to break up, and this last counter-attack of the north wind might delay that for days.

"Best get your boots," said Joe, "an' I'll fix you up to look like a riverpig anyways."

Hugh bought a pair of high riverman's boots and two packages of caulks at the wannegan, and Joe showed him how to set the sharp spikes in the soles and heels. "Start 'em well down to the toe—plenty times a man's just hangin' by his toe caulks. Don't be cheap with 'em, give 'em two rows an' set 'em close."

"Now what?" inquired Hugh, after the boots had passed critical inspection.

"Stag your pants off below the knee, so they won't hang around your heels an' trip you up. You got a mackinaw shirt? That's right, it's the warmest thing you can get on the drive—leather ain't worth a gahdamn. Pull the tail out like the way I have it."

"Why?"

"Because when you fall in the drink it'll drip dry in a little while, but if you keep it inside your pants it'll stay wet an' cold. Now take a handkerchief an' tie it around your neck, the flap in front so you can wipe your face on it if you get het up, an' anyway that's the way all good riverpigs wears it. Now, take an' hang your hat on your ear—that's right. Your hat's too heavy—you need a small light hat what'll float easy an' ain't too heavy on your head when it gets wet. A cap's no good—the damn thing will drip down your neck.

"Now, leave me look you over. Hm, well, you do begin to look a little bit like you belong on the river, not like a poor, damn, dumb, town toot. Oh, an' say, got anything to keep your matches dry? No, well, I'll have to rustle something for you. Here, this here little tin box will do, the lid fits tight. A feller settin' on the river bank in a snowstorm with wet matches an' no fire is pretty much out of luck."

Hugh stood up, his felt hat at a rakish angle, a red bandana handkerchief round his neck, his heavy woolen shirt of broad purple and black checks hanging out behind, his trousers cut off just below the knee to reveal crimson bands of woolen sock above the high brown boots with shining caulks in their soles. He tried to imitate the riverpig's swagger, but that is something that only comes with practice.

He and Joe took their places on a log beside one of the fires. Here the talk was all about river driving, and ranged far.

"There's one river I'd like to drive," said a man. "There's pretty fast water on them there Niagara Falls they tell me. Feller wouldn't be terrible safe ridin' a log over 'em."

"Well, I guess not, I guess not," put in a man called Poke in a loud contemptuous voice. "You're talkin' foolish. Do you know how high them there falls is? A thousand foot."

Hugh shook his head. "Not more than a couple of hundred."

"How do you get to know so much?" demanded Poke truculently. He was tall, heavy, round-shouldered, with very long arms and enormous hands. His thick neck was somewhat twisted and he had a sinister way of looking sidelong at people out of the corners of small greenish eyes.

"I've seen 'em lots of times."

"Oh, you have, have you? A gahdamn down easter, eh? One of these wise guys what knows it all. Gettin' into this pretty cheap, ain't you? Comin' up here, shootin' off your damn big mouth an' lookin' down on us poor ignorant bushwhackers."

Hugh flushed angrily, but replied mildly, "I wasn't looking down on anybody, but as it happens, I've spent most of my life within a hundred miles of the Falls."

"See here, if you're aimin' to call me a liar . . ." roared Poke, and suddenly stopped.

Ernie Carpenter, hearing Poke's bellow and knowing how easily fights start among idle men, had risen swiftly from his seat by a nearby fire and fastened a penetrating eye on the group. He said nothing and sat down again in a moment, but Poke, muttering rebelliously, bent again to his task of shaving a peavy stock.

"Poke, he's one of these here wise guys," explained Joe privately. "He's a bad actor, too, an' now he's got a pick on you. Don't you give him no excuse to pile into you."

"I'm not looking for trouble," answered Hugh, "but I won't take more than a little of that kind of talk from anybody."

"Now, see here, Hugh, there'll be no fun in this business at all, not out here on the river. It's different in town. In a cold sober grudge fight on the river, the man what's bested gets the boots put to him."

"What do you mean?"

Joe pointed to a man nearby whose face was seamed and pitted as though by smallpox and

whose right eye was sightless. "Look at One-eye Goby—he got that from Tom Small three years ago. Tom walked on his face with caulked boots."

"Didn't anybody try to stop him?"

"Oh sure, they pulled him off before he had One-eye killed. But it was a sober grudge fight an' the man what come out on top, why, he had a right to put his mark on the other lad. That's the rule of the river."

"Does that kind of thing happen often?"

"No, no, only once in a while. It's different in town of course—they won't let 'em wear caulked boots in town. Fellers gets dressed up in their good clothes an' light stags—shoes, you know—an' gets a few drinks into 'em, an' they just naturally go to fightin'. But that's just fun an' no hard feelin's. They pull a little wool, with a bloody nose or a black eye, or maybe the odd tooth knocked out. It don't amount to a thing. But it's different on the river—a feller what loses out there most generally always take a trip to hospital. You take my tip an' give Poke all the road he wants."

"Why—is he the best man on the river?"

"No, I wouldn't say that, but he's pretty hard. There's maybe two-three could give him his needin's—big Paddy Murphy or Frenchy Jules Lamotte—I don't know. But Poke ain't tangled with them. What he likes is to pick on some guy what's littler than him an' ride him fightin' mad. Then he takes him down an' caulks him up. He's done that to two fellers as I know of, an' that's what he's fixin' to do to you."

"All right, I'll keep away from the swine as much as I can."

"That's sense. I don't doubt your courage, but a feller's none the worse for a little judgment. Now come along an' I'll learn you how to flip a peavy."

A peavy is a canthook with a longer stock, a slightly smaller hook, and a spike or pick in the end. It is used on the river, while the canthook is used in the woods. Joe had already taken the precaution to secure himself a good one, and he led Hugh to a big pile of the implements behind the wannegan.

"These here has been pretty well picked over, an' there ain't hardly nothin' but sawlogs left, but you'll have to do the best you can. Here's one that ain't so bad—too damn heavy—but you can shave the stock down so she's easier to handle."

He gave his own peavy a quick twirl and sent it flying through the air in a long arc to fasten itself upright in a log. "That's a double-Michigan—just a fancy flip. See, here's a Saginaw—watch how I do it. This here's a cross-check. Keep your left hand up an' slide your right. Keep your hook short. Now you try it."

Hugh essayed a plain flip.

"No, no, no, I told you keep her short. Flip her an' let the hook bite as she comes over. Oh, my gawd, not that way. Watch me, like this."

Hugh was naturally adroit, quick, sinewy, and anxious to learn. In a couple of days of steady application he had mastered the rudiments and fallen completely under the spell of the most magical tool ever invented by man. He would never become a virtuoso—that takes years of practice—but he could to some extent control the vagaries of the swinging hook.

FINALLY the thaw came on the wings of a south wind that filled the skies with northbound waterfowl and the woods with piping small birds. Down by the towering rollways a pool of water formed.

In camp Heck Bigwell cried, "This here's 'nitiation day for young ducks."

The idle riverpigs responded with jubilant yells; all the novices were rounded up and marched down in a body to the pool. Ernie Carpenter came along to see that the fooling was not carried too far.

A small log was rolled into the water, and the shout went up, "Come on, Spider—learn 'em what they got to do."

Spider St. Jean, a little splinter of a French Canadian, poised himself and leaped lightly out upon the slowly rolling log. It became magically still. He grinned and nodded at the crowd, then puckered up his face in exaggerated sternness and solemnity. Stiff as a soldier on parade, he shouldered his peavy, marched to the end of the log, about-faced and marched back. Then he struck the pick into the wood, hung his hat on the upright stock, and, with little hopping steps, backed away.

Taking a package of tobacco from his hip pocket, he rolled himself a cigarette, stood on one foot and lit a match on the seat of his trousers, and then let himself sink gently down until he lay flat on his back, his head pillowed on his hands, and a foot cocked over a bent knee. Hardly two inches of the log showed above water.

Suddenly he gave a wild Indian yell, bounded up, threw his feet into the air and walked the length of the log upon his hands, his caulks gleaming in the sun. He regained his feet with a half somersault, clapped his hat on his head, tossed his peavy ashore, and began to dance a jig.

"Riverhawg!" whooped the crowd in ecstasy. "Hop an' hang all summer on the white spruce! Cuff the bark off her, Spider. White water! WHEEE!"

St. Jean stopped jigging and spurned the log with needle-sharp caulks. It revolved under his feet in a smother of snowy foam while he raced like a squirrel in a cage, maintaining his balance with outspread arms. Then he sprang into the air, came down hard on his heels, and the log stopped dead. He leaped ashore amid loud plaudits.

"Now, who wants to be a good riverhawg?" demanded Heck Bigwell of the doubtful and apprehensive greenhorns. "Come on, hop the timber or float your hat."

"I'll try," offered Hugh.

"Good boy, that's the pig's eye. You know what you got to do—cuff her across."

Hugh suppressed a qualm, gripped his peavy firmly and jumped. Under the feet of Spider the log had seemed a dull and docile thing, but the moment Hugh alighted on it it became endowed with diabolical malice. It twitched from under him like a snake. For one awful moment he hung suspended and then the icy waters of the pool closed over his head.

He stuck the pick into the wood, hung his hat on the upright stock, then backed away with little hopping steps.

He came up gasping to find the air filled with ecstatic shrieks, howlings, bellowings. "Riverhawg, riverhawg, riverhawg! Hop an' hang all summer on the white spruce!"

The water was only a couple of feet deep and he speedily floundered ashore. Humiliated and shivering, his one thought was to run back to camp for dry clothing. They halted him peremptorily.

"Wet or dry, a man don't change clothes on the river till the sun goes down," said Heck. "That's the rule of the river. You hired for a tough-gut an' you got to fill the bill."

There Hugh had to remain with chattering teeth while the rest of the novices were put through their initiation. Though the surface of his body remained cold, a little glow crept into his heart as he watched man after man coaxed or driven to spring out on that treacherous little stick of timber, and dive ignominiously into the water.

"It's easy—just keep on the top side," gurgled the lumberjacks, wiping happy tears from their eyes.

The last novice had to be chased halfway to camp, and carried back by four men. Yelling and struggling in unreasoning panic, he was swung three times and tossed far out into the pool.

Heck Bigwell, self-constituted master of ceremonies, mounted a stump and proclaimed, "I declare an' pernounce all presents here to be duly 'nitiated, an' they got the right to call 'emselves riverhawgs from this time on forevermore."

Hugh and some others, anxious to learn their new trade, practiced assiduously at the pool for three days. Nobody interfered with him, though several came down to watch, laugh, and offer good advice. But log-riding, like swimming, is something a man has to learn for himself.

The first day's efforts left Hugh soaked to the skin, half-frozen, and full of disgust and despair. But on the following days he overcame some of his nervousness and learned at least to endure wet clothing next his skin. As far

as actual log-riding was concerned, he advanced no further than the ability to stand still. The moment he made a movement the log deposited him in the water.

AT FOUR o'clock on a dull raw morning, Ernie Carpenter's trumpet voice roused the camp. "Hurrah, boys, roll out! Today's the day."

After breakfast about thirty men were told off with pikepoles to go down river and start the rotten ice moving, while the remainder shouldered peavies and went down to the rollways. Little fires were kindled and two men, immediately creating a solitude around themselves, began thawing sticks of dynamite in pails of water, and fitting them with caps and fuses. Tied to long withes these bombs were pushed down through holes in the ice under the noses of the rollways. There they exploded with rending crashes, tossing water, ice and logs into the air, and polluting the pure atmosphere with nauseating fumes.

Then broke out the long rolling thunder of thousands of logs beginning their journey to the sawmill. Agile men, picked experts, dodged in and out among the toppling piles, starting roaring timber avalanches with a cunning flip of the peavy here, a quick jerk there. Logs came hurtling down upon them from above. A man had his arm broken in the first two hours of work.

Hugh found himself with another green hand at work on a rollway that had been broken out. They had nothing to do but trundle logs down into the river, a steady monotonous job almost devoid of thrills. Occasionally a stick got away from their inexperienced peavies and had to be heaved back on to the skids by main strength. Once the river in front of them choked with logs and Hugh had his first experience of breaking a jam. He contrived to fall in up to the waist, but earned an approving nod from Booya by going right out on the nose of the plug and pulling out the gilpoked log that was holding the whole mass.

They had a lunch at ten and again at four, and at sunset the welcome clangor of the cook's triangle called them to supper. Tired and aching all over, Hugh dropped on his couch of spruce boughs and fell asleep as soon as he had removed his boots. Ernie's inexorable voice awakened him at dawn to another long day of log-rolling.

"You come wit' me, boy," said Booya to Hugh's partner that afternoon. "An' you bes' go up an' give dat man Poke a han'."

"Here's that damn' white-collar, down-east dude," was Poke's greeting. "It's a wonder they wouldn't send me a real man to work with."

Hugh bit his lip, but threw his peavy into a log in silence. They trundled half a dozen down to the creek, and it became necessary to break back. Poke knocked out the chock and started the pile behind. A log bounced down from the top, in danger of rolling off the skids altogether.

"Cut her back, blast you, cut her back," roared Poke.

Hugh flipped his peavy into the end of the log as Joe had taught him and brought it neatly to a halt.

"Begad, I didn't think you had sense enough for that," said Poke in grudging admiration. "I was hopin' you'd grab her from the back an' take a toss. I like to see smart-alec cocktails rollin' in the mud."

Fortunately for Hugh's temper, work for the day ceased soon after that.

"I'm going to have to hit that lousy swine," he told Joe.

"Best not, Hugh. If you do it on the job you'll get your time—Ernie Carpenter won't stand for no scrappin' in workin' hours. If you stump Poke to fight after quittin' time you'll pretty sure get the boots put to you."

"See here, Joe, you're all the time advising me not to fight, but would you take dirt from that stinking yahoo?"

"I would," said Joe, after a pause for thought. "Nor I wouldn't be ashamed of myself neither. He's thirty pounds heavier'n what I am an' I seen him fight. I know he can trim me. I'd be more ashamed if I was fool enough to let him walk my face with his damn caulks. I keep tellin' you this ain't town—it ain't just a case of tradin' a few punches an' maybe a cracked slat or two. If you lose out, Poke'll mark you for life."

"But everybody hears him riding me. They'll think I'm yellow."

"Who's fightin' Poke, them or you? Well, let 'em think what they like. No man with any sense is goin' to hold it agin you that you won't buck him, an' I never paid no 'tention to fools yet."

"He's a dirty swine, and I want to tell him so."

"Uh-huh, uh-huh, but wait'll you get to town. Let him get them caulked boots off first. Wait till he's about half-drunk an' maul hell out of him. Meantime, keep your shirt on an' let him ramble. Only if he ackshally hits you, then go to it, teeth, toenails, broadaxes an' shotguns, no holts barred."

The advice was too sound to be ignored. Hugh kept his temper sternly under control, but he watched Poke narrowly. The man was terrifically powerful but slow on his feet. The twist in his neck was also a weak spot, since a man with a stiff neck will suffer more from a punch on the jaw. A man who was fast on his feet and working always toward Poke's blind side would be able to inflict a lot of damage as long as he kept out of reach of those gorilla arms. Hugh had done a lot of

amateur boxing at college and he had considerable confidence in his left hook.

However, Poke went down river with the bow crew in a few days and Hugh saw no more of him for a time.

MOST of the logs were in the water by now, and it was the turn of the middle crew to move. The rear would clean up what remained and follow on. Hugh and Joe found themselves with the middle and Booya warned them to be ready in the morning, and handed out a haversack to each man.

It was raining hard when they woke, but nothing must halt the drive. Blankets were rolled up and tied, tents struck and wagons loaded. "Fill up, fill up, boys!" cried the cook. "Take enough for all day. Don't go hungry."

There were piles of bread and doughnuts, platters of salt pork and buckets full of hard-boiled eggs.

"You fill up on the cackleberries," advised Joe. "One little flop in the drink an' it's good-night punk, an' them doughnuts don't hold up so good neither after they been drowned a couple of times. Pork's all right if you can find time to warm it up, but we ain't liable to have any, an' cold sowbelly never did set very good on my stummick. No, sir, you stick by the hen-fruit an' they'll stick by you. Drownd 'em for half a day an' they'll come up a-smilin' when you want 'em. This is goin' to be a gah-damnallelujah hellsniffle of a day, or I miss my guess, but a man with a bellyful of eggs can tough anything."

Hugh helped himself to a round dozen hard-boiled eggs in consequence, a few strips of salt pork, some doughnuts and a couple of slices of bread. The gang began to file off along the narrow boggy path beside the river, peavies clinking musically on their shoulders.

They came to a jam and several men ran out upon the heaving surface and broke it out. But they were not allowed to linger there, for they were still in the territory of the rear crew. The path grew boggier and they emerged upon a vast swamp in which tangled willow thickets stood like islands. Between them the river wound and wound like a piece of string carelessly thrown down. The water in most places was only knee-deep, but long grass dragged at their legs as they walked.

They had now entered their own territory, and Booya split the gang up into several groups, with general instructions to keep the river as clear as possible and work down to Hunter's Bend by nightfall. Hunter's Bend, called after a man who had drowned there, was a well known camping site. Hugh and Joe found themselves part of a group of nine who were told to push ahead, while the others took to the high land to cut the river lower down.

It rained and when it stopped raining it snowed. The water was hideously cold, and in a short time Hugh was unable to tell by sensation that he had any such things as feet. He thought he had already heard all the lurid profanity of which the lumberjack is capable, but that day materially enlarged his vocabulary of anathema.

"Watch out for blind snies," warned Joe. "Hey, Pikepole, you best take the lead. If you go over your head we'll know it's too deep for us."

The man they called Pikepole was some inches over six feet, and he went stalking ahead through the swamp like a huge crane, the water seldom reaching his knees. Suddenly he disappeared to the waist, lurched, recovered himself, plunged almost to the armpits and crawled out on the far side.

"Laugh, damn your louse-bitten hides," he gibed. "Now it's my turn to laugh. Jump, you buggers, jump."

Timid souls sought a way round, but the snie became wider and deeper away from the river. There was no log in sight of which a bridge might be made. A man gathered himself together and launched himself with a yell. He went in up to his neck. One by one they followed him, the shortest faring worst. Poor Joe went almost out of sight, Hugh to the shoulders.

"Now let her do her damnedest," said Joe. "What the hell do we care—we can't be no wetter'n what we are."

They waded glumly on, plunging doggedly through every snie they came to. Only when the water was too deep did they have recourse to temporary bridges made of logs, for there was hardly a man among them who could swim. This struck Hugh as amazing and he said so to Joe.

"What the hell?" was the reply. "Ain't we in the water enough? It's a riverpig's business to keep dry—it's up to him to keep topside of a log. We didn't hire to be damn mushrats. An' another thing, no man what can swim good ever was much on stuff—it's havin' to stay topside or drown what makes 'em catty."

"But don't fellows get drowned?"

"Sure, plenty, but that's their funeral. A man's got to be catty. Hello, what's doin' now?"

"No bottom to this here," said Pikepole, already up to his waist and probing with his long peavy. "There's ten fot of water an' she looks to be twenty foot across. Somebody go hook a log."

The only logs in sight were drifting slowly down the current sixty feet away.

"Somebody's got to swim for it," they decided. "Can't wait here all day. Hey, you, Hugh, you claim to be a swimmer, don't you?"

"See what bein' able to swim gets a feller?" chuckled Joe. "It's up to you, boy, gimme your peavy."

HUGH plunged in, weighed down by his heavy boots, and after a hard struggle got his hands on two logs which he pushed within reach. Clamped together with peavies, the men ferried themselves across the snie, four at a time, on the raft thus contrived. Hugh swam across. He was by now purple-lipped and almost paralyzed with cold, and the rest of the group in little better condition.

"Be damned if we go no further before we eat," they decided. "We'll hit that high ground over there an' build a fire."

They left the river, waded a quarter of a mile or so, and came to drier land. Hugh had to admire the way in which these experts whittled shavings from the hearts of dry willow sticks and somehow got a blazing fire going in a few minutes in a high wind and pouring rain. Most of them had brought along little billies made from old tomato cans, which they put on to boil.

"That's one thing I forgot to tell you about," said Joe. "But you can have some of mine." He took tea from a watertight box in his pocket.

Hugh plunged his hand into his haversack and came out with a fistful of pulp that had once been bread. The doughnuts were not very inviting looking either, or the salt pork. But the eggs had nobly withstood immersion, and were palatable and nourishing, if clammy. Half a dozen of them and a pailful of hot tea set his blood running again, and he stripped off his wet clothing and wrung the surplus water out of it. Some of the men did the same, but the others shrugged their shoulders.

Said one, "We'll be wet as ever right away, an' water that's been next a man's hide is warmer. You fellers is only goin' to be colder for doin' that."

"You're right, too," agreed Joe. "I never take wet clothes off before I reach camp."

Booya emerged from a dripping thicket, lured by their smoke. "All right, boys, you 'ave eat now, so you mus' 'it 'er again. It is better from now on."

"Damned old liar," muttered Joe.

But they went back, sadly proud of their hardiness. There was no general improvement in conditions. Sometimes the water was deep, sometimes shallow; sometimes the swamp was narrow and they could travel for short distances on dry land, at other times they were surrounded by swamp for half a mile on every side. There was little current in the river and the logs jammed slackly, but the jams had to be broken out when reached.

The day waned and they fell in with other parties of their gang converging on Hunter's Bend. It continued to rain—when it was not snowing. They built a big fire and had another lunch in mid-afternoon, and waded more snies and broke more jams. In windy darkness and a steady downpour they arrived at the bend, expecting to find tents pitched and hot food awaiting them. They found only a deserted silence, and their remarks made the language they had used that day seem tame and spiritless.

The man they called Pikepole went stalking ahead through the swamp like a huge crane.

They fished logs from the river and made themselves a bonfire four yards long, and there they stood, the steam rising from them in a cloud—wet, hungry, tired and furious. It was not for another hour that a faint rumbling in the darkness announced the approach of the tote team. They had been stuck fast in a flooded creek for the better part of the day.

Famished lumberjacks, snarling like wolves, snatched the cookstove to the ground and fired up. Others dragged out the tents and proceeded

to pitch them. There arose a yell of fury. The man in charge of the blanket wagon had forgotten to cover the bundles with a tarpaulin. They were sodden through and through. The wretched bullcock responsible fled into the bush followed by a shower of peavies, was caught, dragged to the river, and ducked and ducked again, until rescued at his last gasp by Booya.

Meanwhile, the cook, standing in the pouring rain, was throwing huge slices of salt pork on the red-hot top of the stove, whence they were snatched, half-raw, by the hungry men. Loaves of bread out of a waterproof box were torn in pieces and passed around, a huge pot of water brought to the boil and half a pound of tea thrown into it. The men dipped the liquid out in their own cups.

Fed at last, warm within, if damp without, Hugh pulled off his boots and rolled himself in his sodden blankets on the sodden ground, under the dripping tent, and passed almost at once into deep sleep.

IT WAS still raining next morning. The men dodged out to the cook-tent in the downpour and brought the food to eat in the shelter of the tents. Growling, they pulled on their wet boots.

"Only ducks, mushrats an' crazy men will be out today," quipped Heck Bigwell.

"Hurrah, boys," bawled Booya without. "Wet or dry, de drive go on."

They squelched out after him in a dreary line, following the high ground. From time to time he despatched a man to take post in the drowned lowlands.

"You, Eu, go on down dere an' fin' a ben'. When de log stop comin' go on up de rivaire an' break 'er out. When you 'ear somewan 'oller 'Jam Below!' you go down an' 'alp heem, eh?"

Shivering and swearing in the chilly water,

A greenhorn was cautiously trying to break the plug out from the bank.

Hugh waded along until he found a clump of willows by the river, the roots of which stood up a few inches above the flood. He bent and broke the branches until they afforded him a seat. After a number of attempts and more hard swearing, he got a wretched handful of fire going between his outspread legs.

He had been miserable enough the day before, but there had at least been company and movement: now he was alone, with nothing to

do but watch the wet logs slide slowly by on the muddy water pitted with incessant raindrops. A little cloud of steam rose from his drenched clothing, and the eddying smoke from his pitiful fire made him choke, cough, and wipe the water from his smarting eyes.

Time stood still—it is idiocy to take a watch out on the drive—there was no sun and no means of learning the time. "There are common damn fools," he told himself grimly, "and hopeless imbeciles who go out on the river drive. . . Now, what in hell's happening?"

His fire sizzled despairingly and went out in a puff of smoke. The water was rising. "Begad, am I going to be drowned where I sit?" he thought.

Then he heard a faint bleating from downstream, "Jam Below—J-a-a-m Bee-low!"

He rose and sloshed along the bank until he came to the tail of the jam. It is comparatively easy for a sure-footed man to walk on a jam, however loose, and so he took to the logs. Round the next bend he found a greenhorn very cautiously trying to break the plug out from the bank.

With a feeling of pride, he trotted boldly forward and threw his hook into the key log that had gilpoked. It was the work of only a moment to set the whole mass adrift again. "If you'd get out on the logs, damn you, I wouldn't have to come down and break out for you," he told the greenhorn, and began the long wade back to his own bend. It took him an hour to get his fire going again.

Then the logs ceased to come down from above, and he had to make his way upstream. Here he fell into a deep blind snie, treacherously concealed between two clumps of willow. It was only three feet wide, but it took him almost to the shoulders. In no sweet temper, he reached the nose of the jam to find Joe prying busily among some hanging roots, waist deep in water.

"There's a gilpoke down in under here somewheres," said Joe. "I been rasslin' with it all mornin'. Come an' give me a hand to hawk her out."

Between them, they managed to haul out a small log that had caught in the roots and was projecting out into the stream, causing small jams at ten minute intervals.

When they had the plug pulled, Hugh paused. "What are you roosting?" he inquired.

Joe pointed with his thumb at two logs he had made fast with withes, on one of which he had built a fire. "It ain't awful comfortable," he said, "but it's better'n standin' up, an' there ain't no place around here to set down."

"Ain't river driving a grand life?" inquired Hugh with labored sarcasm. "I've got an excuse for being here because I didn't know what I was up against when I hired on, but you've been here before. I think you ought to have your head read."

"She might be worse," said Joe placidly. "It ain't snowin' anyway. Year before last I was down around here some place an' it blizzarded like hell all day. Sun'll come out tomorrow or next day likely, an' then everything'll be dandy."

"Or it mightn't come out for a week," retorted Hugh.

"I never knowed the rain to last that long."

"Well, I'll have to see if that damn greenhorn below me has got himself into any more trouble."

Hugh caught a log and drifted comfortably back to his own bend, where he found all clear and the fire still burning. He had to go down twice more, warned by rising water, and help the greenhorn break out loose plugs before they became large jams. He contrived, however, to keep from getting wet again above the waist. The rain had petered out to a drizzle by evening, but the bedding was still damp and there were no dry clothes to put on. Once rolled up tight in his blankets, for all that, Hugh soon found himself warming up and speedily fell into a dreamless sleep.

THE sun did at last come out on the next day, and the bullcook took the sodden blankets from the tents and spread them out to dry. The riverpigs took off their outer clothing and hung them on the willows. Most of them returned to camp that evening dry at least from the waist up. The sullenness of the previous day gave way to the normal good humour of the river, and all troubles were swiftly forgotten.

They were at Hunter's Bend about a week, and one day in the drowned land was like another. Hugh fell in a couple of times and floated his hat, but steadily grew more sure-footed on the timber that whirled treacherously in the slack water the moment it was touched. He became wise to the ways of gilpokes, and more and more contemptuous of the dry-land driver on the bend below, who never learned anything and would not venture out on any but the tightest jams.

"If I'm all alone here an' fall in," the unhappy greenhorn defended himself, "who's goin' to pull me out? I can't swim a stroke."

"Say," complained Hugh to Joe one evening, "I thought river drivers spent all their time shooting rapids. I'd like to see a little more action."

"You wait till you get out of old Mud Creek into Clear River," warned Joe. "You'll get plenty fast water and tight jams there. There'll be many a day you'll be bullin' all day on a hard bend an' wishin' to God you was back on Mud Creek."

At last word came to move. The gang spent most of the day wading through the drowned lands and negotiating one snie after another,

but in the late afternoon the banks closed in on either hand and the waters speeded their pace. They came to where Mud Creek joined the Clear, a somewhat larger and much swifter stream.

"Well, here you have what you want," observed Joe. "White water an' tight jams. There's three rapids and four-five swifts between here an' the raftin' grounds. You're goin' to earn your money now."

They camped in a grove of tall jackpines, and slept on a clean, soft, sweet-smelling bed of pine needles. In the morning the men spread themselves out along the river. Hugh did not notice that the rest of the gang had carefully avoided a hairpin bend that had a big stump on one side and a slowly whirling eddy on the other. He unsuspectingly took up his post there.

Logs began to circle in the eddy, ganging up. Presently a long gilpoke pivoted on the stump and spanned the gap. There was a locked and growing jam in a moment. Hugh rushed out, heaving and straining, but the backwash of the eddy kept the logs from floating clear. Almost before he knew it he was struggling with a steadily mounting wall of timber that every moment drowned the key log deeper.

He swallowed his pride and sent out the sonorous plea for aid of the riverpig in trouble, "J-a-a-m Bee-low!"

Heck Bigwell was the first to appear. "Wise guy," mocked the little man. "You would go an' pick Todd's Bend—right there in the eddy is where poor ol' Chuck went down. Come on away from there—no sense at all bullin' in an eddy. Work over here under this point, that's the only place you can clear her. I guess this here's the meanest damn bend on the whole river—this an' Huck's Cutoff. Come on, hawk on her."

While they struggled to clear, a man came down from up above and another from further down. Between them, they pulled the key log and got the main mass away. But Hugh was no sooner left alone than he had to fight another incipient plug.

Though he had help from time to time through the day, for the most part he battled alone. It was noon before he had time to snatch his first lunch, almost quitting time before he could snatch a moment to wolf his second. Booya's welcome hail to stop work found him despairingly and with rapidly failing strength attempting to clear a rush of logs suddenly released from a jam higher up.

"Well, how do you like fast water?" inquired Joe. "Be glad to be back on old Mud Creek?"

"I'm not going back on that blasted bend tomorrow," gritted Hugh.

Booya did not hold him to it, mercifully permitting him to take White Rock Swift. "You will not 'ave so many jam," he said. "But, boy, when she do jam. . . ."

THE river, contracted to fifty feet of racing white water, rushed down to split into two streams on a great white boulder. Center jams were common and much to be feared, for two men had already lost their lives at that point. But Hugh had one of his pleasantest and most peaceful mornings. The wild cherries were bursting into bloom behind him, and big swallowtail butterflies flaunted their golden wings over his head. A humming bird whizzed about like a tiny blue bullet. A beaver fed on the early willow buds.

A mink crept out of the bank below him. He kept very still and five tiny bundles of brown fur followed her out and played gleefully on the narrow beach in the sun for a few minutes. Hugh was enchanted and fell into a happy doze, leaning back against a tree. In another moment he would have been fast asleep.

"Haaa. Ai-ai-ai-ai!" Hugh started awake, to see Booya drifting by on a log and laughing. "Fine day for sleep, hanh? But you watch out, my friend', dis is bad place for jam." His laughter trailed away around the bend.

Hugh got up and walked back and forth. Then he noticed that the logs had stopped coming. He was debating whether to leave his post when a fleet of them hove in sight. They went hurtling down the chute to strike the white rock with a hollow boom and gilpoke to right and left. They cleared, but in a moment came the main mass of the up-river jam.

The chute filled from bank to bank, locked timbers jostled and heaved, and on the tightening plug fresh logs swiftly piled. The water was shut off as by a sluice gate, the stream fell to a mere trickle below the first tight jam Hugh had encountered. Gouts of foam and spray spurted through the interstices in the wall. He dashed out on the rampart and battled desperately.

He rolled log after log off the crest, but still the jam grew. His yells brought tardy aid. First came Jimmy Widdely, a beefy Englishman, then Polio Labretonniere, a halfbreed, then the tall Norwegian Axel Sandstrom; finally Joe Watts and Pikepole. All worked with desperation, knee-deep in foam, the growing wall threatening momentarily to topple and overwhelm them.

All were powerful men, and they tossed logs like straws, tearing great holes in the jam face that immediately filled with ganging timbers behind. With wary eyes cocked, they worked down to the foot of the wall, until all six were able to get their peavies on a big log that had wedged itself against the white rock.

"All together—— 'eave," roaded Widdely. They plucked the timber out like a tooth.

"Yomp!" yelled Axel.

The jam face bulged up and out, spraying logs like a fountain. The men fled every way, tumbling spruce sticks snapping at their heels.

"I didn't yomp kvick enoff dat time," grinned Axel, his face twisted with pain. A log had struck him a glancing blow on the hand, tearing the skin away like a glove. "Oh, vell, it might haf vos a hall of a lot vorser."

He wrapped a handkerchief about the lacerated hand and went stoically back to his bend. The others dispersed upstream and down, and left a somewhat apprehensive Hugh behind them. However, there was only one more little plug toward evening, and he had little difficulty in breaking it out single-handed.

"Been a hell of a day," grumbled Joe. "Never had so much work an' trouble on no bend I ever seen. What the hell would a man go on the river for? I'm near dead. I've a damn good notion to bunch her in the mornin'."

"River driving's pie," grinned Hugh. "All you need to do is pick a nice bend like mine."

"Aw, shut up, an leave me get to sleep."

In town the men who had been paid off were parading the streets in riotous mood.

BY ONE of the curious vagaries of the river, Hugh had a most enjoyable time on White Rock. The logs ran well nearly all the time, and his hardest job was keeping awake. He found much to interest him in the wild life: an occasional round ball of a beaver, a slinking lynx, once a doe and her fawn, and innumerable birds. He had a few little jams that he broke himself, and only one tight plug that he required assistance with. He stuck to White Rock until the gang moved.

One evening there was excitement in camp. Andy Schultz, or "Dutch," was missing. He had helped break a jam in mid-afternoon and had then taken a log down to his bend. They found his haversack hanging on a tree, but no other trace of him. Men with domores and pikepoles probed the bed of the river, and his body was discovered four days later, miles downstream.

"Well, that makes the old ditch safe for this season," said a riverpig in a tone of relief. "It's too bad it had to be Dutch—there's a heap more I'd sooner see take their last drink—but somebody had to get it."

"What's the damn fool talking about?" inquired Hugh.

"It's the hoodoo," explained Joe seriously. " 'Most every year somebody has to get drowned on this here river."

"You don't believe that?"

"I don't know—seems to work out that way. Hoodoos is damn funny things, an' it don't pay to be too snooty about 'em. I ain't sayin' it is so or it ain't so, but I'm goin' to feel a heap safer from now on."

With warmer weather and lengthening evenings, the riverpigs would sit around the fire and smoke a last pipe before rolling into their blankets. They loved argument and recondite speculation, and Hugh seemed to them a man of vast learning. Heck Bigwell dubbed him Perfessor, and the name stuck.

Jimcrow Thorogood and Tom Badwell became involved in a hot argument one evening. "No

sir, you can't prove to me no different," maintained Jimcrow stoutly. "It stands to reason that moles went blind to commence because the dern little fools stuck right underground all the time."

"You got a great head on you," snorted Tom. "Anybody what had a particle of sense would see that a mole has to stay underground because he can't see. He never was able to see nothin'."

The crew divided about equally on the issue. They scratched their heads and exchanged cheerful insults.

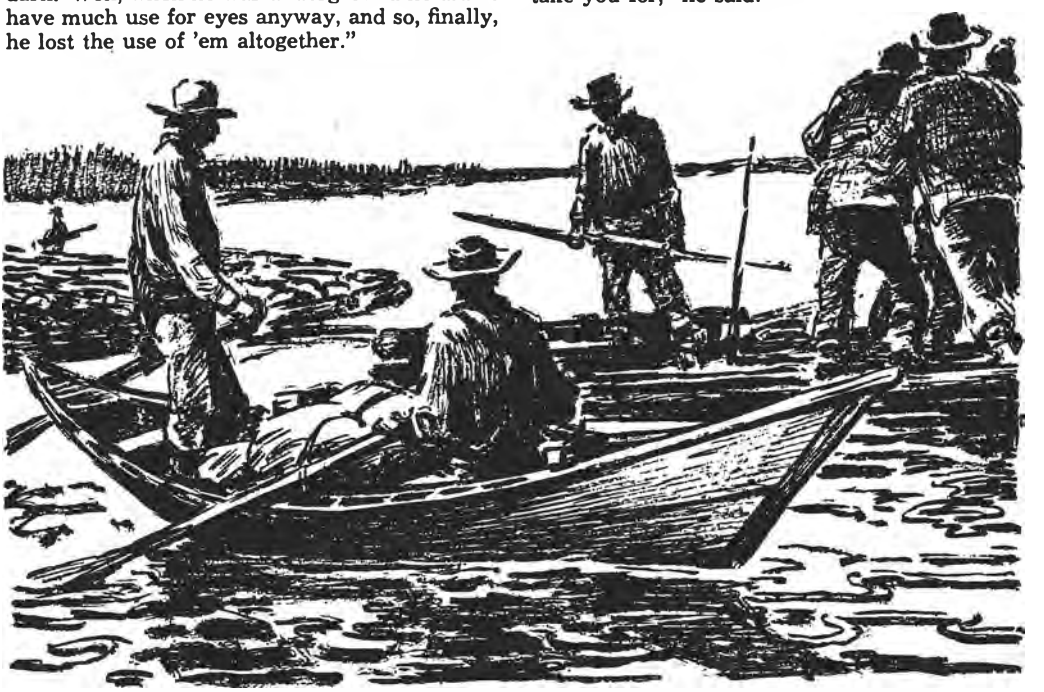
"We'll ask the Perfessor," decided Heck. "Perfessor, what you got to say about this here."

"It's about half one and half the other," pontificated Hugh diplomatically. "Both Jimcrow and Tom are right. It's like this: the mole never did see very well and so he took to sniffling around and digging for worms in the dark. Well, when he was underground he didn't have much use for eyes anyway, and so, finally, he lost the use of 'em altogether."

gang had ended up in the water when part of the bank gave way.

The river here was full of sharp bends, snags, deadheads, sweepers, and gravel bars. It was all white water and tight, incessant, dangerous jams. Hugh put in five days of the most gruelling toil of his career, for his bend was an undercut bank that was perpetually sliding down. He was nearly killed twice by slides. One he avoided in time, the second swept him out into the river, barked a knee and tore one of his ears on a snag. He escaped by diving under some logs and coming out in shallow water on the other side.

He was able to scramble ashore with the current tugging at his legs. He was very cautious after that. The current and the hidden snags made the river dangerous for even the strongest swimmer. Heck Bigwell dubbed his post Suicide Bend. "If you don't get killed around here pretty soon, you're a better man than what I take you for," he said.



Tramp, tramp, tramp! The men trod around the capstan and the crib inched forward . . .

"See what a little eddication does for a man," said Heck. "Take a look at him, boys. You wouldn't think he had as much sense as a hen by the face on him, but there he is, just loaded up with knowledge."

The middle gang moved to its final camping place at Fighting Hill, where a steep gravel-cut bank ran down sixty feet almost sheer to the river. Somebody had once smuggled a case of whiskey into a crew camped there. In the ensuing festivities, all the tents and most of the

The bow was now down to the rafting grounds and the rear only a few miles upstream, so tents were struck and the gang headed for town. "Well," asked Joe, as they tramped along, "what do you aim to do now?"

"Don't know. Isn't there a summer drive?"

"Yes, there'll be a crew goin' up to Deep Lake as soon as the boys has blowed their stake an' sobered up. I aim to take her in myself."

"I guess I'd best do the same. How soon do you think they'll be pulling out?"

"Oh, a week or ten days."

"Guess that'll give me time to run out and take a look at the homestead I filed on," said Hugh.

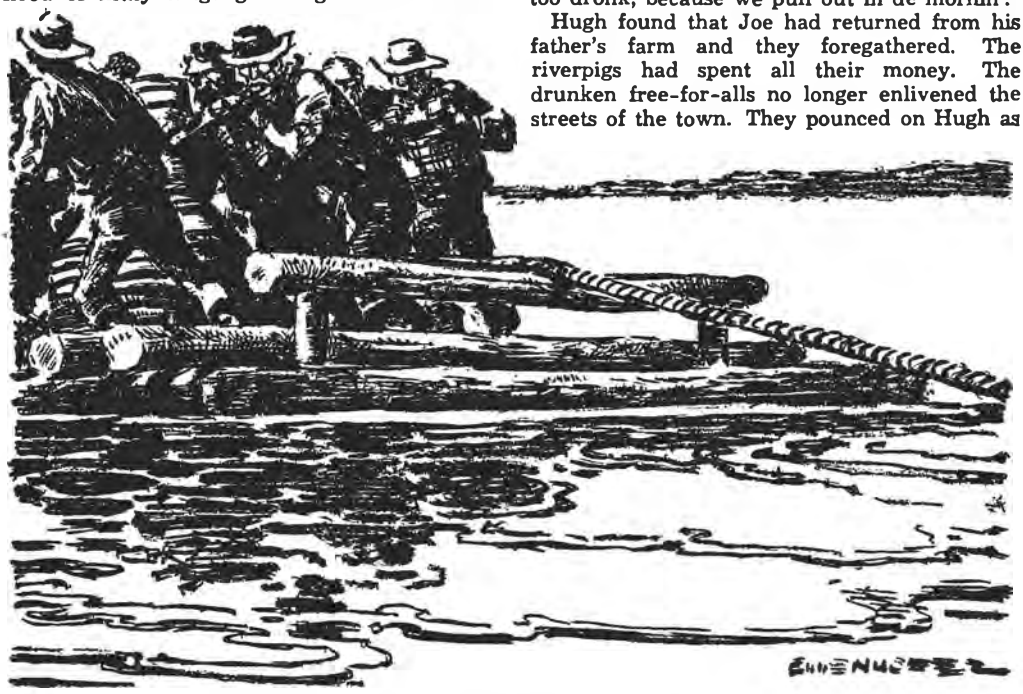
"Me, I'm goin' to run out to my old man's place," said Joe. "Don't forget I got a homestead too, an' if I stick around town I'll blow my stake sure. We'll have a couple of drinks together for good luck, eh? An' if you want to paste that feller Poke—then will be your time."

"I won't bother him unless he bothers me," said Hugh.

"That's sense anyway, but he's liable to be lookin' for you."

They reached town to find the bow crew had already been paid off and were parading the streets in riotous mood.

Hugh and Joe slipped into a bar for a parting drink, and ran full into Poke, half-drunk and extremely irascible. He greeted Hugh with a flood of filthy language. Hugh's brows drew down and his face turned white. Poke advanced on him.



. . . and the field of logs crawled after it in the bight of the boom.

"Keep away," warned Hugh in a low voice.

Poke swung a roundhouse left at him. Hugh stepped inside it and let go with a slashing left hook. Poke sat down hard. He rolled over and tried to rise.

"I can't get up," he announced. "That's the kind of man you are, eh? Wouldn't fight me when I was sober, but come an' pick on me when I'm drunk. Stick around awhile an' I'll 'tend to you. I'll fix you, you. . . "

Hugh turned on his heel and walked out.

"Well, you give him his needin's, all right," observed Joe. "But you'd ought to tramped the guts out of him. Now if you and he ever meet up you'll have to tangle."

"I'll be ready whenever he is," returned Hugh. "But I've other things to do just now."

"Well, see you again next week, eh?" said Joe. "The boys'll be broke an' ready to hit the summer drive by then."

III

"TOFF GUT"

"SURE, Eu, I take you wit' me on de drive," said Booya. "I tell you in de spring I make you toff gut or keel you. I t'ink now you make good rivaire drivaire. Don't for get too dronk, because we pull out in de mornin'."

Hugh found that Joe had returned from his father's farm and they foregathered. The riverpigs had spent all their money. The drunken free-for-alls no longer enlivened the streets of the town. They pounced on Hugh as a man with still a little cash on hand and made him stand drinks for the whole of Booya's crew.

On the following morning about a hundred men trooped out of town after the wagons on their way to Deep Lake. Heck Bigwell sidled up to Hugh with his mischievous grin. "Goin' to hit the treadmill of damnation, eh?" he inquired.

"What's that?"

"Oh, you'll find out. You'll be sorry you ever come on the drive when you see the boys goin'

nuts an' jumpin' into the lake. You'll likely be one of the first. The foolish house is full of guys what went up on the summer drive—they have a special ward for 'em, with a little pond where they burl logs all day."

He went off chuckling.

"What's he talking about?" asked Hugh.

"Well, she is kind of tough on the capstans," admitted Joe. "But a feller can bull her through if he watches himself. Looks as if the flies is goin' to be bad this season. Back here in the deep brush they most generally are."

The north wind had finally abdicated for the season and abandoned the country to the sun. It was sultry under the trees as they plodded along, and the mosquito larvae had taken advantage of the growing warmth to break out of their swimming suits, and now rose, a winged pestilence, from every muskeg and slough. As the day wore on the riverpigs began cursing and slapping. They cut leafy branches and waved them about their heads to drive the nuisances away.

Soon the whole gang were moving in the midst of a thick cloud. The horses were covered with them as with a blanket. That night the men slept around huge smudges of green boughs. It was better in the cool of the morning, but before noon uncounted millions of singing, stinging mosquitoes kept pace with the cursing procession.

"This is hell," said Hugh.

"Bad all right," admitted Joe. "But it'll be better out on the lake if there's a wind. They'll likely hand out fly oil when we get to camp. If they don't there'll be a holler."

It was late that evening when they reached the buildings of a lumber camp on the shores of Deep Lake. Men began shouting for fly oil, but some one had forgotten to bring it and there was nearly a riot. Ernie Carpenter quelled it by dispatching a man on a fast horse with instructions to bring a supply out from town within twenty-four hours. Meanwhile, the men filled buckets with damp hay, set them alight and carried them back into the bunkhouses.

Gradually the mosquitoes disappeared as the smoke within thickened. But not long thereafter the bunkhouses discharged a mob of coughing, choking, weeping, swearing riverpigs.

"Gahdamn, gahdamn, gahdamn!" roared a lumberjack. "When the gahdamn smoke gets thick enough to drive the gahdamn mosquitoes out, a feller's liable to choke to death in the gahdamn smoke." The remainder of his remarks and those of the rest of the crew cannot even be paraphrased.

However, an increasing coolness in the air after midnight discouraged the mosquitoes and sleep was possible.

"Walkin' exercise, boys," said Heck in the morning. "Either get eat alive by flies or go bugs on the capstan. Take your choice."

The crew piled into big, flat-bottomed bateaux, pulling twenty oars apiece, and headed up an arm of Deep Lake, where a vast field of logs floated behind a boom. A pungent smell of wet bark rose from them. Moored to the shore were two large rafts, each mounting a capstan.

The one on which Hugh found himself was poled along the shore dragging the end of a boom behind it, while men on little rafts, made of two logs fastened together, scouted ahead, pushing the logs out of the shallows with pikepoles.

"Why do they call those things do-mores?" inquired Hugh.

"That's easy," returned Joe. "A man can do more on two logs fixed together than he can on one, can't he?"

Slowly the raft, or crib, worked its way around the whole field of logs until it was opposite the crib on the far shore. Now an anchor was loaded into a skiff, which pulled ahead about three hundred yards then dropped it overboard.

"Man de capstan, boys," commanded Booya, "an' away she go."

There were eight bars on the capstan, and two men to each bar. Hugh and Joe took their places at one. They began to tramp monotonously round and round as the dripping cable came in over the bow and was coiled down astern.

"Say," said Hugh, "I'm getting dizzy."

"Keep your eyes closed, or look at the back of the man ahead of you," advised Joe. "Don't go lookin' around or you'll go woozy an' fall down. This is a middlin' tough job."

TRAMP, tramp, tramp! The crib crept forward by inches and the field of logs crawled after it in the bight of the boom. When the anchor was short at last, the raft was moored and the men had a few minutes to rest, while the skiff went on ahead and dropped the mudhook again.

There was no wind, the sun blazed down out of a cloudless sky and its rays beat back from the glassy water. The mosquitoes began to arrive in companies, then battalions, then in whole armies. Sweat dribbled down Hugh's face, his eyes burned and his head ached. Every few seconds he would reach up and wipe a mass of bloody mosquitoes from his neck, or crush them from the backs of his hands and wrists against the bar.

At ten the crib was moored for thirty minutes, and the crew pushed out in the bateau for a point where cookees from camp had built big smudge fires and spread lunch. Then back to the million-times cursed capstan. The heat

grew more intense, the mosquitoes, if anything, more ravenous.

Suddenly a man let go of the bar and fell down. They dragged him to the side of the crib, retching and groaning. A relief man took his place at the bar, while another dipped water from the lake in his hat and dashed it in the sufferer's face.

"Ain't got over his jag yet," commented Joe. "It's hard on them fellers what hit her too hard in town. There'll be more of 'em goin' right away."

"I don't feel I can last much longer myself," confessed Hugh.

"Sure you can—you an' me's in better shape than the most of 'em. There goes Honkytonk."

A haggard riverpig lurched away from the capstan, dropped on his face and plunged his head in the water. There were only four relief men on the crib, and Booya called in a couple more from the do-mores, but even they were unable to keep the capstan fully manned. Men, after a short rest, staggered back to the bars.

Hugh and Joe kept glancing at one another, each doggedly determined not to give in first. Shortly after noon, Hugh felt a wave of dizziness flooding over him. Stumbling like a drunken man he reached the side of the crib, fell on his knees and began to dash water in his face with his hands.

He heard a groan beside him. "I toughed her long as you did, old-timer," exulted Joe hollowly, and vomited overside.

Slightly refreshed, they dragged themselves back to the capstan, but found that they could only remain at their posts for half an hour at a time, a period that grew steadily shorter. Few of the men who had been drinking heavily could remain even so long, and four or five had to be taken back to camp in a state of collapse. However much water Hugh drank, his mouth remained parched.

"I told you you was crazy to hit the treadmill of damnation," grinned Heck Bigwell in a gallant attempt to joke, and then retched horribly.

There was another welcome break at four, but there were three pitiless hours yet before them. The sun was still strong and the mosquitoes diabolical. Anxiously the crew watched the pitiless sun. With what cruel obstinacy it hung in the sky, circling far to the northward as if it would never set. At last its lower rim touched the treetops. A universal sighing groan of relief went up when Ernie Carpenter's long ululating cry brought their purgatory to a close.

"My God, I never put in such a day in my life," said Hugh. "How in hell long is it going to be like this?"

"Well, this is about the toughest I ever seen it," conceded Joe in his cautious way. "It has been pretty bad, but then there ain't never much fun on this here damned old lake. It'll take us maybe two weeks to get down to the other end, but I don't think it'll ever get much worse'n this."

"Well, if it does, I'm through."

"No, you ain't. You stood her as good as anybody, an' a heap better than the most of 'em. What you want to do is keep your eye on the shirt tail of the feller ahead an' just forget you're alive. I wonder did the fly oil get here—it's the flies on top of the rest that made it hard to stick—I'm near eat alive."

The rest of the crew were yelling for fly oil, too, for if the mosquitoes had been bad on the lake, in the woods they were indescribably vicious and there were more of them. Fortunately, the oil had arrived, looking like thick molasses and smelling to heaven. They smeared their faces, necks, hands and wrists, and ate their supper in comparative peace.

In the morning they smeared themselves again before leaving camp, and took bottles of the stuff with them. It was only efficacious until it began to wear off. As soon as a patch of unprotected skin appeared on a man, some winged fiend plunged his javelin into it.

Hugh did not find the day as a whole so trying as the one previous. A few lazy, white clouds drifted across the sun from time to time and gave a welcome respite. A brisk little breeze sprang up in the early afternoon, cooled the air and drove off the mosquitoes. By keeping his gaze resolutely fixed on the red and black or yellow and green or purple and grey checks on the back of the mackinaw shirt immediately ahead, he was able to avoid dizziness.

COMING back to camp that evening the first man Hugh saw was Poke. He had come up from town by a late team and was suffering from a bad hangover. He gave Hugh a malevolent glare, but apparently did not feel in condition for a fight just then. Joe saw him too.

"I was hopin' that louse'd stay away." he said. "Now you an' him'll have to tangle as soon as he feels in shape—or how about you pickin' on him now an' poundin' the guts out of him?"

"No, I won't start anything until he does," said Hugh. "But I won't back down this time."

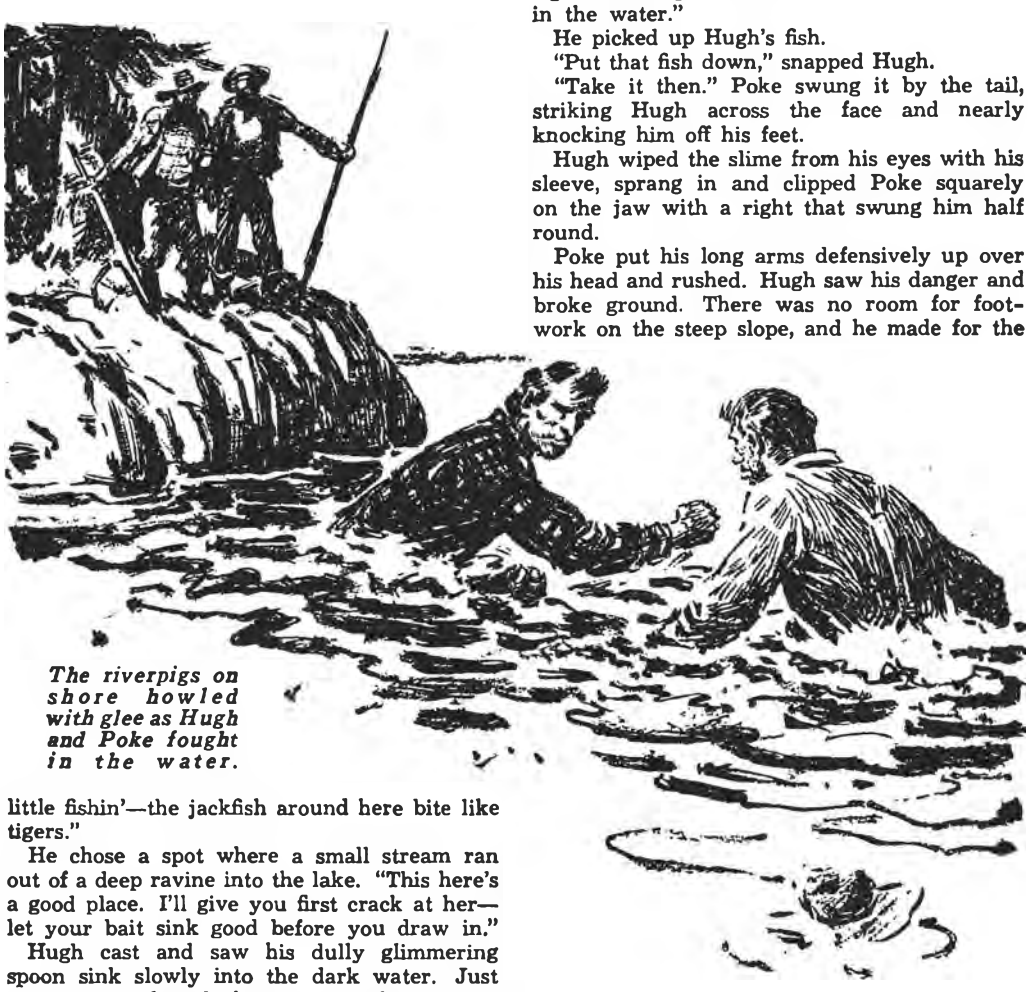
"I guess you have to show," admitted Joe. "It's too bad. Me, I don't believe in fightin' until I know certain sure I can trim the other guy."

Hugh, though by now resigned to the necessity of fighting Poke, was relieved to find that he had been assigned to the other crib. After a day on the capstan no man was in the mood

to fight, and so peace was preserved for the time being.

They had four more days of what Heck Bigwell called walking exercise, and a few of the men, unable to endure the misery of it, called for their time. There was no repining when a strong head wind blew up against which they could make no progress. The cribs were moored, and those not left on guard at the boom were at liberty to do as they chose.

"Come on," said Joe, "I brung a couple of spoonbaits up with me figurin' I might get a little fishin'—the jackfish around here bite like tigers."



The riverpigs on shore howled with glee as Hugh and Poke fought in the water.

He chose a spot where a small stream ran out of a deep ravine into the lake. "This here's a good place. I'll give you first crack at her—let your bait sink good before you draw in."

Hugh cast and saw his dully glimmering spoon sink slowly into the dark water. Just as it was eclipsed there was a furious tug on his line. He planted his heels and tugged. For a moment he thought the line would part, and then he drew ashore a fighting, slashing jackfish a yard long.

"Wow, she's a beaut," whooped Joe. "You mis'r'ble son of a gun. My turn now—see can I beat you." His spoon had barely touched the water when a lean two-pounder snatched it. "To hell with this minnie," he grunted, tossing it back in the water.

It was an hour before the biting slackened, and in that time they had caught twenty-eight fish, most of them under five pounds. These they threw back, retaining only nine that ranged from five up to Hugh's twenty-pounder.

"Well, damn it, here's that swipe Poke comin'," said Joe in disgusted tones.

The bully and three other men came down the bank. "Well, if it ain't that flannel-mouth down-easter," jeered Poke. "Who in hell gave sons like you a license to fish in this here lake? I got a damn good notion to heave 'em all back in the water."

He picked up Hugh's fish.

"Put that fish down," snapped Hugh.

"Take it then." Poke swung it by the tail, striking Hugh across the face and nearly knocking him off his feet.

Hugh wiped the slime from his eyes with his sleeve, sprang in and clipped Poke squarely on the jaw with a right that swung him half round.

Poke put his long arms defensively up over his head and rushed. Hugh saw his danger and broke ground. There was no room for footwork on the steep slope, and he made for the level margin of the lake. Poke followed him.

Hugh's head was quite clear and cool, and he was even happy. The suspense of days had come to an end, and there is, after all, no joy in life to compare wth feeling your blows go home on your enemy and see the blood began to trickle. He closed, lashing out with stabbing lefts that often found an opening in Poke's clumsy guard.

He fought hard but he was not reckless, for

Poke's returns had terrific power behind them. Always he circled to get on his foe's blind side, but Poke knew his own weakness, and it was almost impossible to land a really effective punch on his jaw. Stung again and again, but not yet really hurt, he tried doggedly to get at grips with his lighter, faster opponent.

He landed once with a thump that set Hugh's head ringing, but got a split lip in exchange. Then in a furious exchange, Hugh made a miscalculation and stepped back—into the lake. Poke was on top of him in a flash—had him by the throat and one arm. Hugh flung himself violently backward into deeper water. They struggled breast deep, and then Hugh caught a deep breath and dived, dragging Poke after him.

No more of a swimmer than most riverpigs, the moment Poke felt the water close over his head, he let go his hold and turned shoreward. Hugh bobbed up behind, caught him by the shoulders and tugged. Poke got a big mouthful of water and lashed out wildly with arms and legs. A third time Hugh dragged him under before he fought his way ashore.

The assembled riverpigs howled with glee—so noble a fight was worth going miles to see. Their yells brought others hurrying to the scene.

Poke's struggle in the water had tired him and he had swallowed a lot of water. "Say, if you've had your needin's," he offered, "I'll let you go this time."

"Be damned, you lousy swine," gritted Hugh, and came up out of the water.

"Well, now, don't get excited," answered Poke in a conciliatory tone, his arms hanging loosely at his sides.

Hugh hesitated—he could not hit a man who obviously was making no effort to protect himself. He advanced a step. "Put up your hands or I'll hit you," he warned. "Or else own up you're licked."

They were only a yard apart. Poke suddenly lashed out with his foot. His sharp toe caulks caught Hugh just below the knee, ripping through cloth and flesh to the bone.

That was nearly the end of the fight. With one leg paralyzed, Hugh could only duck out of reach and fling himself back into the lake, where Poke did not dare pursue him.

They faced each other, Poke grinning in savage mockery, and Hugh's face drawn with rage and pain. The riverpigs cursed Poke aloud for a dirty dog, but the rule of the river prevented any interference in an undecided battle.

"Had your medicine, eh?" sneered Poke.

"Not by a damn sight," gritted Hugh, feeling the cool water restore strength to his torn leg.

He began to come ashore, Poke moving to meet him. They fenced a moment at long range, and then Hugh ducked in under his arm and gained the beach. Poke whirled to meet him—a fraction of a second too late. Hugh's ripping left hook caught him at the angle of the jaw. As Poke reeled, Hugh's right clipped him under the ear, and another left hook lifted him almost off his feet. He dropped and lay like a log.

An astounded silence, and then a riverpig said solemnly, "Boy, you got the right to put your mark on him."

Hugh stood nursing a crumpled knuckle and blinking down at his enemy.

"Ain't you goin' to put the boots to him?" inquired the man again.

Hugh shook his head and stepped back. "I guess he's had enough," he said.

HALF-SUPPORTED by an ecstatically happy Joe, and followed by a grinning group, he limped back to camp. Poke, still only half-conscious, was brought in by his friends. The whole camp buzzed with the news.

Booya came privately to Hugh after dark. "Eu, I tell you when I 'ire you I make you toff or I keel you. Now, by gar, you are too damn toff. I do not tell you keel ever'body what you do not like."

"Well, boy, you gone an' done it," said Joe. "Soon as you hit town, every want-to-wasser fightin' man will have to take a poke at you to see how good you are. Boy, you'll have to show."

Creeping day by day along the shores of the lake, at last the huge raft reached the dam at the outfall, and the work of sluicing was begun. The one wholly new experience for Hugh was sore feet and the skin came off between his toes.

"You got scalded feet," explained Joe. "When the water warms up most everybody gets it—they say it's the sand. Best thing you can do is boil up some alder bark like them fellers over there is doin' an' soak your feet in it."

Hugh bathed his feet in the crimson liquid and experienced some relief. The feet of some of the poor wretches were mere lumps of raw flesh, but they limped stoically on about their work. The affliction helped him materially to become a better log rider. He had not cared much whether he was wet or dry, but now he made an earnest effort to keep out of the water, for every time he got his feet wet his boots felt as if they were full of hot coals. By the time the drive was over only a few experts could hope to burl him off a log.

By the time the drive reached the rafting grounds, Hugh had earned several hundred dollars for his summer's work, for he was paid full wages for the last sixty days. With his winter's stake, he felt that he now had enough money to launch him on his homestead.

CHARGE-of-QUARTERS

By JOHN REID BYERS

ACTING Corporal Stephen Knight had swaggered down the company street and into his barracks as became his still very new stripes. But he walked into the cadre room at the head of the barracks stairs treading as delicately as ever did Agag. The lot of a recent recruit who unexpectedly finds himself sharing a small room with two discontented sergeants is not always an easy one.

Private McGee made a sweeping gesture with one big hand. "I was in the last war, I'll have you know," he announced.

Barracks Sergeant Morgan, dressed for company drill, was sitting on his foot locker engaged in the occupational therapy of the old soldier. He was brushing an already gleaming shoe. He looked up at Acting Corporal Knight without affection. "Shake it up and get into

ILLUSTRATED
BY
JAMES SCHUCKER

your fatigues and leggings, Jawbone," he ordered. "And I want to see you get a little snap into that fourth squad today."

Acting Corporal Knight was careful not to smile as he sat down on his cot and shook his head. "No drill for me today, Sergeant," he said. "I'm pulling C. Q. tonight."

Sergeant Morgan gave the shoe in his hand a finishing touch and replaced it in the neat line beneath his bed. "So you are, come to think of it," he admitted. "Well, maybe we can manage to get along without you this afternoon. We'll try. Take good care of the company tonight. And try," he added unkindly, "not to kick reveille around too much in the morning."

Acting Corporal Knight flushed unhappily. His only previous attempt to hold reveille had been marred by a bad attack of stage fright and a voice pitched a couple of octaves too high. Tomorrow would be different. And at reveille tomorrow, he reminded himself, Sergeant Morgan would have to salute Acting Corporal Knight, precisely as he would salute an officer. He turned toward his other roommate. Sergeant Harper sat on the edge of his bed, staring morosely at the letter in his hand. It was a letter from which the shears of some military censor had removed several presumably significant lines. Acting Corporal Knight eyed letter and sergeant with equal respect. "From overseas, Sergeant?" he asked humbly.

Sergeant Harper nodded grimly. "From a guy I went through basic with two years ago, right in this damn camp. We fired for record the same day on the same target. Jim lucked out a hundred 'n' thirty-six; he just barely qualified. And I went crazy and shot a hundred 'n' eighty-three. I was pretty proud of that expert's medal—for a couple of weeks. Then they decided to make a rifle instructor out of me. Jim's a master sergeant with a combat outfit in New Guinea now. And I'm a damn buck, teaching basics to make a loop sling on the simulated rifle range!"

Acting Corporal Knight shook his head sym-

pathetically. "Maybe you'll get out of here yet," he said encouragingly.

Sergeant Harper laughed shortly. "The only way out of the cadre in a training center is to cut your throat," he grunted. "You'll find that out. If the war lasts ten years we'll still be right here, teaching basics to wipe their little noses!"

"Jawbone thinks he knows a way out," Sergeant Morgan observed. Sergeant Morgan was a drill sergeant, with a drill sergeant's acid tongue. "Wonder if he'll still think so this time next year?"

Acting Corporal Knight flushed again. For approximately the hundredth time he wished that he had kept his mouth shut about his plan for getting out of the training cadre, getting overseas service.

"After all, it isn't as if you didn't have something to look forward to here," Sergeant Morgan went on pleasantly. "When you've got in your four months' service you can ask to go before the promotion board. If you remember the names of enough corps areas and commanding generals they'll likely make you a Pfc. That'll be something—Jawbone corporal and Pfc. all in one package! You'll probably break your back trying to turn around fast enough to pull your rank on yourself! Then in another six months you might make real corporal. And by the time you've been here as long as we have—"

The first sergeant's whistle shrilled from the company street and the men in the outer squadroom began to pound down the stairs. Sergeants Morgan and Harper got up, buckled on their gas masks and followed them more slowly.

Alone in the barracks, Acting Corporal Knight sat on his cot and listened to the shouting commands which formed the company and marched it off toward the drill field. It was only a little after four o'clock. The next hour was utterly his own; and unoccupied hours had been rare things in Acting Corporal Knight's life for the last three months. So rare, indeed, that he could think of nothing to do with this one. In the end he opened his foot locker, took out his shoe kit and began absently to improve the luster of his extra pair of GI shoes. He frowned unhappily as he plied dauber, brush and polishing rag. For Sergeant Morgan was very probably right. The hopes he had built on that month-old interview with the colonel had certainly come to nothing yet. In all likelihood he would spend the war right here, explaining the graphic scale, the representative fraction, the military grid and the mysteries of two-point resection to sleepy, uncomprehending basic trainees. Which would, he told himself, be a war grim beyond General Sherman's definition.

Acting Corporal Knight had entered the Army with what he considered a clear understanding of what lay before him. He would take his basic training; would receive a few months more of specialized training; would go out on maneuvers. And then he would march up a transport's gangplank, bound for some distant and presumably exotic foreign port. A little to his own surprise, he had discovered that he was looking forward almost eagerly to what would be one adventurous interlude in a life expressly planned to exclude most realities. For in civilian life Acting Corporal Knight had been a medium-sized, quiet, associate professor of philosophy at a medium-sized, quiet, college which still regarded philosophy as more important than sales engineering.

ACTING Corporal Knight was in excellent health and still under thirty. He neither expected nor desired to stay long at a training center. But when he entered the Army that army was tripling its size practically overnight, and was combing its records desperately for possible instructors to cope with the ever-increasing flood of trainees. Lawyers were at a premium; men with actual teaching experience were pearls beyond price. Three days after he had completed his own basic training, Acting Corporal Knight found himself trying to explain the difference between true, magnetic and grid north to a class of fifty-five openly skeptical basics from Brooklyn and the Bronx.

"You're cadre now," his first sergeant had told him sternly. "That means you got to get on the ball and keep your nose clean and set a good example." He had been issued cadre stars for his shoulder, corporal's chevrons for his sleeves; had learned with unalloyed delight that K. P. was for him a thing of the past, and had been assigned to a bed in Sergeant Morgan's room. For the first day or two he had felt a certain pride at his abrupt promotion. It was Sergeant Morgan who had made it clear that what had happened to him was more in the nature of a penal sentence than a promotion. "Unless you're one of these guys who want to spend a nice safe war right here," he had told him sourly. "Some guys do. I've had 'em ask me how to get into the cadre. What I want to know is how to get out!"

Two weeks of expounding a subject he still did not understand very well himself to groups of weary and bewildered basics had been more than enough to convert him to the sergeant's way of thinking. But his timid inquiries as to how he might get out of his assignment aroused more mirth than sympathy.

"You might try stealing the colonel's dog," the staff sergeant who assigned him his daily classes had told him. "The rest of us have done about everything else. There's a guy down in D. A. C. A. who's had two special courts and done time nights on the hard labor detail.

But he took his regular classes every day. There's another one over in Military Courtesy who's been AWOL three times. He's still cadre, still instructing. Maybe in a couple of years they won't need instructors quite so bad. I don't know. You better just keep thinking about 1948. The war'll have to stop then, they say. That's when we're due to run out of paper!"

The lieutenant in charge of map-reading instruction was no more encouraging. "If I knew any way out of this squirrel cage do you think I'd be here myself?" he had demanded. "I want to see Paris just as much as you do!"

"Sir, suppose I apply for O. C. S.?" Acting Corporal Knight had asked. He had no real desire to assume an officer's responsibility. But if it meant escape . . .

The lieutenant had shrugged. "If they accept you, you'll put in four or five of the toughest months you ever spent. And then, with your background, they'll shove you right back into the training program the minute you get your bars. You used to teach philosophy, didn't you, Knight? Well, just try to take it philosophically. It'll only last another four or five years."

Acting Corporal Knight could remember nothing in Kant or Spinoza which would tend to make those four or five years any pleasanter. Schopenhauer, he reflected wearily, would be his man. But then, as he thought of the grim old German pessimist, the first glimmerings of an idea came to him—an idea which eventually resulted in an interview with his regimental commander and the purchase of a great many beers for the company clerk—but an idea which apparently was going to produce no other results.

With a sigh, Acting Corporal Knight put down his second GI shoe and picked up one of the brown oxfords which were almost his last surviving link with civilian life. When the oxfords gleamed to his satisfaction he washed his hands and crossed to the day room. He sat there smoking gloomily until it was time to walk down to the mess hall, where he ate early chow with the cooks and the K. P.'s. At five-thirty, just as the company was returning from drill, he reported to the orderly room, remembering at the last minute that he now enjoyed the dubious privilege of entering that sanctum without knocking or removing his cap.

First Sergeant Boyle, perspiring slightly, was explaining the source of an error in the morning report to the company commander. The C. O. was young, ambitious and new to the company. He did not seem to regard the first sergeant's explanations with much favor; but eventually he left the orderly room on one of the short tours of the company area which were his specialty. First Sergeant Boyle looked after him darkly. "He'll find something wrong if he has to poke his nose into every furnace room," he observed grimly. "You Basic School guys do a lot of griping, Knight. You ought to have my job!"

The hands of the clock on the wall reached five forty-five. The first sergeant took his whistle from the drawer and stalked morosely away to meet the C. O. at retreat. The company clerk retired to his barracks to shave in preparation for what he hoped would be a memorable evening in town. Acting Corporal Knight seated himself in the first sergeant's chair and leaned back with an air of authority. At night the charge-of-quarters was responsible for running the company, and was endowed with the powers of an acting first sergeant to that end. If the first sergeant stayed in camp he would be either in the orderly room or the barracks, and the C. Q.'s powers remained largely theoretical. But tonight the first sergeant would be off post. He was to meet his wife in town and would not return until reveille. An hour from now Acting Corporal Knight could send his runner for Sergeant Morgan and issue orders to which Sergeant Morgan could make no appeal. Acting Corporal Knight hadn't the faintest intention of doing anything so indiscreet. But it was soothing to feel that you possessed a giant's strength, even if you had no intention of using it like a giant.

Outside the loud-speaker horns on the tall poles were transmitting the playing of the band down at post headquarters. The ceremony of retreat was beginning. Finally silence fell again, and Acting Corporal Knight knew that the company was marching off to chow. A pair of men who had passed up chow in their haste to get to town came into the orderly room to get their passes. The C. O. returned to get his briefcase and eyed Acting Corporal Knight with a hint of disapproval. "I may phone you tonight, Corporal," he warned brusquely. Then he was getting into his car, headed for his home off-post.

Men who had gone to chow began to straggle in to pick up their passes for an evening in town. Acting Corporal Knight had checked off half a dozen on the pass book when First Sergeant Boyle came in. "You can sit over there, Knight," he ordered, jerking his thumb toward a chair in the corner. He took his chair as Acting Corporal Knight got up. "Sure enough he found some dust in the day room," he grumbled. "If I could just get a transfer in grade—" He began to take papers from the table drawer.

"I thought you were going to town tonight, Sergeant," Acting Corporal Knight said. His voice sounded a little hurt. He was, he discovered, definitely disappointed at the apparent curtailment of his authority.

"The old lady couldn't make it. I got a wire this afternoon. Maybe it's just as well, the way

our new general is riding me; I've got some work to catch up here . . . Ever notice how damn military he is, Knight? Ever wonder why? Well, I found out today he was an interior decorator before he went to O. C. S. And if that's not a lace-pants trade!" The first sergeant himself, Acting Corporal Knight knew, had been a bartender. Bartenders, he had noticed, seemed to do very well in the Army. The reasons for this had so far eluded him. But First Sergeant Boyle, he was sure, must have been a most efficient bartender.

IN addition to catching up on his neglected paper work, Boyle was now easily contriving to issue passes, warn known black sheep to watch their behavior in town, answer the telephone and dispatch the runner on an endless succession of errands to the barracks. Two barracks sergeants were summoned to the orderly room to be told just what and how many things the C. O. had found wrong with their respective barracks during one of his tours of inspection. The mail clerk learned about the dust found in the day room. A number of trainees who had fallen into any of the thousand errors to which trainees are prone were dealt with at judicial length and with unjudicial vigor. The mess sergeant appeared to complain that the K. P.'s had been ten minutes late again that morning. The battalion sergeant-major dropped in for a purely social call and exchanged more or less genial insults with First Sergeant Boyle. The administrative lieutenant, slightly in liquor, decorated the orderly room briefly with his presence. And Acting Corporal Knight sat quietly in his corner, doing nothing at all, speaking only when spoken to.

At eight-thirty, the first sergeant warned him that he had better be getting the K. P. signs out. Acting Corporal Knight made a penciled list of the names of the next day's K. P.s, counted out seven of the cardboard signs and toured the barracks hanging them on the beds of the men he was to rouse at a quarter to five. At nine o'clock he left the orderly room again to make sure that the barracks lights were out. When he returned to his seat in the corner the first sergeant was engaged in a losing telephone argument with the regimental sergeant-major as to the number of men the company should in fairness and justice be required to furnish for this week's regimental detail. Fairness and justice seemed to mean little to the regimental sergeant-major. First Sergeant Boyle put down the phone and addressed himself profanely to the construction of the next day's morning report. At a quarter to ten he put his papers away, yawned widely and got to his feet. "I'll be in my room if there's anything you can't handle," he told Acting Corporal Knight. "Be sure you get those K. P.s up on the dot in the morning. And don't forget the C. O. don't sleep so good!"

Once more seated in the first sergeant's chair, Acting Corporal Knight took a blank sheet of paper, headed it "C. Q.'s Report" in neat G I printing and added his name, his rank and the date. Below he noted that at hours 2145 he had taken over the company from First Sergeant Boyle. Then he leaned back in his chair and waited hopefully for material for another notation. Men coming back from town began to enter the orderly room to return their passes. The runner, dozing in his chair, began to snore softly. At a quarter past ten the phone rang and the battalion C. Q. said, "Your distribution's ready," in a bored voice. He trotted up the street to battalion headquarters, then hoofed it back with a sheaf of papers intended for the company and learned with relief that the phone had not rung during his absence. He sat down and sorted out the papers he had brought back.

There were two sealed official communications for the C. O., a dozen week-end passes signed by the regimental adjutant, a bundle of blank forms for future passes, two magazines, a mimeographed copy of *The War at a Glance*, half-a-dozen War Bond posters, and the thick, tightly-stapled bundle of sheets that held the day's production of headquarters and regimental orders. Viewing this last, Acting Corporal Knight permitted himself an instant of doubt as to whether the paper supply would really last until 1948. But he began to turn the pages of the day's orders slowly. Sometimes, intentionally or otherwise, these were humorous; as in the case of the one from the Eighth Regiment which had forbidden the placing of any more wax on the day room floors.

More men straggled in from town. Some of them, he decided, in the condition which the Irish describe as "not drunk, but having drink taken." At ten minutes to eleven he thumbed through the pass book and made a list of the men who were still out. There were seven of them, but three of these reached the orderly room breathless at two minutes to eleven. With a sigh he discovered that one of the remaining names was that of a man also on his K. P. list. At eleven o'clock he picked up the orderly room flashlight—a flashlight so completely GI that ordinary bulbs would not fit it—and set off to make bed check. "If the phone rings, answer it," he ordered the sleepy runner. "But don't forget that you always talk over an Army phone as if you were talking to an officer. You 'sir' everybody."

The day room was already empty. Acting Corporal Knight turned off the lights, wondered how the poker game had come out tonight and headed for the barracks that housed the first platoon. He spent the next ten minutes prowling up and down the ranks of beds in the crowded, dark squad rooms of the four bar-

racks, pausing to jot down the names on the cards at the foot of the unoccupied beds. He returned to the orderly room with five names on his scribbled list. Once more he was happy to hear that there had been no phone calls. Four of the names on the scrap of paper in his hand corresponded with those on the list of passes still out. The other one— He shook his head. And then a thought came to him. "Runner, what's your name?" he asked.

The runner's drowsy head jerked up. "Higginbotham, Corporal."

A little sheepishly, Acting Corporal Knight crossed that fifth name off his list. "All right, Higginbotham," he said. "You can turn in now." When the runner had left he picked up the telephone and gave the number of battalion headquarters. "This is Company A, sir," he said crisply. "Absent from bed check tonight, Privates . . ." When he had finished spelling the names, the battalion C. Q. yawned audibly. "Thanks," he said. "Now if Company C will just check in I can stretch out and get a little sleep."

Acting Corporal Knight smiled wryly as he put down the phone. There was a cot for the C. Q. at battalion headquarters. There had been a day when a cot had stood in the corner of the C. O.'s office, and the company C. Q. had been privileged to catch what sleep he could there between bed check and four-thirty. But the new C. O. suffered from insomnia as well as ambition, and was given to assuaging the first ailment by phoning his company during the small hours of the morning. Any C. Q. who did not answer instantly found himself restricted to the company area for the next week. The cot had been removed to the storeroom now, and the C. Q. dozed fitfully with one elbow close to the telephone. "And I'll probably draw six classes tomorrow!" Acting Corporal Knight told himself gloomily.

He was still printing the names of the men absent at bed check on his report when a truck grated to a stop outside and an M. P. opened the orderly room door. "We got something here for you," he announced. "Bring him in, Jake." Jake appeared, propelling a tall, gray-haired man whom Acting Corporal Knight identified as the Private John X. McGee whom he had just reported absent. Private McGee had obviously been drinking; but he managed to carry himself now with the dignity of a descendant of Irish kings, and his face was that of a martyr who dies willingly in a good cause. "Just ask them why I'm dragged in here like this, Corporal!" he demanded as he shook off Jake's hand and drew himself erect. "Just you ask them!"

The first M. P. was grinning a little now. "It's complicated," he admitted. "An' just how the Argonne gets into this I don't remember. But this soldier was in town with a little load aboard, an' he runs into this colonel of nurses —the head nurse down at the base hospital, I mean—an' he fails to salute. She stops him an' chews on him a little, but he still won't salute. So she calls the M. P.'s. An' here he is, an' I want a receipt for him."

Private McGee made a sweeping gesture with one big hand. "I was in the last war, I'll have y'know," he announced. "I was in the Argonne, I was at Coblenz, I was at Paris. Sure, I was at lots of places all over France. And never once did I salute a nurse! And why should I be salutin' one now?"

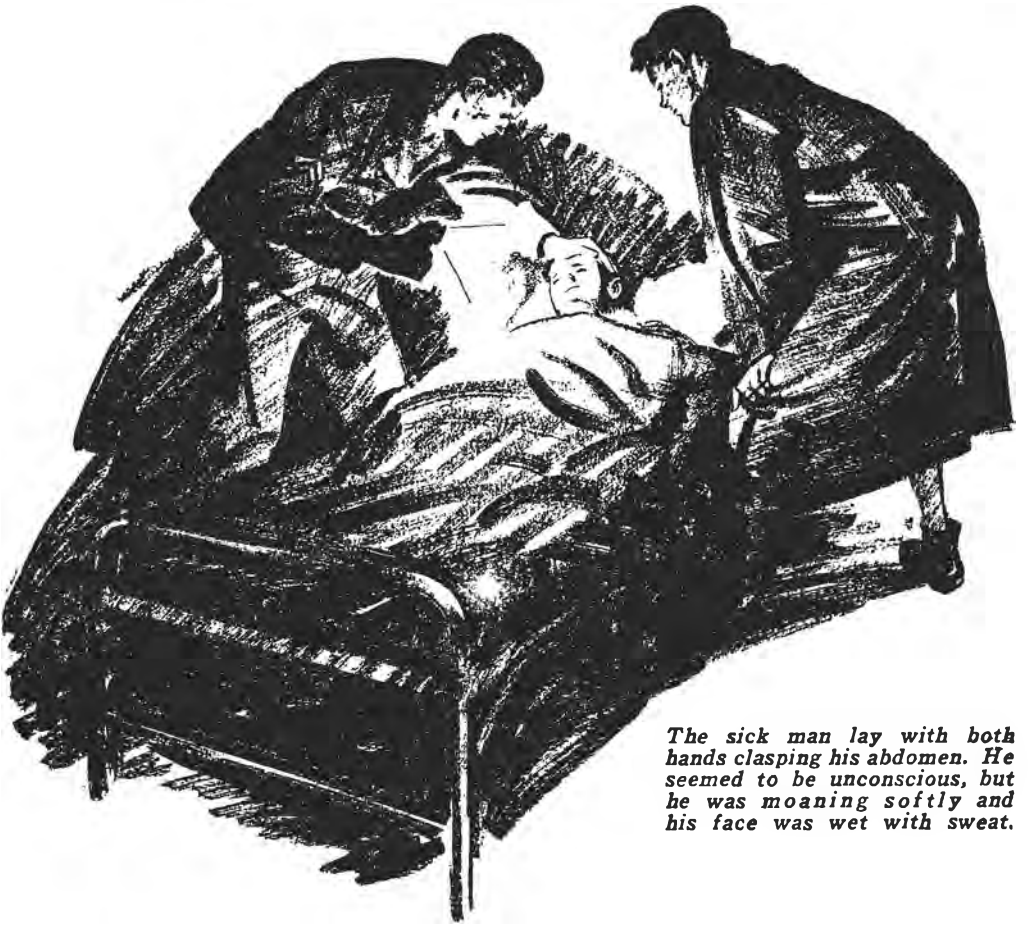
Acting Corporal Knight eyed him with a certain degree of sympathy. The problem of whether or not an Army nurse rated a salute was at the time still a baffling puzzle to the Military Courtesy section of Basic School. A definite ruling from somewhere on high was expected but had not yet been received. He had saluted a nurse or two himself on the when-in-doubt-salute principle, and had found himself more than repaid by the girlish enthusiasm with which his salutes had been returned. But Private McGee could very well be in the right. "Do you think there'll be any charges?" he asked the M. P.

The M. P. shrugged. "The provost marshal's just as much up in the air about this nurse deal as anybody else," he admitted. "Unless the old girl—I mean the colonel!—makes a formal complaint maybe nothin'll come of it. But I want a receipt for him just the same."

Acting Corporal Knight scribbled a receipt for the body of Private John X. McGee. "You better get to bed, McGee," he told the still carefully dignified private as the M. P.'s truck pulled away. "I'll have to turn in a report on this to the C. O. But he'll do his best for you." For if the C. O.'s recent O. C. S. training had instilled in him the idea that it was his duty to ride his company with quirt and spurs, it had also imbued him with the theory that he should stop at nothing to protect any member of that company from outside aggression.

Private McGee was swaying a little on his feet now. He paused in the doorway to grin back at Acting Corporal Knight. "Corporal," he confided owlishly, "I might salute that old biddy the next time I see her, woman or no. Not on account of the eagles she's wearin', but jes' to show me respect for the wonderful way she talked to me. Sure, she ate me out jus' like a man!"

ACTING Corporal Knight brought his report up to the minute, shaking his head forebodingly as he discovered that he had failed to get the name of the colonel of nurses. He would undoubtedly hear about that omission. Putting the report aside, he took another sheet of paper. Tonight would be a good time to catch up with some of his correspondence. He wrote a long letter to a friend



The sick man lay with both hands clasping his abdomen. He seemed to be unconscious, but he was moaning softly and his face was wet with sweat.

in another branch of the service and two short ones to civilian friends. After all, you had to write letters of you wanted to get them; but it was growing harder week by week to write to civilians. They couldn't possibly understand your new, utterly changed life, and their accounts of your old world were becoming strangely unimportant to you. It was, he found himself reflecting, almost as if you had withdrawn into another dimension, where the cubes were merely squares, the cones only circles.

He had sealed the third letter when he heard running feet coming along the graveled path from the barracks. A white-faced boy with a raincoat over his underwear burst through the door without knocking. "Corp'ral, the ol' boy next to me's powerful sick!" he panted. "He's had a bellyache all day, an' now he's groanin' an' kind of out of his head!"

Acting Corporal Knight picked up the flashlight and trotted dutifully after the frightened boy in the raincoat. The sick man lay with both hands clasping his abdomen. He seemed to be unconscious, but he was moaning softly and his face was wet with sweat. Acting Corporal Knight leaned over and prodded the right side of his abdomen with an uncertain finger. The man on the bed flinched and groaned more loudly.

Acting Corporal Knight double-timed back to the orderly room and phoned the base hospital. "Very well, sir, we'll send an ambulance," a sleepy non-com told him. When the ambulance arrived, Acting Corporal Knight went with its crew to the barracks and helped load the unconscious man on the stretcher, remembering at the last possible moment to check his dogtag for his name.

He double-timed to the orderly room once more. The phone was ringing wildly. With a sinking heart, Acting Corporal Knight picked it up. "Company A of the Thirty-second, sir," he said breathlessly. "Corporal Knight, charge-of-quarters."

The C. O.'s voice rasped sharply in his ear. "Where have you been for the last six minutes, Corporal?" he demanded.

Still a little breathlessly, Acting Corporal Knight tried to explain about the sick man and the ambulance. "I'll check on that in the

morning," the C. O. snapped. "How many men missed bed check?"

Acting Corporal Knight told him. Obviously in a mood that presaged a bad day for the company, the C. O. hung up. Acting Corporal Knight added the incident of the ambulance call to his report sheet and leaned back with a weary sigh. It was one o'clock, and the alarm was set for four-thirty. But pehaps he could doze with his head on the desk for an hour or two now. He settled himself in a remote approximation of comfort and closed his eyes. Thirty seconds later he opened them and raised his head at a timid knock upon the door. "Come in!" he barked sourly.

A pair of nervous twenty-year-olds sidled through the door and laid their passes in front of him. "Honest, Corporal, we'd have been back by bed check," one of them assured him, "but we got on the wrong bus an' they put us off over in the Third Regiment somewhere. We been walkin' ever since. We got lost twice. Do—do you think they'll do anythin' to us?"

Acting Corporal Knight yawned as he picked up the passes. "They probably won't shoot you," he predicted. "But you won't be using these for a couple of weeks."

Alone once more, he added the incident to his report. That meant that only one man was still out. And he would probably be gone for a week; he had done it before. The missing man lived in the foothills only fifty miles from camp. Contemplating that fact, Acting Corporal Knight began to understand the Army's obvious desire to station as many men as possible as far from their homes as possible. But the missing man was the one on his K. P. list. "That means I've got to make a K. P.," he told himself. One of the boys who had just left would do. He put a red cross against the name of the missing man on the K. P. list for his four-thirty guidance and once more composed himself to doubtful slumbers. But an owl bus had just gone by, and feet were coming from the bus stop toward the orderly room. He sat up and tried to manage a welcoming smile as the company clerk entered. Non-coms did not have to turn in their passes, but they usually dropped in to pass the time of morning with the C. Q.

The company clerk had clearly been disappointed in town. "And to think I shaved for that babe!" he told Acting Corporal Knight. He shook his head mournfully as he rested his elbows on the railing. He eyed Acting Corporal Knight thoughtfully for a minute before he spoke again. "It don't look as if you're going to hear anything from that application we fixed up," he observed.

Acting Corporal Knight shook his head. "I've just about stopped sweating it out," he agreed.

"Well, that's life in the cadre," the company clerk said musingly. "Say, do you know what

The company clerk had clearly been disappointed in town. "To think I shaved for that babe!"

that word means? It's French, and I looked it up in the French dictionary at the Service Club. It really means 'frame'. And are we framed! . . . I used to try to get out of here, too," he went on reminiscently. "I put in for O. C. S. and for air cadet, and when I got turned down I tried for paratrooper, but I couldn't pass the physical. But when you've been here a year it don't bother you so much. You still gripe, but it don't come from the heart. Just the same, you had a good idea," he admitted as he opened the door. "You'd think G-2 would be looking for guys who know German. . . Well, I'm for bed. And if I ever go to the trouble of shaving for another blind date—"

It had seemed a very good idea to Acting Corporal Knight six weeks ago. His academic knowledge of German was excellent; his colloquial use of that intricate language could be easily improved. And now—it seemed obvious—Military Intelligence would need interpreters to interview prisoners and for a score of other purposes. He had pursued his idea in a G I manner, through channels. His first sergeant had been dubious, but had admitted him to the presence of the old C. O. The C. O. had pursed his lips skeptically, but had authorized him to see the battalion commander. The battalion commander had shaken his head, but had given him permission to talk to the colonel. The white-haired colonel

"Corporal, I got an awful earache," the trainee was saying.

had shrugged his shoulders. "This is a tough place to get out of, Corporal," he had said. "Still, you've got a good point of attack. Put in your application; I'll send it on with a favorable endorsement." The colonel's faded blue eyes had been wistful for an instant then. "And if it should happen to work, if you ever do get across, try and get down to Nice and Monte Carlo while you're there. I saw them in 1919."

The rest of it had been merely a matter of finding out where and in what form to apply, securing letters of recommendation from former collegiate associates and persuading the company clerk to do the necessary typing. The application, he knew, had gone through the colonel's hands a month ago. But since then there had been nothing but a long and increasingly sticky silence. Acting Corporal Knight sighed, shook his head and looked at the clock. It said one forty-five now. He shook his head again and pillowed it on his arms. Almost instantly he was asleep.

Vaguely he realized that somewhere somebody was knocking on a door, and that the door was opening and closing. "Corporal!" a voice was saying. It was a very plaintive voice. "Corporal!" it repeated more loudly. Acting Corporal Knight sat up and rubbed his eyes. The clock, he saw, now read two-fifteen. And another big-eyed, youthful trainee, clad in unlaced shoes, underwear and raincoat was leaning on the railing, fixing him with mournful eyes. "Corporal, I got a awful earache," the trainee was saying. "I just can't stand it no more." Acting Corporal Knight fought back the soft, clutching arms of sleep and tried to consider his new problem. He had not had an earache since childhood and hadn't the faintest idea what to do for one. Certainly it was not another ambulance case, but he could think of nothing to do except call the base hospital again.

A sleepy-voiced man at the other end of the line listened to his story. "Take him up to your battalion infirmary," he directed at last. "There's a couple of guys who sleep there. They'll take care of it." Acting Corporal Knight noted drowsily that neither he nor the other man had bothered to say "sir" at this hour.

The medics at the battalion infirmary woke reluctantly. But eventually one of them rose and, apparently still two-thirds asleep, injected a few drops of sweet oil into the sufferer's ear and issued him a pair of outsize G I aspirins. "Fill his canteen with hot water, wrap it in a towel, and put it against his ear," Acting Corporal Knight was directed. "If he isn't better by morning put him on the sick book and send him back."

Acting Corporal Knight escorted his patient back to his bed, extracted his canteen from a barracks bag and filled it with steaming water in the latrine. "Just an acting corporal with a lamp," he told himself mirthfully as he walked back toward the orderly room. His gait quickened to a run when he came within earshot of its door. The telephone was ringing peevishly.

"Corporal, I have been trying to wake you for exactly nine and one-half minutes," his commanding officer told him coldly. "What have you to say for yourself?"

Acting Corporal Knight recounted the incident of the trainee's earache. It did not sound like a very profitable story even to him; he was not surprised that the C. O. was waspishly skeptical. "Isn't it rather extraordinary, Corporal, that whenever I phone you, you claim

to have been tending the sick somewhere?" he demanded. "I shall check on your story in the morning, rest assured!"

Acting Corporal Knight had not intended to include the earache in his report. Obviously it was not expedient to do so. That, in turn, made it necessary to take the flashlight, go back to the third barracks and secure the name of his patient, who was now, he saw, sleeping soundly. When he had brought his report to the hour and minute he looked at the clock. It said two forty-three. Acting Corporal Knight put his head on his arms again.

Someone was shaking his shoulder. Acting Cororal Knight sat up. "What's the idea?" he mumbled in sleepy indignation. The man beside him drew back. He was, Acting Corporal Knight now saw, the night fireman. "I couldn't wake you up yellin', Corporal," he was saying apologetically. "But I went into the day room to sit down for a while, an' there's a guy passed out on the couch with an empty bottle 'longside him. I thought I ought to report it."

Acting Corporal Knight saw that the clock was registering three-twenty as he pulled himself to his feet and followed his informant. He snapped on the day room light and eyed the man who lay stretched on the battered sofa with a bitterness that increased with recognition. The man was Private John X. McGee.

Acting Corporal Knight stalked grimly into the day room lavatory and returned with a glass of cold water. He dashed the water vengefully in Private McGee's face. McGee staggered to his feet, protesting loudly. "At ease!" snarled Acting Corporal Knight in a voice that Sergeant Morgan might have envied. "I'm not reporting this, McGee. You've got enough to worry about as it is. But you can sweat out your hangover on K. P. today! And now I'm going to see that you get to your own bed!" But as he supported the unsteady McGee to the door his curiosity overcame him. "How in hell did you hide that bottle from the M. P.s?" he asked.

McGee gave a crowing little laugh. "Sure, Corporal, and don't you know that trick? You just slide the pint down your leg inside your drawers!"

Back in the orderly room, Acting Corporal Knight did not even remember lowering his head to his arms. But the strident clamor of the alarm brought him to his feet at four-thirty. In the C. O.'s lavatory he splashed cold water on his face and wiped it off with a paper towel. It was still pitch dark outside. He opened the orderly room door and stood in the doorway while he smoked a cigarette. Maybe, he told himself hopefully, he would draw only three or four classes today, and would have a chance to take a nap in the school supply room. When the cigarette was finished it was twenty minutes to five. Acting Corporal Knight took the flashlight and the K. P. list and began his tour of the still sleeping barracks. He roused the unhappy K. P.'s with vindictive pleasure.

At five-fifteen he checked up on the K. P.'s at the mess hall. All of them were there—even Private John X. McGee, already assigned to the pot sink and looking very sorry for himself. The mess sergeant beamed at Acting Corporal Knight. "Everything fine this morning, Corporal!" he said. "Have a cuppa coffee!" Acting Corporal Knight had two cups of G I coffee and a piece of cake left over from the night before. And then it was five-thirty and time to wake the rest of the company. He hurried through squad rooms and cadre rooms, turning on lights, watching sleepy men hit the floor. He smiled as he made his unpopular rounds, and did not forget to tell Barracks Sergeant Morgan that Private Brunson had taken off again.

Back in the orderly room, he sat down, lit another cigarette and picked up the mimeographed two pages of *The War at a Glance* which he had neglected the night before. As he scanned the terse resumé of the previous day's action in the various theaters of war it occurred to him, suddenly and a little puzzlingly, that the actual progress of the war seemed less important to him now that he was a part of it than it had been when he was still a civilian. Then it had been something to watch, to study, to discuss and worry about. Now it was something that you rarely talked about, never worried about; something you took for granted.

It was twelve minutes to six now. In another six or seven minutes he would be leaving the orderly room to hold reveille. He opened the table drawer and took out the brass whistle. The long night did not seem to matter now. Even when standing in ranks as a basic, Acting Corporal Knight had found that there was something obscurely and elementally thrilling about the Army ceremonies of reveille and retreat. And when you stood out in front of the company, when you blew the whistle and watched the men boil out of the barracks doors in response. . .

Acting Corporal Knight's only previous attempt to hold reveille had not been wholly happy, but that strange inexplicable thrill had been there just the same. And this time would be different. He began to rehearse in his mind the things he had to do.

He would leave the orderly room at five minutes to six, would walk to his post across the ditch that bordered the company street, would take his stand directly opposite the firebreak between the second and third barracks. He would sound a long, imperative blast on the whistle; would stand motionless watching the men trotting down the barracks stairs, watching the platoon sergeants form their ranks and call the platoon rolls. He would wait, would make the company wait, until the big horns

began to blast out the bars of assembly. He would snap to attention himself then, and during that brief pause in the music his voice—pitched exactly right this time—would roll out a deep-chested, "Compan-n-e-e-e—'Tenshun!" He would hold the company at attention while the horns broadcast the remaining bars of the call. Then he would command, "Report!" And then, one by one, the barracks sergeants would salute him as they reported their platoons.

Sergeant Morgan would have to say, "Second platoon— Private Brunson absent!" He would return their salutes gravely. Then he would execute a perfect about-face and report the company to the lieutenant whose turn it was to take reveille. The clock said six minutes to six now. Acting Corporal Knight smiled happily as he got to his feet with the whistle in his hand. The fatigue of the night, the weariness he had felt half an hour ago had vanished now.

The orderly room door opened suddenly. First Sergeant Boyle walked in. "Well, Knight, how'd it go?" he asked. And without waiting for a reply, "I had a *swell* night's sleep!" He was reaching for the whistle; was taking it from Acting Corporal Knight's fingers. "I'll take reveille myself this morning. You stick here till I get back from chow."

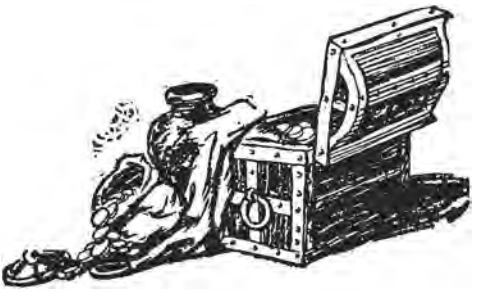
Acting Corporal Knight sank back into his chair as the door closed behind the first sergeant. He was tired again now; he was more tired than he would have believed possible. And he was dully sure that he would draw six classes, all of them dumb. He sat staring wearily at the wall while the first sergeant's whistle shrilled, the big horns blared and were silent, and the company marched off to chow. He was grateful now for those cups of coffee, for the piece of stale cake. His chances of getting anything to eat when the hungry ravages of the company were over were so negligible as to be non-existent.

His eyes dropped dully to the table, and he remembered something he had left undone during the night hours. The first sergeant liked to have the C. Q. go through the day's orders and mark those which applied to Company A of the Thirty-second Battalion. Acting Corporal Knight picked up a red pencil and began to run through the tightly-stapled pages in front of him. He bracketed the scheduled transfer of an enlisted man to another company and smiled thinly at the man's name. It was the absent Private Brunson. He discovered with real pleasure and marked heavily an order promoting the company commander from first lieutenant to captain. "Maybe now he'll stop bucking so hard," he thought. And then, as he turned another page the pencil dropped from his lax fingers. He read the two lines three times, disbelievingly, but they still announced that A/C Stephen R. Knight, A-32, was relieved from duty with Basic School and ordered to report to Enlisted Interpreters School (Military Intelligence) at Fort Benning.

It meant that his travel orders would probably come through in the next batch of distribution. It meant that he wouldn't have to take his classes today. It meant escape. It meant . . .

Acting Corporal Knight grinned fixedly at nothing at all. "Paris, here I come!" he whispered blissfully.

SIGNS of TREASURE



A Fact Feature

By

BARRY STORM

SIGNS of treasure—those intriguing crosses, sunbursts, muleshoes, daggers and other singular marks which always adorn lost-mine maps or buried-treasure charts or which sometimes are found cut into rocks and trees—were meant to be just as enigmatic as they usually are. Even when the key to a proper interpretation of these cabalistic symbols may hang upon the inclination of an arrow or the addition of a dot to a sunburst, however, the logic of their usage may be reasoned out by the careful treasure hunter.

In fact, when the particular circumstances involved in the original creation of such signs are considered, it will be seen that both usage and meaning alike become startlingly similar, even though centuries in time and oceans of space may have separated individual occurrences. Thus arrows, those universal indicators of direction, whether used by wealthy Moors in Africa or by Spanish adventurers or American frontiersmen in our own West, have identical purposes in pointing the way to hidden wealth. Normally flying horizontal, an arrow could hardly mean anything but "travel on toward treasure." If inclined upward, unless pointing to something of importance, its meaning would be much the same with the probable addition of "other signs further on." And when pointing downward into the ground the same arrow is unmistakably saying, "dig for treasure here." But if uncommon pains are taken to add feathers to the shaft, *for the purpose of a particular and secret meaning,* and since the only other meaning which could be logically given a pointer is that of a reversal of the obvious direction pointed out, then the feathered shaft would be fairly screaming to the deductive-minded, "reverse directions for you are traveling *away* from treasure."

Sometimes these signs of treasure are individually conceived like the frontiersman's bowie knife pointing toward his hidden cache or the crossed picks marked by the prospector to record the rich mineral vein over which he has just stumbled. And yet the similarity of circumstance lends a definite standardization to the symbols used. Other markings which occur more often to those recording the locations of mine or treasure are, as might be expected, even still more universally used and understood. One is the simple cross cut into anything handy to designate an important landmark or treasure trail and its variations in which a longer arm becomes a pointer. Another is the sun symbol with radiating rays which from time immemorial has indicated nearby mineral wealth to all peoples of all climes.

This common significance of treasure signs is particularly true if the map depicting them is of Spanish origin or if such symbols are found in territory over which Spanish-Mexican adventurers once roamed. And this includes all of the Southwest and most of the middle and far western states as well. For one thing it was the Spaniards who were there first and who most often found—and most often had occasion to hide or abandon—the fabulous treasure troves and bonanza mines which are legendary everywhere in the West today. Nor was human nature much different then, for Don Pedro Pino reported from Sante Fe to the Spanish congress at Cadiz in 1812 that, "In this province mines have been found closed, some of them with work tools inside, but it is not known at what time they were discovered and worked." So apparently the Spanish king never knew about or ever collected his royal fifth of much of the wealth discovered in a new world.

Many of the miner's signs, which invariably accompany such Spanish-found mineral wealth which later was abandoned for various reasons having nothing to do with an exhaustion of ore, are of Moorish origin in Africa or Spain and consequently had long since gained a standard significance which was further augmented by still more centuries of usage among explorers, miners, pirates and adventurers who all had ample reason for using them. Sometimes native Indian signs were adopted like the double or triple-ringed Aztec sunburst for indicating mines or nearby mineral. Yet all of these signs were used under similar circumstances and for identical purposes and so a definite meaning became attached to them

as to the others. For instance, such variants of the treasure cross developed as that used by adventurers with a longer arm pointing the direction, or that used by explorer-priests with a long arm pointing down to the burial site of church treasures or rich artifacts. Many marked their locations by tree blazes or piles of stones at the three corners of a triangle which enclosed their treasure or mine. Others made this triangle marking to the side of the actual site of their treasure or mine when it became obvious that the triangle would be too easily understood by anyone who chanced upon it. They indicated this variation upon their charts by a locator dot showing the true site. Still others extended one line of the triangle as the true indicator or used circles instead.

In most cases these signs of treasure are symbolical representations of things used or encountered and were therefore easily understood by other men in like circumstances however ambiguous they may appear today. Thus, instead of actually using a valuable muleshoe to mark out a treasure trail or the location of mineral wealth, its symbol, **U**, was cut into a nearby rock with the toe pointing out the direction of travel, or downward to the actual location itself and no one could mistake that it meant to "travel on" or "dig here" as the case might be. And the square or oblong box, symbolizing the chest or container in which treasure would be normally buried, could hardly mean anything but a marking of the actual site of treasure. Again, when mines had to be abandoned because of Indian raids or an exhaustion of provisions, the universal sun symbol for "nearby mineral wealth" with a conspicuous dot or extra circle added to its center would mean nothing but "here is the mineral wealth" or "the mineral wealth is below." And ladders or stairs drawn near it obviously add "in a tunnel or shaft nearby."

When these symbols are properly interpreted in view of the particular circumstances involved at the time they were made, they are found to do either one or both of two things. More commonly they locate the near vicinity in which buried treasure or lost mine has been left so that the original discoverer, acquainted with the intimate details of topography and location, may easily trace his way back without confusion by thus having his memory refreshed at the proper turns, canyon junctions and other landmarks along the way. Less often, and particularly where a trail of such signs may be followed for miles across deserts and mountains, the symbols at last, when read in proper sequence, give exact and explicit instructions for relocating the actual sites of treasure or mine, and even a total stranger in strange terrain may arrive back at the original point of location. However, there are sometimes near this point two conflicting sets of signs, only one of which gives the true location, to insure that anyone who chanced upon the trail to treasure would find himself baffled unless he had the map or other memoranda which the original discoverer had intended to supply only to those whom he wanted to refind his treasure or mine. Usually the true signs of location were marked upon a map identifying the proper region and in the same relative positions as the duplicates left upon the ground.

Signs of treasure found upon the ground usually accompany maps which serve first to locate the proper region. Often this is accomplished by triangulation from two or more prominent landmarks which are outlined upon the map in crude but recognizable detail, so that by traveling around the dominant one until its general shape matches, and then toward it until both shapes match that shown from a common point, the exact site is refound from which the map had been originally drawn. More often the locator map is merely a rough sketch of an outstanding landmark which dominates the region involved because of its height, size or shape. But since no peak or mountain will look the same from all sides, the treasure trailer has only to locate this dominant point and then work around it until its shape becomes recognizable with that mapped, lastly traveling toward it until duplication of shape discloses the point from which the map had been drawn. In both cases the duplicates of treasure signs shown upon the map may be approximately located upon the ground by holding the map to the landmarks shown so that the relative actual positions of accompanying signs can be spotted.

IN THE Spanish-explored Americas, which included a large part of the West, many *antigua* mines and hidden treasures have been refound through the cabalistic symbols indicating their locations. Often the Spanish word for gold, *ORO*, had been plainly cut into a nearby rock and its meaning could only have been "gold is nearby." Often, also, snakes replaced arrows but with much the same meanings since the purpose was identical. A snake crawling down a rock would obviously mean "treasure is here." If crawling up with head pointed at the sky, it would as obviously be saying, "the treasure is on the *opposite* or *other* side of this rock or tree." When coiled, the same snake is all too plainly proclaiming, "here is the treasure!" Thus the meanings of symbols used have been found to be the same when used for an identical purpose no matter whether arrow, snake or dagger, and whether used as marks upon the ground or as marks upon a chart. Yet many of the present owners

of these charts who have inherited them from pioneer ancestors or otherwise obtained them, have been unable to capitalize upon the knowledge they contain, not because of insufficient evidence of the actual existence of mine or treasure within a localized region, but simply because directions thus symbolically given are not detailed enough or the owner is not experienced enough to interpret properly or follow accurately those directions given.

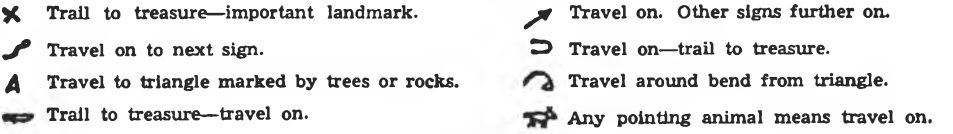
This latter is indeed an easily understood reason why even well-authenticated treasure charts have often proved valueless, and why so many of the lost mines and buried fortunes searched for have not been relocated from *antigua* maps or markings found in the suspected region. Instead, in enough instances to verify the probable value of signs of treasure, rediscovery has sometimes later been made because of public attention attracted to the area involved by the first unsuccessful hunt which caused a subsequent thorough search by others who were luckier.

Often, too, the signs which marked a particularly important point along the treasure trail, were actually shadow, reflection or projected light symbols which did not appear except at a certain time of day and season known only to those who had a legitimate reason for following the trail. This was particularly true of large parties exploiting a group of mines in virgin territory into which they did not wish to attract others. Many such signs have been seen by Westerners shining like an inlay into a hillside or cliff or like a black shadow which presently vanishes. They are seldom refound because the discoverer is not again at the right point at the right time from which they become visible.

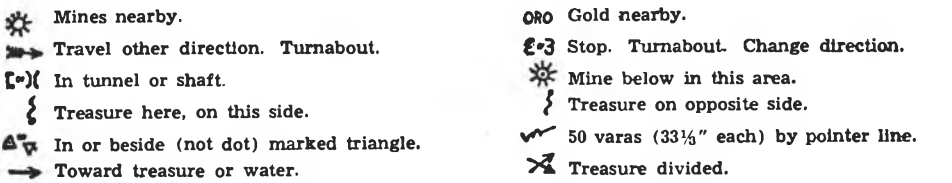
The most common of these ghost symbols were created by piling up a jumble of rocks in such a manner that the shadow cast was at the time of day indicated in the sign shape desired. At any other time the shadow would be unrecognizable. Again, a smooth-surfaced rock or rocks were placed along the line of travel so that the sun striking them during a certain brief period of the day would be reflected onto a nearby cliff-face or hillside in the shape wanted. Less often a hole was cut or stone piled up upon a ridgetop so that the sun shining through for a few minutes would, at the appointed time, project the sign shape like a powerful spotlight upon an opposite canyonside or slope. In all cases the position of the sun is the controlling factor in the creation of such light or shadow signs and *both* the time of day and season of year must be known in order to find these phantom markers at the right points along a trail of treasure.

Of all the symbols used there are some forty-odd which seem to occur to the minds of treasure hiders of no matter what race or clime with an astonishing regularity so that, in spite of individual variations or added decorations to the basic designs, their meanings and purposes can always be recognized. The basic symbols roughly divide into traveling signs, direction signs or more localized pointers, and the location signs actually disclosing the sites of the mine or treasure involved. Often some of one type are used with those of another type to make up a complete sequence of directions, and all types are illustrated below.

TRAVELING SIGNS



DIRECTION SIGNS



LOCATION SIGNS

THE TRAIL AHEAD

No matter when the war or what the weapon—1620 with an arquebus—Revolution or War of 1812, flintlock at shoulder—cap-and-ball defending the Alamo—or Sharps in the '60's—the breed goes on. Next month in a glorious new novelette—

"OULD SOLDIERS NEVER DIE"

By WILLIAM CHAMBERLAIN

—you'll have the legend confirmed—by the crackle of musketry at El Caney, the whine of tracers through Belleau Wood, the roar of a bazooka on the Normandy beaches—in the glorious career of Sergint Gregg Harney who didn't know how to do anything but fight and consequently had to be where the fightin' was goin' on. Chamberlain, who hasn't been with us since "The Jawbone of Shamus Macroom" back in December '39, gives us another of his inimitable yarns of the fighting American-in-uniform.

And Carl D. Lane returns to let us listen to "The Guns of Cayuga" with an off-trail murder-mystery set aboard a Finger Lakes paddle-wheeler. . . . Fred Gipson, in "The Lost Toes of Uncle Wiley," gives us an uproarious insight into the private lives of sundry Texan tobacco-roaders who'd rather shoot squirrels than eat—and sleep than shoot squirrels . . . Durand Kiefer, our *Ask Adventure* expert on things naval, contributes "Turn Away"—an unusual yarn about a greedy commander who insisted on an egg in his beer and at least five Jap ships for every American fighting vessel. . . . Burt Sims lets us fight the war "The Hard Way" in another amusing yarn about our Britain-based airmen . . . Russell Smith introduces us to America's "first" war correspondent—a guy who was Richard Harding Davis, Ernie Pyle and the entire *Yank* staff rolled into one—Januarius Aloysius MacGahan . . . The next stirring installment of Thomson Burtis' new serial, "New Guinea Gold." . . . Plus the usual fact features, verse and departments you can't find anywhere but in—

(Continued from page 6)

instructor. "What appears in green?" Another bright Basic decided it was vegetation. "And what," I asked then, "appears in brown?" (Meaning, of course, contour lines.) There was a long dubious silence. Finally a boy from Texas put up his hand. "Grass!" he said proudly.

They finally broke up the school in which I worked, so I retired to my company and took over the mail room. It was a sinecure; the company was composed in large part of illiterates. And finally, when I had discovered that for me there would be no boat-ride in this war, I put in for one of the over-age discharges which were then going the rounds, and retired to build ships. (After about two weeks of building ships I rather wished I were back in my happy little mail room.) But on the whole my Army career was a success. Eight months in the service and K. P. just once! Ask anybody to beat that. Of course there were times when I'd have been willing to take K. P. rather than C. Q. (I pulled C. Q. in what was then practically a casual company on Christmas Eve. . . . It was Company A of the 32nd Battalion, Camp Crowder, and I'd be glad to hear from any of the G. F. U.'s!)

BARRY STORM, who compiles the sign manual for treasure seekers on page 133, introduces himself thuswise—

"Signs of Treasure" is a chapter from my book, "Thunder God's Gold," to be published this summer by Southwest Publishing Company, Tortilla Flat, Arizona. It will, I hope, be the book to end all books on lost mines and buried treasures.

From this you may gather that I would rather go treasure hunting than eat, which is a mild understatement! The newspapers call me a writer-adventurer, but in the Southwest I am also a mining exploration engineer, having pioneered here use of the Fisher-beam electronic locator for metallic ore finding. The Army uses the same rig with different circuit adjustment for locating dud shells! It is based on the fact of vast differences in conductivity between ordinary rock and metal bearing ores—and of course treasures should be all metal!

In the beginning, however, some 34 years ago I was born in Seattle, had the usual education, then three days out of high school shipped out to the Orient via freighter. In the next two years I did by actual count some 38 different kinds of work. After that I drifted into the Southwest, did a job of gun running for the Escobar revolutionists in 1929, a lot of prospecting and mining and some infrequent writing. Since then I have authored "Trail of the Lost Dutchman"—"Gold of the Superstitions"—"Practical Pistoleering" and several dozen articles and fiction stories to magazines and syndicates. In between times I went lost mine hunting, discovered one of the Lost Peralta Mines (See *Ask Adventure,* page 139. *Ed.*) in the Superstitions in 1940 which made a scoop so hot the UP relays pulled it off the wires ahead of the foreign correspondence, the Lost Tonto Trail Copper Lode in the Four Peaks in 1942 which also made the UP wires, and many lesser strikes. Then came the war. Nine months in the Air Corps in Colorado after years of this desert heat gave me arthritis, so now I am back living in the back end of a huge Packard sedan and again trying to mix writing with treasure hunting and prospecting.

HENRY JOHN COLYTON appears on our contents page for the first time this month with "The Miracle of St. Merrow." Introducing himself at our *Camp-Fire* he says—

I was born in Xenia, Ohio, where the railroad runs down Main Street, and was reared in Dayton. Ohio, where I now live. I attended Ohio State. During one vacation, I joined what was advertised as a "Literary and Historical Pilgrimage to England and Scotland" and I haven't been quite the same since.

Maybe it was the horn mug of ale that I got at St. Cross Hospital, Winchester, as part of the Wayfarers' Dole that has been doling ever since 1100, that worked the change in my chemistry. Maybe the somewhat inebriated old gentleman who halted us that night in the middle of a quiet street in Winchester to tell us that "roight here on this very spot Queen Anne 'ad her 'ead cut off," made his contribution to more than my entertainment. Those pottery shards I still have may once have held somebody's aspidistra, but to me they stand for Roman Britain. I remember Tintagel ruins, high above "the Cornish sea," and the waves booming into Merlin's Cove below. I recall hot water in cans in an old coaching inn, and the plumbing added as an after-thought circa Henry VIII. I remember the fervor of the custodian in an Edinborough art gallery that made me realize that the Stuart cause is gone but not forgotten. I remember, too, the coffee we got, and the way they cook cabbage over there, but it's all right. It's all right. I liked it.

Whatever the reason may be, I came away from England with a strong liking for the days when knights went riding clop, clop, over drawbridges, when nameless architects built the great cathedrals, when nice people entertained wild wholehearted enthusiasms along with their insect life. And when der fuehrers couldn't gnaw the upholstery a hundred miles from the battle front and still be fuehrers. And it is amazing how the murky little rushlight of the past lights up the confusion of the present, and shows how things are going, better than the owlish glare of the radio commentator. That's about all.

I am now a very minor cog in the municipal machinery. But I once held a gold pan

in a rushing Rocky Mountain creek, and I rather think I saw a ghost once.

OF "New Guinea Gold," which gets under way on page 8 of this issue, Thomson Burtis writes—

Almost every incident and character in the story, like the locales, are based on fact. The rivers I call the Florel and the Skirton are roughly drawn from the Fly and the Strickland, and my Lake Murdoch from the actual Lake Murray. The hundreds of thousands of men, including, no doubt, many *Adventure* readers, who have recently become acquainted with New Guinea should remember always that my story is laid in the 1920s, although I understand conditions have changed little. Now, however, parachutes and radio and white men are common, and they weren't then.

I have tried to avoid as much as possible the use of bêche de mer, the pidgin English or lingua franca of the region, and when I have used it have sometimes clarified it so that the reader will not have to stop to figure it out. As everyone knows, it is the universal medium of communication in New Guinea. Perhaps its most famous, historical, and extended use was in a written proclamation in September, 1914. The proclamation is likewise an excellent textbook for the study of the language.

Because the occasion and the sentiments connected therewith might interest the *Camp-fire* audience, I quote an eyewitness account, and the proclamation, from "Gold-Dust and Ashes," by Iron L. Idriess, published ten years ago in Australia by Angus and Robertson, Limited. "Kai kai" means food or eating, incidentally.

"Australia seized New Guinea, and after a sharp little fight for the important Bita Paka wireless station, occupied Rabaul. An incident of historical importance was the reading to the natives assembled at Rabaul on 12 September 1914 of a proclamation in pidgin English, dealing with the annexation from the German Empire of their possessions in the Pacific.

"It was a unique proclamation. Thousands of natives gathered at Rabaul to watch proceedings and to listen to every word. An imposing display of military and naval forces, marshalled under the lazily waving Union Jack, was surrounded by the closely packed ranks of natives in gala attire and many groups of warriors in full regalia of marvelously fashioned feather trappings. After a military salute to the flag, this proclamation was solemnly read:

PROCLAMATION

All boys belonga one place, you savvy big master he come now, he new feller master, he strong feller too much, you lookum all ship stop place, he small feller ship belonga him. Plenty more big feller he stop place belonga him, now he come here he take all place. He look out good you feller. Now he like you feller look out good alonga him. Suppose other feller master he bin speak you: "You no work alonga new feller master!" he gammon. Suppose you work good with this feller master he look out good alonga you, he look out you get plenty good feller kai kai; he no fightem black boy alonga nothing.

You look him new feller flag. You savvy him? He belonga British, he more better than other feller. Suppose you bin makeum paper before this new feller master come, you finish time belonga him first; you like make him new feller paper belonga man longa new feller master, he look out good alonga you, he give good feller kai kai. Suppose you no look out good alonga him, he cross too much. British new feller master he like him black feller too much. He like him all same you piccanin alonga him. You get black feller master alonga you, he all same Police Master. You look out place alonga with him, he look out place alonga with you. You no fight other feller black man, other fellerplace, you no kai kai men. You no steal Mary belonga other feller black man. He finish talk alonga you soon. By and by ship belonga new feller master he come and look out place belonga you. You look out him now belonga place belonga you, you speak him all the same.

Me bin talk with you now. Now you give three feller cheers belonga new feller master.

NO MORE 'UM KAISER!
GOD SAVE 'UM KING!

The above echo of how war came to New Guinea thirty years ago, and the fact that a newer and better war is now being waged there, inevitably gives rise to a bit of wonder about what the native thinks of the big white feller master. There the native sits, hankering for a bit of innocent head-hunting involving the decease of a dozen or so warriors of another tribe in hand to hand combat. "No no," says the big white feller master as he sallies forth to bomb, burn and shoot a few thousand of his enemies. Regardless of the necessity of so doing—and as an old regular army man I yield to no one in the scope and intensity of my rooting for the annihilation of the armies of our enemies—every time I look at the photo on my desk of a New Guinea coast-pilot, grinning at the white cameraman while he cuddles his pet pig, I have to grin back.

I hope I have succeeded in injecting a little of this thought into "New Guinea Gold," and even those who've been there will enjoy it.

Author Burtis wishes to express here his appreciation for the assistance rendered by his friend Mr. Michael Baird, now of Hollywood but sometime resident of New Guinea, in checking matters of detail for accuracy and authenticity in the story.

(Continued on page 144)

ASK ADVENTURE

Information You Can't Get Elsewhere

ON the trail of the "Lost Dutchman."

Query:—I would like to know about the Superstition Mountains and the "Lost Peralta Mines" in Arizona.

Would appreciate answers to following questions as well as any information you may have:

1—Best time of year?
2—Water problem?
3—What tribe of Indians, if any?
4—Best way to get in?
5—Are there many prospectors in the vicinity?
6—Guides and horses?
7—Equipment necessary?
8—What game in that section?
9—Estimated cost for 4 men?
10—List of supplies needed?
11—Do you know any reason to expect trouble or interference?
12—Are there any authentic records relative to "Peralta Mines"?

—C. E. West,
Burkburnett, Texas

Reply by Victor Shaw:—In re this Superstition Mt. country, you've come to the right place for dope, as I've been in there as well as read about all the data published for some time, which seemed so authentic that I investigated for myself. One thing I found out while there is that one party claims to have found at least *one* of those 8 "lost mines", said to have been originally located by Pedro Peralta, who was eldest son of Miguel Peralta who owned a silver mine near la Ciudad de Chihuahua, Mexico, and the grandson of the Spanish don, Pedro Peralta, from Barcelona, Spain. I could give the whole history of these "lost mines", which have been wrongly (it seems) called: "The Lost Dutchman", though this "Dutchman" was a renegade thief and murderer who never found anything, but killed two men who did find one of the old shafts and worked it for years.

The history is detailed with maps of the general area by one Barry Storm, who dug up much of the history himself. It seems authentic and was published by the Goldwaters firm, Phoenix, Arizona, where it sells for $1.00 under the title: "Trail of the Lost Dutchman".

The party who claims to have re-located one of the Peralta shafts is named Linesba; a man from Prescott, Ariz., but who died in June, 1940, leaving the property for his wife to carry on. I met her at her house that was built at the entrance of the South Canyon leading straight up to the old "Weaver's Needle" where she showed me ore and panned gold from some pulp crushed in a mortar. I went in to the Needle up this South Canyon, then came out again to Apache Junction (40 miles east of Phoenix on U. S. 80) then drove a few miles northeast on Highway 88 to Goldfield. There I got a pack outfit of a rancher and went in to First Water on the north side of Superstition Mt. and went on in behind the mountain on its northern side, to where I could see the Needle from a camp site near where Needle Canyon hits East Boulder Canyon. That was last week in September and first week in October and we found it so hot (I had a slight touch of heat prostration) that my companion and I decided to quit for the time being. Next February we tackled it again, going in the same way to this same camp site on lower Needle Canyon. This time we gave that area a fair going-over, although it had to be rather superficial as our time was limited to 2 weeks only. However we did circle the Needle rather thoroughly and looked over about all the area lying within 2-3 miles of this Needle, but finding nothing of any great interest. This included a 2-day trip from camp: gaining the high plateau close to the southwest side of the Needle, from which looking due southeast by east we saw the tent-houses of this Linesba outfit in an upper valley basin and to which we hiked that P. M. and camped with the men that night, and looked over what they were doing before supper. It looked fair, but I'm not fully satisfied yet whether or not that is one of the ancient Peralta shafts.

Next day we returned to our camp via several canyons lying *east* of the Needle. Next day being the last we had for prospecting, we struck off easterly from camp toward La Barge Creek, and found something that looks as if a little work might perhaps develop something. At least, assays later showed some gold, although none could be seen in the samples themselves. We plan going back if possible for more work and investigation of surrounding country. I'm telling you this, because that region is so doggone rough that it matters mighty little, for you couldn't find *where* we went after we left our base camp site.

As to cost: It ran about $25 apiece for a two-week period, but we already had a small tent and camp outfit, guns, prospecting tools, etc. You can get packed in to

(Continued on page 143)

THE ASK ADVENTURE SERVICE is free, provided self-addressed envelope and FULL POSTAGE for reply are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries must enclose International Reply Coupons, which are exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.

Send each question *direct* to the expert in charge of the section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. **Do Not** send questions to the magazine. Be definite; explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question. The magazine does not assume any responsibility. **No Reply** will be made to requests for partners, financial backing or employment.

★*(Enclose addressed envelope with International Reply Coupon.)*

Notice: Many of our *Ask Adventure* experts are now engaged in government service of one kind or another. Some are on active duty in the Army or Navy, others serving in an executive or advisory capacity on various of the boards and offices which have been set up to hasten the nation's war effort. Almost without exception these men have consented to remain on our staff, carry on their work for the magazine if humanly possible, but with the understanding that for the duration such work is of secondary importance to their official duties. This is as it should be, so when you don't receive answers to queries as promptly as you have in the past, please be patient. And remember that foreign mails are slow and uncertain these days, many curtailed drastically. Bear with us and we'll continue to try to serve you as speedily as possible.

ASK ADVENTURE EXPERTS

SPORTS AND HOBBIES

Archery—EARL B. POWELL, care of *Adventure.*

Baseball—FREDERICK LIEB, care of *Adventure.*

Basketball—STANLEY CARHART, 99 Broad St., Matawan, N. J.

Big Game Hunting in North America: *Guides and equipment*—A. H. CARHART, c/o *Adventure.*

Boxing—COL. JOHN V. GROMBACH, care of *Adventure.*

Camping—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

Canoeing: *Paddling, sailing, cruising, regattas*—EDGAR S. PERKINS, 1325 So. Main St., Princeton, Ill.

Coins and Medals—WILLIAM L. CLARK, American Numismatic Society, Broadway at 156th St., N. Y. C.

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Fly and Bait Casting, Tournament—"CHIEF" STANWOOD, East Sullivan, Maine.

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Motor Boating—GERALD T. WHITE, Montville, N. J.

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Mountain Climbing—THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 6520 Romaine St., Hollywood, Calif.

Old Songs—ROBERT WHITE, 913 W. 7th St., Los Angeles, Calif.

Rifles, Pistols, Revolvers: *Foreign and American*—DONEGAN WIGGINS, 170 Liberty Rd., Salem, Oregon.

Shotguns, American and Foreign: Wing Shooting and Field Trails—ROY S. TINNEY, care of *Adventure.*

Small Boating: *Skiffs, outboard, small launch, river and lake cruising*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, 11331 Burin Ave., Inglewood, Calif.

Swimming—LOUIS DEB. HANDLEY, 115 West 11th St., N. Y., N. Y.

Swords, Spears, Pole Arms and Armor—MAJOR R. E. GARDNER, care of *Adventure.*

Track—JACKSON SCHOLZ, R. D. No. 1, Doylestown, Pa.

Woodcraft—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

Wrestling—MURL E. THRUSH, New York Athletic Club, 59th St. and 7th Ave., N. Y., N. Y.

Yachting—A. R. KNAUER, 6720 Jeffery Ave., Chicago, Ill.

SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL SUBJECTS

Anthropology: *American, north of the Panama Canal, customs, dress, architecture; pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions*—ARTHUR WOODWARD, Los Angeles Museum, Exposition Park, Los Angeles, Calif.

Aviation: *Airplanes, airships, airways and landing fields, contests, aero clubs, insurance, laws, licenses, operating data, schools, foreign activities, publications, parachutes, gliders*—MAJOR FALK HARMEL, 709 Longfellow St., Washington, D. C.

Entomology: *Insects and spiders; venomous and disease-carrying insects*—DR. S. W. FROST, 465 E. Foster Ave., State College, Penna.

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Taxidermy—EDWARD B. LANG, 156 Joralemon St., Belleville, N. J.

Wildcrafting and Trapping—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, 11331 Burin Ave., Inglewood, Calif.

MILITARY, NAVAL AND POLICE

Federal Investigation Activities: *Secret Service, etc.*—FRANCIS H. BENT, care of *Adventure.*

The Merchant Marine—GORDON MACALLISTER, care of *Adventure.*

Royal Canadian Mounted Police—ALEC CAVADAS, King Edward High School, Vancouver, B. C.

State Police—FRANCIS H. BENT, care of *Adventure.*

U. S. Marine Corps—LIEUT. COL. F. W. HOPKINS, care of *Adventure.*

U. S. Navy—LIEUTENANT DURAND KIEFER, care of *Adventure.*

GEOGRAPHICAL SUBJECTS

Philippine Islands—BUCK CONNER, Conner Field, Quartzsite, Ariz.

★**New Guinea**—L. P. B. ARMIT, care of *Adventure.*

★**New Zealand, Cook Island, Samoa**—TOM L. MILLS, 27 Bowen St., Feilding, New Zealand.

★**Australia and Tasmania**—ALAN FOLEY, 243 Elizabeth St., Sydney, Australia.

★**South Sea Islands**—WILLIAM MCCREADIE, No. 1 Flat "Scarborough," 83 Sidney Rd., Manley N. S. W., Australia.

Madagascar—RALPH LINTON, Dept. of Anthropology, Columbia University, N. Y., N. Y.

Africa, Part 1 ★*Libya, Morocco, Egypt, Tunis, Algeria, Anglo-Egyptian Sudan*—CAPT. H. W. EADES, 3808 West 26th Ave., Vancouver, B. C. **2** Abyssinia, Italian Somaliland, British Somali Coast Protectorate, Eritrea, Uganda, Tanganyika, Kenya—GORDON MACCREAGH, 2231 W. Harbor Drive, St. Petersburg, Florida. **3** *Tripoli, Sahara caravans*—CAPTAIN BEVERLY-GIDDINGS, care of *Adventure.* **4** *Bechuanaland, Southwest Africa, Angola, Belgian Congo, Egyptian Sudan and French West Africa*—MAJOR S. L. GLENISTER, care of *Adventure.* **5** ★*Cape Province, Orange Free State, Natal, Zululand, Transvaal, Rhodesia*—PETER FRANKLIN, Box 1491, Durban, Natal, So. Africa.

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Central America—ROBERT SPIERS BENJAMIN, care of *Adventure*.

South America, Part 1 *Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, and Chile*—EDGAR YOUNG, care of *Adventure*.

★**West Indies**—JOHN B. LEFFINGWELL, Box 1333, Nueva Gerona, Isle of Pines, Cuba.

Iceland—G. I. COLBRON, care of *Adventure*.

Baffinland and Greenland—VICTOR SHAW, care of *Adventure*.

Labrador—WILMOT T. DEBELL, care of *Adventure*.

Mexico, Part 1 *Northern Border States*—J. W. WHITEAKER, 2903 San Gabriel St., Austin, Tex. **2** *Quintana Roo, Yucatan Campeche*—CAPTAIN W. RUSSELL SHEETS, care of *Adventure*.

Canada, Part 1 ★*Southeastern Quebec*—WILLIAM MACMILLAN, 89 Laurentide Ave., Quebec, Canada. **3** *Ottawa Valley and Southeastern Ontario*—HARRY M. MOORE, *The Courier Advocate*, Trenton Ont., Canada. **4** ★*Georgian Bay and Southern Ontario, National Parks Camping*—A. D. L. ROBINSON, 103 Wembly Rd. (Forest Hill), Toronto, Onto., Canada. **5** ★*Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta*—C. PLOWDEN, Plowden Bay, Howe Sound, B. C. **6** ★*Northern Saskatchewan; Indian life and language, hunting, trapping*—H. S. M. KEMP, 501—10th St., E., Prince Albert, Sask.

Alaska—THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 6520 Romaine St., Hollywood, Calif.

Western U. S., Part 1 *Pacific Coast States*—FRANK WINCH, care of *Adventure*. **3** *New Mexico; Indians, etc.*—H. F. ROBINSON, 1211 W. Roma Ave., Albuquerque, N. M. **4** *Nevada, Montana and Northern Rockies*—FRED W. EGELSTON, Elks' Home, Elko, Nev. **5** *Idaho and environs*—R. T. NEWMAN, 701 N. Main St., Paris, Ill. **6** *Arizona, Utah*—C. C. ANDERSON, care of *Adventure*. **7** *Texas, Oklahoma*—J. W. WHITEAKER, 2903 San Gabriel St., Austin, Tex.

Middle Western U. S., Part 2 *Ohio River and Tributaries and Mississippi River*—GEO. A. ZERR, 31 Cannon St., Pittsburgh, 5, Penna. **3** *Lower Mississippi from St. Louis down, Louisiana swamps, St. Francis. Arkansas Bottom*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, 11331 Burin Ave., Inglewood, Calif.

Eastern, U. S., Part 1 *Maine*—"CHIEF" STANwood, East Sullivan, Me. **2** *Vt., N. H., Conn., R. I., Mass.*—HOWARD R. VOIGHT, 40 Chapel St., Woodmont, Conn. **3** *Adirondacks, New York*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, 11331 Burin Ave., Inglewood, Calif. **5** *Ala., Tenn., Miss., N. C.; S. C., Fla., Ga.*—HAPSBURG LIEBE, care of *Adventure*. **6** *The Great Smokies and Appalachian Mountains south of Virginia*—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

(Continued from page 139)

East Boulder Creek for $2 a day, for a 2-man outfit, and it takes but one day with 2 saddle horses and a pack horse; but 4 men would need double the pack outfit at no doubt double cost; i.e., 2 more saddlers and another pack horse, maybe 3 pack horses, if your plan is to stay in there for a month or six weeks or so.

There are deer in there and some birds, but I believe no open season during winter months, which is absolutely the *only* time to tackle it!

For firearms, you'll need one rifle if you keep together, but should have an extra rifle if you plan to split your party in the field. That is, unless you are good *sure* shots with a .45 hand-gun, in which case each man should pack one in a shoulder holster, as that's the best way when traveling in the field. Sole reason for this is the fact that there are a lot of "javelina" (wild pigs, or peccary) in there. We ran into quite a few, and these animals being the same as across the line in Old Mexico can be *really* dangerous, especially in case of a sow with a late litter of pigs, or some old outlaw boar. Thing is, there's no tree to climb if you're stuck, and never is any cliff to use as substitute, if they happen to jump you. Got to *drop* 'em, you see, so a rifle is indicated (.30-.300 OK), unless you're good with a hand-gun. You needn't fear any snakes from December to March, as all of them are hibernating, including tarantulas, scorpions and centipedes, but we ran into *plenty* of them *all over* there in October. *Also*, note that there is *plenty* of water in all canyon streams, though they're all dry in summer. However, you should each have a canteen for travel on high dry ground, and that's where a lot of your work will be done. There'll be no trouble whatever back in there, with anything excepting those javelinas. There are lots of cattle ranging all through the interior country, owned by stock men whose ranch headquarters are outside, chiefly on the westerly side of Superstition. But these ranchers are good scouts, so far as I've found; but they all pooh-pooh any idea of good ore being found in there and figure the Lost Dutchman is a myth. Don't think any *malo hombres* work in there now, although Ruth was murdered in there only 15 years ago, in 1931; but Adolph Ruth was an Eastern tenderheel, and had no business going in there at all that June, at least without a party and he went in all alone according to "Tex" Barkley. However, with so many cattlemen working in there, I think the wild bunch steers clear of this region nowadays.

Lots of Indians thereabouts, but all are outside and besides are pretty well civilized now. The Apaches were the worst in the old days, but they're about all cleared out now and the Pimas are mostly breeds, too.

Your prospecting tools should include a *miner's* 3-lb. pick (*not* a road pick); a No.

2 round-point shovel with long handle; a cast iron 1-pint mortar & pestle; at least one goldpan, which can be the small 6-7 inch size for ease in carrying, as it's used only for testing crushed ore samples for free gold. I very much doubt if there's any placer in there. Also *each man* should carry a light prospecting pick and have a good magnifying glass. Don't bother with drills, hammers, dynamite, etc., on *this* trip, as you're prospecting, not mining. If you find anything worth working, you must go out anyway to record claims, and can then get what is required to work it. Travel *light* as possible! Put most weight for packing into grub. An 8 x 10 wall tent of 10-oz. duck is OK for 4 men, but *have a fly!* You'll get rain during winter months every now and then. A camp stove is OK, but you *can* do all cooking outside tent on an open campfire, if you know how. Have a waterproofed tarpaulin, to use as a ground-sheet in tent and to cover goods en route in there and going out. Use regulation camp outfit.

Lots of cactus all over in there: sahuaro, octotillo, cholla, buckhorn, pin cushion, prickly pear, etc. Plenty brush of mesquite, ironwood, catclaw, willow, etc., also lots of palo verde and greasewood. Plenty to use as fuel, that is, *so have a light ax!*

Only map obtainable is the "Florence Quadrangle," 1900, U.S.G.S., costs 50c of Arizona Bureau of Mines, University Station, Tucson, Ariz. It gives streams, roads, trails, towns and contour-topography. Also get the state mining laws at same place. There is *NO* geological survey, or *map!*

THE CAMP-FIRE

(Continued from page 138)

WE REGRET more than we can say having to report the death of another of our *Ask Adventure* experts. Lt. Col. Seward S. Cramer, who joined our staff back in 1934 to answer questions on French Indo-China, Hong Kong, Macao, Tibet and Southern and Central China, was killed in action in the Pacific on November 10, 1944.

SEVERAL readers have called our attention to a careless error which crept into Jack Murray's "Florida's Flaming Six-Guns" which we printed in the March issue. We had one of the characters involved draw a ".44 bolt action Smith & Wesson." There ain't no such weapon—never was, we're forced to admit after considerable checking. 'Twas a misprint for "double action" which the author let get into his copy and which no one who read the manuscript managed to catch. Plain dumb all along the line. We'll try to keep all such mythical shootin' irons holstered hereafter!—K.S.W.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE: We offer this department to readers who wish to get in touch again with friends or acquaintances separated by years or chance. Give your own name and full address. Please notify *Adventure* immediately should you establish contact with the person you are seeking. Space permitting, each inquiry addressed to *Lost Trails* will be run in three consecutive issues. Requests by and concerning women are declined, as not considered effective in a magazine published for men. *Adventure* also will decline any notice that may not seem a sincere effort to recover an old friendship, or that may not seem suitable to the editors for any other reason. No charge is made for publication of notices.

I would like to hear from Albert "Shorty" Armstrong, and "Butsy" Butterfield, who were members of the 13th U.S. Infantry Band in 1924 at Fort Warren, Mass. Also Philip Smith, Jr., who lived on Gainsborough St., Boston in 1941. I have recently been discharged from Army Air Force and would like to hear from some of the old buddies of the old days. John J. Delaney, 227 Broadway, Cambridge 39, Mass.

Alex "Scotty" Mackie, age 34, weight 125, height 5'3", blue eyes, dark brown hair, missing since 1939. Last heard from in Cleveland, Ohio. Anyone knowing of his recent whereabouts please communicate with his brother, Robert Mackie, 3774 Highland Road, Cleveland 11, Ohio.

PFC George Allen Agogino, DET-H 997 Sig. Ser. Bn., APO 503 c/o Postmaster, San Francisco, Cal. wants to get in touch with Larence Griswold who wrote a book, "Tombs, Travels and Trouble." He also would like the name of the aviator who flew with Mr. Wallace Hope for the rebels in the Mexican uprising of 1928-29.

Anyone knowing the whereabouts of Max Franck, formerly of 442 S St., N.W., Washington, D.C.; Meyer Harwich, formerly of 13 Acchery Ter., Leeds, Eng.; or Phil Jaffe, a former printer of Cleveland, Ohio, now a rabbi, please communicate with Julius Bobinsky, 4701 N. St. Louis Ave., Apt. 11, Chicago, Ill.

R. Welker, 219-48th St., Union City, N. J. wants to hear from "Blackie" Fredericks, former crew member of the S. S. *President Roosevelt.*

Captain Rudolph Petersen who used to write sea stories formerly lived at Locust Street, 133 Street, Bronx, New York City, N.Y. Last heard from in 1940. Anyone knowing his present address please communicate with Norman Gilmartin, c/o General Delivery, Brooklyn General Postoffice, Brooklyn, N. Y.

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prior is dead, messire, and there are ten of the brothers dead within the church."

"Well, we've avenged you, in a way. They tried to get away when they heard us coming, I guess. We fixed 'em! Fourteen of 'em are decorating the trees by the wall, and my men are rounding up the others. I came as fast as I could! What happened here? Did they fight each other at the last?"

"Come," said the sacristan solemnly, "and I will show you what befell! It was a miracle, messire—a true miracle!"

He led the baron to the corner of the church behind the altar where a holy water font jutted out from the wall. Hereabouts the roof still held; the light was too dim to permit the baron to see more than a piled heap of bodies, with here and there an arm thrust out stiffly, weapon still in hand.

"Torches!" bawled the baron. "Come on, you! This way, men!"

A half dozen of his vassals had followed him into the church. One huge man lifted a blazing timber fallen from the roof and came trotting up with it. When, in its red glare, the baron could look over the heap of dead, his eyes bulged, and his men, crowding the monks, exclaimed, staring.

"Longspurs, by God! Longspurs! Did he kill all these?" The baron snatched at the great torch and held it high. "Why, it *is* a miracle!"

The sightless eyes of the robber knight stared tranquilly up at the red blaze of light. His body was so gashed and hacked that his gown was all one wet crimson. But his right hand still gripped the hilt of an enormous sword, and his left arm was flung protectingly over the breast of a young novice, whose stiffening hands still clutched the broken handle of a pitchfork.

The sacristan knelt down and gently turned the boy's face to the light. The baron sucked in his breath. The two dead faces, now side by side, were alike, not only in their peaceful composure, but feature for feature.

"Here was St. Merrow's miracle!" murmured the little sacristan, his hands clasped. "Our new brother, and our novice—they, with St. Merrow's sword, held back the heathen from us until the very moment when we heard the thunder of your horses' hoofs outside our gates. They have saved our priory! Praise to God and to St. Merrow!"

Slowly, Sir Hamon gave back the torch to his vassal. Slowly, he crossed himself. "A great mystery," he muttered. "I'm no hand for mysteries. But Longspurs and his boy made a good end of it, that I can see. God rest their souls!"

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