LORD OF THE NOON SUN *by* GEORGES SURDEZ

25¢

Adventure

JUNE

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NOVELETTES

SHORT STORIES

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BE OUT ON JUNE 9TH ◆◆◆

SERIALS

THE FACT STORY

DEPARTMENTS

Cover painted for Adventure by Maurice Bower

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

THE Congressional Record, we had always been led to believe, makes pretty dull and heavy reading for the most part. But we were extremely interested in certain portions recording proceedings in the Senate which were published in the issue for March 17, 1943. We thought you'd be interested, too, in the official recognition tendered the author of "Swain's Landfaring" on that date for the instrumental part he had played in initiating the transfer of those famous fifty American destroyers to Great Britain. So we'll let Senator Walsh of Massachusetts and Senator Danaher of Connecticut talk about Arthur D. Howden Smith for a minute—

Mr. DANAHER. Mr. President, relating what I am about to say to the remarks with which the Senator from Massachusetts closed his presentation of the bill, I should like to say that a few days ago I found in the New London Evening Day a column written by Mr. Ray Tucker, a noted Washington correspondent whose articles are syndicated under the title "News Behind the News—Washington and National Activities in Government and Politics."

In this particular article he made reference to a letter which had been written by a friend of his whom he had not seen for many years. The friend was Mr. Arthur D. Howden Smith. Mr. Smith may be known to a good many here as the author of the volume Mr. House of Texas. As collaborator with Colonel House during the World War in many of his ventures, and as a member of the staff of the New York Evening Post from 1905 to 1918, Mr. Smith had had many opportunities to meet the world's great and near great.

It developed, from Mr. Tucker's article, that Smith had at one time been a very close acquaintance of a gentleman named Philip Kerr, who is better known to us as Lord Lothian. Further, Mr. Tucker wrote, under date of May 2, 1940:

Mr. Smith had addressed a communication to Lord Lothian.

I was so interested in what Mr. Tucker had described as the events which followed that particular letter that I am going to ask unanimous consent from the Senate that Mr. Tucker's entire piece be printed in the Record at this point.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

There being no objection, the article was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

Fighters: A noted New York reporter was the author of the arrangement whereby we gave Great Britain 50 destroyers in return for bases in the Atlantic littoral. His name is Arthur D. Howden Smith. He worked beside the writer 20 years ago on the old, internationalistic New York Evening Post, which was then owned and controlled by Thomas W. Lamont, of J. P. Morgan & Co.

The famous transaction was not consummated until September 3, 1940. But the following private correspondence discloses that the deal was in the making months before that date. Behind-the-scenes facts are quite illuminating, despite Pearl Harbor. On May 2, 1940, Mr. Smith sent this message to his old friend, Lord Lothian, then British Ambassador to Washington and formerly Lloyd George's secretary:

"I had the pleasure of knowing you as Philip Kerr many years ago when I was associated with the late Colonel House, whose final biography I shall publish in September. If you chance upon it, you will find it a startling, accurate forecast of what is happening. It should be of service to the Allied cause. But that is not really the occasion of this letter.

"It occurs to me that the Admiralty will have increasing need for escort vessels as warfare spreads. Our Navy has a large reserve of wartime destroyers, somewhere between 100 and 150. They are serviceable vessels and they have been adequately maintained. Forty or fifty were reconditioned for use in the neutrality patrol last fall.

"Am I taking an undue liberty, as a private citizen, if I suggest that it might be possible for the Admiralty to purchase a number of these vessels for convoy service? I see no difference between such a demonstration of 'benevolent neutrality' by the administration and the waiving of warplane contracts in the Allies' favor."

The envoy's reply to Arthur's suggestion is significant. He admits that London could use a few sub sinkers, but notes that the sale or swap would be somewhat illegal.

(Continued on page 8)

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(Continued from page 6)

His communication is dated May 17, 1940 (Mr. Hull did not publicize the proceedings until September 3 of that year).

"My Dear Arthur Howden Smith: Thank you for your kind letter of May 2. I well remember our previous meetings. I would dearly like, if I have the leisure, to read in September your biography of that wise man, Colonel House.

"As to your suggestion about the destroyers, it is an interesting one, and I am passing it on to our naval people.

"But you will no doubt realize that international law forbids a neutral government to sell warships to a belligerent. American airplanes—this was before the fall of France (editor's note)—are, of course, being sold to the French and British Governments by private and not by governmental firms.

"Thank you for your suggestion, and with kindest regards.

"Lothian."

Before his late lordship died, the Lend-Lease Act was passed. So he got his destroyers, his planes, food, and also American buck privates. It is not generally known, but there are almost as many Yankee fighters in empire territory as there are Britishers.

MR. DANAHER. Mr. President, I communicated with Mr. Tucker to ascertain where Mr. Smith was at the present time, and discovered that he is right here in Washington, as a member of the public-relations section of the American Red Cross. I went down to see him and asked whether by any chance he still had the correspondence to which Mr. Tucker had referred, particularly the reply which had been sent by Lord Lothian. He loaned them to me, to the end that I might cause them to be photostated, and I hold in my hand a photostat of the original carbon copy of a letter dated May 2, 1940, from Mr. Arthur D. Howden Smith to Lord Lothian, and a photostat of the original reply, dated May 17, 1940, from Lord Lothian to Mr. Smith. I shall read them for the information of the Senate, and for their historical interest. The letter from Mr. Smith is as follows:

(Here Mr. Danaher read the original of Mr. Smith's letter printed in Mr. Tucker's column. —K.S.W.)

Mr. NYE. What is the date of that letter?

Mr. DANAHER. The date of that letter is May 2, 1940. The reply is dated May 17, 1940, and reads:

British Embassy,
Washington, D. C., May 17, 1940.

My Dear Mr. Howden Smith——

Mr. WALSH. Mr. President, will the Senator yield?

Mr. DANAHER. I yield.

Mr. WALSH. Did Mr. Smith have any authority or any connection with the Navy at that time?

Mr. DANAHER. So far as I know Mr. Smith had no connection with the United States Navy then, nor since. As he himself said, he was writing simply as a private citizen who was deeply interested in the success of the Allied cause.

Mr. WALSH. He apparently had some knowledge about the number of destroyers, and the condition of our Navy.

Mr. DANAHER. I gather, let me say to the Senator from Massachusetts, that he had substantially accurate information not only as to the number of destroyers available, but of the fact that 40 or 50 had been reconditioned for use in the neutrality patrol the previous fall. In any event, the reply follows:

Here Mr. Danaher read the original of Lord Lothian's letter printed in Mr. Tucker's column.—K.S.W.)

After Mr. Howden Smith had permitted me to borrow the correspondence thus recited, and I had the photostats made, Mr. Smith was kind enough to autograph my photostat for me with this memento:

Having long been acquainted with Lord Lothian and being greatly interested in the success of allied arms, I wrote to the British Ambassador a letter dated May 2, 1940, retaining a carbon copy. From the British Embassy came Lord Lothian's reply under date of May 17, 1940, the original of which I still possess. Above is a photostat of the original carbon copy of my letter and the original of Lord Lothian's reply, now presented to Senator John A. Danaher with my best wishes.

Arthur D. Howden Smith.

Mr. President, I thought that some of my colleagues, and particularly the Senator from Massachusetts, in the light of the discussion which developed this afternoon, would be interested in this historical recollection thus prompted by Mr. Smith's correspondence with Lord Lothian.

Mr. WALSH. The Senator has not completed his narrative, has he? Did the letter from the British Embassy end the negotiations for our destroyers while we were neutral?

Mr. DANAHER. It is my recollection that the files of the New York Times and other newspapers will reveal that starting within a week or 10 days thereafter, there were hints of the impending possibility of the United States making such a transfer as that of 50 destroyers to Great Britain, and it is my recollection that during the summer and into the early fall the matter was bruited about here on the floor of the Senate and elsewhere. Ultimately the situation culminated in an opinion written by the Attorney General, in which, as I recall, the Attorney General directed, or at least suggested with mighty cogency, that Admiral Stark certify that the 50 destroyers might be termed "over-age," and therefore be subject to disposal, and thereafter a transfer was effectuated. I think that, roughly, is a sequential summary of events.

(Continued on page 131)

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LORD OF THE NOON SUN

For five or six kilometers there was a running fight. The bush seemed to sweat Japs.

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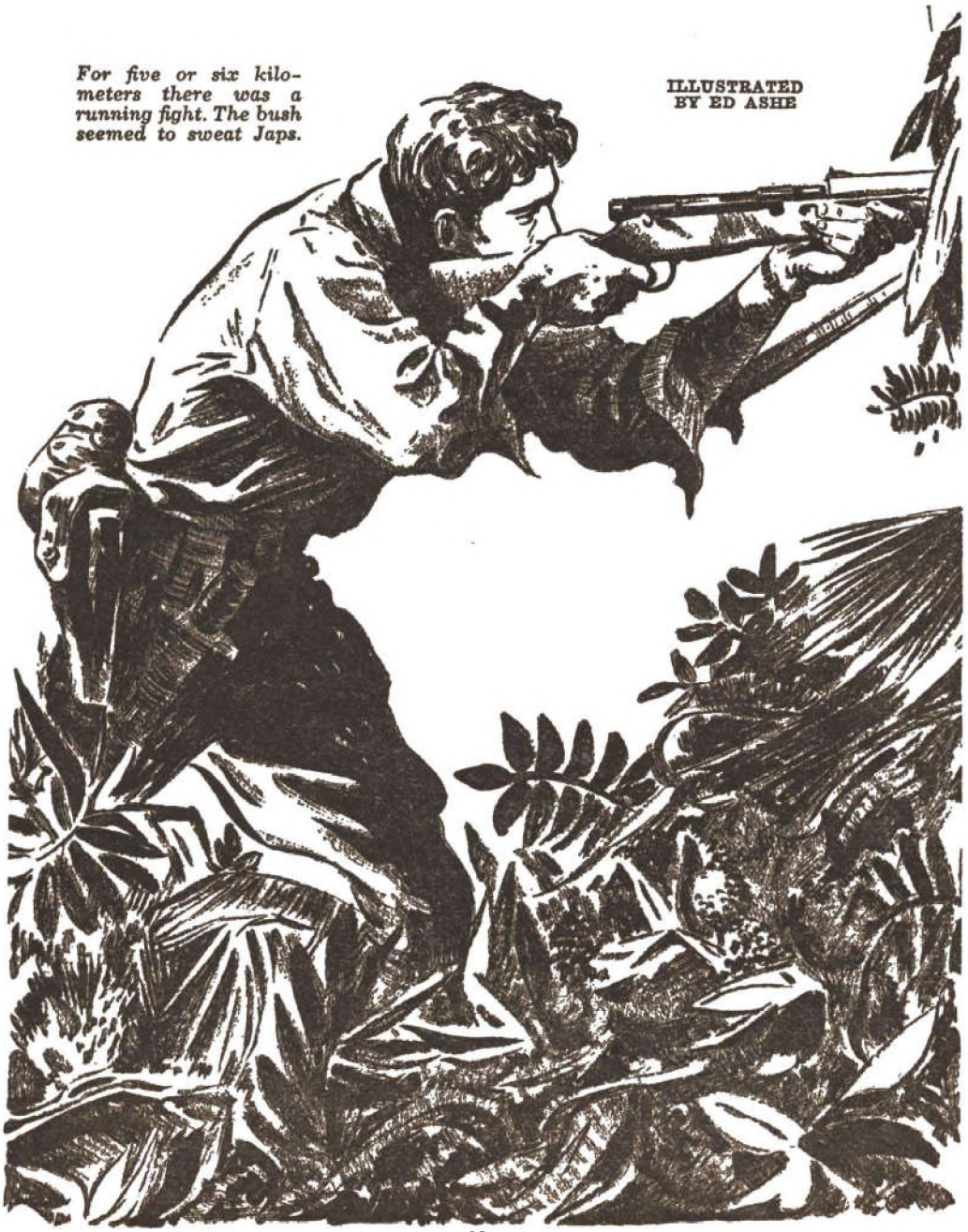

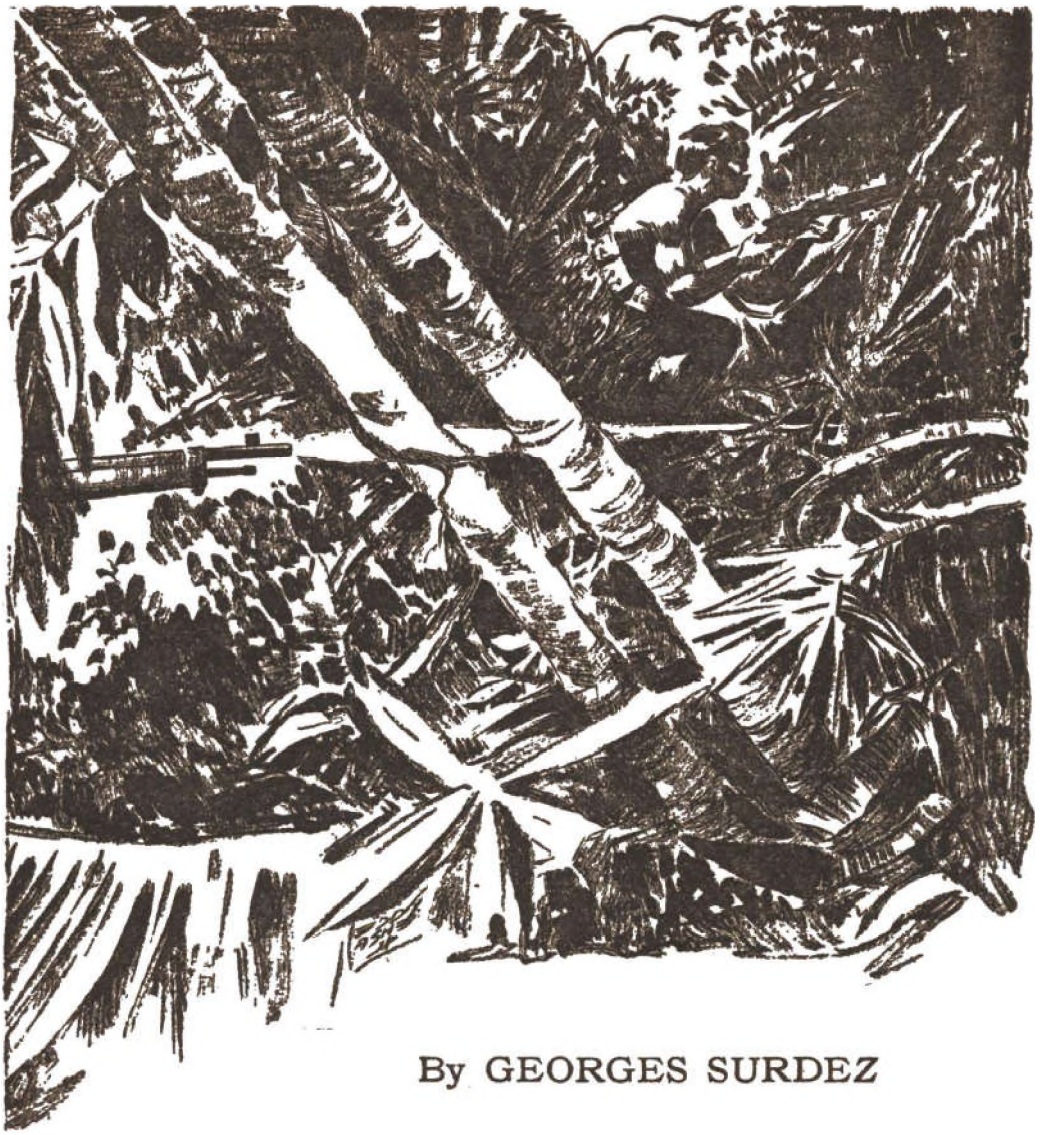

By GEORGES SURDEZ

GERARD GALTIER could see the central place of the village of Lao-Keac through the foliage. The Japanese flag was flying over the building once occupied by the French gendarmerie. From the light platform of bamboos, sixty-five feet above the ground, to the main entrance of the structure, the range was slightly more than five hundred meters. With a telescope-sight, the shot should be relatively easy.

"Could be done," he admitted.

"Will be done!" Verbier snapped.

"And then what?"

"Then there'll be one swine the less."

The young man shrugged, lifted the glasses again. He could see the sign announcing that the settlement was now the Imperial Domain of Hirutake. The little yellow men had a passion for renaming everything, mountains, streams, villages. And up here in the hills of Tonkin, a few miles from the old Chinese frontier, they made no pretense that the occupation was temporary.

Gerard and his companion felt secure enough. While the distance was short as the crow flies, the village was six or seven kilometers away by the trails. A bullet could speed out in a fraction of one second. But it would take an armed detachment two or three hours to arrive.

"I'll take the first shot," Verbier resumed.

The short white beard that sprouted from his brown, seamed, leathery face made him appear even older than his admitted sixty years. But

he still could shoot. His bag of tigers, leopards, buffaloes, deer in over thirty-five years in Indo-China must have reached a fabulous total. In the somewhat more than two years since the occupation, his bag of Japs was impressive.

"I'll take the first shot," he repeated. "If the guy drops, not another shot. If I miss, try your luck."

"Right, Captain."

"Never mind the 'captain' when we're alone." He climbed down the tree, swinging from limb to limb, his boots finding the prepared toeholds swiftly, surely. He was tall, lean, muscular and agile as an ape despite his years. Gerard, twenty-three, accustomed to the jungle since boyhood, a good hunter and tracker in his own right, nevertheless did not find it too easy to match his pace.

They took a narrow trail, a sort of tunnel through high grass and bush, stooping often to avoid tangles of creepers and vines, streamers of hanging moss. Within ten minutes, they reached a clearing of the forest, centered by a small pagoda. Ten or twelve men were there to greet them.

MOST of them were Thos, brown, stocky, rather short; the others Nongs and Mans, rangier of limb, lighter in complexion. All of them were half-nude, heads and hips swathed in faded rags. They were loaded down with bags of ammunition and food, their sashes bristled with the handles of pistols, knives and short swords. Each one carried a modern rifle, either the French Lebel or the Japanese issue weapon.

"Anything new, Quan-Nhoc?" Verbier addressed a Tho with sharp intelligent eyes.

"Nothing, Captain."

"You boys understand what you are to do this afternoon?"

"Yes, Captain."

"If there is but one shot, leave and go to the usual meeting place. If there is another shot, then the men with automatics must open fire, kill as many Japs as they can, for two minutes, and two minutes only. Then leave fast, disperse. The groups are placed as I ordered?"

"Yes, Captain," Quan-Nhoc replied. "I placed them myself."

"Then let's eat."

They filed into the pagoda. In a big room beyond the altars, two young lads brought pots of rice and boiled meat. Verbier and Gerard, Europeans, ate at a small table. The others squatted on the flagstones.

"A hundred francs say that you don't have to shoot, that I'll drop him clean." Verbier grinned at Gerard.

"I won't bet," Gerard said. "I know you can shoot. May I break the rule and ask one question?"

"Sure, go ahead."

"Whom are you going to shoot?"

"Well, he isn't a Jap and he isn't one of our fine collaborationists." Verbier laughed. "I'll tell you, but beware of informing *them*." He indicated the partisans with a lift of the chin. "I'm going to shoot a chap by the name of Ky-Nhat-Nam."

"The son of the De-Nhat-Nam?"

"The Lord of the Noon Sun, yes."

Gerard said nothing, lighted a cigarette.

Gerard could not sleep when he stretched out for a short siesta. Not only because the air was moist and heavy, but because an odd excitement, totally unlike the usual buck-ague, tingled through him.

Verbier planned to shoot the son of the De-Nhat-Nam! Within three hours, four, they would be on the platform high in the tree, glasses in hand, rifles ready. In the distance, bugles would sound, the stocky little infantrymen of the outpost would line up, bayonets glistening. A string of light armored cars, camouflaged green, brown, yellow, each one fluttering a small red and white flag, would roll out of a side street into the central place.

Men would alight from one of the cars, the local officers would come to meet them for the ceremonious introductions. One of the newcomers would not be in Japanese uniform. Verbier's hunting rifle would crack, that man would fall.

But if he didn't? Then would he, Gerard, obey orders as he was sworn to? Would he shoot at a man whom he had never seen, yet had known from birth? Gerard Galtier's father had captured the De-Nhat-Nam, and had remained his friend after defeating him as a foe.

Verbier was not a fool; if he judged that the fellow must die, he had his reasons. But if Verbier or Gerard shot Ky-Nhat-Nam, what would Quan-Nhoc and his comrades think? How would they react?

The majority of Tonkinese considered the De-Nhat-Nam their racial hero. To them he was a sort of super-William Tell. Gerard understood them. The De-Nhat-Nam had been a strange and heroic character. Born in a jungle village, the son of a wandering Chinese trader and a Nong hill woman, he had been a fighter from childhood. At fourteen, he had joined a band of *Giacs*, land pirates, supposedly to fight the rule of the Imperial Chinese officials, in reality to loot. At twenty, he had led his own band, six score hardened bush bandits armed with rapid-fire Winchesters.

When the French had come, he had taken service with them as an irregular. After the Chinese had been driven out of Tonkin, he had expected some important appointment from the conquerors, just reward of his services. Instead he had been summoned to surrender his

weapons and take up farming, work. This suggestion he had rejected with indignation, and when the French had sent troops to arrest him, he had wiped out the detachment.

That had been the beginning of a spectacular, fantastic career. For twenty-seven years, De-Nhat-Nam had lived as a hunted fugitive in the jungle. There were times when his band numbered five hundred rifles, held territories the size of two or three departments of France. At other times, he had had but a half-dozen dogged followers.

An enormous price had been put on his head. Ten times had he been reported dead, only to appear again, to burn villages, to kill French officers from ambush, to kidnap officials and traders, beheading some, obtaining huge ransoms for the rest.

At last, after more than a quarter of a century spent plaguing the French Administration, old, weak, wounded, he had been taken by a detachment commanded by Captain Galtier, Gerard's father. He had been exiled to Tahiti, whence, on important occasions, such as the Chinese New Year or the birth of a child, he had written his captor.

Gerard thus knew that Ky-Nhat-Nam was his last male descendant. His other sons had all died, leaving the name to be carried on by a boy born in exile.

And that was the man who must be killed.

GERARD could hold on no longer. He rose and went to Verbier, laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Captain?"

"What is it, youngster?"

"I don't think the fellow should be shot. He doesn't deserve death."

"Who claims he does?" Verbier's bushy gray brows lifted. "A lot of guys are dying these days who don't deserve death. All a matter of luck. He is in our way, and it's too bad for him."

"He more or less has to do what the Japs tell him."

"True. So we more or less have to kill him."

"But is he dangerous? I mean, can he harm us?"

"Of course he can!" Verbier lowered his voice so that the partisans in a nearby room would not hear. "You were brought up among these people, you talk their lingos better than I do, but you don't savvy them. We're white. They're yellow."

"They've been loyal to you for years."

"Because they want to keep away from the Japs, because they don't want to be shipped to the Coast as coolies. But let them have the whim to give in, tonight or tomorrow, and they'll walk out on us quite casually. After that, if the Japs hunt us down and chop off our heads, they won't care."

"Not Quan-Nhoc," Gerard protested hotly.

"No, not Quan-Nhoc, so far as you're concerned. He likes you. But even he, if the De-Nhat-Nam's son calls upon him to come and serve the Japanese, may obey. Remember that his father served for fifteen years in Ky-Nhat-Nam's father's band. No, we can't take a chance that they'll obey him."

Gerard hesitated. He had promised, tacitly, to obey the old man when he joined him. Verbier, an inspector of fields and streams for the French Protectorate, had been his father's friend for many years and was one of the very few who had resisted the Japanese from the beginning.

When Gerard's father had died after his plantation had been put into the hands of a Jap overseer, the young man was left alone in the world. His two brothers had joined their regiments in France at the start of World War II. One had been killed on the Somme, the other reported missing. Gerard, rejected by the air force because of an old leg fracture, was fretting at his impotence to do anything against the little yellow men who were imposing their will upon Indo-China with such fierce brutality.

Then Verbier had sent for him.

"It is useless to shoot at Ky-Nhat-Nam, Captain. Lead cannot hurt him."

"Come into the bush with me, youngster," he had said, "and help pester the Japs. The life isn't bad. We manage to get supplies and ammunition. There are friends, caches—"

"But, Monsieur Verbier, it may last for years."

"Forever, perhaps, if they win the war. But what do the odds matter?" Verbier laughed. "I'd sooner be dead than Japanese."

Thus Gerard became a guerrilla leader.

Yet, despite his gratitude and respect, Gerard felt that the old man was about to make a mistake.

"You don't think Quan-Nhoc knows, that our men know?" he insisted.

"I know they don't," Verbier retorted.

"Natives usually know such things."

"Not necessarily," Verbier said. "I worked it out myself. A Frenchman in Hanoi tipped me off that the Japs were sneaking in a guy from Hanoi into the hills, very carefully. Now, everywhere they've gone they've used one system, in Burma, in Malaya, in the Philippines, in Java. Brought in some renegade of the race to impress the others—someone with a big name to preach the Asia-for-Asiatics creed. De-Nhat-Nam is a hero in the minds of the Tonkin natives, and his son—"

"But would they listen to his son?"

"You know these people—they will eat the liver of a tiger raw, supposing it will make them brave. If they think that even what they eat affects their courage, they must believe the son has inherited the old man's guts with his blood."

"WILL he work against us?" Gerard wondered. "Remember, he was brought up among Frenchmen—"

"Who probably made him feel more than once that he was of another race. He knows he has nothing to expect from France but a small pension. The Japs will make him a puppet king, but still a king, with a budget. He's been in Japan since 1940, I happen to know. So why kid ourselves? He'll work his head off to turn the people for Japan, against France. Do you think I didn't consider the matter before deciding to kill him?"

"It's a lot like murder."

"It's war, youngster."

"My father and his—" Gerard started.

Verbier laid a hand on the younger man's shoulder. "I swear that if my own son was working for the Japs, I'd kill him like a dog. You—I have known you since you were a baby. But I shall not permit disobedience now."

"Very well, Captain."

Verbier strode out of the pagoda, called the men together for final instructions. They lined up like soldiers, stood at attention, impassive. Then a slender, effeminate-looking chap left his place, saluted militarily. He was nineteen, and had killed more Japs than he counted years. Under that smooth skin, in those graceful, supple limbs, were muscles of steel. His name was Vinh-Thai; he had studied in French schools.

"Well?" Verbier snapped.

"It is useless to shoot at Ky-Nhat-Nam, Captain. Lead cannot hurt him. Poison cannot hurt him. He is, like his father, protected. I speak for all of us, not because we fear for him, but because bad luck dogs the man who seeks to wound or kill him, and as you are our leader, your bad luck would be ours."

Verbier shot a glance toward Gerard, a glance in which utter astonishment and boundless fury mingled. But he knew that the young man had had no opportunity to reveal the secret. The leader recovered calm with a visible effort.

"The De-Nhat-Nam himself was captured, wounded."

"He was in an impure state, for in the great distress of hunger, he had eaten of human flesh, which destroyed the charm."

"I intend to shoot Ky-Nhat-Nam," Verbier said, "for he comes here to utter words the monkeys have put in his mouth." His hand rested on the butt of the big automatic at his belt. "What do you intend to do?"

"We shall not interfere, Captain, for you cannot hurt him. But we will no longer stay with you." Every man in the group gestured or spoke agreement.

Verbier looked from one to another. The veins stood out on his forehead, he was furious, tempted to risk all on a bold act, to shoot the spokesman as a mutineer. But the veteran ranger was not a fool, knew that he could do nothing without his native followers, and that, as blood calls for blood, he might be killed in turn.

"I compel no man to follow me, Vinh-Thai. Who told you Ky-Nhat-Nam was coming to the hills?"

"It has been known, always, that the son would return."

"I know the legend myself," Verbier retorted with a grin of scorn. "But since he was never here, how can he return?" His hand had dropped to his side casually. "How did you know this was the day?"

"We were told three moons ago, Captain."

"Three moons ago he was in Japan."

"A very old woman, most wise in such things, told us that she had learned from the *macoui*, the demon of the mountain wind, that the monkey-men would bring the son of the Lord of the Noon Sun here to work for their cause—that he would reach here in so many days. We counted. This is the day."

"And then, you'll obey him and side with the Japs?"

"Not so, Captain. He will leave the monkey-men and come to his own—to work evil upon outside people. By his hand shall the flag of the French be lifted for the first time since

the days of sorrow came to Tonkin and our mountains. Then he will seem to vanish for a time, to return for the great glory."

Verbier lifted a clenched fist. "Go on, go on!" he shouted. "Spit it out! For the greater glory when, after we get you rid of the Japs, you think you'll throw us out, eh? You are going to govern yourselves, eh? You will administer the country, run the railroads, the buses, the telegraph, the hospitals, all by yourselves? Let me laugh! You, educated in French, have not lost your primitive superstitions. You believe in an old witch—"

"Was she in error? Is this not the day?"

Verbier stopped short, turned purple. For a moment he could not speak, then he waved his hand. "Send word to the others that it's called off. Dismissed."

"At your orders, Captain," Quan-Nhoc snapped. "Detachment, at ease. Dismissed."

CHAPTER II

HERO BY INHERITANCE

BACK in their room, Verbier tossed his weapons aside, pulled off his boots. "Say it, youngster, say it. I have lost face, I showed anger— Bah, they've got us! We can't fight on without them, and they know it. So what will I do? So I'm going to get drunk."

At the first chance, Gerard took Quan-Nhoc aside, reproached him for not having informed him. The Tho remained stolid.

"Thou art white," he said simply. "Thou wouldst have said it was nonsense. Thou wouldst have told the captain, he would have been angry longer, no good would have been done. Perhaps even harm might have come of it."

"Where did Vinh-Thai really learn of his arrival?"

"An old village witch who said she—"

"I know, Quan-Nhoc, I heard. But the truth?"

"Seest thou, Gerard? Even now, thou dost not believe."

No, Gerard did not believe in anything occult on this occasion. But he knew that he would never get a different answer. So far would his old friend Quan-Nhoc trust him, and no further. By nightfall, Verbier had kept his word; he was sodden drunk, and nothing could have awakened him. Gerard sat on the worn steps of the pagoda, listening to the jungle sounds in the night. Business as usual: tiger, stag, owl, bird, all hunting, all hunted.

A half-dozen shadows filed from the structure into the open.

"Where are you chaps going?" the young Frenchman asked.

"To Lao-Keac," Quan-Nhoc replied, "to fetch the son and bring him among his father's people."

Gerard turned in early.

He did not believe that Quan-Nhoc and his men would succeed. They could slip through the Jap outposts easily enough, but they would be discovered if they prowled in the village itself. He did not worry much about his men's safety. They would scatter at the first shot and make for the forest, and the Japs had learned not to pursue them too far in the darkness.

One of the young lads who followed the partisans' band—half servants, half apprentices—awoke him at four o'clock." Lieutenant, Ky-Nhat-Nam come soon. On road."

Gerard lighted a storm-lantern. Verbier, six feet away, was sprawled on mats, head back, beard jutting, snoring, almost nude. When the young man shook him, he sat up, scratched the gray fur covering his chest. Scars left by a tiger's claws streaked his left shoulder and upper arm. Below the right clavicle was a star-shaped pucker, left by a German bullet in 1915. Here and there were healed punctures and slashes collected during an adventurous career.

"What's wrong now?" he grumbled. When Gerard explained, he reached for his bottle, uncorked it, swallowed long and earnestly. "And what the devil am I supposed to do? Fall on my face and worship?"

Nevertheless, he drew on his breeches, buckled the pistol belt about his hips. He was feeling his drinks and was in a surly mood. "Listen to the racket outside, will you? What do they want to do? Get the Japs to turn loose with mortars? Come on—"

There were the unmistakable sounds of a crowd, low voices, shuffling, multiplied by the echoes in the old building. Startled bats skimmed overhead. At the door leading into the main room, Verbier stopped short and swore under his breath.

It was a bizarre scene. In the uncertain light of two small lanterns, four or five score men were kneeling on the flagstones, swaying in the ritual salute of their race, the ceremonial *lai*. The *bonze*, priest of the pagoda, was among them, shaven head, yellow robe and all. Dimly discernible in the night outside were many others, not only partisans but ordinary folk—traders, farmers, fishermen. A singsong muttering swelled, faded away, resumed.

Gerard sought for the object of this demonstration, saw a little white figure standing before the altar against a background of black and scarlet lacquer panels, under the dull glint of the bronze and gilt idols.

Verbier walked toward him, lifting the lantern high.

A strange young man, Ky-Nhat-Nam; not more than five feet five inches tall, slight, narrow-shouldered, puny. His well-cut European suit of white cloth was torn and stained by grass and mud. He held a gray sun helmet in one hand, and the other, slim and childish, waved, half in acknowledgement, half in protest.

HE caught sight of Verbier bearing down upon him. The six-foot forester, with broad, bare torso, unkempt white hair bristling, must have looked anything but reassuring in the dim light. The young man stepped back, then smiled.

"*Vous êtes français, monsieur? Ah, grands dieux, quelle fantastique algarade!*"

Verbier owned to being French and agreed it was a most fantastic situation. Then he threw his head back and broke into a great, fierce laugh.

Ky-Nhat-Nam laughed himself, shyly. Gerard studied his face with curiosity. He knew that the man had one Chinese grandfather, one French, a Nong grandmother and a Tahitian one. The general impression was oriental—slanting eyes, tapering chin, the shape of the skull.

Ky-Nhat-Nam shook hands with the two Frenchmen. "Can you stop them? I have asked them not to—" He moved his hands up and down. "Perfectly horrible. They—they overwhelm me, quite!"

"Quan-Nhoc!" Verbier called, and when the Tho stood before them he spoke with a hint of humor. "His Lordship is weary. Order these people to leave, very quietly." He went on in a sharper voice, "Dawn is not far off, and the Japanese planes will be around. Take all precautions. Now, Your Excellency—"

"Oh, I beg of you, sir."

Ten minutes later, the three sat around a small table. The newcomer had preferred coffee to tea, smoked a French cigarette. "For fugitives, outlaws," he said, "you have many comforts."

"Many French traders help us secretly, and all the Chinese," Verbier explained. "All we have to do is to make known our needs, and we are told where the stuff will be hidden. We are luckier than your illustrious father."

Ky-Nhat-Nam, who asked them to call him by the name he had used in French schools—his native name had caused laughter harmful to discipline—explained that while he had expected interest, respect, he had been bewildered by the veneration shown him.

"I've really known very few Tonkinese," he said. "My father died when I was seven, and I was sent to Algiers, to the lycée. Save for my language tutors, I knew very few natives of Indo-China—and those had quite assimilated French ways. Civilized, if you wish, tame." He shrugged. "But these fellows!"

He narrated his adventures of the past few

years. He had been studying in Paris, too young for military service, when the Germans had come. He had not expected them to bother him. But they had sent for him, informed him he was to leave. They had given him no idea of his destination. He had crossed Germany, Russia, Siberia, and in Manchuria the group of Germans with whom he had traveled had turned him over to the Japanese. He had been treated very well, but subjected to a course of endoctrination, flattered, promised power.

"I got wise at once," he went on in his swift, colloquial French, "that the moment I refused to do what they asked, I'd be cooked. They don't kid, the Japs. They had teachers brush me up on Annamese, Tho, and so on. They had me rehearse speeches, which I was supposed to make over the radio.

"I didn't know how I was going to duck working for them here. But in Hanoi I found a note in my shoe one morning, telling me my friends were watching over me. Last night, when I unwrapped a piece of soap, there was another note. I was to wait until midnight, go downstairs to the latrines in the yard. Then I was to climb over a wall, and a man would meet me." He smiled. "He was there, Quan-Nhoc."

"You weren't afraid it was a trick of the Japs to test you?" Verbier asked him.

"No. There were key words I had been taught as a child, that no one but my father and those very close to him could have known."

"What words?"

"I seem to have forgotten them, Monsieur Verbier," replied Ky-Nhat-Nam, know in Paris as Jean Laube.

Verbier looked long at the young man, then quietly informed him that he had intended to shoot him.

"As you did not know my good will, it was the logical thing to do," Laube admitted. But Gerard saw that he was disturbed as the thought sank in, and that his hands shook.

He pitied him. The poor chap was not cut out for great adventures. When he mentioned his walk through the forest, from the village to the pagoda, he spoke of it as an exploit. He did not seem to realize how many hundreds of miles, through much worse country, he would have to cover in the routine existence of the raiders. He had been literally shanghaied into leadership.

"We must move," Verbier said. "The Japs will be swarming here by noon. From now on, you'll learn how your father made his name. I hope you will learn to like it."

IT was due to the very fact that he had escaped that Ky-Nhat-Nam had to undergo such a rough initiation to jungle life. The "redeemers of Asia" had lost considerable face and were furious. Rumor had it that several

Four or five score men were kneeling before a little white figure standing in front of the altar.

of those responsible for the Tonkinese's safe-keeping had killed themselves rather than face the blame from their superiors. Two battalions of crack soldiers were brought into the region to scour the ravines, while the Jap radio blared that a pseudo-son of De-Nhat-Nam had been hired by the enemies of all Asiatics to cause trouble in the Upper Tonkin.

These two thousand specialists of bush warfare formed the nucleus of the search, but the Jap reservists from the permanent garrisons in the district participated, too, fired to emulation, their officers crazy to prove themselves as brave as the others who had fought white troops and beaten them.

For three weeks, Verbier and his band were on the move almost without cease. Human nature being what it is, the invaders had informers among the villagers, and on several occasions, the partisans had to fight their way out of supposedly safe hiding-places.

Gerard himself, seasoned by more than a year of jungle experience, prepared for it from boyhood, felt the pace. He would lie down, worn out, the fatigue of covering forty kilometers in a few hours tormenting his muscles, and drop off to sleep, only to be awakened fifteen minutes later.

"*Boucacs* come, Lieutenant."

To form a first barrier, to protect themselves against a surprise attack, the raiders used an old jungle trick: They laced twigs, vines, creepers, and tall grass together to form a sort of net. When anyone touched this barrier, the rustle was enough to put them on the alert immediately.

Even keen-eyed Japs, trained for forest combat, could not discern the lashings in time, so well did the weavers blend them with the surrounding vegetation.

The Japs knew, of course, that when they encountered such an obstacle, the enemy might be lurking very near, and that they probably were the target of several rifles. Yet, their patrol leaders, officers or noncoms, never hesitated, but broke through, shouting defiantly.

On one of these occasions, Gerard was hiding behind a tree, rifle ready, when he saw a Jap scout come against the invisible screen. The Frenchman could see his face, an ordinary Jap face under the clumsy helmet, streaked with sweat. The temperature must have been above one hundred and twenty in the moist semi-darkness below the canopy of foliage. Gerard sighted for the middle of the body, a steadier target than a bobbing head. And waited. . . .

At first, the Jap evidently thought he had merely come upon a particularly thick tangle, and tried to break through sideways. Branches and creepers yielded a bit, elastically, but held. Then the little guy knew what he was up against. His beady black eyes probed the bushes, the trees. He froze there, the perspiration gathering on his chin, dripping in brilliant drops in a shaft of penetrating sunlight.

His comrades could be heard floundering elsewhere. The soldier stepped back one step, two, three. Suddenly, he lunged forward, crashed through, bayonet high, screaming, "*Teki-hei, teki!*"

Gerard shot him.

Vinh-Thai darted from cover, gripped the helmet, tore it off, picked up the automatic rifle, and slashed his neck with a cleaver-like sabre, with incredible speed. By the time the other Japanese were at the spot, Gerard and his handful of men had vanished silently.

In camp that evening, twenty-five miles away, Gerard related the episode to Verbier and Laube. "Almost sorry to kill him," he concluded. "Game guy. He could have backed away, joined the rest, and either kept quiet or returned with others to divide the risk."

"White or yellow, it depends on the individual," Verbier said. "Not all Japanese have guts, certainly not all Asiatics."

Laube—both Frenchmen called him that when in private—was spreading jam on a biscuit, and he spoke without looking up. "I am quite aware of it, Captain. I'm sorry I disappoint you."

Gerard glanced swiftly at Verbier, who lifted his bony shoulders. The old chief had remarked several times to his young second-in-command that Jean Laube, dubbed Ky-Nhat-Nam, was nothing but excess baggage and that even the mountaineers, blinded by traditional respect for the mighty name though they might be, were beginning to notice it—and did not like it.

CHAPTER III

KY-NHAT-NAM TAKES A SHOT

LAUBE had suffered, that could not be denied—suffered as a soft, novice European would have, from jungle hardships. He was dreadfully emaciated, and on several occasions, when endurance was needed, his devoted followers had had to carry him on a stretcher of bamboo poles and lianas. The change in diet and the insect bites had brought out sores and boils. But the flaws in his physical equipment could be condoned. What was more serious was his lack of spirit. He made no effort to behave like a chief.

He was as timid as a child at night. The jungle terrorized him, and he was reluctant to go twenty feet from the camp alone. He was afraid of wild animals, principally of snakes. His ignorance of bush-lore caused him to shudder as wildly at the sight of a harmless reptile as at a cobra. All the respect, all the

awe, melted from the partisans when they saw him run from one of the green, red-flecked snakes that the Chinese epicures consider a delicacy. A hill child of six would have picked up a stick and killed the thing.

His eyes were not trained to distinguish objects in the bush. Late one afternoon, Gerard had halted him, motioning for silence, and pointed. Across a clearing, thirty or forty yards away, a fine tiger had broken cover and frozen to look at the intruders. The animal was not in an aggressive mood, his whole attitude denoted that. The Frenchman did not wish to shoot. Shooting attracted Japanese, and tiger pelts were hard to dispose of those days. Laube strained his neck forward, and Gerard made a natural comment.

"As fine a specimen as you'll see—four or five years old."

"Curious, yes. What is it?"

"A tiger."

The direct descendant of men who had killed tigers with spears and arrows then realized what the striped bulk he discerned was. His reaction was immediate and startling. He ducked behind his comrade with a startled yelp. The tiger, quite as afraid and not in the least ashamed of it, bounded twice, plunged into the thicket, vanished. Laube shivered and panted for two hours.

He was not openly afraid of bullets, however, and kept up appearances when they lashed and smacked through the foliage.

"He doesn't realize what they are," Verbier told Gerard. "If he ever sees anybody smashed up by one, he'll turn to jelly every time a gun pops."

"He's green," Gerard protested. "Nothing prepared him for this. Quan-Nhoc's brave enough, but he'd get scared in a Paris traffic jam. He'll get used to things."

"No pride, no hope," Verbier retorted. "Look, when a native's brave, he's brave. When he's a coward, nothing ever mends it. I served in the army for years out here, saw green young officers in the bush for the first time. But I never saw one who made such a jackass of himself. What in hell are we going to do about it? I don't think he's such a hit with the villagers, anyway."

The villagers would come out to behold Ky-Nhat-Nam when opportunity offered. Laube spoke the languages quite well, exchanged greetings with the notables, even risked a speech now and then. It is difficult for a European to read oriental faces. Nevertheless, Gerard thought he saw surprise and disappointment when the skinny little chap in shabby hunting clothes appeared. He would hold a repeating carbine in his hands for these presentations, for what he called "martial effect," but he handled it with all the ease and grace of a chimpanzee toying with a lorgnette.

And, day after day, the Japanese broadcast over their radio—they had loudspeakers in all villages and towns—that the so-called Ky-Nhat-Nam was an imposter, the son of a coolie, that he had no Tonkinese blood. They had one speaker, a renegade Tho with the local sense of humor, who called the great man "Turtle-Dung."

"Better get him to do something," Verbier growled. "Break him in. He hasn't fired a shot."

Gerard approached Laube. Would he like to participate in an ambush? Was he not weary of the constant retreat without striking a blow? Laube nodded, without enthusiasm. One thing had to be granted, he did not complain and was willing to take suggestions.

NATIVE informers had brought news that a detachment of thirty-odd Japs was in the neighborhood, counting two officers. Vinh-Thai and three other partisans started out as decoys. They were to come in contact with the Japs at a safe distance, possibly by crossing a path a few hundred feet ahead of the lead soldier. One of the raiders carried a pig's bladder filled with blood. As soon as a shot was fired, he would let some of it drop in an exposed spot, crush the grass as if a man had fallen prone, then leave dragging tracks and spots of blood.

They were then to lure the patrol to a narrow gully, through which a torrent raced, cross on the narrow bridge made of bamboo rungs and lianas. To give a sense of realism, they were to hack the fastenings after crossing, dropping the bridge. The Japs, sure they were following but four men, one wounded, would risk the crossing. Gerard and ten picked riflemen would be hidden in the brush and boulders on the safe side.

The success of the ruse depended on how long the Japs' officer had been in the region. A few had learned to avoid narrow spaces, cut bridges, fallen trees lying innocently across paths. And there was the chance that Vinh-Thai and his gang would be trapped themselves by some smart lieutenant who'd dispatch small groups to the banks of the nearest stream.

Gerard found a beautiful spot for himself, Laube and a gun bearer. It was a sort of balcony on the side of a rugged cliff, screened by a spreading *goh-linh*, a huge tree growing flat against the rock, pushing roots into crevices. The bridge was about sixty meters away, a spidery structure swinging thirty feet above the swirling water that spilled, two hundred meters further on, into a pit several hundred meters deep. The smash and roar of the cataract would cover all minor sounds.

"If the bridge is gone," Laube wondered, "how can they cross?"

"The maps show a ford—see those rocks? An agile man can leap from one to another, and get across almost dry—"

"But if you fell in, you'd be carried straight over—" The young Tonkinese turned a bewildered face to Gerard. "Do you mean they'd chance that?"

"Any soldier would. Ours did, not far upstream, and with four hundred Chinese armed with Winchesters on this bank. Those who fell in were picked up six kilometers downstream."

"Dead?"

"Very." Gerard offered a cigarette. "No worry about seeing the smoke. The wind is strong in this gully. Now, remember—shoot low. Anything that knocks a guy down counts."

"Understood." Laube was silent a while, then started to talk of Paris, of his friends, of painters, musicians, poets, of whom Gerard had vaguely heard. He was discussing a music-hall singer when Gerard held up his hand.

VINH-THAI had appeared at the far end of the bridge. He did not cast a single glance at the side where he knew his comrades waited, but beckoned, shouting, "*Teyail, teyail!* Run, run!"

Three others appeared, the one in the center half-carried by his comrades. They started across, made it, and Vinh-Thai drew his sabre and chopped at the lianas. When the fourth of his men did not appear and they did not wait for him, Gerard knew that there had been a genuine casualty. The vegetable ropes parted, the flimsy structure fell, was caught in the

Reports could be heard above the roar of the waters and some of the Japs fell into the rushing torrent.

stream, washed down, torn loose in less than two minutes.

According to instructions given by Verbier, Vinh-Thai kept on the trail, in sight, still hurrying. It was necessary that the Japanese see them fleeing to draw them on. Gerard looked at his watch. It was four minutes and some seconds before the first Jap showed up. He spotted the fugitives, still running, already

quite a distance from the bank, and shouted.

Other soldiers emerged from the bush, one of them an officer wearing a sword more than half his height. He lifted glasses, scanned the cliff, the jungle. Every gesture was visible, he was less than one hundred meters away. After a moment, he shoved the instrument back in the case, trotted to the very brink of the torrent, pointed, shouted. Including the captain, Gerard counted twenty-three men.

Two of them, stripped to breech-clouts, started across with bamboo poles in their hands. They leaped to the stones, swayed, recovered, dipped the sticks into the stream. They resembled odd, ferocious gnomes, with their muscled, gleaming bodies and the tin helmets. An exchange of calls, and one of those ashore threw a rope. The two then hopped and measured, hopped and measured, forging ahead steadily, with surprising speed. At one point, where they found the leap too long, one fastened the rope about his chest, the other held on while he swam.

The gun-bearer touched Gerard's shoulder, pointed. Four more soldiers had appeared, this quartet on the cliff across the way, covering the gap with automatics.

Twenty-three and four, twenty-seven. There might be two or three more, lurking under cover. The two nude men were across, hauling on the rope to tighten it around a tree trunk. It formed a sort of hand-rail and safety line. Without hesitation, not removing so much as his boots, the little officer bounced to the first stone, to the second. Without hesitation, the soldiers followed him, until the sparkling surface of the rushing stream seemed alive with leaping, bobbing figures.

"You saw where the guys had to swim for it?" Gerard asked Laube. "Good. When he gets there, that fellow will pause for breath, before getting in. You shoot him then. Aim low, knees. I'll take the automatic guys across the way."

"All right, all right."

Gerard picked his target. About one hundred and twenty meters. One could not miss at that range. He knew that Quan-Nhoc would do things right; he was an old hand. He would pick out the chaps nearest the far shore, nearest to cover. Things had progressed remarkably well, and this sort of ambush was a pleasure.

Laube's rifle cracked.

Gerard squeezed his own trigger, the soldier crouching behind the automatic stirred, rolled over slowly. He shifted his aim slightly as he pumped in another cartridge, fired. The second man collapsed. The other two made off.

The Frenchman turned his eyes downstream. He became aware of many reports above the roar of waters. He looked in vain for the officer. The Japanese were working their way back along the rope. Some of them lost their grips, swirled away. Others reached the friendly bank, plunged into the bush.

Then someone cut the rope, and the two remaining men stumbled, sank, slid away. Gerard glanced at his watch. The skirmish had lasted three minutes. No sign left of the Japanese, save the automatic and two bodies on the cliff, and two small piles of equipment and clothing on the far bank.

"I figure we got fifteen," Gerard said, turning around.

Laube was squatted, hands over his face. Blood dripped between his slim fingers. Gerard was certain that not a bullet had come near them; in fact, he did not believe the Japs had fired more than a dozen shots.

"It's the gun—" Laube said, indicating the rifle he had used. "It—it leaped in my hands and I fear my eye is damaged."

Gerard poured water on a handkerchief, carefully wiped away the blood. Laube complained of his shoulder. A great light broke for the Frenchman. The rifle had kicked, bruised Laube's collar-bone, and his thumb-nail had slashed his cheek.

"How much shooting have you done?" he asked.

"This—this was the first time." Laube was apologetic. "I was not eighteen when the war came, never had military training."

"Why didn't you speak?"

"I thought it was easy. Did I—get the officer?"

"No, not a chance. But someone got him, so don't fret."

He led the way to the trail. Quan-Nhoc met them. He had something bundled in big leaves, dripping blood—the heads of the two men who had made the near shore.

"I shot the leader," he announced, ending Laube's last hope.

"We disposed of the covering riflemen," Gerard replied. But he knew he owed Verbier the truth, and worried about his reaction.

CHAPTER IV

"TURTLE-DUNG" TAKES OVER

VERBIER knew that the region would now be very unhealthy for him and his band, and he took his men northward, into the Lung-Men District.

In the higher altitude, among the pines, Laube developed the malaria that had been lurking in him for weeks. The natives were concerned, but not concerned in the way Gerard would have wished them to be. They were beginning to doubt their great man, the heir to all wisdom, who was afraid of the bush, who could not handle a gun properly, who succumbed to sickness like a woman. A number of old crones and sorcerers found their way to

the encampment and volunteered their services. And the son of the De-Nhat-Nam, too weak to pretend, turned them away without a word of flattery.

It took a fortnight for Laube to be on his feet and in a condition to walk any distance. The partisans ran grave danger by sojourning anywhere, even in the fastnesses of the Lung-Men, for more than two or three days. Money is a powerful solvent, and the Japanese knew how to melt men's souls with it.

No one informed them where Ky-Nhat-Nam could be found, but they learned that he was ill and announced the fact over the radio. At certain times of each day, the native population could gather in public places and listen to the Japanese programs.

"I don't know what to do with him," Verbier told Gerard. "We may get into a bad mess dragging him around. The men still venerate him openly, but that's keeping face. They know they might get caught and wiped out trying to carry him along. I am tempted at times to—" He shrugged. "You know, if he disappeared, they'd find some legend to explain it. What the Japs wanted with him, I don't know. He's no damn good—"

Gerard defended the young chap, as usual. "He'd have been all right in a settlement, with a good bed, regular meals. He's not a fighter, he's a propagandist. That's how he should be used."

"Don't you think I've thought of that?" Verbier gestured. "I finally got out of him the name of one or two of the natives who communicated with him at Hanoi, arranged for his escape to us. They now claim they can't do more than they have done, that the Japs have his picture and his fingerprints, could identify him easily if he hid in a town. No, we're stuck with him."

"Perhaps we could smuggle him into China."

"He'd never make it. Cave in on the trails, or be abandoned by the guys with him, as soon as he shifted from Tonkinese to Chinese guides. And there's the political angle, too. Some of his ideas don't fit in with what the Chinese leaders want. His name's unknown out there, he doesn't know anything about the army, wouldn't be any good."

"He could learn."

"I doubt it. He doesn't like war, fighting, bloodshed. And this is no time to study poetry and ideographs."

Gerard himself was puzzled and discouraged. He had thought of teaching Laube the elements of their rough trade. But in two months of bush existence, the poor fellow had made little progress. And it was a delicate matter to educate publicly the son of the De-Nhat-Nam in the handling of a carbine, for instance, particularly as he showed no promise of learning. For Laube, a rifle remained an implement of wood and metal that made an unpleasant noise and aimed primarily at injuring the wielder.

He had been well educated, could have named the queens of France without mistake, cited the Chinese and Tonkinese sages, listed the eight floors of the Annamese hell and the purgatories, but the relation of a front sight to the rear one escaped him. He was still in mortal dread of tigers, but would have blundered into one without seeing him.

If there had been a safe city for him to live in, surrounded with mandarins and dignitaries, Gerard felt that he would have been invaluable. He was a figurehead, and could not be active on his own initiative. He recovered slowly, and Quan-Nhoc himself treated him more like a younger, weaker brother than like a demi-god. An idol should not suffer from dysentery nor retch yellow bile.

What surprised Gerard was the simple fact that he had come to be fond of the unfortunate lad. Laube was blundering, weak, but a gentleman. He suffered morally from his plight, knew that his prestige was melting to nothing, yet he did not complain nor offer excuses.

"I'll find him dead some morning," Gerard thought often, "like a sick kitten."

Gerard and Ky-Nhat-Nam lived on a sampan moored in an isolated cove.

"I'm rather a burden on you all," Laube told him.

"You'll pick it up, you'll learn."

When the band went south again, the Japanese having recalled most of their troops after a prolonged, vain search, Verbier sent Gerard with Laube to a river port. Ky-Nhat-Nam needed a few days of convalescence, he declared. The two lived on a sampan moored in an isolated cove. And Gerard tried to teach his friend the elements of the business.

But Laube was accustomed to learning from the printed page, from books. He would listen with attention, practice faithfully. But, at two hundred yards, he could not pick out a bird on the limb of a tree unless it were pointed out to him. He recovered his health, but did not acquire muscles.

On the other hand, at chess, at cards, he was Gerard's master. And the latter was startled when, from memory, the son of the pirate executed maps of the regions they had tramped through. This chap who could not recognize a bandian tree from an ebony, remembered trails, landmarks, distance, with prodigious accuracy. Ky-Nhat-Nam, who could not handle a rifle decently, was well versed in war as taught in books—strategy, tactics, advances, retreat.

When they rejoined Verbier, Gerard informed the older man of this. The forester was unimpressed. "It'll be some years before we have divisions to oppose the Japs around here, and then they'll bring their own generals."

He was courteous toward Laube, but far from cordial. He, Verbier, had planned the ambush at the bridge, but some smart fellow had attributed the feat to the young native, to build his reputation, and although Verbier knew this was for the general good, it rankled. Also, he was aware that many considered Laube as the chief, himself as a lieutenant, and his pride was hurt.

"Try to stay calm and keep out of the men's way," he told Ky-Nhat-Nam when the young man asked him what he was to do.

But the veteran bushman was working toward a fit of temper. When the storm broke, Ky-Nhat-Nam would listen to some truths about himself, his appearance, his courage and his ancestry. Gerard dreaded that occasion.

THE clash came in tragic fashion. The band had gone to pick up supplies at an assigned spot on a river bank. The scouts who slid through the night to investigate, returned to report that the sampan was there, but that the shore crawled with Japanese soldiers. It was impossible to know whether there had been a trap from the start or if the betrayal had come later.

Verbier had twenty-four armed men and a number of porters. The Japs made no distinction, shot or bayoneted all natives picked up outside the settlement after dark. He gave the order to turn around, hoping to extricate his party undiscovered. Before long, as the scouts reported, the conclusion became inevitable that the Japanese knew what they were after, were tightening a screen of troops to squeeze the band back under the fire of the soldiers on the river side.

There was but one course to follow: clear one of the trails. Gerard, Quan-Nhoc and six picked men removed the Japanese guards, using noose and cold steel. The porters galloped through, the armed men followed. Gerard had turned the care of Ky-Nhat-Nam over to Vinh-Thai, while he directed the slitting party. Vinh-Thai did not know that Ky-Nhat-Nam ordinarily held on to a string tied to Gerard's belt when on night marches. Bush-bred natives could keep in line by slight sounds, by instinct.

Laube grew confused, stepped out of line, wandered off a few feet. In a dark jungle, that was enough. He was lost.

Vinh-Thai missed him after a while, turned back with some men to locate the stray sheep. That caused additional sounds, the beam of a powerful electric torch fused from somewhere. Then a flare rose, bloomed, illuminated the foliage. Birds shrieked, wild animals crashed in and out of the thickets, and Laube, instead of freezing, started to run along a trail. A Jap automatic spattered out, hacked leaves and twigs. The cries of the soldiers sounded like the yelping of dogs.

Verbier tooted the signal "each man for himself" on his horn. He knew that he was outnumbered, that the Japs had reinforcements on barges on the river. For five or six kilometers there was a running fight, one of the prettiest mixups that Gerard could remember. The bush seemed to sweat Japs, the light crackling of their small-bore rifles slapped from all directions.

He did not reach the agreed rallying spot until after noon of the following day. Until twilight, men straggled in, in small groups or isolated.

Just before dusk, Vinh-Thai brought in Ky-Nhat-Nam, weary and scratched, but not seriously hurt. Vinh-Thai himself had been hit three times and was retching blood. He delivered his charge to Verbier, then proffered his rifle and ammunition.

"I won't need them again," he stated calmly.

Seven others failed to report, six more had returned with wounds. Verbier did not speak to Laube, did not look his way. Gerard could not bring himself to discuss the scrape. During the evening meal, served in a sort of lean-to, Verbier rose and went to look at the wounded.

When he returned, he found Laube still eating. He sat down heavily.

"I'm glad your appetite holds out," he said coldly. "We have rations to spare. Vinh-Thai's croaked."

Gerard clenched his hands in an agony of embarrassment. He expected the sensitive young chap to break down, to mumble regrets, apology.

But Ky-Nhat-Nam's dark eyes lifted, met and held the stare of Verbier's pale blue pupils without flinching. Gerard was startled by the hatred, the scorn in those eyes.

"I wasn't reared to live like a wild beast, Verbier," Laube said slowly. "I know men died by my fault last night. But they were doomed anyway, as we all are. I deny you the right to judge me."

"You deny me?" Verbier snapped, tensing.

Laube wiped his fingers on a handkerchief carefully.

"You can glare and grind your teeth. You can kill me. I am no more afraid to die than you are, than Vinh-Thai was." He indicated the pistol at Verbier's belt. "The question is, have you the guts to do what's necessary?" He paused, while the old Frenchman sat as if turned to stone. "You haven't. Very well."

He made pincers of two sticks, picked up a live coal to light a cigarette. His fingers shook a bit, but from excitement rather than fear.

"I've failed, and I realize it. I've been thinking of it for weeks. I am not what you expected, what these fine fellows believed I would be. I am willing to die." He laughed harshly. "I know there is no other way out for me. And I can't endure this sort of thing much longer. If you have the guts and the imagination to help me—"

"If I have—" Verbier broke off, at a loss for words.

"My first speech for the Japanese was to be made from the blockhouse at Thong-Kyat, because that was my great father's stronghold, his lair, at the height of his glory." There was a faint ring of derision in Ky-Nhat-Nam's tone. "I'd like to make a speech, not precisely the one they expected, from that place."

"You're mad," Verbier retorted. "It's isolated, true. But there's a permanent garrison of twenty-five Japs, plus some casuals and technicians. I'd need every man I can gather to try it, and lose a fourth of them. We could not hold it for twenty-four hours. They'd send planes, bring up troops and mortars."

"He who risks nothing gains nothing." The little Asiatic lifted his small chin, squared his puny shoulders. "There must be casualties in war. It would be excellent for the morale of the hill people. For even my illustrious father never stormed a blockhouse. Men, you need men? I'll send a call for them, for I am the son of the De-Nhat-Nam."

"If you got five hundred, a thousand, the finish would be the same: Wiped out in twenty-four hours."

"We don't need twenty-four hours. We need only one."

"It's mad," the captain repeated.

"We need a couple of men," Ky-Nhat-Nam went on, without heeding him. "A more or less alert and intelligent chap who lived in the blockhouse when it was held by the French. Then some radio man who can adjust the apparatus, in case the Japs refuse to—collaborate. I'll explain." He picked up a twig, started to draw a map on the ground. "Here's the blockhouse, the cliff. Here, the main trail—"

THE blockhouse of Thong-Kyat was known throughout the Tonkin.

Its crenelated walls crested the tip of a gigantic stone cone shooting up from the floor of a vast depression in the mountains. Its patch of white walls seemed to serve as the hub of an immense circle of surrounding peaks for, although not as high as many of them, its very isolation made it impressive. It was sufficiently high for the tropical jungle of the valley floor, the luxuriant growth of the moist ravines, to yield to trees and plants of the temperate zone toward the summit. The foliage that covered its slopes like a green pelt changed from palm to fir.

It was of little military use in modern days. It took hours for patrols to reach the valleys, and the road creeping around its upper flanks, hacked out of the rock by the Foreign Legion in the nineties, was practical only for men and mules. The gate could not be reached by motor car because of the many long stretches where the path was nothing more than a narrow ledge. When built, it had had great value as an observation post, but the planes had made it obsolete for that purpose.

For years before the Japanese invasion, the French had kept but a few men up there, as caretakers. The Japs had put in a garrison chiefly for the prestige, to display an enormous rising sun flag where it could be seen for many miles. Then they had established a broadcasting station there, which was on the air twice a day for thirty minutes, fifteen in the classic Annamese, fifteen in Meo, which is corrupt Chinese, in Tho, which is corrupt Laotian, and in Nong which is a mixture of all three.

The programs announced the magnificent victories of the Japanese over the white race and their deluded Asiatic auxiliaries, devoted a few words to local topics and often mentioned that the broadcast emanated from Thong-Kyat, where that worthy precursor of the Pan-Asians, De-Nhat-Nam, had defied the greedy, arrogant whites. The peasants and coolies, gathered in the village places to listen to the Japs' loudspeakers, could in a number of settlements, look up and discern the faint white spot against the pewter-blue sky. Often, patrol planes would be circling above it, impressing the beholders with the invaders' progress and power.

Thong-Kyat blockhouse was not impregnable. In fact, a French detachment had driven the chieftain from the crest, climbing under fire, hugging rocks and bushes under the bullets of Winchesters—and that was before the road had been made. Nevertheless, it was an undertaking, and Gerard was not in favor of it any more than Verbier until Ky-Nhat-Nam literally hypnotized them.

The preparations took several days. To assure relative quiet around their hidden camp, Verbier dispatched small detachments to points fifty or sixty miles away, to carry on minor depredations and keep the Japs busy. To the two Frenchmen's amazement, Ky-Nhat-Nam's mysterious friends seemed to have some influence. One promised to have seventy-five men, each equipped with a repeating rifle and at least one hundred cartridges, at any rallying point indicated. Another guaranteed fifty-two, another fifteen, and so on.

Sergeant Bastide, Colonial Army, retired, reported. He had spent five years in the blockhouse, knew "every pebble, every bush." He was almost as old as Verbier, gabby and boastful. He had been a foreman in the coal mines on the Coast, had quit because he "wouldn't work for the yellow scum." The radio specialist came soon after—a tall, quiet, blondish chap of thirty-five, an ex-Legionnaire, who spoke French with a trace of accent. Gerard knew him only as Monsieur Charles.

Neither one gave many details of their recent journey, of the many miles covered on foot through bush, or hiding in the stinking holds of sampans being poled up dangerous streams.

"The apparatus in use at Thong-Kyat is German," Charles said. "They won't destroy all spare parts. I can almost guarantee to fix it up if they damage it."

He had brought along a small radio set which he claimed could not be located by Jap spotters. Gerard and the others listened to news different from that spouted by the enemy: San Francisco and Seattle had not been razed by air raids.

Those were restful, pleasant days for Gerard. The camp was well hidden and the Japanese planes which roared overhead two or three times a day were not to be feared. Even had they flown flush with the tree-tops, it is doubtful that they could have spotted anything. And, as the air was treacherous above the streams, inside the deep ravines, they preferred to fly very high.

At last the entire band, close to one hundred rifles, reassembled and headed for the Thong-Kyat blockhouse.

CHAPTER V

THE BATTLE OF THE BLOCKHOUSE

THREE strenuous night marches brought them to the foot of the peak. They were joined by some of the promised reinforcements, another hundred and fifty men. Some of these newcomers were dressed and equipped like Chinese of the free armies, moved in formation. The rest were peasants and laborers, tough fighters just the same, born

bushmen. Omens seemed favorable, for the clouds sank low over the crests and a slow, steady rain swept into the valley, just when concealment was most needed.

The leaders were gathered for a final council in a hut. The new arrivals prostrated themselves before Ky-Nhat-Nam, who accepted this demonstration calmly, as his due. Verbier assured himself that all understood French, and outlined the plan made by "The Son." Bastide was consulted each time a question of terrain had to be made plain, and Ky-Nhat-Nam used a sand box to draw his maps.

Gerard drew the toughest assignment. Verbier wanted a white man in charge. Bastide was too old for the task, Charles was not a fighter but a precious specialist. Gerard was permitted to select twenty men, and he took them all from his own band, asking for Quan-Nhoc first. He had to leave earlier than the others, and after he took leave of the gathering, Verbier accompanied him into the night.

"It won't be so tough, kid," he said. "You're sure-footed, a fine climber. The real danger will all be concentrated in about a minute. Try to keep from sweating about that one minute in advance. You have the lay of the ground well in mind? Inside the place, I mean? Know just where to go? If Bastide made a mistake, don't get worried, take your time—"

"I'll do my best, Captain."

"Hell, I know you will. I'm not talking to you, but to myself, really. I'm more worried than you are. You've been a fine comrade, Gerard, and some day I hope I can get you some token of appreciation—"

"Sure," Gerard laughed, "the Imperial Order of Nhat-Nam."

Verbier suddenly grasped Gerard by the shoulders, touched his bearded cheek to the young man's face. "*Allons*, be off."

GERARD gathered his men around him, spoke to them in Annamese, then in Tho. "If anyone doesn't understand, let him ask questions. Quan-Nhoc, make sure they get it."

"All catch on," the guide said, chuckling. "No fear, all catch."

There was a preliminary trek through jungle to circle the base of the peak. Rain poured at intervals. Quan-Nhoc was in the lead, walking tirelessly. Gerard wondered how many thousands of miles those sturdy legs had covered. Animals galloped through the thickets at their approach, there were crashings and flutterings, the slitherings of reptiles.

The trail now led uphill. The actual climb had started. From time to time, Gerard's extended hand would touch Quan-Nhoc's bare back, the fingers of the man following would brush his shoulder. In a couple of hours he, Gerard, would have to swing—no, what was it Verbier had said? Not to think of it in advance. Only a minute, only a minute—

There were more than twenty-five thousand Frenchmen in Indo-China from Saigon northward, and of these, not fifty could claim to have resisted as actively as he had. Only a handful, a chosen handful. No, he must be wrong. There were many more. But only a few compared to the mass. If he lived, would he be pointed out, admired? He laughed. No. The men who had fought the Chinese, the Annamites, the Thos, who had won the land for France, had grown old and been considered garrulous, boastful old pests. If he lived, he would see people quietly disperse when he mentioned that he had climbed the Thong-Kyat by night to surprise a Japanese garrison.

The medical officers had turned him down as unfit for service. And within eighteen months of that verdict, he had started to serve. He had served well, Verbier said, and Verbier did not flatter. Where was his remaining brother at this time? In England, or with the Fighting French, in the Chad, in Italy?

Quan-Nhoc clucked his tongue slightly, in warning. The real job was starting. The detachment was to climb the cliff to the west of the peak, which rose almost wall-like for hundreds of yards to meet the base of the blockhouse's rear wall. Quan-Nhoc, who had eyes like a cat's, worked his way up slowly, carefully, finding hand holds, toe holds.

"Right, right, right, left—"

His whispers were scarcely audible, scattered by the wet wind. And Gerard would lean down, whisper in turn into the darkness, for the next man. The rainy night was opaque, one could not see four feet away, yet the sense of yawning space at one's back increased, tore at the heart, at the bowels. The earth was soggy, mud turned hands into clumsy lumps that had to be scraped clean on rocks. Several times, Gerard asked for a count, to check on his men. All were following.

The Frenchman knew that he had the favored spot. A man ahead to test the holds. Sometimes, after four, five, six men had hoisted their weight on the thick roots of a cliff-tree, those roots would loosen, become unsafe. Then the next fellow had to grope about for a substitute. But they managed. Most of them, in the cheerful times of peace, had led much the same life from choice, smuggling opium out of China, or women into China. The enemy for them then had been white, wearing the badges of the Protectorate's customs service. The war had brought about a slack season, the Japs had brought opium with them at a price that made smuggling ridiculous, and the Chinese had other concerns than dalliance with beautiful maids. This Japanese-baiting served their racial and patriotic leanings and permitted them to keep their hand in.

Gerard motioned for the ladder to be inched in and his hand grasped a root. No man could have got over that bulge without help.

QUAN-NHOC called for rest periods at various intervals. He was a good judge of other men's wind and hearts. Each man would stretch out or squat where he was, depending on the width and length of his current support. In the lulls of the downpour, Gerard heard the swishing of flying bats, and when the sound came from below him, he experienced an odd type of dizziness.

At last, Quan-Nhoc halted, turned and helped him onto more solid ground. "We are here."

"Here," Gerard knew, was a ledge about two feet in width and fifty in length, reported by Bastide. As a matter of cold fact, they were within grenade distance of the blockhouse, hung in space seven hundred feet above the nearest landing spot. And here, Gerard saw after consulting his watch, they must remain for two hours at least, until daylight, huddled in the rain without a loud word or a cough.

Above this slender platform, fifteen feet or less, was a bulge, an overhang, that screened it from observation from the wall. The wall itself was twenty feet from the edge, but there was a jutting platform for a sentry, which came within three feet of the brink. It was Ky-Nhat-Nam who had coaxed this information from Bastide, realized its importance. A sentry could look down the cliff and see its surface for most of the way. That was why it had been necessary to climb by night. Ky-Nhat-

Nam had reasoned that when day broke, the guard would almost automatically scan the ascent, see nothing, and lose interest. Bastide said that this western face was considered so unapproachable that the barbed wire enclosure had not been continued there, being left in the shape of a horseshoe.

He did not mention the overhang at first, but Ky-Nhat-Nam put the question. Perhaps his father had told him of it, perhaps it was instinct. Bastide had admitted knowing of its existence. And he had agreed that the Japanese might not know about the odd natural niche beneath. "But," he had added, "you'd have to be a fly to get from the ledge over that bulge. The other way around's possible. That's the way the De-Nhat-Nam gave Captain Bargelos the slip when he was cornered up there. He made it, but ten or twelve of his guys didn't and smacked down all the way."

"That side is therefore considered safe from attack?"

"Completely."

And Ky-Nhat-Nam, growing further and further away from the Jean Laube who had wondered that the Japanese would undertake to cross a torrent, had announced calmly, "Then that's where we must attack."

In conference with Verbier, it had been decided that the opportune moment would be shortly before the sentries were changed in the morning. The man on duty would probably look down the cliff mechanically, see nothing, and resume his pacing. Tired from his turn of guard, he would be thinking of food and sleep. Ky-Nhat-Nam had made a little model, to scale, calculating the fields of vision from various posts on the walls.

Gerard had expected the long wait to be the hardest part of his task. To his surprise, it was not. He squatted with his back against the stone, somewhat sheltered from the rain, folded his arms across his knees, rested his head on them, and dozed. The fatigue and nervous strain of the climb had dulled his imagination. Minutes passed swiftly, and suddenly he found that he could look into gray mist and discern peaks to the south.

He had heard no sound from the blockhouse, probably because of the wind. The difficult minute mentioned by Verbier was approaching. Quan-Nhoc had already started to work, assembling stout lengths of bamboo. He constructed a sort of ladder, two uprights about twenty feet in length, rungs just wide enough to permit a shod foot to slide through. The pieces had been carefully made, fitted solidly, reinforced by pegs. It had been assembled and tested several times, did not sag under Gerard's weight, and he was the tallest and heaviest man in the party.

Nevertheless, it had an extraordinarily flimsy appearance, resembled an acrobatic prop more than a serviceable implement. When it was ready, the feet were braced against the rock, and men supported it with ropes. This also had been tested, rehearsed—but under other conditions, when the slip of one man's foot meant a drop of twenty feet at most, and not seven hundred odd.

Quan-Nhoc looked at Gerard, did not change expression, and moved to start climbing. The Frenchman waved him aside, stepped to the ladder and started up himself. He had done it fifty times in practice. This was the same, only he must not look down, for he would see the space between the rungs, the boulders below. The bamboo creaked, as always, and the ropes jerked each time he shifted his weight. He was aware of the men crouching below, muscles swelling their weathered skin. A single second of relaxation, and the ladder would twist and spill him.

Craning his neck upward, he motioned for the ladder to be inched in and his hand grasped a root. Nothing in his existence had ever given him such a sensation of permanence. No, no man could have got over that bulge without help. He gripped another root, a protruding edge of rock, pulled himself up, and suddenly the wall was before him, startlingly close. He expected to see a Jap on the platform, but it was deserted.

The next moment, he was flat on his stomach, negotiating the few feet of slope to solid ground. There was something Bastide had forgotten: solid cement pillars connected with chains, to serve as a rail for the watch-path. As instructed, he went to the wall, flattened against it. He was panting and sweating.

Quan-Nhoc appeared, another man, a third. One looped a rope around one of the pillars, dropped it over the edge. Soundlessly, calmly, the men climbed into sight, slid forward, rose. Then the ladder itself was hauled to the top. Quan-Nhoc had held a coil of greased cord with a lead weight at the end, a deadly weapon in his hands. With it, he could pull a sentry off a wall at almost every cast.

THE ladder was propped against the wall of the jutting platform, and this time Quan-Nhoc went first. He was gone for two or three minutes, returned and beckoned. Gerard went up, the others on his heels. Quan-Nhoc pointed to a niche in an angle of the parapet. The Japanese sentry was there, quite dead.

Gerard held one hand against his cheek, closed his eyes, in the mimic of sleep. Quan-Nhoc shook his head, grinned, imitated a man leaning on a rifle, staring vacantly into space. The Frenchman looked about. As Ky-Nhat-Nam had predicted, the spot could not be seen by other sentries because of the jutting of

"The son of De-Nhat-Nam will vanish now, but will return when the People of the Mountains are free."

roofs. When the blockhouse's military worth had ended, the French had constructed carelessly, masking vision.

The Japanese seemed absurdly lax, until one remembered that they were hundreds of meters above the jungle belt, behind solid walls and a girdle of barbed wire. The pattering of rain would cease momentarily and he could discern faint voices, probably from the guard room near the gate. A man emerged from a building, nude save for a loin cloth, beat his clogs across the yard to a row of little structures, entered one of them.

Gerard led his men down the ramp. As he rounded the buildings, he saw a soldier on the south wall, rifle slung, pacing slowly. Two or three lighted windows made golden patches in the gray mist. The raiders hugged the buildings, heading for the place where Bastide had said the radio station was located. The door was open, a Jap in a kimono sat before communication instruments—a telephone, a small switchboard, a radio set. He was busy handling little brushes, painting.

Quan-Nhoc crossed the threshold, slid forward. His sinewy hand clamped over the Jap's face, the blade in his right fist slashed the throat. Gerard cautiously opened another door. The radio room. His men took care of the other rooms, silently, efficiently. There were two or three scuffles, but no loud cries. Methodically, they would lay the bodies against the walls, where no one would stumble over them.

"Traitors," Quan-Nhoc announced, indicating some of them. They were Indo-Chinese, the hired broadcasters.

Gerard looked at his watch. If all had gone according to plan, there were several hundred men massed under cover within half a kilometer of the gate, between five and ten minutes away. He had performed his own part perfectly thus far, prevented the possibility of an alarm being given all over the region, saving the apparatus from destruction.

There were two floors to the building, which had been used as a storage shed by the French. The door was flanked by two windows opening on the yard. The upper story had six ventilation slots through which rifles could be used.

He locked the door, pushed furniture against it. If the Jap commander was a quick thinker, he would try to retake the communications room, to give the alarm. But if there were less than thirty men in the garrison, he would find it quite a job!

Then he assigned turns to the men, for not all would be able to have room at the windows and loopholes, and all were equally entitled to some sport. The nude man crossed the yard, reversing his trip, looking neither to right nor left, unconscious of danger. He opened a door, vanished.

"I'll wait until they change the sentries," Gerard thought.

But the minutes passed, and although day had completely arrived, there was no movement. And he remembered that Verbier and the others were waiting anxiously. He went to the window, lined his sights on one of the wall sentries. He called out his target, Quan-Nhoc picked his, others reported. It saved cartridges not to aim at the same man.

He squeezed the trigger, the detonation cracked out.

There had been four men in sight, and all four went down under the first shots. From a small building right of the gate, a number of soldiers emerged. The fusillade resumed and when it ceased there were three more bodies on the ground. Some of those who had dodged back inside were wounded, Gerard was sure.

Then, oddly, silence settled down on the blockhouse—a silence so complete that Gerard heard the signal horns of the others outside. The Japanese had probably realized that enemies had somehow penetrated into the compound, and that to emerge was death. They were trying to find out what had happened, where the shots came from.

This lasted for dragging minutes. Then Verbier's tall silhouette was outlined against the sky, other men followed him, using climbing-poles. Shots came from the windows of the officers' quarters, from the loopholes of the

barracks. As the attackers trotted down the ramp to the yard, a brace of automatics came into play, dropped some of them. The rest scattered, strung out against the walls, advancing slowly.

The field mortar and two heavy machine guns on the platforms were in the hands of the newcomers. The action that followed lasted five or six minutes. The mortar went into action, knocked holes in the brick and plaster walls, through which the infantry rushed, with bayonets and short sabres. Building after building was stormed, occupied, the defenders wiped out.

Fifteen minutes later, a small French tricolor was run up the staff, before the assembled partisans, while Bastide sounded colors on a Japanese bugle. The beautiful, poignant call aroused remote echoes in the hills.

Gerard found his cheeks wet with tears and tried to hide his emotion. But he saw that Verbier, his right hand at the salute, was wiping his eyes with the left. They were French, and the symbol of their suffering motherland lifted once more in triumph stirred their hearts. That flag would be hauled down again very soon, but its few hours of glory had rekindled all their hopes.

CHAPTER VI

RED CEMENT

A JAPANESE plane flew low over Thong-Kyat during the morning. The pilot made three runs before leaving. Verbier had ordered his men to cover and there was no firing.

"I don't understand their code," Charles said, "and they've probably tried to get an answer on the radio. I tried German, as the chief operator here knew it—I saw his books—but they must be suspicious."

"Well, they will know soon now," Verbier pointed out. "That flyer must have spotted the flag, probably noticed that some of the buildings were wrecked. But we have a little time. He won't be believed at first—those people think no one dares to attack them. Then, when they're convinced, they'll have to ask headquarters for instructions."

At its usual hour, twelve-thirty, Radio Thong-Kyat went on the air, broadcasting a one-man program. Ky-Nhat-Nam spoke in classic Annamese, made a strong, yet flowery speech.

"I, Ky-Nhat-Nam, son of the De-Nhat-Nam, have returned to the mountains across the seas and over the lands," he said in part. "I found that a race of monkeys sullied the country, had occupied even the highest nest from which my father watched the valleys like an eagle. Made indignant by this sacrilege, I have had them driven out, killed to the last in punishment. The cloth of the French, blue, white and red, is again flying here, as my father wished it would on his day of death. Annamese and French fought a long war against each other, then fought side by side in a greater war across the seas. Twenty-five years ago forty thousand Annamese fell for France, and their blood is a red cement to bind us."

He spoke rapidly, with a ring of pride and authority.

"Men of the Mountains will fight, fight for themselves, fight for their great friends, the French. There is the time of peace, tolled with a silver sledge upon a bell of gold, and there is the time for war, shrilled by the battle trumpets and the chieftains' signal horns. I, the son of the De-Nhat-Nam, speaking the words of his mouth and the thoughts of his brain, summon you to war. Those of you who cannot as yet fight, for lack of weapons and the mighty odds against you, will fight with your will, fight with your hearts. Let your eyes become dim and your limbs clumsy when you work for the monkey-men!"

Charles, at the control, signaled for him to conclude.

"Those of you who can behold Thong-Kyat will see it vanish today. The time for complete freedom has not arrived, but it will come. I, the son of De-Nhat-Nam will vanish now, but only for a while, to reappear when the People of the Mountains are free. That you may know I am not an impostor, as the monkey-men claim, I utter the words which the old men among you who once followed my father, and the trusted sons of those men, will know." The orator took a deep breath and shouted, "What race shall survive? Ours! Ours! *Giao-Chi, Giao-Chi!*"

"I think most of it got over," Charles explained, as he turned off the apparatus. "Took a while for the Japs to be tipped off as to what the speech was, but they were trying to scramble it at the end."

"We'd better leave," Verbier suggested. "We shall have bombers overhead inside an hour."

Ky-Nhat-Nam exchanged ceremonious bows with the native leaders, who left one by one. Outside, the tramping of men showed that the place was being evacuated very swiftly. Then Ky-Nhat-Nam, Verbier and Gerard were left alone in the room.

"Well, Captain, you had better go," Ky-Nhat-Nam said.

Verbier took his slender hand in both of his.

"I'm proud to be on your side," he said. "Won't you reconsider? There is no need to follow your plans to the letter."

Ky-Nhat-Nam smiled faintly.

"After that speech? I must vanish, or I'd lose face." He paused, then resumed. "I would

die in any case. I am very ill, very tired, to a degree you cannot guess. And I might shame you, shame myself." He gestured. "You saw the others of my race. They know it is necessary, they did not protest, did not plead."

"Then—" Verbier hesitated. "Let me stay with you. The devil, there should be a Frenchman in on this, too!"

"No. For a Frenchman, it would be suicide. For a man of my blood, it is hope." He lighted a cigarette. "It doesn't matter, really."

"What are you going to do, Jean?" Gerard asked.

"Vanish, that's all. End all my sufferings."

"How?"

"This blockhouse is old," Ky-Nhat-Nam replied. "In the old days, when French pride was intact, there was a provision against surrendering a blockhouse to"—he smiled—"natives. There were explosives prepared. One blew the thing up. Bastide told me where the fuse is—"

Gerard looked at him, gasped.

"And you mean you'll stay here and blow yourself up?"

"Precisely."

"THE hell you will!" Gerard grew suddenly furious. "Listen, there's no call for you to do that. You're not a soldier, you're not—"

"I happen to be the De-Nhat-Nam's son."

"*He* didn't blow himself up!"

"But, I tell you, I can't face that jungle again—"

"Nuts," Gerard snapped. "You can stand a few days more. We'll go together, across the frontier, to join the Chinese. They can use you, train you—and after this stunt, they'll have to believe you can do something." The young Frenchman looked from the Annamese to Verbier, saw that they were not moved. He concluded, "Or I stay here with you. I can be just as pig-headed as either of you."

"He can, too—" Verbier admitted. He addressed Ky-Nhat-Nam. "We'll go ahead and you can join us after touching off the fuse."

Gerard laughed. "Oh, no! All together, or not at all."

There was a pause of fifteen seconds, the three staring at each other. Then Ky-Nhat-Nam went to the wall, lifted a flagstone, revealing a sort of brass tube. He touched the tip of his cigarette to the fuse. "We have fifteen minutes," he answered. "A little less if the fuse is dry, a little more if it's damp."

They walked out. Ky-Nhat-Nam's face was impassive. He did not appear to feel much joy at being coaxed back to life—and the jungle. But Gerard felt that he could get him to a city, back to civilization and organized society, where he could gradually find his place. The thought of letting this poor little guy die alone was revolting.

Verbier lifted his hand as they neared the gate. Gerard followed his indication, saw blurs against the sky in the distance.

"Planes."

"They'll be surprised when the whole business goes up in their faces," Gerard remarked. Then he started. "Eh, what's that?"

Something heavy had thumped to the ground nearby. He looked about, down—and saw it was a grenade. The second that followed seemed to last an eternity. Gerard had the familiar nightmare sensation of horrible danger impending and his being unable to move, to call out. He and the others were close to a wall, it was useless to drop, and fourteen, fifteen feet away, in the door of the guard room, a half-nude, blood-stained Jap was about to heave out a second missile.

He met Ky-Nhat-Nam's glance. That impression could not have taken a tenth of one second to register, but he was to recall it forever. There was panic in the little fellow's brown eyes, and there was friendship, love. Then the glance changed, the expression matched the mocking quirk of his lips. He threw himself upon the grenade. . . .

(Continued on page 144)

READ ARGOSY—THE MAGAZINE OF THE YEAR!

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ARGOSY
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GRAVEYARD GOBBLER

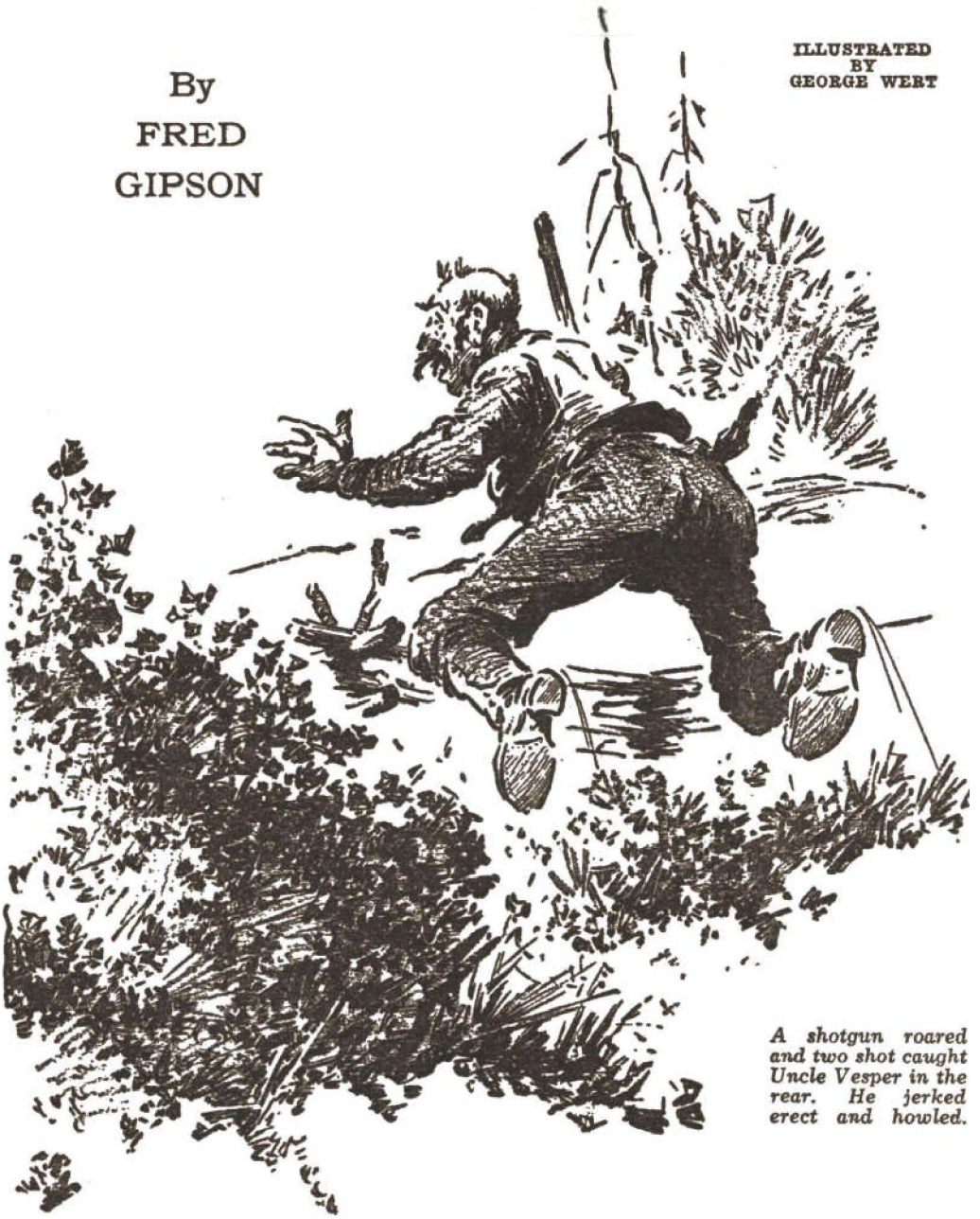
I'M NOT superstitious; I want you to understand that. Yet before raising my gun, I think I knew I'd never shoot.

He was a huge, long-shanked old gobbler with a beard that tipped the ground. He fed under the towering live-oak that stood in the corner of the weed-grown Scallon burial lot. He scratched leisurely for acorns in the leaves collected between the graves of my Aunt Elfie and Uncle Vesper Singletarry.

Frost-tinted poison ivy hung to the sagging rail fence, screening my approach; he was un-

By
FRED
GIPSON

ILLUSTRATED
BY
GEORGE WERT



A shotgun roared and two shot caught Uncle Vesper in the rear. He jerked erect and howled.

aware of my presence. But few eyes are keener than those of a wild turkey. He caught the movement of the rising gun and jerked erect. His drooping wings snapped shut against his body; every feather fell into place. Long neck uplifted, he stood rigidly at attention and his bronze feathers gathered light from the setting sun, reflecting it in dazzling, liquid flame.

This U. S. Marine had to shoot quickly now if he meant to get a turkey on his furlough; a wild gobbler never looks twice. When that prize bird broke his stance, he would be gone —whipping himself into the air and hurtling to safety at brush-top level. And I'd never acquired the knack of knocking a wild turkey out of the air with a rifle, like my Uncle Vesper used to could.

But I didn't shoot. And the gobbler didn't

fly. Instead, he stepped up on the slab of rotten granite that marked the head of my Uncle Vesper's grave—and gobbled!

The surrounding woods caught up the sound, magnified it, and hurled it back with an overtone of brag and daring.

That did it—that taunting gobble, and the sight of the tiny patches of light feathers at the tips of his wings. I lowered my gun and slunk toward the ranch headquarters with something like a cold snake crawling up my spine. I felt as if Old Death had reached for me and just barely missed.

LOTS of people wouldn't understand a thing like that. But lots of people don't know of the strange chain of events leading up to the sudden and mysterious death of my Uncle Vesper Singletarry.

He was a bronc-buster, Uncle Vesper was, and a natural. He was nearly forty when he signed on with the Turkey Track outfit—old for the business. But he was a little man, tough as rawhide, and at fifty there still wasn't a jug-head bronc in Mason County that could shake the steel-rimmed spectacles on his nose.

And while he broke wild horses for a living, Uncle Vesper lived to hunt wild turkeys. My Aunt Elfie, who was born a Scallon and who finally inherited the Turkey Track ranch—well, she knew she stood second to turkey-hunting in Uncle Vesper's affections. She knew that before she married him. But she watched him ride the pitch out of bad horses and she watched him shoot with that .25-.35 carbine he packed. And being a Scallon to the core, with hard-riding, straight-shooting ancestors behind her, Aunt Elfie saw her destiny in my Uncle Vesper.

Uncle Vesper had the bird dead center in his Winchester sights when the bobcat flung himself off the ledge.

Also, she was a practical woman. She reasoned that turkey-hunting wasn't as bad as whiskey-drinking, the vice of the Scallon men. Turkey-hunting wouldn't keep a man away from his bed and his woman of a night, but it would keep him out from underfoot of a daytime.

So Aunt Elfie put out her bait, like a woman will, trapped him and married him, and never lived to regret it.

There was only one little rift between them to mar a perfect marriage: Uncle Vesper persisted in shooting turkeys around the old Scallon burial lot.

The family cemetery rests on a slight knoll a couple of miles back in the woods. It's located on Comanche Creek, in a circular basin, hemmed in on two sides by a curving granite ledge and on the other two by towering live-oaks and mountain elm. It's a protected spot and turkeys like it. Some even roost among the branches of the gnarled live-oak that stands in the corner of the graveyard.

Aunt Elfie didn't like for Uncle Vesper to shoot turkeys out of that graveyard live-oak. She'd ask him how he'd like for somebody to come stomping around on his grave, disturbing the peace of his bones with rifle shots. She said it wasn't showing proper respect and reverence for her dead. She said bad trouble would come of it—and maybe she knew what she was talking about.

But Uncle Vesper, he wouldn't listen. He leaned to the opinion that the Scallon bunch was used to gunfire and their remains had no call to get uneasy. He claimed he could think of no better place for his bones to lie than under a good turkey roost. He went right ahead and he got in a mighty lot of good shooting before the trouble showed up.

When it did come, it was in the form of a lone gobbler, a huge bronze bird with a strain of domestic blood in him, judging from the little patches of grayish white at his wing-tips.

Uncle Vesper got his first good look at the wild gobbler late one evening from where he squatted in the burial lot. He had his back braced comfortably against the granite ledge and the barrel of his Winchester resting on the top of Great-grandpa Mill-Wheel Scallon's tombstone. He was all set for a shot if the turkeys came in to roost.

But the long shadows crept across the graves, the sun went down, and still no turkeys came to roost. So Uncle Vesper went to work with his turkey caller.

Uncle Vesper called with a turkey bone. Old Badger Clabe, a neighbor across the mountain, called with a squared-up green leaf which he held against the roof of his mouth with his tongue. He blew on it like a saxaphone reed and the resulting sound was music to any lost turkey hunting his bunch. But Uncle Vesper claimed flat-out that the only real and natural turkey talk was made by sucking on the hollow bone from a gobbler's wing. He shut Badger up for good when he pointed out a string of turkey beards hanging over his fireplace twice as long as Badger's string.

The old man wasn't surprised this evening when his calls got an answering yelp from the gloom down by the creek spring. The coarseness of the yelp told him he'd aroused a gobbler, so he waited a long, long time before he called again. And then it was just one low seductive note. Uncle Vesper knew how his turkey hens talked to a gobbler.

That last enticing note got instant results. Out of the underbrush strutted a monstrous bird. His tail was spread like a Mexican dancer's fan. His dragging wing-tips boomed against the ground like muffled drumbeats. He stretched a long red neck and shattered the evening stillness with a gobble that rang the echoes in the basin.

UNCLE VESPER'S heart leaped and his pulse hammered in his ears. But he held himself rigid. If that was the gobbler he thought it was, he had a job on his hands. Off and on, for the last couple of years he'd been catching glimpses of a big gobbler with a splash of white at both wing-tips. But every time, it was only a glimpse before the bird melted into cover.

Uncle Vesper knew the kind. He called them hermit gobblers. They ranged alone. They seldom spent two consecutive nights in the same tree and changed feeding grounds regularly. They led wary, solitary lives, seeking companionship only at breeding time.

A man had to play it cautious with a cagy old bird like that; he wouldn't walk blindly into a gun-trap. A slight movement, bad timing, or one false note in Uncle Vesper's calling, and that turkey would be gone.

Uncle Vesper waited still longer this time before he called. He wanted that gobbler out in the open where the shooting light was better. Night was almost on him now, but he'd hunted turkeys too long to rush the thing.

It took two more calls. Then the big bird left the timber, approaching at a saddle-horse trot.

Uncle Vesper lined his Winchester sights dead center, pulled the trigger half off, and held it. He'd fire the instant the gobbler halted to strut again.

But the bobcat attacked first. With a savage squall, he flung himself off the ledge onto what he thought was a turkey hen calling from the shadows beside Great-grandpa Mill-Wheel's grave. What he sank his teeth and claws into probably surprised him as much as it did Uncle Vesper.

Uncle Vesper's howl of dismay was cut off by the lashing report of his rifle. The startled bobcat cried out and fell loose from his catch. The gobbler wheeled, vanishing like a phantom into the gloom.

There was no way out for Uncle Vesper. When he rode in for supper, one torn ear was still dripping blood onto his brush jumper and ragged clawmarks were plain across his neck and shoulders. Aunt Elfie kept at him till she got the story, then pinned him down to admitting that he'd been waiting for turkeys at that graveyard roost again.

"I been telling you for fifteen year," she told him, "to quit tromping around on the bones of my dead people. This here is just a warning. Keep at it, and you'll git in bad trouble, Vesper Singletarry. You mark them words!"

That brand of superstitious prattle riled Uncle Vesper. He spoke sharp to his woman for the first time in his life.

"Hush that rattle-tongue talking and patch me up," he ordered. "There ain't enough dead Scallons and fool bobcats on the Turkey Track range to keep me from gitting that gobbler. And you can mark them words!"

That stopped Aunt Elfie. She didn't hold with a woman's arguing with her man. She sent one of the boys to the smokehouse for spider-web while she hunted up the turpentine and sugar. She stopped Uncle Vesper's bleeding and set out his supper in grim silence. Then she went out to her rockingchair on the front gallery and sat and rocked in the cold till everybody had gone to bed.

Uncle Vesper waited better than a week before he made another trip for that graveyard gobbler. He wanted to give the old boy plenty of time to get over his scare. Then one foggy morning he rode out while the coyotes were still singing for daylight. He was holed up in a tight nest of bamboo briars surrounding Monk Scallon's grave when the east began to gray.

This blind didn't suit him as well as his favorite one behind Great-grandpa Mill-Wheel's headstone, but it was out of reach of any fool bobcat prowling the ledge. He squatted on his hunkers, listening.

He heard the cautious movements of some animal off to the left and behind him. He finally decided it was a deer or a wild range hog. A little later, he heard a single turkey fly down from a roost a couple or three hundred yards up the creek. A few birds twittered among the live-oaks down by the spring. Then there was complete silence.

Daylight came and a slight breeze attacked the wreathes of heavy fog hanging in the basin. Uncle Vesper was satisfied. If he'd heard several turkeys leave their roosts, he wouldn't have had a chance. The gobbler he wanted wouldn't be roosting where turkeys hang out in bunches. But that one turkey he'd heard—his wings had sounded mighty heavy in the brush. Uncle Vesper guessed that was the gobbler he was after. He laid his gun across a fence rail and lifted his turkey-bone caller.

HIS first soft note got an answer. But it was from the wrong direction and the sound of it puzzled him. It came from the left and behind and the notes were a little too soft for a gobbler, yet mighty coarse for a hen. He waited a long time; that wasn't the gobbler he wanted.

When finally he called again, he got the right answer from the right direction. It came from up the creek and he would have recognized that hoarse, wary yelp anywhere. It was his lone graveyard gobbler and the old hermit was talking to him.

Then from behind Uncle Vesper came that curious yelp he'd heard the first time. Only it was closer now, less than a hundred yards away. Uncle Vesper frowned and peered behind him through the last wisps of fog that hovered over the graveyard and seemed reluctant to leave. A turkey that close would ruin his chances with the big one.

Uncle Vesper studied the situation. He wondered if he could maybe frighten this turkey away without scaring him into sounding the alarm signal that would put the big gobbler on guard. The odds were long, but it looked like his only chance. Carefully, he shifted his feet under him and brushed the briars with one hand, making a slight noise.

A shotgun roared and a withering blast of Number Four shot tore through the briars. Two shot caught Uncle Vesper in the rear, driving deep and burning like red-hot spikes. He jerked erect and howled. He leaped two graves, stumbled on the footstone of the third, and sprawled belly-down across the fourth. He lay there in the dead weeds, wallowing and pitching and hollering.

He got himself in hand in time to catch sight of a man streaking through the brush, clutching a double-barreled shotgun in one hand. It was Badger Clabe and he was running as if the devil were on his tail. He cast wild glances back over his shoulder now and then, but kept going.

By the time Uncle Vesper could get his hands on the rifle he'd flung aside, Badger was out of sight. And that's all that kept my Uncle Vesper from back-shooting a man that morning.

Aunt Elfie didn't ask her man one question when he came crippling in, leading a horse he wasn't able to ride. She got her tweezers and a spaying needle, like Uncle Vesper told her, and went right to digging for the buried shot.

The four boys helped. They swung to their daddy's arms and legs, holding him across the kitchen table while Aunt Elfie worked.

Uncle Vesper squirmed and groaned in agony and swore he'd kill Badger Clabe if it was the last thing he ever did. He said he might have known any man who'd call a turkey with a green leaf and shoot him with a shotgun instead of a rifle, would be the kind of belly-crawler to cut down on a man and then high-tail it when he saw it wasn't a turkey he'd shot. He said if Badger had been an inch closer, he'd have been a dead man now, Uncle Vesper would. He told Aunt Elfie and the boys that Texas wasn't big enough to hold him and Badger Clabe both and that leaf-blowing thing had better take to the tall timber and make it a hurry-up case. That spaying needle gouging into his seat sure did hurt and Uncle Vesper was mighty mad.

He kept at that kind of talk till Aunt Elfie got the whole story. She helped him to bed and then sent the oldest boy to warn Badger. She told the boy to tell him she didn't want a killing on her man's hands, but that's what was fixing to take place if Badger didn't haul his freight before Uncle Vesper got able to draw a bead on him with that turkey rifle of his.

Likely Badger had already figured this out. The boy got there too late. Badger had called up his dogs and quit the country.

It was a month before Uncle Vesper could get back in the saddle. And by that time he was so far behind with his horse-breaking that he had to let his turkey-hunting slide for a spell. But whenever he left the house riding one of his bronc horses to gentle it, he packed his Winchester in his saddle scabbard. There was no telling when he might get a chance at that big graveyard gobbler again.

He got his chance, all right, but he never got to shoot. He topped out the high ridge just north of the Scallon burial lot one morning at sunrise, riding a crab-walking grulla dun that still had rollers in his nose. Before him lay a long gentle slant leading up to a cedar-combed ridge beyond. The slope was open except for a scattering of catclaw bushes.

And about half-way up that slant was his gobbler.

The big bird wasn't spooked yet. He was just easing through the catclaws, his long neck stretched and his blue head shining in the sun.

It was a perfect set-up. The gobbler was less than a hundred yards away. He might run or he might fly—it was all the same to Uncle Vesper. He piled out of the saddle, dragging his Winchester with him. He aimed to stick

a bullet right where that big gobbler's wings hinged.

BUT the grulla dun couldn't see it that way. The rattle of the gun as Uncle Vesper jacked a shell into the firing chamber was too much for the bronc. He snorted and fell back against the reins, dragging Uncle Vesper down the slant. Before the old man could quiet the animal with a couple of solid kicks in the ribs, the gobbler had reached the cedars and disappeared.

Uncle Vesper was pretty riled about losing that shot. He stepped across the saddle and bogged his spurs. He lifted that snorting bronc down the slant and up the next slope so fast his hoofs hardly touched the ground in the low places. The gobbler was frightened now, but Uncle Vesper still had a chance to get a shot from the top of that ridge.

Sure enough, when they crashed out of the cedars on the far side, yonder went the gobbler, toeing it down through a wide prickly-pear flat.

But there was no stopping the grulla dun now. He'd been spurred into a panic and he'd gone wild. This was the first time Uncle Vesper had ridden him without a hackamore and there was no holding him with a bridle. He'd clamped the bits between his teeth and was running cold-jawed and blind.

The gobbler flew at the sight of them. He whipped himself heavily into the air and streaked off across the flat, gliding barely above the prickly pear.

Since Uncle Vesper couldn't hold his runaway, the next best thing he could think of was to let him run, which he did. He slacked off on the reins and reached for his hat. Leaning forward, he whipped the dun's head with his Stetson enough to keep him fought out of the worst brush thickets and headed in the same direction as the turkey.

Uncle Vesper was stirred up now and hell-bent to get that gobbler.

They weren't too far behind when the bird hit the ground; and before they were out of the prickly pear, they had crowded him into the air again. This second flight wasn't so far; the gobbler was heavy and tiring fast. The third flight, which carried him to the crest of a low brush ridge, was less than a hundred yards.

After that, he didn't fly again, but there was still plenty of run left in his long legs. He tore out down the bed of a dry water-course, traveling like a bronze streak.

Behind him, the blowing dun was ready to throw up his tail and call it quits. But Uncle Vesper wouldn't have it. He shoved his Winchester back into the scabbard and reached for his catch-rope.

"You was aching to run, dang you," he told the dun, "so bow your neck and have at it!"

And he started reefing the runaway down one hind leg and then the other, encouraging him. The dun flattened under the saddle and stretched out for all he could reach. The gap between him and the running gobbler began to close.

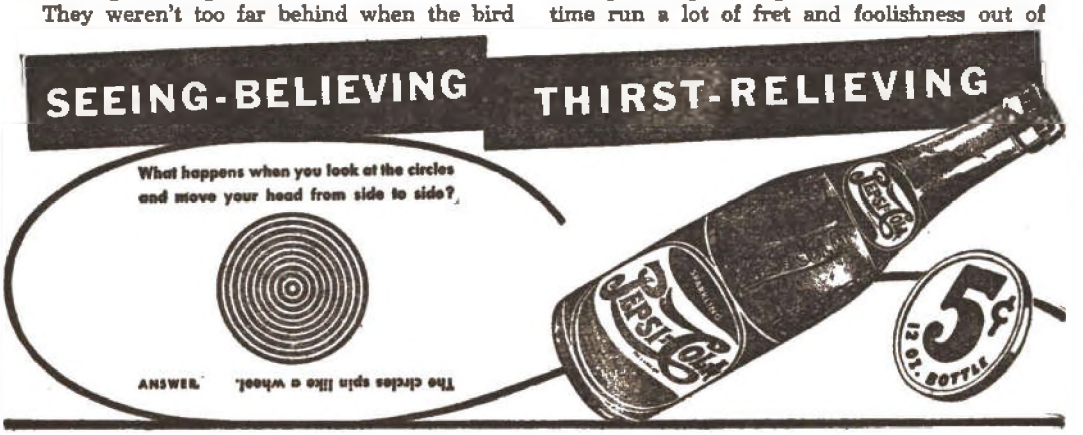
There was a strip of blackjack timber just ahead, but Uncle Vesper rode onto his gobbler before they reached it. He leaned out of his saddle and swung the loop of his hard-twist catch-rope against the gobbler's outstretched neck, aiming to break it.

The gobbler rolled in the grass, loose wings pinwheeling, then flopped over on his breast, to lie quivering.

"By gum, I got him!" Uncle Vesper said jubilantly, and hauled back on the reins.

The dun squatted and slid to a halt, happy for the chance. He stood spraddle-legged and blowing, all the scare run out of him, while Uncle Vesper swung down and got his turkey. The bronc didn't even flinch when the old man flopped the turkey's limber neck across his withers and looped an off-side saddle string around the bird's neck.

Uncle Vesper felt mighty satisfied with himself when he mounted again. Here he'd finally managed to get his gobbler and at the same time run a lot of fret and foolishness out of



He sailed out of the saddle clutching a fistful of mane in one hand and a wad of turkey feathers in the other.

the grulla dun. He swung the bronc toward home, willing to bet the animal didn't hunt boogers under every bush and shy at every sound on the way back.

That's when the stunned gobbler came to life and the show opened.

One moment Uncle Vesper was riding along, thinking turkey-and-dressing; the next, the turkey was climbing up into his face and whipping him blind with heavy blows of his strong wings.

Uncle Vesper had his bronc figured to be run off his feet, but he was mistaken. At the first move of the gobbler, the grulla dun snorted, swallowed his head, and quit the ground with the saddle skirts popping. He bawled like a choking calf. He twisted in the air and sunned one side of his belly. He came down, one foot at a time, giving Uncle Vesper four separate jolts. He went up a second time, shaking himself like a dog leaving water, and gave the sun a chance at his belly from the other side.

Uncle Vesper never was a man to brag, but he always claimed he could ride anything that wore hair. And maybe he could—but not with a wild turkey gobbler spurring him in the face. This was like riding a cyclone with the bridle off. He lost one stirrup the first jump and the second jump snapped him clear of the saddle. He sailed out over a wild persimmon bush, clutching a fistful of the dun's mane in one hand and a wad of turkey feathers in the other.

He landed head-on against the base of a blackjack oak, and his lights went out.

IT was nearly noon when the dun showed up at the corrals with an empty saddle. By the middle of the afternoon, half the men along Comanche were combing the Turkey Track, hunting Uncle Vesper. The womenfolks stayed at the house, gathering around Aunt Elfie and comforting her with recollections of all the broken and mangled bodies of riders that bad horses had thrown and dragged in their time.

Nobody found Uncle Vesper, however. He made it in by himself a little after dark. His hat was gone and his head was bloody and both glasses had been knocked out of his steel-rimmed spectacles. Otherwise, he seemed all right. He did act mighty worn-out, but that was to be expected of a man who was never known to walk a step that a horse could pack him.

He came in and sat down on the front gallery and said his head ached a little, and he couldn't quite seem to understand why all the folks were gathered and making such a to-do over him. But after Aunt Elfie had brought him a tin cup of whiskey, he perked up and told what had happened and seemed to get as big a laugh out of the scrape he'd been in as anybody.

"Me'n that old graveyard gobbler's had our rounds," he said. "But, by gum, I got him! Elfie'll have him oven-baked and stuffed with onion-dressing by moonrise, if you folks'll lay over for the feed."

There was a sudden dead silence.

"But, Pa," spoke up one of the boys, "there wasn't a sign of a turkey on that dun when he come in. I reckon that old gobbler's run a whizzer on you again."

That brought on a still bigger laugh. The men slapped their legs and roared.

But Uncle Vesper didn't laugh. And Aunt Elfie didn't laugh, either. Aunt Elfie always said she guessed nobody else saw the look that came into Uncle Vesper's eyes when he learned that his gobbler had given him the slip again. Leastways, they never did mention it.

But she saw it; and there was something there that made her want to throw her apron over her face and scream. She always declared that one look told her that her man was doomed, that that graveyard gobbler had got him at last.

But a body has to bear up in times like that, Aunt Elfie explained. A woman can't afford to break down and carry on in a way that'll shame her man. So she held it.

Uncle Vesper didn't say anything for a moment. He just sat silent and seemed to shrink, Aunt Elfie said. Then pretty soon, while folks were still laughing, he reached up and caught to a gallery post and pulled himself to his feet.

"I'll go rest up a spell," he said. "I feel porely."

And those were the last mortal words that passed his lips, Aunt Elfie said.

He dragged his spurs off into the house and she heard the bedsprings creak. She wanted to follow him, but she had her good-bys and thankyous to make to the neighbors. And when finally the last one had gone and she went in to her man—Uncle Vesper's bed was empty!

Aunt Elfie couldn't hold back her screams any longer. She'd flung her apron up over her face and it was a thick one, made out of a cotton-seed hull sack, but folks already a mile from the house heard her.

They came back. They searched the house; they searched the corrals. Finally, they spread out into the woods. But it was nearly sunup when they found him. He was slumped down behind Great-grandpa Mill-Wheel's grave. His rifle lay across the tombstone and in his clenched right hand was gripped the hollow-bone turkey-caller.

But what caused the most head-shaking were the little square-cut green leaves that littered the ground around him. All were cut like Badger Clabe used to cut his leaves for calling turkeys. And they found one leaf stuck to the roof of Uncle Vesper's open mouth.

Later a story made the rounds that those were poison-ivy leaves and that was what had killed Uncle Vesper. But that was mostly town talk and nobody along Comanche put much stock in it. They all knew that a goat can fatten on poison ivy and Uncle Vesper was tougher than any goat that ever lived.

People couldn't afford fancy deaths in those days, with satin-lined caskets and expensive flowers and such. Some of the men just went to the house and knocked a salt trough apart and built Uncle Vesper a coffin out of the pieces. The rest dug him a grave under the big live-oak in the corner of the burial lot. They buried him there, beside the bones of the Scallons he'd tromped over at his turkey-hunting.

And every soul who took in the burying can tell you how, while they sang *The Last Call*, a big ragged-necked wild turkey appeared on the high ridge above the graveyard and strutted and drummed and gobbled till the last clod was piled on Uncle Vesper's grave.

I can walk under a ladder; I can ignore black cats crossing my road; I never bother to turn my left shoe upsidedown under a bed when I hear a screech owl calling of a dark night. I know that my Uncle Vesper died from a brain concussion he suffered when the grulla dun threw him against that black-jack tree. Old Doc Whitney, who examined Uncle Vesper's body before they laid him to rest, explained that to me. And there's just as logical an explanation for each of Uncle Vesper's other unfortunate experiences with that old hermit gobbler.

Still, as Aunt Elfie used to point out, "There's the natural things of this world and then there's the on-natural. And stomping around on a body's grave, trying to kill a turkey, ain't natural!"

And I know that if Aunt Elfie were alive today, she'd say that shooting a big gobbler off the headstone of Uncle Vesper's grave isn't natural. And whether she'd be right or wrong, I'm still glad I didn't do it. A marine, about to go into combat—well, he'd be a fool to take any chances.

That's the way I look at it.

OF

A "Caradosso" Story

The robber danced up and down, spitting out teeth and oaths. I laughed so hard my eyes were full of tears!

ILLUSTRATED BY L. STERNE STEVENS

TO HIS Serene Eminence, my Lord Duke Pietro IV of Rometia, from Luigi Caradosso, sometime Captain of the Guard, these:

Sire:

Since the courier brought your inquiry in the matter of Carlo Filippo Belandi, I have been mooning about this cottage of my retirement in a very strange state of mind; doubting (an effect certainly quite unforeseen by Your Grace) no less than whether the work to which I de-

TREACHERY

By F. R. BUCKLEY

voted sixty years of my life may not have been a waste of time, blood, hair and perspiration.

To the best of my memory at this time, I have since the year 1543 killed seven men for asking did I not betray this Carlo Filippo Belandi to his death while taking pay to guard him; the question has lain dormant since long before Your Eminence was born; and yet, whenas I am about to creep into my own grave and join those others—here it is again, fresh as the day it was first asked, and giving me no option save to answer it in full.

What I have been mooning over is the thought that my whole life, as servant of Princes, has been devoted to the suppression of uncomfortable questions by force—questions affecting great numbers of the common people—which, like this little question concerning only me, have in time forced a reasonable answer. How well I can remember leading troops to prevent peasants serving one lord from leaving his estates to serve another who would treat them better! It seems but yesterday (though it is fifty years ago) that I was mounting guns in the Great Square of Nori, to make sure merchants should do no business until they had paid my lord his market tax. Similarly I recall wars great and small and hangings of few or many on other aspects of the simple question, whether all men are men, or only some of them.

I was of course paid not to ponder the matter, but to enforce the decision that nobles only are human, and the rest of humanity (including myself) mere brute beasts. All over Italy, thousands of men like myself, clad in acres of armor and backed by all the cannon in the land, were likewise paid to cram the question back down any throat that might ask it. And yet—today a farmer leaves one lord's land for another's with as little concern as he eats his midday soup; a noble who would move to oppress merchants might better go drown himself at once in his own moat; and it seems that I have lived through thirty-seven wounds only to hear a ragged fellow (as I did last week) say in a tavern that lords and ladies, too, were but eating, drinking, breeding, stinking animals like everyone else. Hundreds have been hanged for saying half of that; thousands have languished in dungeons on suspicion merely of thinking it; yet—

Can it be that there is more truth in this world than there is rope?

The truth in this matter of Carlo Filippo Belandi: Your Grace, hearing that I betrayed him to his death, will *not* have heard that I first became acquainted with him by the accident of saving his life? No; yet such was the fact. Well does the proverb say that Rumor speaks only through her *rotten* teeth.

I WAS then Captain of the Guard to Berno Volpi, holder of quite considerable lands near Padua and (I then thought) a quite unreasonable lunatic on this subject of artillery. I had recently left one place because its lord insisted on arming my men with arquebuses, instead of honest swords and crossbows; and here no sooner was I settled, than this very Carlo Filippo Belandi must come pestering my life with his larger stink-pots. He had been a caster of statues and bells and similar honest commodities; but now, conceiving that there might be more profit in killing men than in pleasuring them (an idea not so mad as it might

seem), he was all agog to run his bronze into the form of cannon and sell these to the Count. Since his argument was that one gun would do the work of half a troop of horse and require no food or wages, naturally he had not addressed himself to me. Nay, he had sneaked and bribed his way into the Count's cabinet by the backstairs, and I had had to try to answer his arguments as they were put to me by my master. It is not easy to express one's true opinions on such a subject when one must stand to attention in full armor and refrain from vulgar words; and so for some time past, I had had an evil feeling that I was losing this battle of wits with Belandi.

It was in fact to brood at peace on the prospect of being replaced by a culverin, and to ponder the doubt that my lieutenant might be going over to the enemy, that I was wandering about the streets of the city on that particular evening; I had a sweetheart in the town, of course, but Your Grace will judge of the depth of my perturbation when I say that I had left her immediately after supper.

I was even bending my steps in the general direction of a church, when in a little narrow street to my left hand I chanced to notice four men in the act of robbing a citizen—a city watch affair, of course, which at any other time I should have passed by with contempt, but at that moment it offered me a welcome outlet for my annoyance.

The first robber to hand I completely beheaded; the second I split exactly down the noseline as far as the chin—first time I had ever succeeded in this; he must have had a tender skull—and then, purged of the baser passions, I settled myself for a little amusement with the remaining two. They had flung the citizen down on his face for greater convenience in plundering him. He was lying quite still, either in a paralysis of fear or because he had fainted. So it seemed good to me, as my opponents came rushing forward, to stand on their victim's back and fight down at them from that added height—he was a plump little man and made an admirable fencing-mat. It was not, of course, that I needed any advantage for the simple killing of these rogues; but I had thought out a little trick involving a false guard and a *rinverso tondo* which I wished to try without too much risk to myself; and of course, with the citizen adding a foot to my stature, I was as safe as if I had been at home in bed.

They came in from the right and left, as the uninstructed always do—their nurses must advise them in the matter, I don't know—and of course while I was staggering one with a strong parry, the other thrust carelessly at my left side. Usually, one proves the value of timing and the necessity of taking nothing for granted by running the opponent through while he is still in mid-thrust; but there was a long evening ahead of me, with nothing to do but brood on those cannon, so I merely pushed this man's blade aside and kicked him in the face. I do not think he could ever have been kicked in the face before, so seriously did he take it. He went staggering back with a look of the greatest astonishment, dropped his sword, put both hands to his jaws and danced up and down, spitting out teeth and oaths while tears flowed from his eyes like a torrent. He did really dance, Your Grace; you never saw anything so ridiculous! I laughed so hard that my own eyes were full of tears and for two or three passados I had to deal with his comrade by the sense of touch.

ACTING entirely by instinct and unable to see what I was doing, I ran an inch or so of steel into this second fellow's chest; upon which, what does he do but draw back howling and accuse the other man of desertion. For a moment, I thought they would turn to and fight each other; but, the first man replying merely with more oaths and teeth, they just stood shouting at one another, I meantime roaring with laughter, until the noise woke up the city watch, wherever it may have been sleeping, and brought the whole patrol of it shambling into the mouth of the alley.

The sight of this collection of burghers adding their pot-bellies and gallimaufrey of weapons to the scene, made me laugh harder than ever—until their officer, God save the mark, gave me to understand that he proposed to arrest my playmates and take them away to his lousy city jail!

"But, C-Captain," says I, hoping I should not be struck dead for blasphemy. Finding no bolt struck me, I even used the word again. "Captain, consider. *I* found these men. I have wasted two of them already, in defense of this citizen on the ground there. I have an important experiment in hand, of enduring value to military men everywhere. I must have vile bodies on which to try it, and you propose—"

"Silence!" says this wool-carder — glass-blower—whatever he was.

I could not believe my ears. Thinking indeed that they must have deceived me, I stepped down from the citizen's back—he wriggled and moaned, regaining his faculties — and approached the guardsman. I was about to ask his pardon and beg for a repetition of his remark when, if Your Grace will credit such enormity, he shouted something and raised his hand, and behold me confronted with two great well-mouthed musketoons—and the louts behind them ready with the triggers!

I stopped, aghast; and at that moment, as luck would have it, the two thieves, desiring to be captured neither by me nor the city guard, made a dash to break through the crowd of us.

WELL, after all, I am not writing this to amuse Your Grace, but to defend myself from serious accusation, *videlicet* of a fatal betrayal of trust in the case of this Carlo Filippo Belandi; so I will not describe the scuffle which now followed. It was in any event a ridiculous, confused affair of which I remember very little. Suffice it to say that my trick with the *rinverso tondo* worked excellently on both the bandits; I put the city guard to sleep or to flight without injuring any man beyond what he might have got falling down three or four flights of stairs in his own home; and within half an hour of first coming on the robbery, I was sitting very much at mine ease in a tavern, pouring Falernian wine into this Carlo Filippo Belandi to restore his circulation. I, that am accused of getting him murdered!

He had stuttered out his name while I was dragging him to the inn. I have explained to Your Grace why, and to what extent, that name was odious to me. And yet, anyone seeing me thrust my thumb into that scoundrel's eye to revive him, pushing my fist into his mouth to make room for the wine-noggin and taking the money out of his wallet to pay for the wine, I swear would have thought he was my father.

It was a woundy, sweltering fat wallet, stuffed with gold. It comforted me to think that these robbers had at least had something worth dying for.

"And all made a-casting of gimcracks, eh?" says I, beating him on the back as the wine seemed to choke him. "Cheer up, good sir; I'm not to cut thy throat for thy money."

"Nor for any other reason, I hope," says he in a faint voice, looking at me very pale.

"Well," says I reasonably, "as to that, who knows? A man who's taking the livelihood away from another man, especially one such as I am, must take his chances. But let us not borrow trouble, good sir; let us be gay while we can."

Which was not, apparently, to be for very long. At this moment, who should come gasping up to us but the landlord of the inn, and with what but news that the city guard was in attendance again, with the expressed intention of taking me dead or alive.

I strolled to the street window (through which someone at that moment fired a bullet) and there they were, sure enough, perhaps a hundred of them, drawn from the other wards of the city. I looked out of the back window and there they were also—actually flying their ward-banner as though going into action with some foe. It was ludicrous, and yet it was no laughing matter; and the less so for that the poor fellows seemed to have no notion of the danger in which they stood.

Returning from the rear of the tavern, I stopped at the corner in which I had left Carlo Filippo Belandi, expecting to find him anyhow in a state of abject terror and designing to comfort him; but to my surprise, he was not there. Judge how amazed I was to find him, on the contrary, standing on the doorstep of the inn, as swelled-up and full of assurance as a fighting cockerel, loudly telling the *bargello* of the city troops to take his rag-tag and bob-tail and begone.

"But, sir—" falters this fellow, who would have defied me—me!—to my very beard, "It was reported that this Captain Caradosso—"

"Captain Caradosso is a friend of mine!" shouts Belandi. "He saved my life while your rogues were scratching their fat paunches around some fire. Now cease to annoy him and be off with you! Avaunt!"

"Y-yes, sir," says the *bargello*, backing away; and within five minutes the street was as empty as a pasture. I was astonished at this, but still more bemused by the change in Carlo Filippo. Instead of staggering as though his legs had no bones in them, he now strutted ahead of me to our corner and, calling loudly for more wine, had the audacity to pat me on the back and assure me that I had nothing to fear.

Naturally, my impulse at this was to knock his head against the wall until his teeth should be loosened; but I restrained it. Instead, and with genuine humility, I asked how he had accomplished the recent miracle.

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"Easy," says this little fat man, leering and patting his fat wallet. "The *bargello's* father owes me five hundred ducats. I hold his bond; and if by any chance he or his son should offend me, I can fling them both into the street. Your health, Captain, and a wise eye to your own prosperity!"

I drank to that, but only a mouthful.

"Meaning?" I asked, struggling with this thought of a sword-armed man cringing before one armed with a strip of parchment.

He put down his pot and leered at me. He had small blue eyes with light lashes, very like a pig.

"Meaning," says he, "that y'have done yourself a woundy favor this night, Captain."

"I had thought," says I, "the favor was on the other hand."

" 'Twas so—'twas so; but the favor to thyself is greater, in that I am one of those who never forget a favor done to me. How'd thee have liked to go home tonight, Captain, and find thyself out of employ; and (unless the Count's temper had changed since this afternoon) maybe in prison to boot?"

THE "out of employ" was no new thought to me, since he had been hanging about with his accursed cannon; but—

"In prison?" I demanded of him sternly; and he nodded, grinning.

"The horse-feed and armorer's bills for last month," says he, slowly, "were in the amounts of seventy-six ducats, two soldi, and fourteen ducats, two soldi; making a total of ninety ducats, four soldi, of which nine ducats and the four odd soldi went not to the aforesaid tradesmen, but into thy pocket, Captain Caradosso. The feed-merchant also contributed a half-barrel of wine."

"But," says I, aghast, "this is no prison matter! A commission on expenditures for the troops hath been the perquisite of captains since—"

"I know it, I know it," says Belandi, putting forth a soothing hand, "but so much depends on just how the matter is brought to the attention of one's lord, is it not so? He may know all about it, and yet he may be told about it in such terms as to make him exceeding wroth. I can assure you, Captain, that when I left him this afternoon—having at last obtained his signature to an order for twenty cannon—His Lordship could see very little difference between his captain of the guard and a common pickpocket."

"I have a very good mind," I told him, laying hand to my dagger, "to cut your lying throat, Messer Belandi. Hast any artillery to protect thee from that?"

"Aye," says he, patting his wallet, all unafraid. "I honor thee, Captain, by mounting golden guns. Look you: be not a fool. Your employ with his lordship is gone forever—your lieutenant hath the place and his gear in your quarters at this moment. If ye offer me violence—ye've seen my power but now—ye'll be hanged as sure as the sun rises. Why not be wise, and save thy violence for such as would offer it to me?"

"Could not thy *bargello* hang them, too?"

He screwed his face up painfully.

"It would seem from tonight," says he, "that while he takes orders admirably, the *bargello* hath not perhaps that enthusiasm for my safety—in short, Captain, I need a bodyguard. Thy pay with His Grace was fifty ducats; I'll give thee sixty. So!"

I hesitated, drawing lines with my wine on the table-top.

"Places as guard-captain hereabouts are hard to find," says he. "Now that I have convinced this lord, I shall sell cannon to all the nobles of the *campagna*. And wherever thou goest, Luigi, there'll always be a lieutenant, like this one, to scheme with me for thy captaincy."

Ah, ah, that hurt me! My lieutenant had been a fine boy, Bastiano Credi his name—upstanding and frank, and (I remembered) notably careless about money. I asked this future employer of mine how he had managed to seduce him, and the wretch leered and rolled his head from side to side.

"Why," says he, "that was very simple, Captain. All fish will not take the same bait, *no e vero*? Hast ever heard of Angelina degli Alberti?"

Who had not? She was famous as far as Rome. Indeed, that very afternoon I had seen her on the balcony of her house in the Strada Ducale, an exceedingly beautiful woman looking, however, both too expensive and too sad for my taste.

"Being interested in my prosperity," says the fat man before me, coughing out the words lest I fail to understand, "she is naturally willing to do aught within reason to advance the same. It would scarce be an exaggeration to say that she hath bewitched your lieutenant, Captain. Indeed, the last time I had the pleasure of overhearing them together—for one must not take risks when military men are about, eh, Captain, hee hee?—the lad was saying that he desired captaincy mainly that he might save money toward marrying her! Angelina in a cottage! I laughed so that—"

"What did she say?"

He waved his fat palm to dismiss the foolish question and demanded flatly, without further words, would I serve him or would I not; and, pushing aside my wine without finishing it, I said I would. After all, there was no proof that God had not created him; and then, too, I had my wives and children to think of.

I will dismiss the next six weeks by saying

that I served him according to agreement; going everywhere with him like his shadow—but by night as well as by day; into situations moreover from which a decently-brought-up shadow would have recoiled in horror; walking with him amid hundreds of folk he had injured, to whom his death would have been a boon and a blessing; and none raised a finger to him. My sixty ducats were well and promptly paid, but I worked for them. Gone were my leisurely hours in quarters, my whole days off duty when the lieutenant would mount guard; gone my easy saunterings about the battlements, with sentries to give me warning of impending danger. I must be alert every moment. My only times off duty were the hours he spent with Angelina degli Alberti; and I wished to God he had been younger or a single man, so that there might have been more of them.

MY main interest at this time, strange as it may seem, was in those cannon which had brought me to this pass. One would imagine that I should hate the very sight of the things; but, forced to hang about the foundry when my master (God help me) was there, I could not but wonder at the ways of these men who melted hard bronze like butter and moulded it like clay. There was an old German there with whom I struck up quite a friendship. We had very little language in common, but he had been a soldier in his time and we exchanged memories by showing wounds and giving names of battles. Once, explaining the long crosswise cut on my chest, I said, *"Duce—duce!"*, meaning that the skirmish had no name, but that I had got it in the service of a duke; and the old German sneered and spat into one of the filled gun-moulds. He did not like nobles—I knew that; but where he spat, the molten metal exploded, as it were, and a great pock-mark showed in what was to be the breech of the gun.

I pointed to this, and he laughed.

"But," says I, "will it not make a weak spot—may the force of the powder not burst through there?"

He made no answer, and I was straining myself to make my meaning clear, when his eyes informed me that he knew what I had said. I therefore held my peace and looked at him, he meantime surveying me with a gaze I did not understand; until finally he shrugged his shoulders as Germans do, turned on his heel and walked away.

At that moment, as it chanced, Carlo Filippo Belandi came forth of his counting-house; very cheerful and merry, as he always was after sitting among his profits.

"Well," says he, patting me on the back till my flesh crept, "communing with thine enemies, Luigi? Though the day may come when thou'lt agree they're the best friends ever thou had, taking thee out of that service and putting thee into—"

"There's a hole in that one," I broke in, lest I be sick.

"A hole?" says Belandi. He stooped down and stared at it. His nose was but two hand's-breadths from the red hot metal, and I had a foot that would have fitted so neatly into the back of his neck—and I stood there motionless like a statue and still there are folk who say I got the brute murdered! Indeed, indeed, in this world, consciousness of virtue must be its own reward.

He stood up.

"I see no hole in the gun," says he, "unless of

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course ye mean the touch-hole, Captain. Being unfamiliar with these engines, perhaps you are not aware that the gunpowder does not explode of itself, or at the word of command, but that—"

"I mean yon chasm in the back of the gun—where the cannoneer would be standing," says I, pointing to it with my toe. "Is *that* the touch-hole?"

He stared at it, and then at me, all innocent.

"I see no such thing," he said. "And right glad I am of it, Luigi *mio*. Because half a dozen faulty castings could rob me of all my little profit, and how then should I pay thee? In any event, since when hast thou been foundry-master? I hired thee as bodyguard, I think; in which capacity, I'll thank thee now to escort me as far as the Strada Ducale."

At Angelina's door, he turned to me again with a deadly look in those blue pig-eyes of his.

"Between now and tomorrow," says he, "thou might well see a doctor, Captain. Thy sight alarms me; many fatal diseases begin in the eyes."

And by God! going back to the foundry—as if drawn by enchantment—some hours later, I began to believe him. The gun still lay cooling in its mould. Certainly it was the same cannon, though bronze-colored instead of red as formerly—but now, though I looked carefully, there was no sign of a hole in its breech. Where I had thought to have seen it, there was a little irregularity in the metal, but nothing to signify. The spot seemed, if anything, to be a little raised above its surroundings, as though the metal were thicker there than elsewhere!

I went forth into the field behind the foundry, where the guns already finished—ten of them—lay in the grass. I examined all of them, from the two culverins down to the four wall-guns, and found nought wrong with them.

I did not, nevertheless, take mine eyesight to a physician; I took it to a wine-shop and treated it so successfully that before midnight it showed me not merely one but two of everything. I met, for instance, two *bargellos* identical with the one Belandi held in fee; defied both of them and the patrols they happened to have with them, and put them both to flight. The *podesta* must have made a complaint to the Count, because when I left home to call for Belandi at Angelina's house, whom should I encounter but a patrol of the real guard, headed by my lieutenant and looking for me. He looked very pale and wan, poor lad, as well he might under the circumstances—I mean the circumstances about Angelina, even so far as he knew them—but he was very polite and dutiful. He explained what had happened, asked me if I had any notion where I might be found and, when told I had not the slightest idea, saluted and took his men off in smart soldierly fashion.

Fifty paces away, he halted them, and himself came back to me.

"Luigi—Captain," says he; and gulped.

"Well, boy?"

I could have sworn there were soon to be tears in his eyes.

"By the look on't, we're to have a little war soon," says he, trying to smile.

"Well, that's good, lad," says I. "No way to learn your trade like practising it. Just try to remember what I taught thee about keeping the flanks ahead of the centre—and don't trust too much, I beg ye, to those damned guns."

He shook his head.

"It's—it's—that I may be killed," says he. "Perhaps that would be best—but, Luigi—"

"Come, come, lad," I began.

"I'd have thee know," says he, "that I'm woe for what I did. It torments me in the night. But I love her. I love her, and for her I'd do it again!"

Well, now, a man in that state is to be pitied; what else? So I took him in my arms and kissed him on both cheeks and told him not to be a fool—either about that or about those guns—and so sent him back to his troops.

IT appeared that Carlo Filippo Belandi also had heard of the impending war. There were great doings all day, with carpenters coming and going and mounting the finished guns into their carriages. The Count sent horses and hauled them away with great pomp and circumstance. And in the evening (this was in the house where he lived with his old wife) Belandi sent for me to his cabinet. It was a mean room, all full of strong-boxes which in turn were full of papers showing how much various folk owed him.

"Captain," says he, biting his forefinger and glittering those cold blue eyes, "my lord Sergio Tuozzolo will invade the territories of your former lord between nine o'clock and noon tomorrow; and, since warning has been sent to the proper quarter, those guns you so much dislike will go into action against him."

I suppose my astonishment showed in my face as plainly as if I had spoken it.

"How do I know?" asked Belandi. "Money knows everything, Luigi. How did I know about your commissions on the horse-feed and the armorer work, down to the last soldo and the half-barrel of wine? Because I was, and am, both the feed-dealer and the armorer. Other men do the work, but I own them both. In the end I shall own all the nobles. They will wear the furs and the brocade and give the orders; but they will wear and say what I tell them—I, fat, shabby little Carlo Belandi! But to bring that to pass we must sell them all cannon, Luigi *mio*, and in that I need thy help."

It became evident, as he continued to talk, that for all his ambition and for all his success so far, he was afflicted with fears as to future

dealings with the nobility. As a commoner, not entitled to guard-rights, he could not take me with him into the cabinets of the various lords; and since this was so, there was actually nothing to prevent some gentleman of the rougher kind from interrupting his plans by stabbing him. Or having him stabbed—or strangled; the details would be unimportant.

He wished me therefore to be his ambassador; and to train me for this honorable task, wished to send me now as observer to this little war. As a soldier, with experience of guns in action, I could then speak favorably of my own knowledge.

"But suppose they do not well?" says I—

There was no warning. Angelina had stabbed him four times before I could reach her.

eager as I was to leave him for even the most disastrous of battlefields. "Suppose the cavalry rides over them?"

"Success," says he, biting his finger, "is much in the estimation of the beholder, Captain Caradosso. If my guns do not please thee, if thou feel unable to commend them to the nobles—if the cavalry should ride over them, in short, Captain, better let it ride over thee as well. Trampling to death is quicker than starvation."

Oh, but he was near death at that moment. Your Grace knows me—hath known me from a child; I mean, since Your Highness was a child, with a child's clear knowledge of character. If I would stand there and let a man say that to me without killing him, is it likely that I would permit someone else to usurp my privilege? No. No.

"I," says he, "shall await your report at the house of Madonna Angelina. The battle—the war—should be over in a few hours. Tuozzolo hath no knowledge of these guns; he'll send his forces forward at the charge and they'll be blown to ribbons by the first discharge. Ha, ha, ha! Then it should take thee about three hours to ride back. I'll expect thy glad tidings about vesper-time tomorrow. Understood?"

Well, sire, there you have the case; it is true I did not salute him on withdrawing, but I meant nothing by that—certainly not murder. It was just that my arm and hand refused to perform the motion—and that he knew better than to insist.

It is also true that I seemed thereafter to be going about my business through a sort of red mist; but it is to be remembered that for most of the time I was on a battlefield, where there was enough red flying about, God knows—on the ground, through the air, on my horse-cloths and my own clothes. Blood, blood, blood everywhere—blood and worse. I have been on a many fields, but (for reasons which will appear) never on one as terrible as that. I struck not one blow all day—naturally, since I was engaged on neither side; just the paid agent of the confectioner of it all. But as I rode toward the city with my news, I could feel my face haggard as I have never felt it after fight before or since.

I was, as I have said, pretty bloody; but I think it was the sight of my face which caused Angelina to scream. It had no effect on Belandi; he was sitting on a couch eating bonbons out of a silver dish.

"Well, Captain?" says he, smiling.

I had in my hand a piece of metal, which I had brought from the battlefield. It was, to be plain and in order with Your Grace, a piece of lead with a thin layer of bronze on one side of it, and I had pulled it out of the chest of a young man whom it had killed. It was not bloody any more, however; on the ride home the sweat from the palm of my hand had washed it clean.

Belandi paid it no mind.

"How did the guns perform?" he asked with his mouth full; and, being paid to report in this matter, I told him.

"The smaller weapons," said I, "with the exception of one *dragonetto*, discharged according to plan and threw the enemy cavalry into much confusion. The larger guns, to wit, two culverins, and the *dragonetto* aforesaid, burst upon firing and killed their crews. Their effect on the enemy was negligible."

"Burst?" says Angelina, coming toward me and speaking in a whisper almost. "The guns burst?"

"Unfortunately, yes, ma'am," I told her. "And killed their crews."

"But—but—" says she, looking from me to Belandi and back again, "they—why should they burst?"

"I think," says I, pointing to the piece of metal on the table, "that was in consequence of their having been cast of bad metal, with cracks in it, and the said cracks having been plugged up with lead."

SHE was still staring at me with such lack of comprehension that I explained further.

"They were thus cast and thus cracked, and the cracks thus concealed," I told her, "in order that Messer Belandi might have more money to spend on your ladyship and other worthy objects."

She was now as white as a sheet, and the brown eyes she stared at me withal seemed to take up half her face. Carlo Filippo Belandi (to do him justice) was by now also very pale; but his pig-eyes retained their usual size and expression.

"Bastiano!" the lady was saying through dry lips, and I took her to be inquiring after the fate of my lieutenant. "Bastiano! Captain!"

"When the guns burst," I informed her, "your ladyship's young friend—or perhaps I may say lover, for indeed he seemed to love you—was among those killed."

Oons, I never have heard such a demented, terrible shriek in my life. She had been (I must make this plain to Your Grace) so quiet and still, almost as if in a trance; but hardly had I said "among those killed" than she gave this scream like a soul in torment and confronted Belandi like all the furies rolled into one. I cannot pretend to write down all she said—there was so much of it, and spoken so very fast, and so interspersed with tears and sobbings; but the signification of all was that she hated Carlo Filippo Belandi and had loved this boy lieutenant of mine, and that in her esteem the man whom she hated had murdered the one she loved.

"Nay, nay," says Belandi, through dry lips. For some time he had been sitting there like a man turned to stone. And she shrieked "Nay, nay!" after him and tore at the laces of her bosom. I thought this was to give herself heart-room, as ladies sometimes do in such cases; but no. It seems she had a stiletto there, with which she now flung herself on Carlo Filippo Belandi and stabbed him to death.

How—I ask Your Grace—was I to prevent this? There was no warning; he himself had oft told me that this Angelina was his turtle-dove; and it would be presumption in me to tell Your Grace, a married man, with what rapidity turtledoves in this sense can turn into the deadliest of snakes. She had stabbed him four times—twice right through the heart and twice, most deftly, in the apple of the throat, before I could reach her. He was as dead as pork, and I had all I could do to prevent her from killing herself.

"Come, come," says I, taking the knife away from her. "Is this a thing to do? Fie, fie."

"He murdered him!" she kept sobbing. "I want to die! Let me die, Luigi Caradosso. He killed my darling for his filthy money. God, God have mercy on me!"

It was evident to me that there had been a misunderstanding.

"If by your darling you mean Bastiano Credi," I told her, "he hath not been murdered or indeed injured at all, beyond a slight deafness. His troops having been destroyed by cavalry, as I said they would be, he is indeed out of employ—"

She was staring at me again with those great brown eyes.

"You said—you said he was among those killed when the guns burst!"

"And so he was," I protested, "in the very midst of the gun-crews, as he should have been. But he himself was not killed. In fact, he is sitting his horse outside your ladyship's door at this moment, waiting to say good-by before departing toward Venice. The Venetians are hiring—"

Well, sire, I put it to Yourself as a father (and I was old enough to be hers): What could I do? I was to arrest her, of course, and hand her to the proper authorities for trial; it would not have benefited Carlo Filippo Belandi (who, slaughtered, looked more like a pig than ever), but duty is duty, and I was fully prepared to do mine. Was it a betrayal to let the poor wench, who would certainly be hanged, say a last good-by to her true love, found too late? Was half an hour, or an hour or so, too much to allow the poor children on such an occasion? And if, going down to the door to take her into custody, I found that she and this boy Bastiano had betrayed my trust and escaped, taking my horse (which was really Belandi's) for her to ride—was I to blame?

When I was in Venice some years afterward, I sought them out, to tell them how ill they had behaved; but what with one of their children pulling my beard and another tugging industriously at the points of my hose, and the parents laughing all the time, I came at last to leave it to their consciences.

As, all these years, it hath been left to mine.

Which doth not prevent me from hoping that this plain tale may likewise convince Your Grace that there is no blemish

On the Honor and Fidelity
Of Your Highness' Humble Servant,
L. Caradosso
Captain

ILLUSTRATED BY
HAMILTON GREENE

SILENT DRUMS

A "Trader Leeds" Novelette

By BRIAN O'BRIEN

One hippo lifted a cavernous mouth and roared. "Look aht!" Mr. Leeds shouted. "That 'un's arter us!"

IT WAS a hot, breathless afternoon. The sea about the small dugout canoe was as flat as glass, flashing brilliantly under the sun. The coast was a gray-green line barely visible to the east.

Mr. Charles Leeds, West African trader, hunched amidships watching a line that slanted into translucent depths. Behind him, sitting on the overhanging stern, was the Bulu, Sala, Mr. Leeds' man-of-all-work, gently moving a long, spear-bladed paddle in the languid manner of a fish's tail.

Below them, sinuous silver shapes curved in the water and every now and then the dark lines of a shark swept about the fish. Once a long gray-nurse nudged the canoe tentatively, rolling a pig eye as he swirled away from the rocking craft.

"Damn yer eyes!" Mr. Leeds cursed him. "Tike a shot at 'im if 'e tries that ag'in, Sala."

"Aye, *n'tangan.*"

In the bow lay several good-sized snappers, a small shark whose hide Mr. Leeds intended to use for sandpaper, and a few shapeless monsters he had dredged up from the bottom.

It was about four when Mr. Leeds took down an umbrella, fished in a bottle of gin from a line hanging overside, took a good swig and, wiping his tangle-bearded mouth, stuck a pipe in his toothless jaws and sighed. Then he jerked his line and hauled it in, empty.

"All right, Sala, le's git in."

They were making slowly towards the land. To the north a few Batanga fishing canoes were shooting towards their beaches. A land breeze came up and ruffled the silk-smooth sea.

"*E ké!*" Sala's voice was suddenly urgent. "Wot's up?"

Mr. Leeds looked over his shoulder and his eyes bugged like pale blue marbles under his battered helmet.

Something was breaking surface a hundred yards to starboard.

Two periscopes slanted from the water. A sharp, black bow jutted like a shark and smashed the smoothness from the surface. With water streaming from its bilges a small submarine floated abeam.

"Blime! It's a Nazi!" Mr. Leeds gasped, eyeing a swastika painted on the conning tower.

The Bulu, gray with fear, watched his master.

"Is it a devil, *n'tangan?*"

"Devil's right," Mr. Leeds told him. "Pretend yer don't see 'im."

Something clanged and a round head appeared on the bridge of the U-boat.

"Canoe, ahoy!" came a harsh, metallic voice. "Heave to, or we fire."

A lumpy rating manned a machine gun and Mr. Leeds saw three or four sailors scramble on the wet foredeck to where a light gun was mounted.

"Come alongside. Hurry!" rasped that tooth-jarring voice.

The sub loomed above Mr. Leeds' canoe, the sea surging over its bulging hull. Two sailors, pallid and shifty-eyed, hooked the dugout close.

"'Old 'ard!" snapped Mr. Leeds. "Wanter capsize us?"

"Where have you come from?" barked a crop-headed man from the bridge.

"H'africa," Mr. Leeds answered cockily. "Where the 'ell d'yer think?"

"Englander, eh?" sneered the officer. "Where are you bound? Answer quick or I sink you."

"Campo River."

"*Gut!*" The officer disappeared and Mr. Leeds heard him shouting something.

A door opened in the conning tower and two men emerged, followed by the officer and some seamen carrying bags.

"You will take two officers ashore," announced the officer.

"Wot d'yer mean?" howled Mr. Leeds. "I ain't no bleedin' tender."

The officer snapped orders and the seamen passed down two large canvas bags into the canoe. Each was fitted with a long line and a float, Mr. Leeds noticed. There were a wooden box, evidently for food, and two rifles. The men, both wearing life jackets, carried haversacks and revolvers in belt holsters. They exchanged words with the sub commander and stepped gingerly into the canoe.

"Make for shore," the taller one said, squinting across the darkening water.

Mr. Leeds eyed the pistol he had drawn.

"Pull, Sala."

They heard the sound of gongs and the sub disappeared.

"It wass lucky to find you, my man," said the tall one. "It would be a long pull in a rubber boat."

The other man was gripping the sides of the dugout and staring fearfully ahead.

BEFORE long it was pitch dark and the canoe rolled and slapped in a rising sea. Icy spray came inboard and the Germans muttered peevishly.

"How far now?" asked one.

"'Ow d'I know?" Mr. Leeds snapped. "Cawn't see a damn thing."

"The native must know. Keep paddling."

Soon the motion increased. The canoe lurched heavily and the two men baled.

"Gettin' near the river bar."

"Careful. Don't have us over."

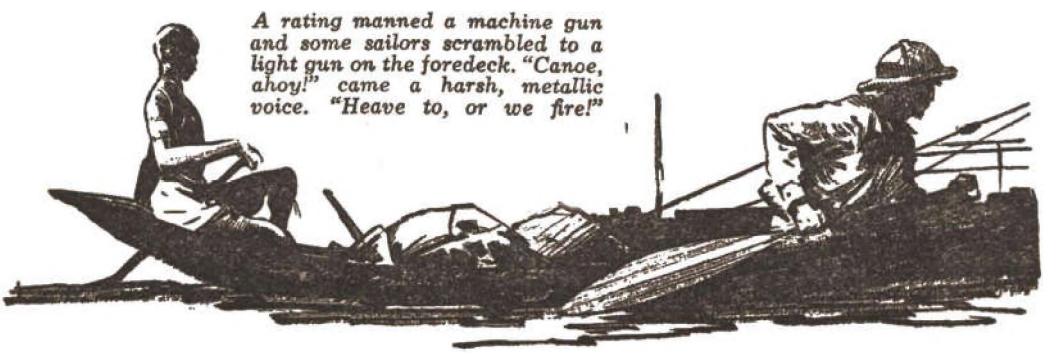
"Keep yer 'air on," growled Mr. Leeds. "I ain't balmy."

There was a faint sprinkle of lights ahead and the bow lifted to heavy rollers. For breathless minutes the heavy craft plunged and lurched like a log. Spray soaked them all and great, gray crested waves thundered past.

Then they were in calm water and the lights were astern.

"Put yer ashore 'ere?" Leeds asked hopefully.

"No. Pull up-river."



A rating manned a machine gun and some sailors scrambled to a light gun on the foredeck. "Canoe, ahoy!" came a harsh, metallic voice. "Heave to, or we fire!"

Sulkily Mr. Leeds bent to his paddle. Well inside the bar by now, they slid along the shore of the estuary. A light marked the island at the mouth of the Bongola River.

"Bear to starboard of that," one said. "We stay in the Campo."

"Knows yer w'y abaht, dontcher?" Mr. Leeds puffed.

"We have charts. Go ahead."

"Listen, mates," Mr. Leeds panted after a while, "I'm a old man. I cawn't go no further."

"Pull on."

It was black as pitch. They could only make out the loom of sky above the trees overhanging the river. The scent of wood smoke came to them.

"Moloko village ahead. Wanter stop there?"

"No. Keep to the other side."

They slid under trees and Mr. Leeds could see the watch fires on a broad canoe beach across the river. Then all was dark again.

"Who are the white men?" came Sala's soft Bulu.

"Bad men. Enemies."

"Stop that talk," snapped one of the Germans.

They paddled silently past M'bula and Bipa. The river was wider here flowing through miles of swamp. It seemed lighter, too, and great fireflies swung and curtsied about them.

"Lissen, I—gotta rest."

"Pull to the side," growled the German.

The canoe slid under overhanging branches and the men swiped at mosquitoes.

"You may rest for a couple of hours," said the leader; the smaller man had said little so far. "Tell your native to rest, too. I shall keep watch." He drew his revolver.

Sala curled up in the stern of the craft and Mr. Leeds, grunting, made himself as comfortable as possible where he was.

He awakened with cramped and aching limbs to feel a boot nudging his ribs.

"Get up," the tall German barked at him.

Grumpily Mr. Leeds reached for his paddle. Sala, stone-faced, was already perched on the stern.

The sky was gray and a cold mist covered the river. A few birds wheeled above the mangroves.

The tall German shivered in the chill. He was thin-faced with high cheekbones and cold gray eyes under thin brows. His mouth was thin as a knife. He was dressed in khaki coat and slacks, with thick boots which he kept on the canvas bags. The other man was younger—about thirty-five, Mr. Leeds figured. He, too, was thin, with pale cheeks spotted now with insect bites. His hair was thin and red, and white eyelashes made his pale eyes look empty. A soft red mouth went well with a chin that was knobby and plump looking. He was dressed like the other and kept shifting the revolver holster as though he were not used to it. It was obvious to Mr. Leeds that he was afraid of the taller man.

"Look 'ere, you blokes!" said Mr. Leeds indignantly. "Wot's the idea, thet's wot I wants ter know? 'Ow far do I 'ave to pull this bleedin' canoe?"

The tall man glared at him.

"You know this river?"

"Yus."

"Well, you will take us to a place called Ekin."

"Ekin?" yelped Mr. Leeds. "Thet's me own plice!"

The men looked at him, then exchanged quick sentences.

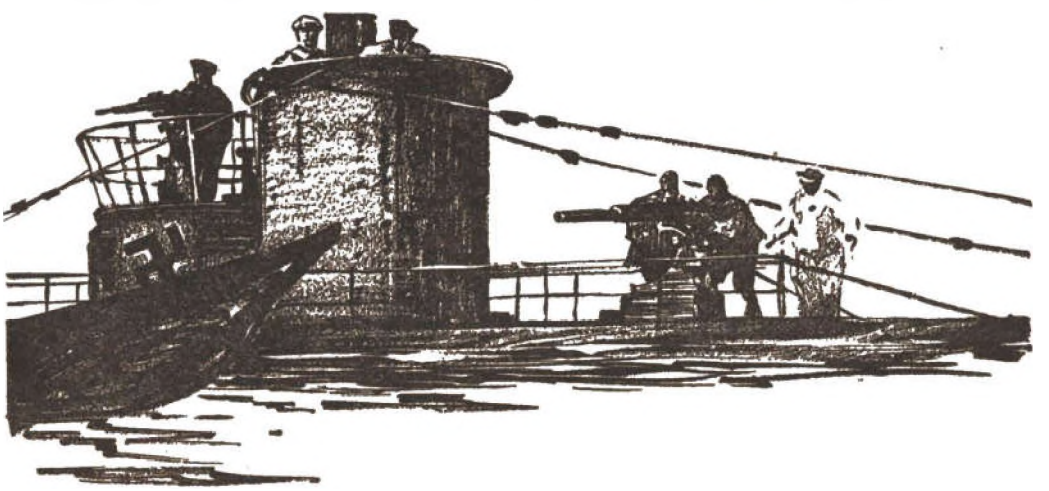
"So? Who else lives there?"

"No one, on'y the Bulus."

"*Gut.* We shall stay in your house."

"Thet's reel kind of yer!" Mr. Leeds snorted. "And wot if I don't invite yer?"

"You will be well paid," answered the tall one. "I am Kapitan-Leutnant Reise and this



The canoe swept upstream. Here and there, mangroves sheltered mud-banks where cat-eyed crocodiles lay. "Achtung!" cried Baumann suddenly.

iss Herr Baumann. You will do as we say and you will be well paid. But no foolishness or you will suffer. So."

REISE opened the box and took out sandwiches. He gulped from a flask that gave out a thirst-provoking tang.

"Wot abaht a wet?" Mr. Leeds suggested. "I gotta mouth too, yer know."

"Shut it."

Grumbling, Mr. Leeds tilted his helmet against the sun's glare and started paddling.

By late afternoon they were in a wide, islanded stretch of the river going northeast. Mr. Leeds was exhausted.

"Look 'ere," he announced, "we're abaht 'alf way. But I gotta rest, see? An' eat an' drink, too."

Sala was pulling mechanically, his eyes watching every move of the Germans. His usually round face was drawn with fatigue.

"If yer wants ter git ter Ekin, yer better tike a spell with these paddles," Mr. Leeds said.

"Pull in."

This time they motioned Mr. Leeds to the food box and he handed two large sandwiches to Sala, who wolfed them with a rapidity that visibly disgusted Baumann. Then he scooped up some water and sat watching them, motionless. Mr. Leeds swallowed some bread and queer-tasting meat and managed a quick swig of the flask before Reise snatched it from him.

Then he looked about the canoe. His rifle was under the Germans' things; no chance of getting at it.

"Look 'ere," he said after a while. "Wot's the bleddy gime, eh? Wot d'yer want arahnd Ekin?"

"That iss not your affair," Reise told him. "You will do as you are told and then you will be paid. That iss all that need concern you."

"Wot yer got in them bags?" Mr. Leeds kicked at one.

A pistol was jammed in his face.

"Keep your filthy feet away," snarled Reise.

"Garn!" growled Mr. Leeds, but he moved back.

"Tell your native to rest now. We must go on."

Sala curled in a tight ball and was immediately asleep.

"How far to Ekin?"

"Day an' a 'alf."

"So, we go on through the night."

"Oh, no, we don't. There's a swamp ahead we cawn't find our way through in the dark."

Reise cursed.

"How far is this swamp?"

"Two-three mile."

"Go on, then."

"Achtung!" cried Baumann. He was crouched peering through the hanging screen of leaves, a pistol in one bony fist. Mr. Leeds followed his gaze. A small canoe slid downstream under the opposite bank, two natives paddling lazily.

"Bit nervous, ain't yer, mate?" said the old man softly.

"Was?" Baumann spun, the pistol quivering in his grip. "Silence!"

The two Germans watched the canoe disappear around a bend.

"Go on, *schnell.*"

The canoe swept upstream until the banks dwindled far apart and small islands of bush cut the river into narrow, winding channels. Here and there, mangroves sheltered mudbanks on which cat-eyed crocodiles lay like dead things, with tickbirds, white as pearl, picking between their filthy teeth.

"Gotta wait 'ere," Mr. Leeds said. "Gettin' dark."

The air was whirring with insects and a thick mist lifted like smoke from the still water. Things moved on the islands and here and there the hoarse bark of a disturbed crocodile startled Baumann into trembling curses.

Night fell suddenly and Reise fanned a flashlight across the black water. Red sparks showed beasts lying about them.

"Dangerous plice," observed Mr. Leeds, cocking an eye at Baumann. "Some o' them crocs is big enough ter rush a small vessel like this."

Baumann babbled something in German to Reise, who snapped a gruff answer.

They ate, and Mr. Leeds grumbled as Reise emptied the bottle. Then they settled down to try to sleep, Reise sitting on guard.

At dawn they went on, Leeds watching high trees across the tangle of islands for familiar landmarks.

Once a hippo reared its massive head from the water and Baumann screamed, firing blindly at it.

"Stow it!" yelled Leeds. "Want thet 'ippo ter charge us?"

Reise volleyed a stream of guttural abuse at the younger man, who defended himself feebly, glaring pathetically at Mr. Leeds.

It was past noon before they were out of the swamp and pulling strongly up the wide stream. The two Germans lay in the bottom of the dugout when they passed villages, but Mr. Leeds was well aware of a pistol near his back.

"If the natives hail you, answer," Reise instructed. "But be careful what you say. At the first wrong move I will shoot."

"Wish't I knoo wot this is all abaht," complained the old man.

CHAPTER II

THE DRUMS SPEAK

THEY pulled in to rest in the afternoon and Baumann took a paddle later. All that night the canoe was forced upstream and it was dawn when they passed the mangrove swamp below Ekin, full day when they pulled in to Mr. Leeds' beach.

"What's this?" Reise pulled his pistol and jammed it in Mr. Leeds' back as natives ran, shouting, down to the riverbank. On each side of the clearing, palm-thatch go-downs stretched back from the river to a long, low house against the forest, facing the river.

"This is my plice," Mr. Leeds announced. "Tridin' fer palm oil, cocoa, iv'ry and sich. Village is 'alf mile up-river."

"Lead the way to the house. No talk to the natives."

The Germans hefted the two canvas bags out of the canoe and, weaving under their weight, followed Leeds to his house. The Bulus stood back, eyeing the strangers. Sala picked up the box and padded along in the rear.

They dropped the bags on the veranda floor. Mr. Leeds thought one clinked a little. Reise snatched the rifles that Sala carried, yelling at Baumann.

"Send the natives away," he ordered. "Keep that one, Sala, here."

He watched the curious laborers return to their huts.

"Now, hand over all arms."

Baumann searched the three rooms beyond the veranda, brought out two shotguns, a revolver and light rifle, and piled them in a corner of the veranda.

"Any more?"

"No."

"Tell your man to bring water for baths."

"Lissen 'ere," stormed Mr. Leeds. "You ain't in 'Itler-land nah. This is H'africa. Yer cawn't chuck yer weight—"

The pistol menaced him and beyond it he studied two eyes that were as cold as agates. He suddenly realized that this man would not hesitate for a moment to kill him.

The two stripped their life jackets and when the water came, bathed in turn.

"We shall be here two weeks," said Reise calmly. "You will obey orders and no harm will come to you. Make no attempt to warn of our presence."

"I wanna know wot yer arter?" Mr. Leeds said stubbornly.

"That iss not your business. You will obey orders. That iss all."

"Lemme tell you suthink," Mr. Leeds said indignantly. "These 'ere Bulus is my friends, see? They comes arahnd ter talk an' git the noos of me trip. They'll wanter know all abaht you two. An' if yer don't keep yer noses clean, they'll send runners ter Ebolowa and yer'll 'ave troops dahn."

"So." Reise smiled thinly. "I will tell you something. I know all about you. You have been here over thirty years. The government trusts you, so no patrols come this far south. We have come here to meet someone. This place was chosen because it iss the safest place on the border. When we have finished our mission we will go and you can do what you like. But until then be careful, my friend. And do not try to send messages by your Bulu friends, because I understand Bulu. We have schools in Germany for such things. You are helpless. Understand that, and behave yourself accordingly."

He eyed Baumann. "It iss well for you to understand, too," he went on. "Understand that I am in complete charge here, responsible for the success of our mission. You are both under my orders.

"Now, send for the Bulu, Sala. I will speak with him."

Mr. Leeds was astounded when Reise spoke in fair Bulu.

"We are friends of your master," he told the pop-eyed Sala. "We shall rest here with him. You will tell no man that we are here, neither will you talk in the village."

Sala looked at Mr. Leeds.

"Is this a true talk, *n'tangan?*"

Mr. Leeds caught the icy gleam of those small eyes.

"Aye," he said heavily.

The Bulu saluted and went obediently to his hut.

"Arrange with him for food," Reise ordered. "And now, what have you got to drink? We must be comfortable."

"I'll go an' see."

"Oh, no," Reise smiled. "You will stay here. Baumann will go."

Baumann rummaged in the storeroom and came out with a bottle of gin, bitters and glasses.

" 'Ere, 'ere," Mr. Leeds complained. "Go easy with that, it's me lawst case."

They ignored him and helped themselves generously.

Mr. Leeds reached for his own glass and gulped sulkily.

SALA brought food, which he served in silence. The Germans ate and after the meal Mr. Leeds sprawled in a tattered deck chair while they talked. He cursed under his breath for having forgotten the smattering of German he had picked up when Cameroon was under the Kaiser's rule. But a few words came to him. He heard the word "Congo" repeated from time to time, then "*Gelt.*" Reise gestured across the river once or twice. "*Diamanten*" occurred often in the conversation.

"Iss there a road across the river?" Reise wanted to know.

"Find aht," spat Mr. Leeds, and was promptly knocked out of his chair by a hard slap across the mouth.

"Remember this," said Reise softly. "I can find out anything I want to know. But you will answer my questions or"— his eyes lit like a cat's— "I will smash you to pieces, *verdammte* old swine!"

Mr. Leeds got up muttering, sighed, nursed his broken lip and reached for a pipe.

"Well?" Reise's voice was still soft but he was as tense as a boxer waiting to administer a knockout. "You have not said where iss the road."

"Up opposite the village," Leeds said painfully. "Ekin's back from the river, but there's a old trade trail that crosses 'alf a mile up."

The two crouched close together talking busily. Once or twice they scanned a paper carried by Reise. Often they eyed Mr. Leeds. This went on all afternoon.

In the evening Sala brought food: a stew of monkey meat and ground nuts with rice, fruit and tea. The Germans finished Mr. Leeds' gin.

He sat there for a while watching the flames of a fire in the compound. About it squatted Sala, his two wives and some laborers, talking in low voices.

"Think I'll turn in," Mr. Leeds ventured.

The two stared at him, then muttered to each other.

"You will sleep here," Reise stated.

"Cawn't I 'ave me own bedroom, even?" howled the old man.

"*Halt's maul!*"

"Nuts ter you, too!" Mr. Leeds screamed silently.

He called Sala and watched that puzzled native make up his camp bed and rig the mosquito net.

"Do not be restless," came Reise's voice. "We shall keep watches."

The old man crawled under his net and lay there, conscious of the dull gleam of Reise's revolver.

Sleep didn't come easily, though he still ached from the hard pull up the river. What were those damned Nazis after? Said they had to meet someone. And what was that talk of the

Congo? Were they going there? *Gelt.* Gilt—gold! Were they after gold? He grinned in the darkness. Precious little gold to be found around Ekin.

Then he remembered something else. *Diamanten.* Diamonds! He nearly spoke it aloud. Congo diamonds, that was it!

He clenched his gnarled old fists under the cover.

They had come to buy industrial diamonds, were to meet the agent right here in Ekin. Those canvas bags must contain the gold they spoke of.

And if they got away with it once, they'd try it again.

"Not if I knows it," he whispered to himself and went to sleep.

He awakened twice during the night and each time one of them was watching.

"Wot's up, cully?" he jeered at Baumann once, near dawn. "'Fraid ter go bye-bye?"

The man jumped and a stubby pistol shook in his hand.

"Windy basted, ain't yer?" Mr. Leeds observed and closed his eyes.

Next morning he was not allowed out of sight of at least one German.

"Dammit! Cawn't a bloke 'ave no privacy no more?" he bellowed.

By evening he was in a state of violent rage, but the Germans would not allow him near anything that might serve as a weapon. He noticed, too, that Sala was not allowed near him.

Then, just after dark, the signal drums began their evening thudding.

"What iss that?" Baumann yapped.

"Call drums," Mr. Leeds told him. "They sends the noos every night and mornin' by 'em. Passes all over the country. They're probably tellin' the bush that there's two noo white men 'ere."

"Stop them. Do you hear? Stop them!"

"Ho, Sala," shouted Reise. "Run to the village and stop the drums."

Sala stared.

"Tell him," Reise snarled at Leeds. "Tell him to silence those damned drums while we are here."

Leeds started to say something, then thought better of it. "Yes, sir."

He told Sala, "You will tell the chief at Ekin that the drums must not speak until I give the word. Neither will they answer the drums of other towns. There must be no drum talk from Ekin. Do you understand? There shall be no drum talk. It is my order."

"Aye, *n'tangan.*" Sala, his brow wrinkled like a bull dog's, obediently trotted off.

"*Gut,*" Reise approved. "It iss good that you did not try to play foolish. I understood your talk."

"I ain't stoopid," Mr. Leeds answered and winked at a star.

HE turned in that night hoping that the drum message would get to Kribi where Hope was. For the drums had said that the Silent Walker, which was Mr. Leeds' "drum name," had returned from the sea, bringing many wonders.

Maybe Hope would be curious and come for a look-see.

Hope had been in Cameroon longer than Mr. Leeds. Tall, burly, red-faced and bespectacled, he trekked through the forests and swamps of South Cameroon every six months, listening to and solving native problems, and administering merciful justice insofar as the American Mission would permit. He and Mr. Leeds had been through many adventures together and regarded each other with exasperated respect. For Mr. Leeds violently refused Hope's spiritual attentions and flaunted his own bad habits with bravado. And the missionary's trick of leaving native deacons to watch over his converts brought Mr. Leeds to apoplectic fury.

"H'interfering in me villages!" he would storm. "Them nawsty old rakes is on'y good fer robbin' the chiefs and messin' abaht with the gels. 'Ypocrites, thet's wot they is."

But Hope knew when to be a missionary and when to use his football-trained weight in a scrap.

Yes, Mr. Leeds hoped that the missionary was listening for the Ekin drum.

For three days the Germans stayed in the compound, and not once had Mr. Leeds been out of their sight. Sala skirmished in the distance, hurt and dismayed by his master's apparent indifference to him.

Baumann wasn't happy either. The steely Reise bullied him unmercifully.

"We are a nation of warriors," he jeered to Mr. Leeds one evening in Baumann's hearing. "Civilians are only those who are unfit to be soldiers. Useful in their way, but only when they are obedient. Scum!"

And Baumann, with shaking hands, endured it.

One dawn Mr. Leeds awoke to the rumble of drums to the south. He saw Sala run out into the compound to listen.

"Two white men on the road to Elanka," came the faint stutter. "They come from the sea. They slept in the town of N'fasa. They follow the trade road . . . This is the drum of N'fasa . . . Where is the drum of Ekin? . . . Why is there no talk at Ekin? Has the river stopped flowing? Is the drummer of Ekin dead? . . ."

Mr. Leeds grinned.

A faint rumble showed that an up-river drum was passing on the message. But there was no sound from Ekin.

Suddenly Mr. Leeds sat up, shoving the drooping net off his head. Two white men on

the Spanish side! Missionaries? No, the drums would have told that. Were they the men for whom the Germans waited?

"What iss it?" Reise was sitting beside him, face lined and unshaven, dressed in wrinkled shorts. "What did the drum signal?"

"I dunno." Mr. Leeds tried to look dull. "'Ad a nightmare, I 'spect. Wot drum?"

Baumann ran out, red-eyed, buckling a pistol over his pajamas.

"The drum, you heard it!" barked Reise.

"Drum talk's secret, known on'y ter a few Bulus," Leeds mumbled. "Ain't no white people as knows it."

The two spent the day moving about the compound and watching the river. Mr. Leeds made an attempt to talk to Sala but the Bulu, with an eye on Reise, sheered off.

That evening Reise was in foul humor. Leeds heard him berating Baumann until the younger man ran out into the firelit compound in terror.

Just after dark the signal drums of Ekin began thudding.

Then, just before morning, they were shocked out of sleep by a rifle shot.

Baumann ran whimpering into the bush behind the hut. But Reise dressed quickly and dragged Mr. Leeds out of bed.

"Get a canoe, come on," he snapped. "Someone on the river."

They paddled upstream as far as the trade trail but saw no one.

"Who could have fired?" Reise wanted to know.

"Might bin a ivory poacher," Leeds suggested. "The elephants is on their way west this time o' year."

"But that shot came from the east."

"Cawn't tell in the bush where they comes from."

During the afternoon a villager ran into the compound telling of a white man who stood on the south bank of the river.

"What manner of man?" Reise asked.

"A stranger, *n'tangan*. No man has seen him before."

"Baumann, you stop here and guard the hut," Reise ordered. "Leeds, take a canoe and carry me upstream."

The old man paddled upstream to where a slight cleft in the wall of forest showed the trade road. A white man squatted beside it. He rose, waving his arms, as the canoe appeared.

"Who are you?" Reise called, as the canoe veered towards the bank.

The man grinned, showing white teeth beneath a small black mustache. He was dressed in sweat-stained white duck. Once-white shoes covered his feet and he fanned himself with a broad felt hat. A heavy revolver was strapped to his belt.

"Who are you?" he retorted.

"Where iss Solaze?" Reise demanded.

"Back there." The man jerked his head. "I am D'Alverry."

"So. Come aboard."

CHAPTER III

PROFESSIONAL KILLER

THE man slid down the bank, hooked a toe over the canoe gunwale and hopped aboard. Leeds noticed that he was a wide-shouldered, bulky man, with the large man's catlike grace. He sat down, rubbing a blue chin and smiling, beady-eyed, at Reise.

"You have brought the—package?"

"Have you?" grinned the Spaniard. He looked like a half-caste to Mr. Leeds. "Who is this? Your appraiser?"

"This man—iss working for us," snapped Reise. "Where iss the package?"

"Not with me. That is, with Solaze. I have

come ahead to see that everything is prepared."

"All iss ready. Go back and get the—oh, do not bother with this fool! Get the diamonds."

Mr. Leeds held his breath. So it *was* diamonds.

"Where is your expert?"

"In our camp. Get the stones."

"First I will see the money—in gold marks, remember—then I will show the stones."

"I thought your partner had them."

"I know where they are."

Reise snatched the pistol from his belt.

"What was that shot we heard this morning?"

The beady eyes studied the pistol.

"I do not know. Perhaps something I shot."

"Perhaps you shot your partner," Reise said softly.

Leeds sat still as a mouse in the stern. The thin German was like a blade pointed at the bulky, sweat-smelling D'Alverry, who grinned sleepily, sucking his teeth.

"We are a long way from the law," he said lazily. "If my partner tries to cheat me, I protect my interest. What do you care? You want the stones; I have them. You pay me the amount agreed and I give you the stones. *Es verdad?*"

"So. Bring them and we will see."

The Spaniard rubbed finger and thumb together in an ancient gesture.

"Don't be a fool," Reise almost screamed.

"Put that pistol away," said D'Alverry. "If you kill me you will never find the diamonds; prime Congo greens and brights. I know they are all you care about. I know, too, that you dare not return without them. So—"

"I shall not return without them," Reise said harshly. "I give my word as a German officer to pay when I am satisfied the stones are as specified."

"A German officer!" The Spaniard spat overside.

Reise's pistol shook.

"Listen, murderer, you cannot sell those stones to anyone but me. If you try, you will be found guilty of murdering your partner. You need the gold that I have. Now"— his voice barked triumphantly— "bring the stones and we will examine them. If correct, we pay you. If not, you take them away. Your risk is greater than mine, my friend."

The Spaniard scowled, his small eyes darting from Reise to Leeds.

Two murderers, thought Mr. Leeds. Maybe three. D'Alverry even admitted it. Reise was a cold-blooded killer, that was easy to see. And Baumann was frightened enough to kill by accident. Mr. Leeds felt mighty uncomfortable.

The canoe nosed into the bank and they stepped ashore. Baumann came from the veranda, a rifle in his hands. D'Alverry grinned as he shook hands with him.

"Where is the money?" he asked at once.

They took him to the house and showed him the two canvas bags.

"Open them."

At a nod from Reise, Baumann unlocked the brass padlocks which, by means of rods threaded through brass eyelets, secured the bags. Inside were smaller canvas bags and in them, tightly rolled cylinders of gold twenty-mark pieces. D'Alverry picked one up and bit it.

"*Bueno*," he said. "I will eat something and then I will go and get the stones."

The Germans could hardly contain themselves while the Spaniard ate one of Mr. Leeds' chickens. Then, wiping greasy hands on his shirt, he went down to the canoe.

Reaching the trail on the south bank, Reise stepped ashore with him.

"I go alone," D'Alverry grinned. "I find the stones easier that way."

He lounged against a tree while the canoe pulled out into the stream, then with a wave of the hand, disappeared.

"Send that Sala to follow him," ordered Reise.

"Nuthin' doin'," Mr. Leeds objected. "He'll shoot 'im. 'Sides, Sala wouldn't understand wot it's all abaht."

They pulled back to the compound.

THE Germans were jubilant and celebrated with Mr. Leeds' dwindling supply of gin.

" 'Old 'ard," he complained. " 'Ow abaht leavin' a trickle fer me?"

"You shall be paid," guffawed Reise. "See?" He stooped, opened his haversack and tossed a roll of gold coins to the old man.

"Blime!" gasped Mr. Leeds, counting it. "Thousand marks—thet's fifty quid."

Both Germans laughed loudly.

Mr. Leeds didn't like it. He didn't like the way those two Nazis whispered and looked at him. They wouldn't even let him go away by himself to put the money in a safe place.

That evening the drums across the river spoke again.

"Cross his hands on his breast," they said. That was the death signal. A white man was in the old sugar plantation making magic, the drums went on. No man dared to watch. A dead man was in the forest, a white man. Mr. Leeds hoped that message would get as far as Kribi.

It was morning before the Spaniard returned.

"Have you brought the stones?" Reise called.

"No, *señores*," the big man smiled. "You come this side to see them. Bring the money."

The canoe returned to Mr. Leeds' compound.

"You go with the old man," Reise ordered. "I will wait here."

"But," quavered Baumann, "I— Had we not both—"

"Go. Tell that Spanish swine I am sick."

"*Zu befehl.*"

Reise yelled for Sala and he with Mr. Leeds shouldered the two bags down to the canoe. Baumann, pistol in hand, followed them.

"Where is your officer friend?" D'Alverry wanted to know.

"He iss sick. Fever," Baumann told him. "I have full authority to inspect the stones. I am a qualified appraiser. I warn you, if they are not quite up to specification I shall not pay you a penny. Understand that."

The little man was puffed up like a frog, Mr. Leeds noted, and strutting like a bantam cock.

"I have a pistol, too," he went on. "So don't try to swindle me or it will be the worse for you."

"Don't worry," the Spaniard said nastily. "I, too, am armed. You cannot find the stones without me."

They followed him along the old trail that crossed the deserted village of Elanka. There they turned off and, as far as Mr. Leeds could make out, marched parallel with the river.

The bags were heavy and the men stopped frequently to rest.

They walked through the moist, hot green of the forest for what seemed like hours. Sala was streaming with sweat.

Suddenly Baumann halted at a stench of carrion.

"What iss that?" he stammered, turning gray.

"Some beast, I dare say," replied the Spaniard.

"Two-legged beast," Mr. Leeds growled and glared fiercely at D'Alverry's beady eyes.

"We are near the place now." D'Alverry hurried forward.

They followed him into a clearing that was filled with scraggly sugar cane, choked with weeds and stamped down here and there by feeding beasts. Sala and Mr. Leeds dropped their loads with relief.

"*Haba!* Look out, *n'tangan*," cried Sala.

Leeds looked up to see the Spaniard backed against a tree, pistol in hand. Baumann, greasy with fear, was dragging futilely at his own weapon.

"Take your hands away from that gun," purred D'Alverry, "There is nothing to fear, but I take precautions. You shall have your diamonds, but you will leave the gold here, with me."

Baumann sputtered nervously.

"We do not do business this way," he blustered. "Bring the stones."

"You, *viejo!*" D'Alverry looked at Mr. Leeds. "A bag is under that tree root. Get it out."

Mr. Leeds, watching them both, stooped and dragged a scratched leather briefcase from the loam at the foot of a gnarled *lignum vitae*.

"Open it."

The lock had been broken. Mr. Leeds spread on the ground bulky packages in white paper secured by rubber bands. One he opened and small stones glimmered dully in the half-light of the forest.

Baumann fitted a jeweler's glass to his eye and knelt beside the packages, the Spaniard watching him closely.

He opened package after package, turning the stones to the light, examining each carefully. Some were yellowish and clear, shaped like two pyramids base to base. Others were irregular lumps of dull green. Some were like fragments of clinker. He counted them carefully, comparing them with figures on their wrappers and figures on a sheet of paper he carried.

D'Alverry stood clear, pistol up, watching them.

"Don't look much like di'monds ter me," Mr. Leeds observed.

"Silence!"

SALA was standing near the gold bags, his head to one side, listening and watching the bushes behind D'Alverry.

At last Baumann rewrapped the stones, closed the case and stood up.

"All are correct," he stated. "There iss your money—"

There was a sudden report, shockingly loud in the quiet, and birds fled screaming. Echoes reverberated among the gray trunks.

D'Alverry dropped on his knees, face leaden. He gritted his teeth trying to bring up his pistol. Baumann shrank back wild-eyed, babbling. There was another report and the Spaniard was knocked flat. He coughed, writhing, gnawing at the earth. Then he died.

Reise a rifle under his arm, stepped into the clearing.

"*Aber—*" began Baumann, half fainting.

"Pick up those stones," snapped Reise.

"You—killed—"

"Of course I did. That swine murdered his partner to get the gold for himself. He would have killed us, too. We killed first. Thus we save money for the Fatherland."

"*You* killed him," Baumann said in a thin, high voice.

Reise eyed him coldly.

"Yes, I killed him. Killing is my profession. It iss good to kill. I will kill anyone who interferes with my duty. Remember that. Anyone. Now pick up the stones. You, Sala, take one bag of gold. Leeds, the other. *Vorwärts!*"

Leeds, bowed under the bag of gold, cocked an eye at Reise.

"I'm next, I s'pose."

"You? No, you are too useful. We need you to get back to the coast."

"Ah," said Mr. Leeds meditatively.

They marched back to the river, Baumann hurrying nervously ahead, Reise in the rear.

There was a sudden, shocking report and D'Alverry sagged, his face twisted in pain.

That night Mr. Leeds watched them curiously. Baumann ate little, jumping at every sound, his frightened eyes on Reise, who seemed calm, a slight flush on his leathery face.

"Our rendezvous with the submarine iss not until eight days," he told Mr. Leeds. "Until then we rest here. You will have the natives collect fruits and vegetables and fresh meat for the submarine crew."

"We had better leave tonight," said Baumann urgently. "That dead man—we left him there. Some native will find him. I—I would feel better if we had the stones in a safe place."

"Calm yourself, Herr Baumann," sneered Reise. "Your work iss done. We shall stay here until I give the word to leave. Don't worry. You will be safe in your bed in a month."

"There will be trouble about D'Alverry," Baumann said, with timid stubbornness. "He wass a useful agent. I cannot accept any responsibility—"

Reise stared with blank ferocity.

"Do I understand you disapprove of my action? Do you presume to criticize me?"

"Oh, no!" Baumann smiled shakily. "I know you did your duty. But—"

"'But, but, but!' You make me sick!" roared the officer. "The important thing iss to get those stones back to Germany. Nothing else matters. If I am killed, if you are killed, it does not matter so long as our mission iss successful. Yess, Herr Baumann, I like to kill. Remember that."

Baumann shot a glance at Mr. Leeds, as if seeking support. Mr. Leeds wondered why they were talking English. Was it because they both needed to justify their actions? Couldn't be. Yet . . . Baumann was scared stiff of the taller man, that was certain. And Reise eyed him like a mad dog watching a cat.

"I gotta go out," said the old man.

"I will go with him," Baumann said hastily.

They passed out of the lamplight, crossed the compound and entered a narrow path that led to Mr. Leeds' privy.

"Wait!" said Baumann suddenly. He was craning his neck to look back at the house.

"Wot's up?"

"I think"— he turned and his face was a pallid mask in the darkness— "I think Reise iss mad. I think he means to—"

"Means ter wot?"

"Nothing. Hurry and return."

Leeds came out of the small hut and started back.

"Wot's the idea?" he asked.

"Nothing. I—I will speak again."

"Did you have a nice talk?" Reise grinned at them as they entered the veranda.

"Talk?" Baumann jerked at his shirt collar. "What iss there to talk about?"

Reise's teeth were white chips in the lamplight.

Mr. Leeds was curled under his mosquito net when he heard an exclamation from Baumann.

"Yess, Herr Baumann," came Reise's cold, unmodulated voice. "I took the precaution to hide the firearms—except my own, of course. It iss better to avoid unnecessary accidents."

"But how do I guard the prisoner?"

"Take a club. But do not make sudden moves for I am a light sleeper. And I sleep with my pistol in my hand."

Blimel Mr. Leeds felt cold. So Reise was afraid of Baumann, too.

CHAPTER IV

SALA DESERTS

AFTER a restless night Mr. Leeds awakened with a headache and a feeling of queasy helplessness. He stood stretching in the cool dawn. Baumann watched him, red-eyed, from a chair.

Drums rumbled somewhere to the north—Ambam, Mr. Leeds figured.

He heard the *n'dan*, or drum name, of Hope.

"The Beautiful One walks in the forest," thudded the drum. "Where is the Silent One? Has he gone from Ekin? Why does Ekin not answer the drum talk?"

Sala looked out of his hut but a quick gesture from Mr. Leeds sent him back. But not soon enough.

"That drum!" Reise exploded behind him. "That native—why did he hide?"

"I dunno," Mr. Leeds said dully.

"Get that Bulu here."

When Sala approached, Reise demanded, "What did the drum say?"

"He does not hear the drum talk," Mr. Leeds said in Bulu.

"I do not hear the drum talk," Sala repeated, face expressionless.

"You lie, swine."

The pistol was out and pointed between Sala's eyes.

"What is this thing, *n'tangan?*" he asked Mr. Leeds. "Will the white man kill me?"

"No," Leeds snapped. "'E don't know nothin'," he told Reise. He was wondering where Hope was. Was he at Ambam? Would he come walking into the compound—into Reise's pistol?

"Tie him to that post," ordered the officer. "Go on, make him fast."

Sala backed to the veranda post and Mr. Leeds picked up a length of box line.

"What will you do with me, master?" The Bulu was trembling a little. "Will you flog me?"

"No."

"Now, Herr Baumann." Reise sat down, grinning. "You will flog this man until he tells me what that drum signaled."

Baumann looked sick.

"What—"

"Use that whip," directed Reise, pointing to a twisted elephant-hide *bulala* Mr. Leeds had taken from a tough chief. It was yellow, as hard as horn, and it stank.

Hesitantly, Baumann brought it across Sala's back.

"Why do they flog me?" the Bulu asked. "I have done no wrong." His eyes sought Mr. Leeds. "You are my master. Why do they flog me?"

"He iss no longer your master," Reise said. "I am your master, bushman. These men are less than nothing. You will tell what the drum-talk said."

Sala was silent.

The hide whizzed and thudded on Sala's back. He gritted his teeth and glared over his shoulder at Reise.

"What said the drum?"

"No savvy."

"Flog him!" yelled Reise, leaping out of his seat. "Strip him to pieces!"

Baumann slashed blindly and Mr. Leeds heard the native gasp.

"Go on, kill him!" commanded the officer.

Baumann's face was greenish and sweating. He swung the hide, bringing it down with sobbing grunts until the brown skin was broken and beaded with dark blood. Yet no sound came from the thick lips. Mr. Leeds clenched bony fists, glaring, shamed, at the ground.

"Lissen," he blurted at last, "wot's the use o' killin' the lad? 'E don't know nuthin'."

But Baumann was slashing at the twitching Bulu like a madman. Ugly welts broke under the hide and Sala's legs were buckling.

"'Ere, 'ere, stop it!" Leeds shoved him to one side.

Reise jumped forward, pistol ready.

"Go on, shoot, yer bleedin' killers!" yelled the old man. "Shoot me, but don't cut the pore lad ter bits."

Reise got himself under control.

"Loose him."

Mr. Leeds cut the lines and caught the man as he sagged. Some wide-eyed laborers ran to help him down from the veranda.

"Softly, softly," Mr. Leeds managed to whis-

Mr. Leeds clenched his fists and glared, helpless and ashamed, while Baumann cut at the twitching Bulu like a madman.

per to him. "I will talk when these men are gone."

Sala staggered to his hut and Mr. Leeds heard him drop with a groan on his bed.

BAUMANN was slumped on a chair, eyeing the blood-flecked rawhide in his fist.

"What did you whisper to that Bulu?" Reise snapped.

"Look 'ere," Mr. Leeds roared. "Fust you flog 'im 'alf ter death fer nothin'. Then yer awsk me wot I sed. Wot could I say?" Tears of rage were rolling down Mr. Leeds' whiskered face. "That Bulu's me own boy. He looks ter me like his own father. And I stood by an' let you beat 'ell outa him. Wot *could* I say?"

"I don't like your manner," threatened the officer.

"O.K., wot yer gonna do?" Mr. Leeds yelled. "You gotta git back ter yer bleedin' U-boat, dontcher? I'm the on'y one as knows the way. Nah leave me alone."

Baumann mumbled something. Reise stared, then grinned.

"The little Baumann suggests you taste the rawhide," he purred. "He seems to like to use it. Take care, Leeds, that you do not annoy our little fire-eater."

"Baumann"—Mr. Leeds glared at him—"you flogged a man as was never flogged before. Bulus is free people and they don't like bein' flogged. Take care 'ow you goes arter this. There's plenty o' spears and poisoned arrers in this bush."

All that day Mr. Leeds watched Sala's hut. But the native did not appear. One of his wives shot a nasty look at the house.

"Your man, is he well?" Mr. Leeds called.

"He is sick," she snapped. "He cries out because his master is dead."

"Oh, woman," came Reise's jeering voice, "tell him he has a new master."

She ducked, frightened, into the hut.

Reise stood up. "Come," he said. "We will walk to the village."

"Wot fer? The chief'll come 'ere if yer calls 'im."

"We will go to him. It iss more polite that way."

"I will wait for you. I am tired," Baumann suggested. "Besides, someone must guard the stones and gold."

"They will be safe—as long as all of us are together," said Reise slowly. "Come along with us."

Baumann scuttled fearfully along the trail to Ekin, darting frightened eyes into the thick undergrowth. They arrived at the village at the trot.

The chief, squatting outside his hut, jumped instantly to his feet and ran to crouch near Mr. Leeds.

"*M'bolo*, chief," Reise said grandly. "I bring you *dash*." He held out a bright silk handkerchief and a claspknife.

"What does the *n'tangan* want for these fine things?" The chief fingered them with unconcealed delight.

"The drums have spoken this day," Reise said softly.

"Nay, *n'tangan*. It was ordered that no drum talks from Ekin."

"But other drums have spoken."

"It is so, *n'tangan*," the chief answered eagerly. "They say, what is wrong at Ekin that the drum is silent. They ask if all are dead here."

Reise eyed Mr. Leeds nastily.

"What did the drum say this morning?"

"It was the drum of Ambam. It says that the Beautiful One comes to seek the Silent Walker."

"Who iss the Beautiful One?"

"Me native gel," said Leeds quickly. "It's wot they calls a—"

"Silence!" snapped Reise. "Who iss this Beautiful One?"

"He is a mission man from Kribi."

"So! Back to the compound."

They hurried out of the village, Reise fuming.

"So you managed to get word to your friends," he snarled. "Well, we will see who iss cleverer, you and your damned natives or myself." He halted and called to the chief. "You will make drum talk that this white man has gone to hunt elephants, to the east."

"Aye, *n'tangan*."

"That should keep your missionary away," Reise smiled. "He will hardly come to seek you here."

They hurried back to the compound.

"Get a canoe ready. We leave at once."

Baumann staggered down the slope with the bags of gold and the food box.

"Where are the guns?" he called.

"We won't need them," Reise sneered at him. "Just this one. We will leave the others for Leeds, when he returns."

BAUMANN finished loading the canoe and hurried to a hut for paddles. Reise glowered at Mr. Leeds.

"Where iss that Sala?"

"Yer cawn't tike 'im," Mr. Leeds objected. "'E's crippled."

"Bring him here or I'll drag him out," raved the German. He stood listening while the Ekin drum stuttered.

"The Silent One has gone to hunt elephants to the east," it rumbled. "He will be gone for many sleeps. Let the Beautiful One follow him to the elephant country."

"Damned fools," Leeds mumbled. "They oughter know there's no elephants to the east this time o' year."

Sala crawled from his hut. Immediately a swarm of flies hovered over his back. He was gray and drawn, his hands shook.

"Get in the canoe," Reise ordered.

"'E cawn't paddle," Mr. Leeds protested desperately. "Yer'll kill 'im."

"You'd like him to remain here to tell your mission friend which way we have gone, no doubt."

"'E won't last the trip!"

Sala weaved past him without a look and sat in the stern of the dugout.

"'E's finished with me, too," said Mr. Leeds miserably.

"Come on," Baumann muttered. "They may be—"

"You are afraid," Reise told him.

"I am not. I'm merely anxious for the stones."

"Don't let them worry you," Reise said pleasantly. "They will be safely delivered no matter what happens."

Baumann took his place in the bow.

Reise squatted on the gold bags amidships, Leeds next and Sala in the stern.

"There's a lot o' crocs abaht 'ere," Mr. Leeds said, with an eye on Baumann.

The water was green and dark, calm as death. The trees billowed down to the surface like dark green wool, and here and there the bare, white limbs of a dead cottonwood stretched like tortured fingers toward the brilliant blue sky. It was hot and not a breath of wind stirred the leaves. Flies wheeled about the canoe as Sala painfully plied his paddle.

They pulled into midstream and the current helped them past the mangrove swamp and into narrower reaches of the river. Just before nightfall Baumann called that there was light ahead, and they pulled in to wait for dark.

Mr. Leeds listened for drum-talk. At last it came, but he could not distinguish its message. He glanced back at Sala but the Bulu was crouched over the stern, trying to scoop river water over his torn back.

"Lemme 'elp the boy," the old man muttered. He crawled past Reise and, stripping his shirt, pulled his undershirt over Sala's back. The boy

submitted silently, and Mr. Leeds crawled miserably back to his place.

Suddenly it was dark and they pulled out again, Reise slapping at whining mosquitoes.

They passed a small village, and Mr. Leeds thought of singing out to natives he saw crouching about a watch fire. But he knew that wouldn't do; they'd probably think he was a devil and run for bush.

Silently the canoe stole past.

Several times during the night Baumann called softly and Reise answered. Once something grunted and swirled away from the canoe. Baumann screamed thinly.

"'Ippo," Mr. Leeds said, hoping to keep Baumann on the jump. Before morning the little man was whimpering and talking to himself.

The sky lightened as false dawn grayed the river. A brain-fever bird tinkled in the forest. Baumann's eyes turned this way and that, searching the shadows. In the stern Reise crouched low, helmet over his neck, and Sala paddled with tireless regularity.

Then the sky blackened again. The river grew narrow and winding.

It was at that time that the canoe ducked and swerved. Mr. Leeds pulled with his paddle but the craft didn't answer. He stopped paddling and the dugout swerved broadside to the current.

Suddenly there was a cry. Reise cursed and his flashlight fanned across the black surface. Something moved under the bank. The revolver cracked. There was a faint cry and a splash. Something floated and caught in branches.

"Pull ahead, damn you!" Reise grated. "That damned nigger tried to get away."

He leaned over and grabbed Sala's paddle, urging the craft back on her course.

"Village ahead," babbled Baumann.

THEY forced the craft past a narrow beach. The river turned north here. Leeds looked hopefully but the beach was empty.

"That native got away," whined Baumann. "They'll stop us."

"He didn't get away," Reise growled. "I saw him drop. I don't miss. I hope crocodiles get him before some native finds him. Did you tell him to run?" he shot at Leeds.

"No," groaned the old man. "'E was through with me arter you made me lose face with that *bulala*. 'E tried ter desert like any Bulu'd do if 'e was flogged."

After a few miles they pulled in to rest. Mr. Leeds lay miserably in the stern after eating and drinking a little.

"I will keep watch," Baumann said eagerly.

"Yess," Reise agreed. "I will sleep for a couple of hours. Call me then."

"*Gut*. Give me—"

"Oh, no," Reise laughed softly. "See?" He knotted his pistol lanyard about his wrist until the butt lay in his palm. "Wake me if anything happens. Don't make any sudden moves, Leeds."

He fell asleep immediately.

Baumann eyed the pistol longingly, wringing his bitten hands.

"He means to kill us," he whispered. "You saw him kill the Spaniard. He will kill us, too, and say he got the stones himself. He will keep the gold, four hundred thousand marks in gold—he will keep it all. I know these Party officers! He will kill me first, then you, as soon as you find the U-boat."

"Wot yer going ter do?"

"I don't know. I'll get a rock or a stick—I don't know."

"I might 'elp yer—fer a bit o' the gold," Mr. Leeds offered.

"How?"

"Rush 'im, nah!"

"No, he would awaken."

"Wot, then?"

"Hush."

Reise stirred, looked at them with clear eyes, and went back to sleep.

"See? He heard us! I think he is mad."

"If yer don't kill 'im, 'e'll kill you," said Mr. Leeds softly.

Baumann's sweating face went livid.

"Wait."

He groped in his haversack and brought out a small shaving kit. From it he slipped a blade. Leeds held his breath. Baumann started past him toward the sleeping Reise.

At that moment the officer stirred and Baumann nearly went overboard. Whimpering, he stumbled back to his place, stuffing the blade into his shirt pocket.

Exhaustion drove Mr. Leeds to sleep.

When he awoke, Baumann was sleeping and Reise was on watch. He motioned Leeds to the food box.

Baumann was jerking and muttering in his sleep. Tear-stains furrowed his thin, dirty face and a scrub of pale hair smeared his trembling chin.

"Looks kinda queer," Leeds ventured.

"He will be all right," Reise said, kicking the prostrate man.

With a wild yell Baumann struggled up.

"Come on, we go now."

Scowling furtively at Mr. Leeds, Baumann grabbed a paddle. Reise sat on the stern.

All night they pulled, the current helping them north. They passed N'jabesan before dawn and a few miles further on they heard the stutter of that town's drum.

"Where is the Silent One? Come quick, come quick, come quick. The Beautiful One searches."

Leeds gripped his paddle. That meant Hope was in the village they'd just passed. He wondered if they'd get him if he capsized the canoe. He wiggled tentatively.

"Don't try it," came from Reise. "I'll blow your backbone out if you try to upset us."

What was Hope doing so far down-river, Mr. Leeds wondered. He'd be working east by now, going farther and farther away. Cursing bitterly, he paddled on.

CHAPTER V

REISE'S OFFER

THEN the river widened and they entered the swamp choked with mangrove and floating islands of slimy bush. Several times they had to backwater to avoid tangling. And mosquitoes whirred about them until Baumann was yelling with strain.

He screamed loudly as a crocodile snapped its jaws like a gun and slid into the water.

"Shoot him!" he yelled. "There he iss!"

Reise scratched himself, searching the greenery.

"Is this the channel?" he demanded.

"I dunno," Mr. Leeds said. "Sala alw'ys took me through 'ere."

"There must be marks."

"Mebbe," the old man nodded, an idea nudging his mind. "We better have a look-see."

They followed a winding channel, only to be halted by an impassable wall of green. Turning to port they skirted a waterlogged trunk and pulled into a weed-choked fairway.

"This cannot be it. Pull through there."

Baumann let out another yell as a fat, green, spitting snake dropped from a branch, hit the gunwale and slithered into the water.

"Pull, you filthy coward, you!" raged Reise.

Mr. Leeds sighted a tall, tuft-headed mahogany tree and steered away from it. He hoped Reise had not noticed it.

"Keep to the west," the officer ordered.

Mr. Leeds was content; the river ran north through this swamp.

"Any villages near?"

"No."

"Well, keep going until we find the channel."

"'Ow can I?" whined Mr. Leeds. "I dunno the way. We'll be lost in this 'ere swamp—ate by crocs, like as not, or rot, or die ravin' o' sunstroke. Lissen, mister, I'm dead beat. I gotta rest. I'm a old man."

"Rest then, damn you."

The canoe nosed into a tangle of mangrove roots.

"Make fast."

Suddenly Baumann giggled. His face was scarlet, his eyes red-streaked. Grizzled beard blurred his face and he was licking his cracked lips. His feet were kicking in the bottom of the canoe and Mr. Leeds saw one hand scrabbling at his breast pocket.

"Make fast," he tittered. "Make fast! Are you afraid the boat will go away? Where do you fear it will go? Does it matter where we go? We're lost!" His voice rose to a cracked scream. "We're lost! We and the gold and the diamonds—we're lost! Reise, you are a fool. *You are a fool!* Yes, now I can say it. I'm not afraid of you. You are a fool!" Foam flecked from his working mouth. "We're lost. We shall be eaten by snakes and crocodiles. The natives will never find our bones. *You are a fool!*"

He scrambled forward, the pitiful sliver of steel in his fingers. Reise lifted the pistol, sighted leisurely and shot him.

Mr. Leeds watched the thin figure shudder and a look of bewilderment cross his flushed face. Then he dropped overside and blood stained the green water.

There was a sudden swirl and the snout of a crocodile snatched the floating body. Over and over it whirled, armored tail thrashing, as it dragged the dead man down to putrefy in its den.

"Pah!" Reise's face was yellow. "Better to get that madman out of the way." He eyed Mr. Leeds quickly. "Get some rest and we will go on," he said. "Go on, sleep!"

Mr. Leeds, the bitter taste of fear in his throat, crouched as far as he could from the steely-eyed German.

"Don't try anything," said Reise quietly, moving the pistol lashed to his hand. "I watched you when Baumann sought to cut my throat with that razor blade. I know you would like to kill me. I shall sleep, nevertheless. But if you so much as move, I will cripple you—not kill you, for you will have to pull a paddle. Take no chances if you want to get out of this swamp with what remains of your life."

In spite of his terror Mr. Leeds slept a little.

They pulled out in late afternoon skirting the sodden islands and following tortuous lanes in the swamp.

Once there was a coughing bellow and a fourteen-foot crocodile rushed them, mouth wide open, from a mud bank. Reise, showing his teeth like a weasel, fired again and again into the scaly head, Leeds pulled his best to get away from there.

"Nest full o' eggs," he panted. "Cow croc."

Reise was watching him furtively, one hand covering his pistol.

"Get us out of here," he croaked.

NIGHT fell and they were still in that horrid tangle of poisonous green. The food was gone. Leeds scooped up some water and drank carefully. It tasted of ancient slime.

"You are trying to lose me," Reise said suddenly. "You have been through here before. I shall shoot you if we are not in the main channel by morning."

"'Ow'll yer git yerself ter the U-boat

if yer kills me?" Mr. Leeds returned calmly.

"I am certain that you know the way out."

Silence.

"Listen!" Reise's voice was urgent in the darkness. "Do you know why I am sent on this mission? Do you know why I have learned the native tongue? Do you know? I will tell you. When the war iss won I shall be *gauleiter* of this colony. Once Kamerun was German. It will be again. I shall be military governor." He paused a little. "You will still be here, a trader," he went on softly. "I can help you a lot when I return. Listen." Leeds tried to see his face in the darkness. "There are four hundred thousand gold marks in these bags. No one but ourselves knows that we have them. I can leave them with you until I return. Then you shall have half. Half! A fortune. And you can return to your country, a rich man."

Leeds caught his breath.

"Where yer gonna 'ide it?"

"On the riverbank near the entrance to this swamp. I will give you your share as soon as I reach the U-boat. You must give your word of honor to protect my interest until I return. What do you say?"

Leeds cudgeled his tired brain. What was that Nazi after now? Why did he bother to promise the gold? Mr. Leeds knew very well that as soon as the U-boat was reached he would be killed.

"'Ow d'yer know I won't snitch the lot?" he asked, playing for time.

"You won't be able to use German gold until after the war," Reise told him. "And I shall be back here as soon as hostilities cease."

There was something Mr. Leeds could not understand, but he had to play along.

"O.K.," he said. "It's a deal. We'll 'ide the boodle soon's we git outa this swamp."

"*Gut.* Now you can find your way, no?"

"No. I don't know me way."

The German cursed loudly.

"Filthy *schwein!* You try to fool me. I'll kill you, I'll drown you!"

"Fine talk fer a pal!" Mr. Leeds sounded aggrieved. "I said I'd do me best, didn't I?"

"Get on, then."

All about them fireflies danced above the silent water. Luminous fungus glowed eerily.

"Gotta rest," Mr. Leeds said. "It'll be dawn soon and we'll 'ave another go."

He lay down. He felt faint, sick, the swamp miasma was getting him. No quinine for five days. His head ached and he felt feverish. He'd have given all the gold for a bottle of gin. But he had to keep that Nazi in the swamp until he was sure of help. He fell asleep wondering where Hope might be.

At dawn they pulled wearily down the narrow waterway. Mr. Leeds turned his grizzled face this way and that, searching for landmarks. Behind him Reise was scrabbling in the haversack.

"Wotcher lookin' fer?"

"*Was?* Get ahead!" Reise's voice barked like a frightened dog.

Mr. Leeds could hear him searching in the food box and the bags, muttering to himself and sighing.

Deliberately he shipped his paddle and turned around.

Reise crouched back, the pistol lifted. His face was yellow and strained under its smear of sweat and dirt. His eyes looked scarlet under the red lids. His mouth was almost invisible.

"Wot's up, cully?" Mr. Leeds asked. "Yer looks sick."

"Nothing. Get on. Pull to that tall tree." The pistol gestured towards the high mahogany.

Mr. Leeds pulled towards it and suddenly they could see the river wide and clear between high banks of trees.

"There! We are clear. Now get on!"

"Thought we was goin' ter 'ide the gold 'ere?"

"Get on. I will tell you when to stop." The German's voice was high with triumph. "You thought to lose me in that morass until I went mad or died of fever, didn't you? Well, my friend, you missed. Everybody misses when they try to outwit me—Baumann, that Spaniard, and now you. No one can beat me, no one! *No one*, you understand?"

SILENTLY Mr. Leeds picked up his paddle and steered the canoe into midstream. Behind him, Reise was still searching in the bottom of the dugout. What was he looking for, Mr. Leeds wondered. He set himself to think. Food? Drink? No, they had been finished two days before. What then? He tried a quick glance backwards. Reise was watching him artfully, one hand covering his pistol. Was something wrong with it?

Mr. Leeds turned his face ahead. How many times had Reise fired that pistol? Once at Baumann. Several times at the crocodile. But how many times? Four? Five? Was he out of ammunition?

They were skirting an island in the river. Beyond it was a hippo pool. Silently Mr. Leeds pulled ahead. Yes, there they were, several hippos and a couple of calves.

"Look aht!" he yelled suddenly swinging the canoe towards the beasts.

One grunted, lifted a cavernous mouth and roared. Another submerged until only the bosses of its eyes were visible.

"Watch out!" Mr. Leeds shouted again. "That 'un's arter us!"

He paddled frantically and heard a click behind him.

They veered away, leaving several indignant hippos roaring defiance at them.

But Mr. Leeds knew now that Reise's pistol was empty.

Reise was crouching in the stern, his heavy spear-bladed paddle across the gunwale. His eyes, slitted evilly, were studying Mr. Leeds.

"How far to the sea?" he croaked.

"Oughter git there tomorrer mornin'."

"So. Pull ahead."

Late that afternoon they passed the village of M'bule on a spit of dry land in a swamp on the north bank.

Reise apparently did not notice the natives who stood like storks watching them pass. Mr. Leeds waved an arm, expecting every minute to hear something from Reise. He glanced behind him. Reise's eyes were closed as he paddled mechanically.

Watching Reise carefully, he snatched off his own helmet and dropped it in the water, then pulled on. The battered pith floated buoyantly.

"Not much 'ope," he told himself. But it might tell the natives who had passed, and if the missionary came that way . . . Mr. Leeds dared not count on that.

By nightfall they pulled carefully past another village. Reise was awake now and the river, broader, shoved the canoe along at a fair pace. Soon they would be near the mouth. There were more villages there. There, maybe, Mr. Leeds would have a chance to escape.

The river broadened until the banks were more than half a mile apart. The watch fires of Moloko glimmered and disappeared.

"Tired," muttered Mr. Leeds, resting his aching head on the gunwale.

"Get on."

"Cawn't."

"I'll shoot."

"Shoot," Mr. Leeds groaned. "I cawn't stick it no more."

The canoe was floating swiftly now. It swerved and slid broadside to the current.

"How far is the sea?"

"Ten—twelve mile."

There was a movement. Mr. Leeds looked up as the canoe lurched. Against the sky he made out the figure of Reise, his heavy paddle poised like a spear.

Then the fire-hardened point lunged downward—but Mr. Leeds had rolled swiftly to one side. The canoe rocked for a moment, then turned over.

Mr. Leeds struggled, choking in brackish water. The round keel of the dugout slid near. He gripped it, arms slipping over its slime. He heard a splashing, a sobbing cry and Reise grabbed hold farther down the keel.

"I'll kill you!" panted the German. "You lost everything!"

"Good, yer basted!" puffed Mr. Leeds. "Yer don't git them stones, anyway."

Grimly the German struggled towards him.

With a deep breath Mr. Leeds turned from the canoe and started swimming towards the shore. Water slopped into his mouth and he realized that he could never make it. Behind him he heard Reise shouting. Prayerfully he rolled on his back and lay as still as possible, floating. He could feel the current dragging at him and wearily he let his head go back. It went under. Choking, he struggled to keep afloat. He marveled that he was not drowned and again managed to float for a spell.

But he was at his last gasp when he made out a black form against the sky. He rolled on his face and struck out in a feeble breast stroke. His hands struck something. He clung to it like grim death. His feet touched and sank into slime. For a while he fought it, sinking lower and lower. Then he managed to drag himself clear and wedged himself between the pallid roots of a mangrove.

HE listened. There was the shrill roar of the night forest and the gurgling of water somewhere below him. Something moved close by. He clung close, frozen with fear.

Something splashed in the water and he felt the roots quiver.

"Come on, damn yer!" he snarled at he knew not what.

"N'tangan."

"Gawd lumme!"

"N'tangan."

"Sala."

"E ké!"

"E ké, me eye," mumbled Mr. Leeds. "Gemme outa 'ere."

He felt a warm hand grab him and lost consciousness.

When he awakened it was morning. Sala, feet wedged between two roots, was supporting him and yelling wildly at a canoe that was slanting across the river towards them.

It drew close and Hope, a silly, frightened expression on his red face, was reaching to help him into the canoe.

"'Ere, 'ere, I ain't a baby!" grunted Mr. Leeds as the strapping American picked him up bodily.

"Darned old coot," growled the missionary.

"Wot yer blubbin' fer?" snarled Mr. Leeds, reaching for a water bottle in the bottom of the canoe.

"Something better here, Charlie." Hope picked a square bottle from a haversack.

"Blime!" Mr. Leeds dragged happily at a bottle of gin. "I never thought ter see the day," he finished prayerfully.

"What have you been up to now?" Hope wanted to know.

"'Ere." Mr. Leeds sat up reaching weakly for the gunwale. "Dahnstream," he ordered. "Did yer see a capsized canoe?"

"Yes, and we fished a dead man out of the river below Dipikar. What's it all about?"

"Lissen, get me to a village. There's a sub outside the river."

"What?"

"Yus." Mr. Leeds told him of the rendezvous.

"Well, soon as I found that Ekin was silent I figured something was wrong and in order to get to you as soon as possible I wangled a ride in a patrol craft to the Campo mouth. It's there now. We've got a launch at Dipikar."

"Get us ter it, pronto," ordered Mr. Leeds, "an' git news ter the patrol ter look out fer a U-boat abaht ten mile orf the river mouth."

The canoe men were slaving, driving the dugout like a knife through the muddy water. Sala was squatting beside Mr. Leeds, patting his back and making small clucking noises.

"'Ere." Mr. Leeds stopped the paddlers. "There's a mint o' money upriver." He told Hope of the gold and diamonds.

"We'll get those."

The canoe shot around a bend and pulled up alongside a trim U.S. Navy launch.

"Hi ya, pop," said a quartermaster. "Where did ya find the old man o' the sea, sir?"

"None o' yer lip, sonny," snorted Mr. Leeds and fell over the launch gunwale. "Git steam up and back ter yer ship." Then he fainted.

Mr. Leeds was infuriated to learn that he had been lying unconscious while a plane, radioed for by the patrol craft, had strafed and sunk the U-boat the following evening.

But he was well enough to follow the river and show an incredulous U.S. lieutenant commander the two floats that marked canvas bags containing four hundred thousand gold marks.

"They's a bag o' di'monds somewheres dahn there, too, sonny," he stated. "Lemme know when yer finds 'em."

And Mr. Leeds, with Hope, Sala and a crew of paddlers started upriver towards Ekin.

"'Ow did yer find me?" he asked the missionary. "'Ow did yer know where ter look?"

"When the Ekin drum at last did speak and said you were gone *east* after elephants, I knew something was wrong because elephants come west at this season. Just after my launch reached Dipikar I got a drum message from Sala, so I decided to stop here and head off your canoe when it came down.

"But you've got Sala to thank for your rescue. That Bulu, after the Nazi shot at him, followed the canoe like a bloodhound, resting when you did, and fighting his way along the bank keeping the canoe in sight all the way down-river. I don't know how he did it."

"When the Germani flogged me," Sala said quietly, "I knew master ate trouble, for he would never let harm come to me otherwise. Thus I ran from the canoe, fearing that master would think I had deserted. And when the Germani fired I pretended to die. Only thus could I help my master."

"Good fer you, son," gulped Mr. Leeds. "Tell yer wot. I'm a bit done in. We'll tike a bit of a rest fer a few days, then 'ows abaht a spot o' fishin'?"

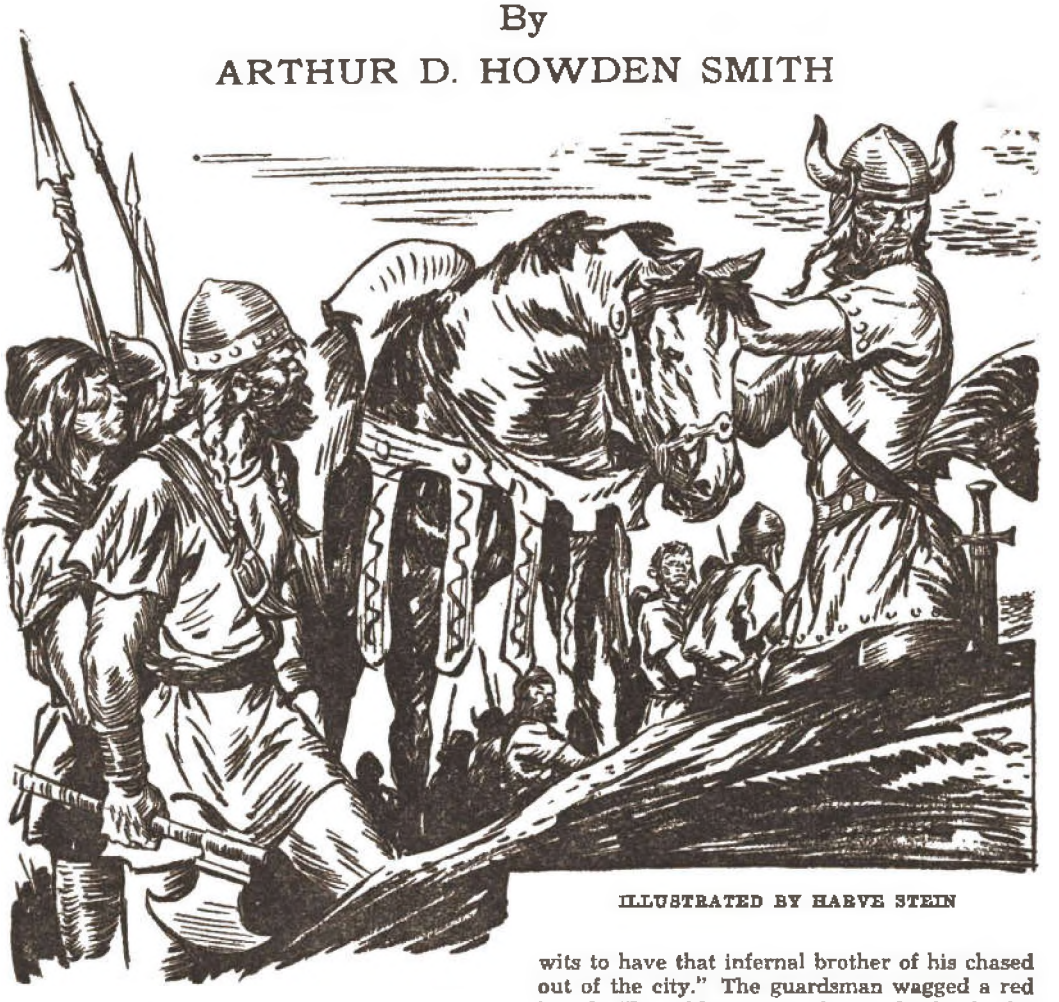
Sala, much to Hope's horror, used several explosive and wicked Bulu cusswords. Then he pulled a mosquito net over Mr. Leeds' already dozing form.

"No savvy," grunted Sala.

SWAIN'S LANDFARING

By

ARTHUR D. HOWDEN SMITH



ILLUSTRATED BY HARVE STEIN

THE red-cloaked Varangian Guards leaned on the long helves of their battle-axes outside the curtained doorway of the Hall of the Palace of Chalcé in Byzantium, and winked humorously at the booming laughter of the Emperor.

"Manuel feels his wine tonight," remarked one, with the easy familiarity of the Norse folk. "Well, he has cause for pleasure. He has tossed back the Slavs from the Danube for another year, at least."

"Oh, the Patzinaks are an old tale to him," replied a second. "But it was a load off his wits to have that infernal brother of his chased out of the city." The guardsman wagged a red beard. "I could never understand why he let Andronicus be forever pulling the bed-gear over his eyes. It is said that Andronicus would be sitting in the curule chair, within there, if the lecher hadn't kidnapped our Krlstin. Aye, and if Swain had not been here to thwart him."

A third guard strolled over from the far side of the corridor.

"Did I hear you speak of Swain Asleif's son?" he asked. "We of the Orkneyfolk take Swain for granted. The one man in the world who has thwarted Swain is Olvir Rosta, who slew his mother. And Olvir has kept life in his bones only by fleeing whenever Swain came too close.

The Caesar was in bad case when he challenged Swain."

"Hear," spoke up a fourth. "There is Swain, now."

A deeper, richer voice even than the Emperor's set the heavy curtains quivering.

"Aye, carles," affirmed one of the group. "It is something for a man to be called King's bane, let alone Jarlmaker. I have had my fill of bloodletting, but I never yet sank a blade through a crown."

"In the Orkneys," Swain's fellow islander said proudly, "we have a saying that Jarl Harald rules behind Swain's shield. And Jarl Harald is no coward."

A third voice pealed in silvery laughter.

Swain gripped the cross-hilt of Skullbiter and stared at the domes and towers of the Holy City. "If this is what the White Christ expects of folk who come to His city, this is what Swain Asleif's son will do for Him."

"It is not often that Swain speaks up when the bragging-cup is passed," observed the Orkneyman. "He is choice of ale and wine. And to say truth, there is no occasion for him to recite his deeds. The skalds have done it for him. There is no private man in the North who can match him."

"Kristin!" a Varangian exclaimed with a touch of rough awe. "Ah, what a woman that is—of the true Valkyrs' strain! I do not belittle Swain's honors, but say, carles, did one of you ever know a woman who could bear so nobly the titles King's daughter and King's mother?"

"Well said," echoed the Orkneyman. "And

Grim Gusli

who but Swain would have dared to rescue her from Erling Skakki, her husband, when Erling would have sealed her in a nunnery that he might have complete sway over the infant Magnus? And who but Swain would have fetched her here to Mikligard, with Grim Gusli, and persuaded the Emperor and the Patriarch to grant her a divorce that she might wed with Grim, and know a measure of happiness at long last, and bear stout sons to man their longships?"

"It will be many days before Grim sails a longship again," interposed Redbeard. "I had it this noontide from Rolf Arni's son, our strategos, that he retires to lick his wounds and con the seas beyond the Saevidsund. Grim will succeed him as our chief."

"I could wish all the Emperor's choices were as wise," growled a battle-scarred guardsman. "I never saw better axework than when Grim led the shieldwall at the Danube crossing."

"He is a man of luck," asserted the Varangian who had first spoken of Kristin. "It is not every man, though of good property and talent, who weds a woman as beauteous as our Queen, aye, who by rights has been twice a Queen."

He hefted his axe aloft.

"If I had a horn of ale I would pledge the pair of them rightly. Axe, you shall be witness to my will in this matter."

A rumble of laughter shook the massive shoulders of the group. But they became grimly silent as staves rang on the tesselated flooring of the corridor, and a procession of skirted, high-capped figures swayed into view.

"The eunuchs," muttered the under-officer in command. "Stand back for the creatures, carles. Ground axes. The feast will soon be over."

THE Great Hall of the palace blazed with silver lamps burning perfumed oil. All the imperial generals and officials were present, with their wives and daughters, dark, sinuous women of the rich city families and from the Asiatic themes, golden blondes of the Islands and Achaia and Thessaly, with piled and banded hair and costumes sheeny with brocades and gold and silver lace, vying with the gilded mail of the soldiers, the Domestics of the Tagmata, or Imperial Guard, the strategoi and drungariot of the Numeri of the regular line troops, who were camped outside the walls, preliminary to dispersing to the themes of their customary stations.

But four people stood out distinctively from all the rest. They sat at the high table on the dais at one end of the vast room. The Emperor would have been distinctive in any company, if for no other reason than that he sat in the throne chair of gold and ivory, and wore the steeple-crowned imperial tiara. But aside from that Manuel was, like all his family, the Comnenoi, a big man, whose features were strong and handsome, if a thought inclined to petulance by reason of the eternal flattery to which he was subjected and of which he was justly suspicious. This night he was in an unusually pleasant mood. He had returned from a victorious expedition to the northern frontier which had increased his popularity with his people—never had the streets of the city rung louder with applause at the captives and booty in his train—and in his absence his friend, Swain the Orkneyman, had defeated an attempt by Manuel's unnatural brother, the Caesar Andronicus, to kidnap and marry his guest, Queen Kristin, and under cover of the prestige of this alliance, to seize the throne.

Kristin sat at the Emperor's right, her white robes in contrast with the gaudy raiment of the Greek women. On her honey-yellow hair, braided in two thick strands over her shoulders, sat the golden crown of Norway. Kristin was called the most beautiful woman, and the bravest, in the North. She could wear mail and swing sword as neatly as most men. Her father had been Sigurd the Jorsalfarer, who had voyaged to the Holy City to perform his share in owning allegiance to the White Christ and in beating back the paynims from the Holy Sepulcher. Much trouble had she known, for her first husband, Erling Skakki, was a man as ruthless as he was intelligent, and when her father had died he had seized Norway for their son, the infant Magnus, and refused Kristin any part in the boy's fostering. More, he had tried to imprison her, and persuaded the Pope in Rome to forbid the bishops to grant her a

divorce, although it was well known that Skakki bedded with three other women.

Her new husband, Grim Gusli, sat on her right, and he wore for the first time that night the embroidered crimson cloak of the strategos of the Varangian Guard, who were charged with the protection of the Emperor's person. From an Irish mother he had his blue-black hair and merry, questioning blue eyes, startling in the frame of his swarthy face. He was a man who would have seemed big in stature had not he been sitting by the Emperor and Swain, whose chair was on the Emperor's left hand, an indication that Manuel had amply forgiven earlier bickerings and misunderstandings with the Orkneyman.

This Swain was a man who long since had become a figure of legend throughout the Western World, from the towered walls of Mikligard to fog-wrapped Iceland and beyond to Furdurstrandi, the Long and Wonderful Beaches, where he had fought with the red heathen who dwelt in the endless forests of an unknown land, which, he was wont to say, made Norway seem but a small estate by comparison. He was sufficiently tall to meet the Emperor eye-to-eye, and had he chosen he could have boasted that he had bowed his head to only one human being, his mother, Asleif, who had died in protecting his children.

When King Sigurd once had commented that it was the custom of the North to take the father's name, for lawwork and in issues of property, Swain had answered him, "It is not to the despite of my father's memory that of the two my mother was the better man."

If proof were needed of how the Emperor had come to regard Swain now, it lay in the fact that he was the one man in the Hall who wore his sword, the famous Skullbiter, belted to his waist.

"I can do without my jerkin," he would say, "but I am naked if I do not have Skullbiter on thigh."

It was typical of him that he was also the one man in the room who was dressed shabbily. The wine-servants far outshone him. And it was also typical of him that the flagon before him was almost untouched. Now he looked up casually when the Emperor rose and belatedly followed Kristin and Grim to their feet, as a rustle of movement swept the length of the Great Hall.

"Our feast is over," the Emperor said. "It has celebrated two deeds well done. One enemy is banished from the Great River march. One"—his face darkened momentarily—"whose wicked purposes have cost us much vexation and grief, has fled the city. We shall attend to him," he added sternly. "And to his friends. The Prefect of the City has our orders. But we will set aside such sad thoughts. We have one more duty tonight, and it is a pleasant one."

Queen Kristin

He smiled at Kristin and Grim and placed a hand on Swain's shoulder.

"We offer you the Imperial Person's wishes for your health and prosperity, Queen Kristin and faithful Grim, and in the same measure to you, Swain, who have protected us so wisely and valiantly. First, then, we pour a libation to the Bodyless Ones." He spilled a few drops from his flagon. "And now we drink to you, Queen Kristin, the most beautiful guest we have been privileged to receive in our Eastern Rome." He smiled warmly. "You make us realize that we should be happier for an Empress in the Daphné. We speak haltingly in your tongue, which the Varangians have taught us. We hope you and Grim will tarry with us long enough to learn our Greek. As for Swain, we know well that he is too footloose to be confined in palace walls, no matter how we urge him."

He touched the flagon to his lips, and passed it to Kristin.

"Your Mightiness has made me feel that I have found another home," Kristin responded. "Health and a long reign to you!"

She drank, and returned the flagon.

"To you, Grim," the Emperor responded. "You shall never lack for honor while you lead our Varangians."

He drank, and Grim accepted the wine from him.

"All health and glory to Your Mightiness," the strategos said simply. "It is my thought that as we Norsemen pass the horn of ale when we boun for vikingfaring, so I am going upon a voyage with you."

THE Emperor turned to Swain, his hand still gripping the Orkney-man's shoulder.

"What can I say to you, my friend, whom I have thought my enemy?" he asked, dropping the stilted plural of imperial etiquette. "Except it be to say that if you will not stay with my fortunes, I pray to Those who watch over us that They will not stint protection to you."

Swain accepted the flagon, wiggling his shoulder muscles.

"Why, Emperor," he said, "I can say for you that you have sword-strength in your fingers, which is not true of many Emperors and Kings, and by the Hammer, I hope you will never lack for it." His voice rang out in the roar which could carry from poop to forecastle. "Skoal!"

He set the flagon to his lips, and drained it, dashing the winedrops from his beard.

"A man's toast," exclaimed the Emperor. "I wish I could call upon twenty like you at need!"

"Then no one of us would be as valuable to you as one alone," Swain retorted.

The Emperor chuckled boyishly. There was no longer in his features the hint of petulance which had marred them.

"Come with me to the Daphné, Swain," he answered. "I have things to say which are not for all ears." He turned to Kristin and Grim. "By your leave, Queen Kristin. It is time you two had a moment to yourselves. Remember, the Domestic of the Palace has orders to see that all is done for your comfort in the Bucoleon."

The trumpets and cymbals sounded a fanfare. The curtains at the door swished back and revealed long files of Varangians, and the outlandish group of eunuchs, posed like a central panel in a frieze. These clashed their staves on the floor-tiles, and bowed low as the Emperor descended from the dais with Swain a step behind him.

"Now, how can a man like Manuel be content with these shavelings for bower-women?" Swain muttered in his beard.

"You said?" the Emperor asked.

"I was thinking I would not care to be Emperor with those skirted folk to listen at my door," Swain grunted.

"Nor I," rejoined the Emperor. "I doubt not that half of them are in my brother's pay. Varangians keep my chamber-door. And shall."

Manuel waved away his escort as they reached the imperial quarters, and closed the door behind Swain.

"Sit," he said. "We are not on ceremony together, you and I." He lifted the heavy tiara from his head, and placed it on a stand. "So, now, we are two men, not the Emperor of Rome and Swain the Norseman."

Swain grinned as he took a cushioned chair, and hiked Skullbiter across his lap.

"This tool of mine has sheared through one crown," he answered.

"And that is why I trust you, disrespector of crowns," rejoined the Emperor. He crossed to a window, and stared out at the moonlit waters of the Bosphorus. "I have a favor to ask of you—my friend. You have reason to wish intercourse with my brother, who has shown a disrespect to your ward of which I know you would not have been guilty to any woman. I would not wish him slain, seeing he is my father's son, although he has not been a good brother. But I would have him put where he would be incapable of disturbing the Empire."

"I am for Jerusalem next," objected Swain.

"Will it matter to you, farwanderer, if you are belated in reaching the Holy City? Post-riders fetched word today that the Caesar is ravaging his way along the Euxine coasts toward Trebizond. He has told certain of his friends—who have talked under urgence—that he had a connection with Massoud, the Seljuk Sultan of Iconium. He plans to collect forces on his way, and establish himself on the frontier themes as a menace to Christendom. I would have this stopped. There is no man who could follow him faster than you."

Manuel stripped a signet-ring from his finger.

"I am having a warrant of authority drawn up for you. With that, and this ring, you can command the imperial forces wherever you may be. I know that you are not avaricious in such matters, and that you have a just reason for anger with Andronicus; but there is no limit to the reward you may ask of me. I have also appointed one of my best seamen, John Palaeologos, to attend you. He has the Norse speech. And in the morning I shall send word by relay riders to Trebizond to bar the city to the Caesar."

"It might be said that you were confident of my answer," Swain said.

"I was. It is a venture I should like for myself if I were not obliged to draw closer the bonds of this beset empire. We have just curbed the Northern Slavs. Now, Andronicus would kindle a fresh blaze in the south. And Iconium has grown apace since my father's time. When the Sultans are not raiding Jerusalem they are whittling at our frontier themes. My brother could be a dangerous ally for them. He was always more of a paynim than a Christian."

Swain inspected the massive signet-ring.

"Humph," he grunted finally. "I have been landfast too long. I had it in mind to fare south with my folk by sea, taking what chance might offer. But it is true, Emperor, that no man has irked me more than this brother of yours. We Norsefolk are tender of our women. So be it, then. I will accept this venture for

you. But"—and he frowned—"I will not be responsible for the ill carle's neck. That must be understood."

The Emperor sighed. "I could not ask you that, Swain. Do not belittle Andronicus. He is a soldier when he chooses to be. Whenever he has lost a battle it has seemed to me he was less anxious for his purse. Take him alive, if you can. If you send me his head, you shall not be blamed. When can you sail?"

Swain strolled to the window. "The weather promises fair. My folk shall be bound by mid-afternoon tomorrow. Andronicus has gained a long start in the race."

"Good! I have given Palaeologos three dromonds for your aid. He shall not delay you."

The Emperor hesitated. "There is one other matter I would charge you with." He laughed. "It is such a matter as is not often confided to you, but I have confidence in your judgment of people. The truth is, Swain, your Queen Kristin's beauty and graciousness have put me in mind that I should take me a fit consort. I have heard report of Queen Theodora, the widow of King Baldwin of Jerusalem. When you reach there I would have you take note of her, if she be well-shaped and mannered, of good mind and disposition. I know from experience I cannot always trust the honesty of prothonotaries and priests. The one have itching palms, the other objects not to my liking or interest."

Swain rumbled in his beard. "By the Hammer, Emperor, you will make a bower-woman of me! Heh, you shall hear the truth, be she crooked or foul-seeming."

SWAIN walked briskly through the endless corridors and gardens of the imperial enclosure to the adjoining Palace of the Bucoleon in which his apartment was located. An occasional Varangian lifted axe in salute, with a "Skoal, Swain!" And once in a while a skirted eunuch, bent on some errand of intrigue, stood back against a wall with grounded stave and eyes lowered.

Outside the door of his apartments Swain halted momentarily, and bent an inquiring ear. It seemed to him he heard the wrangling of voices, the clatter of wine-cups, and—yes, the rattling of knuckle-bones. He threw open the door, with a fierce scowl on his face, belied by the chuckle he quickly smothered.

"What, disorderly carles? Do you carouse and play at chance the instant I am busy sitting at meat with the Emperor? The wine staining the table, and the stakes beside the cups! I marvel I did not find you with bare steel overhead, and blood flowing. It may be said it is well that you are both much of a size."

The two men who looked up at him, startled, were Eric Bitling, his forecastle man, a short, stocky, swart carle, with a dry, humorous face, and a Lapp archer named Loge. Men said of him that he was the best archer since Einar Tambelskelver. He was so short and broad-shouldered as to be almost a dwarf, with a flat, yellowish face and dark, slanting eyes. Men said also of Loge that he had the evil eye, and knew more than was lawful of Lapland magic. But Swain loved Loge, as he did Eric, above all men, aye, and trusted them, too, and it was well known that Father Peter, in Kirkwall of the Orkneys, had tested him with the Sign and the Cross which Jarl Rognvald had brought back from Jorsalaheim, and Loge had neither shriveled nor turned black, as he must have done had he been in traffic with the Evil One.

Between the pair were two unequal stacks of golden arm-rings, and Swain's eyes twinkled as he noted that the larger stack was on Loge's side of the table.

"Why, here is no harm, Swain," grumbled Eric. "But as to size you are in error, seeing that I outtop Loge."

"What if your shoulders reach my scalp," boomed the Lapp in a voice twice his size, "seeing what is beneath that scalp? Also, I am as much broader in the shoulders, and it is the shoulders that heave an axe and send an arrow home."

"Peace," commanded Swain. "I see that you have not learned your lesson, Bitling." He gestured toward the heaps of arm-rings. "I will wager the bones came from Lapland."

Loge grinned and Eric looked embarrassed.

"He has the fiend's luck," he said. "The truth was, Swain, time hung a weight on both of us. We are sick of palaces, and fawning Greek wenches and men-things who are not men."

"Be at ease, then," Swain rejoined. "We plough Ran's Bath before another night darkens."

"Andronicus?" Loge questioned shrewdly.

"Yes, we sail for the Emperor as well as ourselves, south and east on the Euxine."

"And Jorsalaheim?" asked Eric.

"That can wait. Perhaps Andronicus will lead us there. We follow his track until we take him, alive if possible, dead if he must try the White Christ's mercy." Swain's expression was quizzical. "I do not think we need be too generous with his brother's mercy. But there will be no sleep for you two—or me. I go to rouse Grim Gusli from his bridal bed, and inquire his price for *Bokesuden*. We must have three longships to match the dromonds the Emperor sends with us. You shall go to the Varangians' barracks, and try how many you may seduce from the Emperor—I will answer for him. After that scour the taverns on the Golden Horn, and fetch me all the Norsemen or English or Irish who are men of their hands and at loose ends. It is in my mind that this

Eric Bitling

will be a farfaring, carles. We venture strange waters, and perhaps strange lands."

Loge stretched his long arms, and scooped the knuckle-bones and rings into his pocket.

"Odin knows this is the best word I have heard since we came to Mikligard, Swain," he said. "I think I shall make a spell."

"If you do, keep it to yourself," warned Swain. "These Greek priests are not as understanding as Father Peter."

"Cast the bones, Loge," urged Eric. And to Swain, "So he tells men's fortunes."

Swain watched, idly curious, while the Lapp warmed the speckled white cubes and tossed them on the table-top three times. Loge's expression was puzzled when he looked up and pouched them again.

"Aye, it will be a farfaring," he said. "And there will be luck in it, but the end is not clear."

"Who cares?" Swain replied. "I would like it ill if I knew the sure fortune of a faring. Be off, carles. Many of our folk have become such wineskins as the Varangians. They will be all over the city, wenching and bibbing. Each one must be on his legs aboard by the time the sun is masthead high."

CHAPTER II

OUT SKULLBITER

THE city wall along the Golden Horn, above the Grand Admiral's Dockyard, were thronged with Greeks and the polyglot multitude of Byzantium's million souls. Swain's three longships—his own great dragon *Farfarer*, and *Vatn-Orm* or *Water Serpent*, commanded by Horvald Geir's son, the captain of his house carles, and *Bokesuden*, commanded by Grim Gusli's forecastle man, Bjorn Boneyshanks—nudged a pier under the towers of the Admiral's Gate. They were all of sixty benches, and jammed with men collected by Eric and Loge overnight.

On the far side of the pier were the three dromonds of the Drungarios Palaeologos, lean, low-decked vessels with close-packed slaves chained to their oars, and tubes for discharging the deadly Greek fire on their prows. A huge, high-waisted buss ship, which the Emperor had assigned at the last minute to carry horses and spare stores, was loosing her moorings at a nearby quay. She mounted mangonels on her deck as well as a fire-tube on her forecastle.

The Emperor sat his horse at the head of an escort of Cataphracti of the Imperial Guard in silvered mail. Beside him were Kristin, corseletted and crowned, riding, as became her, like a warrior queen, and Grim Gusli, very proud and happy. Swain and Palaeologos stood talking to them; the crews were prepared and ready to sail.

Swain was objecting to having the buss ship accompany him.

"I tell you I know those lurching, clumsy sea beasts," he said. "They are as handy as a sea-going castle, save it be they have the wind astern, forever shifting sails and lurching and rolling in wave hollows. We can row circles around them, and yet make better time. I have taken many like her, Emperor. If the Caesar is to be overtaken—"

"Let her follow as she can," Manuel interrupted. "But I could not have you lack for horses and land-gear, if you must land. And should you find yourselves fronting a castle or city, there are catapults in her hold. The drungarios knows how to use them," he told Swain.

"Aye, so, Your Splendor," assented Palaeologos. "They save lives when there is a gate to be breached."

"It may be," Swain the Orkneyman admitted grudgingly.

He had taken one of his rare fancies to Palaeologos, a blond Greek of the Islands, as were most of his crews, tall, sinewy men, not so sturdy as the Norsefolk but exceeding well-proportioned and skillful in their tasks on shipboard. Also, the drungarios had a frank eye, and a way of speaking shortly after Swain's own fashion. The Varangians had assured the Orkneyman that he was of one of the great senatorial families, but preferred to follow the sea.

"A manner of jarl, it might be said," they explained. "For a Greek he has been a farfarer. He knows Hedda's Tavern on Stavanger Strand, and Matta's by the Icelanders' shipway

at Trondhjem. He has made some lusty fights with the paynims and the Genoese and Venetian raiders. Never doubt, he will uphold his own shield."

All of which were good recommendations to Swain.

There was a fresh wind blowing over the city which set cloaks and skirts to fluttering, a fair wind for Swain's purpose. He reached up a hand to the Emperor—of all the folk in Mikligard, save only Kristin, he was the one privileged to this familiarity. His teeth showed against his beard.

"We have talked enough," he said. "There is bench-work toward. You have given us a good faring, friend, for which I thank you, and if you do not have news from us soon to your liking it will be because the Caesar has more wit than I estimate."

The Emperor clasped his hand, but shook his head.

"Think well of Andronicus' wit, Swain," he answered. "Luck—and the Bodyless Ones—have aided me to keep my throne against his guile." He smiled suddenly, and leaned down from his saddle. "This time you will find the harbor-chain down."

"There was more than my luck in that deed," Swain rejoined, his teeth flashing as he recalled the time he had once defied Manuel by overriding the barrier of the Golden Horn.

John Palaeologos doffed his seacap while Swain kissed Queen Kristin, his ward, and handfasted Grim Gusli.

"I would you were with us, you two," he said. "Well, I must have Loge make magic with his knuckle-bones, and belike that yet may happen. . . . Ho, John, oar-music for these land-bound folk!"

He turned and strode down the pier with the Greek, and when his arm lifted a rough shouting responded, and the chattering of oars outthrust in the tholes, with a bustle of canvas and the clamorous orders of helmsmen and forecastle men. From the walls came responsive applause, and the strains of the *Kyrie Eleison* chanted by a band of bearded priests. But the last word in Swain's ear was Kristin's voice, clear in the tumult.

"May the Valkyrs shepherd you, Swain Asleif's son—good friend and better enemy! Ho, Swain, I smell the oarspume already. The Norns ride with you, and the steel shall drip red! Fare forward, Swain!"

And Grim's deeper tones. "A rich harvest for Skullbiter! Aye, fare forward, Swain!"

The longships and dromonds rowed smoothly down the narrow gut of the Golden Horn between the cheering onlookers, atop the walls of the city and the opposite suburb of Galata, where dwelt the foreign merchants. Behind them lumbered the buss, her towering square sails bellying on her three masts, her open waist

Loge the Lapp

a confusion of squealing horses, tethered to the bulwarks.

Swain looked back at her with renewed disfavor. "The Emperor has done well by us," he grunted, "but it is my rede that a man on a horse has two to think of, instead of one."

Loge winked knowingly. "Odin favors the beasts," he hinted. "We might slay him a rich sacrifice—out of Manuel's sight."

"And how the Greeks would babble," retorted Swain. "No, I counsel you to make a vow to him the next time a horse is slain under you, dwarf. It will be cheaper."

The cumbrous chain across the harbor mouth splashed beneath the water as they approached, and the seven vessels veered to larboard into the mile-wide expanse of the Bosphorus. The towers and domes of Mikligard faded behind them in the sunset glow, and they rowed on up the strait past country palaces and outlying villages and groves of trees. With the wind astern, Swain ordered the single sails hoisted to save his men's strength, yet still the buss lagged.

"As the Emperor said," he remarked with a shrug, "she must follow as best she can."

By the time they had emerged from the Bosphorus into the Euxine she was so far astern that they could not have identified the many-colored representation of St. Cyril, her name saint, on her mainsail, even had it not been for the engulfing twilight. Swain set a new course to starboard, and they followed it in two ranks, three abreast, keeping contact with the skill of men who boasted over the ale or wine that they could smell their way at sea.

Overhead the stars guided them. Inshore, the twinkling lights of men's dwellings were sufficient warning of the shoals.

THE buss had not caught up with them by morning, but Swain's keen eyes glimpsed a reflection of sunlight on her gaudy canvas when they came to off the first sizable port they encountered. Here Palaeologos picked up intelligence of Andronicus' progress. He had remained there two days, seizing shipping and recruiting men from the local garrison and the restless spirits of the community and neighboring farms. The prefect was nonplussed by what had happened. He had suspected the intentions of the Caesar, he admitted, but how was he to stay the demands of the Emperor's brother? The visit had cost his folk dearly. He was relieved when Swain did not deliver him to the mercies of his own tormentors.

With the buss again in company, they resumed the pursuit. That evening they hove to off a burned village, populated by corpses and weeping women. The second day they came to a town whose governor told a red tale of an unsuccessful assault upon his strong defenses. He had been less credulous than the prefect.

"Ho," grunted Swain, "this wolf leaves a warm slot."

The third day, with the buss at hand—headseas had hindered the oarsmen—they received a surprise. A small port was a desolate ruin, but the surprise was in the arrow-storm which smote their landing parties from groups of angry Greeks. A prisoner gave the answer. Not Andronicus had raided them, but men like the Norsemen in similar ships, led by a heavy-set chief of middle-height, with an immense black beard.

Swain's eyebrows knotted in a solid bar; his eyes burned with the baleful light his men had often seen.

"Olvir Rosta," he exclaimed. "Who would have thought to find him ravaging at this end of the world? Now we have two enemies to pursue."

Palaeologos looked worried.

"Let the Emperor's ships care for him, Swain," he urged. "Our task is appointed. We will send a message—"

"Never fear," rejoined Swain curtly. "Not my worst enemy can sway me from a venture appointed. But my thought is that if Olvir meets with the Caesar, they will come together like two brothers of the same mating. Olvir is a man who is uncomfortable without one more powerful than he to protect him from my wrath. Never doubt he has heard that Andronicus has betrayed the Emperor, and must fight with a bold hand." He tugged at his beard. "Yet I wonder how he came hither. Not past Mikligard. That is certain."

"Out of Russland," suggested Loge. "We heard last of him from the Easterlings, who said he was in those parts. He might have come south by one of their rivers, and built longships on the northern shore of this sea."

Whether or not the Laplander's wisdom came from black magic, as most of the Orkneyfolk believed, this was exactly what Olvir had done, as Swain was to learn long afterward.

Swain rounded abruptly upon Palaeologos. "What is your counsel, John? You think the Caesar is for Trebizond? And why?"

"Where else?" replied the Greek. "Trebizond is the strongest and richest city of the Euxine. Many an Emperor's brother or son or nephew has sought to establish himself there in the purple. Also, it is within touch of the Seljuks of Iconium, and we know Andronicus has been in communication with the Sultan."

"That is where Olvir will be," Swain said decisively. "Out oars, carles, and row as though Fenris-wolf were gnawing at your livers."

They shoved off in the teeth of a biting east wind, the buss ship lumbering persistently astern.

The savage, rocky coast of the Euxine was swept bare of shipping, except for an occasional fishing boat which fled the squadron's approach into some precarious, hidden cove. It was like Norway without the hospitality of the fjords, the Norsemen remarked to one another. The weather was stormy and uncertain, and they kept well offshore. But the last day turned pleasant, and they sighted the towers and girdling walls of Trebizond, shining white against the bleak mountain barrier under a warm autumn sun, which loosened the oarsmen's muscles and lent zest even to the efforts of the slaves who toiled in the dromonds' holds.

"Ho, Swain, I see sails," Eric shouted suddenly from the forecastle.

"In oars, on mail," Swain ordered. "Open the arrow-chests, Loge. A dozen of you carles amidships heave up ballast stones. How do you say, Bitling, are they many?"

"Twice our number," Eric answered, peering under a shading palm. "And longships! Aye, there are two dragons and a snekke. Four dromonds, and one, two, three—five busses, but small."

Swain lifted his mailshirt from the deck beside him.

"Good hearing, Bitling," he said. "Those are odds worthy of a blood-letting. Olvir—or Andronicus—would never have ventured against us with less."

He bade the carles on the benches lay in their oars after they were ready. "Let them come to us," he said. "So we shall be fresh in wind. Sails will carry us fast enough."

Noting this deliberation of the Norsemen, Palaeologos gave his slaves a rest, and rounded to by Swain's poop.

"Are you for bearing off, Swain?" he called.

"That was never my thought," replied Swain. "They are not overmany, John. No, all that concerns me is that saltmeat-tub astern."

He jerked a thumb over his shoulder at the buss, which was lumbering after them in her ungainly habit. She had rigged nettings over her bulwarks. Her fire-tube and four small catapults, two each on fore and aftercastles, were manned, as were the mangonels erected upon platforms above the livestock in her waist.

Palaeologos smiled with relief.

"Oh, never vex the Bodyless Ones with a prayer for her," he answered. "Her bulwarks are too high for easy climbing, and she can brew trouble for any craft comes within slinging range. She'll care for herself."

"By Cross and Hammer, I hope so," Swain said doubtfully. "Bid her master take station midway of our line, John, and astern, and be prepared to lend aid to any of us may need it. But I have seen these busses, and—"

"You have never seen an imperial buss in battle," rejoined the Greek. "Bide, Swain, bide. Be sure all my people will do their share."

"I am sure," Swain said, smiling. "If my tongue is rough— But we need deeds, not words. Andronicus and Olvir come on apace. Form line abreast with us, John. . . . Back to the benches, carles. We'll have oar-music before steel clangs."

FROM the longships came the hoarse exclamations of the rowers, "Hah! Hee! Ho! Hah!" as they bent their backs to the ash-sweeps in lunge, catch, tug and recover. Beside them the drums of the slave-masters of the dromonds set up a rhythmic beat. The buss responded with a wild clamor of shawms and cymbals. And they stood down to meet the enemy, arrayed in a semicircle with the dromond of Andronicus and Olvir's dragon in its center.

Loge, standing beside Swain, bow in hand, grinned at him knowingly as he conned *Farfarer's* course.

"The usual order, eh?" asked the Lapp.

"Dwarf, if you put arrow in Olvir, and I am alive, your head shall fall."

"I wish I made as certain of your head as mine," retorted Loge. "More than once have I had the Black One lined over shaft for armpit or throat. But he is still here to cost us good carles."

"All men would die in battle," Swain said indifferently. "So shall Olvir. So shall I. But not— Larboard more," he snapped at the helmsmen who wielded the great steering oars. "So! Lay me aboard that dragon, and you shall share a helmful of gold pieces."

Swain bent a wary eye upon the enemy's formation. It was well ordered.

"Of Olvir I might expect this," he muttered to Loge. "But the Caesar—"

"Both the Emperor and Palaeologos warned he was no coward, if a wastrel," the Lapp reminded him. "I smell a trick on the wind."

"And I," agreed Swain.

The fleets were so close that Olvir's broad figure and black bush of beard spreading over his mailshirt, his shield bearing a bloody hand, were clearly visible, while there was no mistaking the gigantic form of Andronicus, just under seven feet and resplendent in gilded armor and casque, on the forecastle of his dromond.

Olvir waved a mocking hand; the Caesar's blade flashed in a challenging salute. Swain ignored them; Skullbiter remained sheathed.

He spoke curtly to the helmsmen. "Hard alarboard. I would sheer through Olvir's starboard oarbank."

But he had miscalculated Olvir's cunning, and the agility of the slave-driven dromond with a quartering wind bellying its huge sail. Olvir had been watching him keenly, and his dragon swung to starboard in the instant *Farfarer* altered course. Swain still had a powerful enemy on either beam, but he refused to admit he was trapped. The dromond was turning wide in a half-circle to bring her fire-tube to bear on Swain's waist, and ram him amidships. She was nearer than the dragon, speedier and more powerful.

"Astarboard," he snapped to the helmsmen. "Fast, carles."

Farfarer spun on her stern, and came about on a course parallel with the dromond's, but out of direct range of the firetube. Quickening the beat of their oar-strokes, her crew drove her smashing through the dromond's starboard oar-bank, trailing their own oars as the screams of the miserable slaves in the 'tween-decks told of the havoc they had wrought by the collision.

"In oars! In oars!" Swain shouted, and barely in time, for Olvir sent his dragon crashing against *Farfarer's* larboard beam even while Swain's men were scrambling to their feet from the first shock. *Farfarer* was pinned between her enemies, their sides clustered with men ready to board. But it was not Swain's way to bide the attack. His first thought was of Olvir, but he remembered his promise to the Emperor.

"Ho, Eric," he shouted to his forecastle man. "Hold Olvir! Stand to it, Bitling, until I come." His voice rang out over the rising tumult. Skullbiter flashed like a blue gleam in his hand. "Loge, hold the poop. Use your bowmen as seems best."

Loge scratched his nose.

"'Why, goodman, I take but two-thirds of your porridge, quoth the king,'" he said. "But you have given me sterner work, Swain."

And he loosed an arrow at the Caesar's resplendent figure, which was caught by a shieldman, who collapsed driven through the shoulder.

"That is the worst of kings and jarls," he said to himself, notching a second shaft. "They take the glory, the common man the point."

Swain leaped the short gap between *Farfarer* and the dromond, a score and a half of swords and axes at his heels. He knew what he must do first. He had not found his footing when Skullbiter lopped the arm of a man who poised a sputtering container of the Greek fire. Swain caught the missile neatly, and hurled it aft into the dromond's waist. Men shrieked in agony as the blazing liquid burst from it and ignited clothes and hair. But Swain and the men with him paid no heed to this diversion. They slew the Greek forecastle guard with swift precision, and toppled the fire-tube on the prow into the sea. They did not know how to use it, in any case, and Swain judged the devilish thing safest overside.

They had moved so fast that Andronicus was

Andronicus halted at the foot of the mast. "Stay your sword, Swain," he called. "You are too good a man for me to fight."

caught off-guard—perhaps he had expected Swain to attack Olvir first. For a scant moment Swain had opportunity to scan the fight. Two dromonds and a small buss had ringed Palaeologos. Horvald Geir's son had made the mistake of attacking a dromond bow-on, and *Water Serpent's* forecastle was afire. The imperial buss ship was beating up toward them at the awkward gait of a fat farmer's wife carrying two geese and a piglet to market. Swain cursed under his breath and returned to his own plight.

The Greeks had doused the fire in the waist with sand from buckets. A compact band, shields under chins, were striding aft, Andronicus looming in their midst like a golden tower, the crest of his helm nigh three ells above the deck. On the dromond's poop her archers were exchanging shots with Loge's carles, but Loge, himself, ignored them. Clang, clang, clang, he drove his shafts into the Caesar's mail, good steel, it seemed, beneath the overlayer of gilt. The air was ahiss with arrows, and ballast stones hurtled back and forth.

Andronicus halted at the foot of the mast.

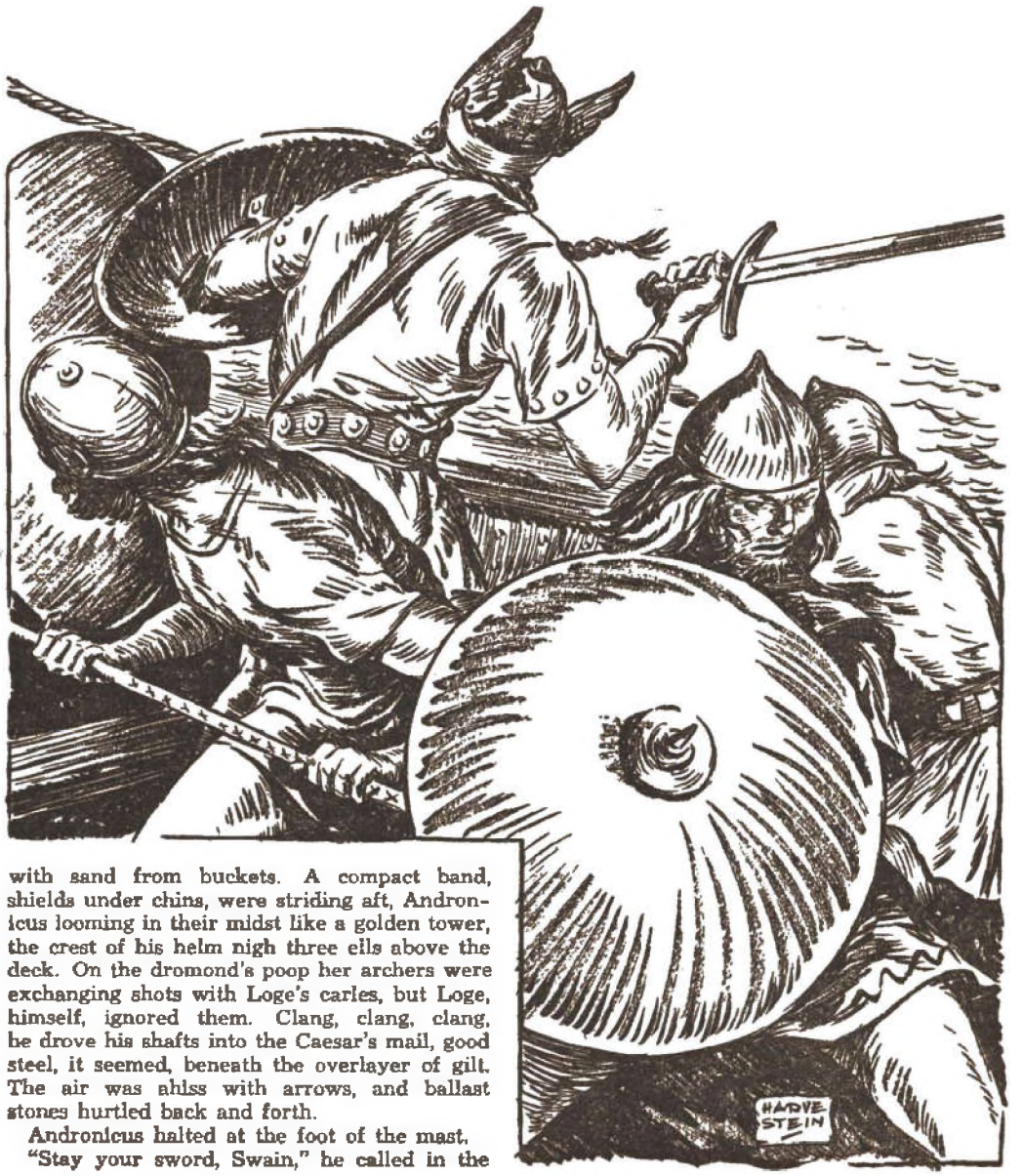
"Stay your sword, Swain," he called in the curiously soft and gentle voice which so belied his stature and sinister repute. "You are too good a man for me to fight. I can offer you more than my palace-bred brother."

"You ask this after the ill you did me?" rasped Swain.

"What is one woman between men who have use for each other?" Andronicus replied.

Swain smiled grimly. "You ask this, too, after you have brought against me the man who is my worst enemy, aye, from Trebizond, here, to Furdurstrandi!"

"Oh, Olvir!" The Caesar dismissed the Roy-



sterer by the tone of his voice. "An amusing companion. I needed him. But if you join me, his use ceases. Say the word, Swain, and we'll sweep his ship shield-to-shield."

Swain laughed aloud. "Heh! So you ask me to trust you, you who hold no woman or man's trust in honor's bounds, you who would betray the man who is fighting for you a ship's breadth distant, you who have betrayed your brother and your homeland! Are you witless no less than a niddering coward, Andronicus Comnenus?"

There was no passion or resentment in the Caesar's features.

"A man of your talents," he sighed. "It is to be seen that you are only a steel-eater like Olvir. The Bodyless Ones forgive me, but I must slay you, Swain."

His right arm came up from behind his shield, and a javelin whirred from it like a bolt of lightning. Swain stood motionless, but his shield slanted a little and the javelin glanced off into the sea.

"And now your offer is sealed," he jeered. "Ho, carles," to the men at his back, "let the steel sing!"

THE Orkneymen formed shield-wall at the break of the shallow poop, but they were outnumbered three to one, and a buss ship rounded under the dromond's stern and loosed a hail of arrows at their backs. One by one, they went down. Foot by foot, they retreated, despite Swain's furious sallies. Angrily, he challenged the Caesar to combat, but Andronicus remained at the foot of the mast, an amused smile on his handsome face. Glancing behind him Swain saw Palaeologos still afloat, one of his dromonds sinking; *Water Serpent* had quenched her fire by swinging her stern to the wind, and was boarding another buss. Looking forward, he gritted teeth at the spectacle of Olvir Rosta leading a wedge of berserks, their beards flecked with foam, down from the forecastle of *Farfarer* into her waist, where men stumbled over the oar-benches locked in furious struggles.

An arrow tinged on his helm, made his head ring. It came from *Farfarer*. He glanced left, startled. Loge was leaping up and down in excitement.

"Overside, Swain," hailed the Lapp. "You would not hear. The buss comes—our buss. The fire, Swain, the fire!"

He pointed astern. Swain, following his finger, saw the unwieldy *St. Cyril* lurching down upon the tangled knot of ships, a group of men busied around the fire-tube on her prow, others yelling and gesticulating at him. Already, the buss under Andronicus' larboard quarter was striving to gather way, but before she could get her canvas braced the fire-tube puffed a stream of flame into her upper works and sails. She paid off before the wind, blazing like a skalli put to the torch, spewing men armored and unarmored from her bulwarks, and slid away to starboard, scattering embers over *Farfarer* and Olvir's dragon.

Swain raised his voice in the croak that was all he had left to him.

"Overside, Swain's carles! Rolf, Gutorm, hold the Greeks with me! Overside, carles, the fire comes."

Andronicus, seeing the surge of retreat on the forecastle, and hearing the exultant howls of his men, started forward to lend a hand at the finish; but as he set foot on the ladder the beam of one of *St. Cyril's* catapults jerked forward, slinging a net of fire-pots into his dromond's waist. He knew what that meant, as did the unfortunate Greeks who were hewing at Swain and his pair of axe-wielders.

Andronicus, moving with a lightness remarkable for his bulk and the weight of mail he carried, ran aft to his own stern, vaulted to *Farfarer's* forecastle, shouted a warning to Olvir and gained the poop of the Roysterer's dragon. His men, faced by steel before and fire behind, jumped from the forecastle into the dromond's waist, tearing frenziedly at the straps of their armor.

"Overside," Swain bade his supporters. "That saltmeat-tub has done our work for us."

Springing after them, he chopped the rope which Loge had looped to a mooring-pin on the dromond's deck, and *Farfarer* commenced to drift broadside to the wind. He jumped from the poop to the gangway between the oar-benches and ran forward. The one thought in his mind, now, was Olvir. He was honorably free to deal with the Roysterer. But as he ducked under the longship's tattered sail Olvir dealt Eric a blow on the shieldarm with his axe, which felled the little man and gave himself opportunity to follow such of his folk as were alive across the gap separating *Farfarer* from his dragon.

"After Olvir, Swain's carles!"

"Too late, Swain," grinned Eric, scrambling to his feet. "Olvir would never bide linked to us by his lone."

He gestured with his axe toward the widening belt of water to larboard. Olvir, like Swain, had thought first of freeing his ship, which was falling off rapidly as the freshening wind caught her hull and the stone-wrecked fragments of her sail.

Swain stepped on an oar-bench, and forced his throat to a bellow of rage.

"Bide, Olvir! Must you always be niddering? Is your fear so great you—"

The Roysterer stepped to his poop-rail. His mail was hacked and rent and smeared with blood; blood dripped from the axe, he raised in mocking salutation. Mocking, too, were his

close-set eyes, as black and stony as a snake's.

"It seems you are impatient, Swain," he answered. "The Norns have not yet readied your doom. And I take my orders from the Caesar."

Andronicus joined him. The Caesar's untarnished appearance was in contrast with Olvir's.

"Be at ease, Swain," he said softly. "We shall meet again."

Swain stepped down from the bench, without replying.

"Our oars," he ordered. "We will run them down. It has been well said that he is a lucky man who takes two wolves in the one trap."

"If the trap holds," commented Eric.

Swain patted his shoulder with the affection he showed none else, not even Loge.

"Heh, Bitling," he said, "you still live, who have striven with Olvir, chest to chest. It is my rede that the ill carle has weakened."

"Then so have I," Eric retorted drily. He rubbed his left arm tenderly. "I shall have need of a shieldman in our next onfall. But that was why I spoke. Take heed to our benches."

Farfarer had fought two ships' companies, and she had paid toll for survival. Many of the men who tugged wearily at the heavy oars were of Loge's archers or the forecastle guard, and all bled from open wounds. The ship was littered with bodies, and those of the enemy were not more numerous than *Farfarer's*.

Swain nodded thoughtfully.

"Yet must we follow. See, they mean to beach in that cove west of the city. Ho, and their friends flee with them! The saltmeat-tub has ordered the battle for us."

Of the Caesar's fleet he had lost his own dromond and another, Olvir's snekke and three busses, his ship and two busses by fire. The remainder were in full flight, pursued by the *St. Cyril*, which was hammering after them with long casts of fire-pots from her catapults and flights of javelins as broad as a skalli's beams from her mangonels. *Water Serpent*, low in the water, was making poor progress, but *Bokesuden* was rowing lustily; Palaeologos and a second dromond lagged so far that *Farfarer* soon overhauled them.

The drungarios limped to the rail to acknowledge Swain's hail. He had lost his helm, and his yellow beard was streaked with blood from a slash on the cheek; but he contrived a crooked grin.

"Ho, Swain, what say you now to our saltmeat-tub?"

"I say your folk have more wit than the Franks. I am a simple steel-swallower, but I know good fighting carles when I see them. How do you stand, John? Can we muster a force to take the land after those villains?"

"They are beaten men," replied Palaeologos. "We might harry them at will. But there is aid at hand for them. Andronicus has not been slow in calling on the Sultan of Iconium."

Swain looked past the enemy ships, beaching hastily on the rocky shore. A torrent of mounted men, wearing long white robes over their mail, and spiked helmets, was pouring out of a gap in the hills.

"The paynims!" he exclaimed. "So Manuel did not misjudge his brother! What think you they will do, John? They are many."

"If we had not come, they would have overrun Trebizond in a week's time," the drungarios answered promptly. "But Andronicus has more at stake than the outermost city of the Empire. He knows he has lost this play. He will be off with the Seljuks to plot more treachery."

"At the least, we can burn his ships and bar him from flight by sea," said Swain. "And it would be to good purpose if we picked up a few prisoners to question. This chase has but begun. I had one enemy when we sailed from Miklgard. Now I have two, and I would fare to Jorsalaheim and beyond, if I must, to lay Skullbiter on their throats."

"You speak lightly, Swain," grumbled Loge. "We are viking folk, not landfarers."

"Before we are finished with this venture, dwarf, it may be your legs will look less like a pair of your bows," grinned Swain.

CHAPTER III

A HEAD FOR MANUEL—AND ONE FOR SWAIN

THE Governor of Trebizond was a fat, pursy, little man, who shaved his eyebrows and scented his hair. He was aghast at the bearded, grimed and bloody warriors who swarmed into his palace after the fleet made port.

"This windbag has never smelled battle-sweat," Swain observed aloud to Palaeologos.

"Put up your nose to the attar of roses he wafts around him," assented the drungarios. "But with him must we deal."

"Humph," grunted Swain, and thrust the Emperor's signet under the governor's tremulous nose. "Ask him if he knows what that means."

Palaeologos whistled low. "So that is how His Mightiness esteems you, Swain! Mark how he cowers back. What will you have?"

"The intelligence of his spies, and what force he can lend us in the pursuit. Oh, and what have his tormentors learned from the prisoners."

It was evident that the governor might be spineless in masculine company, but he understood how to order spying and the work of extracting information from the helpless. He had his own spies in the court of the Massoud, Seljuk Sultan of Rum, Iconium to the Byzantines, which these nomad Turkish horsemen

had carved out of the frontier themes of the Byzantine Empire and Armenia. Andronicus and the Sultan had entered into a treaty, each contingent on the good will and honesty—which were doubtful—of the other, to assail the kingdom of Jerusalem as a prelude to an assault in force upon the barrier themes of the Empire. Andronicus had sought to anticipate the necessity of the conspiracy in Constantinople. Now the Caesar was intent to make it work according to the preliminary plan.

"What next?" Palaeologos asked after the tormentors had finished their grisly work. "My counsel is that we should post a dispatch to the Emperor, aye, and send a copy by sea with a double shift of slaves for the oars. The frontiers must be reinforced. The Opsikian and Anatolic thema must be brought to strength, and troops sent from Europe."

"I am no hand with a quill, in shaft or on paper," Swain replied. "Do you see to it, John. Read it to me after, and I will scrawl my name"—his teeth glinted in his beard—"if you will save me a half-sheet of parchment."

"Shall I order the shipmen to make ready for us to follow the messengers?"

Swain stared at him. "By Cross and Hammer, no," roared the Orkneyman. "I promised the Emperor I would follow Andronicus until I could send him the varlet's head or deliver his body."

"But Andronicus will be riding for Iconium in the land of Rum," protested the drungarios. "He will have all the might of the sultan in his support. It is a hostile land, Swain, wild and mountainous, and the Seljuks are good men of their hands."

"The wilder the land, the better our luck," returned Swain. "We Norsefolk know mountains as we do the sea. But I do not seek to fight the Seljuks, only to keep to Andronicus' track, and if I know him it will be a broad track, and a long one."

"Iconium is many days ride," assented Palaeologos, "but we might not enter it without an army at our backs, if ever, in truth. It has defied the Emperor, and his father before him."

"Andronicus will not bide in Iconium," Swain said flatly. And to the Greek's look of surprise, "He is for Jerusalem, John. You all tell me he is a man of shrewd wit. So, too, must be this sultan—how do you call him? Massoud? They would never assail the empire, leaving the kingdom at their backs. Their first thought will be to plot the capture of the Holy City."

Palaeologos pondered this. "It may be you are right," he said finally. "But even so, Swain, it is a long, long journey overland from Trebizond, through the land of Rum and Armenia—which is Christian and friendly, to be sure—to Jerusalem. Our people have never fared that way. My advice is that we take ship for the city, gather forces and voyage to Acre by sea."

"That is what Andronicus expects us to do," asserted Swain. "Now, tell me, what force can your people muster here?"

"Including the outlying garrisons? There is the Bucellarian thema, the heavy-armed cataphracti of the theme, say twelve thousand men. With the mercenary and auxiliary alae, perhaps twenty thousand in all."

Swain was familiar with the flexible, subtle system of organization in the Byzantine army. Like most of the Norsefolk, he was contemptuous of its defensive character, but he had respect for the efficiency with which it encountered the superior masses of the paynims and barbarians who hedged the empire's frontiers or all sides.

He knew that the themai, one to each theme, consisted of ten thousand armored horse-archers, trained both as missile troops and as heavy cavalry, divided into two turmai of five thousand men each, which in turn were divided into five bandon of five pentarkhia. In addition, each thema had attached to it engineers, battering and sanitary detachments and a sizable transport train. They were the core of the Byzantine army, capable of fighting on foot with sword or axe as well as mounted with lance and bow.

"This is my plan," he decided. "We might never pass through Iconium with a train of armored men clanking behind us. That would be to stir up every man the Sultan could raise. We must trust to ourselves for the most part. Go to this puking governor, John, remind him of the Emperor's signet, if you must. I would have him throw all his heavy troops across the frontier wherever Andronicus crossed. That should befool the Seljuks, and since we shall not be with them, and our ships will have sailed and we aboard, Andronicus will be assured that we have yielded the chase."

Palaeologos gaped. "But you said—"

"Bide. We will land from the ships at night down the coast westward of the city. The governor will have horses awaiting us, with one bandon of the thema and two alae of good mercenaries—I leave it to you, John, to see that they be stout folk, Huns, if possible. There must be guides, also, who know the bytracks of the lands we shall cross. We will hold the bandon with us until we are safe past the Seljuks' border castles, and as for the alae I do not know. If we can move as fast as we Norsefolk would, and yet keep close to Andronicus' track, we will send them back, too. This is a venture which calls for few, not many, and our horses will be fortunate when they graze."

The drungarios hesitated.

"What now?" Swain prompted him.

"Your men, Swain—can they endure such a pace on horses?"

Swain laughed shortly. "You will see that the Norsefolk are as apt on a horse as on a long-

ship's deck," he returned. "But whether we are as lucky—heh, that is a question the Norns are spinning as we talk. Is all plain?"

"By the Bodyless Ones," exclaimed Palaeologos. "We shall need Their aid, aye, and the spells of that yellow man you keep by you, if we are to win through. But this is a venture I would not have missed for a tax-collector's revenue."

IN afteryears, when Swain sat out the winter nights over the alehorns, in his home skalli on Ronaldsbay of the Orkneys, with Eric and Loge and his house carles, he was wont betime to come out of a mood of blank abstraction with a sudden great burst of laughter.

"I do not need the second sight to see that your thoughts have been pleasant, Swain," Eric would remark.

"Yes," Swain would answer, quaffing his horn. "I was remembering our landfaring that time in Asaland"—which was the Norse name for all the lands beyond the Middle Sea, whence came Odin and the Old Gods—"in the land of Rum. I do not think my luck was ever at its strongest when I fared landward, but we wrought to a purpose, Bitling." And he would fill up his horn, and yerk Loge in the ribs with the hilt of Skullbiter. "Say, dwarf," he would demand, "did you, in truth, work the spells the Greeks bought of you?"

"Why, as to that, Swain," Loge would answer slyly, "I would call to your mind that the Greeks never complained for their gold."

And Swain would laugh again until the smoke from the firepit bellied to the rafters. For that was a journey of which the skalds sang from Nidaros up the Baltic to the cities of the Easterlings, and westward across the gray waters to Iceland and the Greenland settlements. As Haldfan the Blind had it in a stitch the weanlings learned, listening from bowerroom doors:

> Swain dares the wastes of Asaland,
> False Greek and Olvir flee his hand.
> He follows to Jorsala's towers,
> The holy King guards with his powers.
> He thwarts the Greek's and Olvir's greed,
> And saves Jorsala in its need.
> Well do the hosts of black Mahound
> Know Swain protects the sacred ground.

The fat governor of Trebizond wrung his hands when he received Swain's orders.

"But this is war with the Sultan," he protested. "I say nought of the Caesar, but Massoud! If aught goes wrong, it will be my head that falls."

"Tell him, if he has not moved by night his head shall surely fall, and I will send it with the Caesar's to the Emperor," Swain answered. "The Emperor is a proud man. He will have scant use for a servant as spineless as this bag of wind."

There was a prompt scurrying of messengers, rallying the outlying garrisons, and a beat for horses amongst the farms that had escaped Olvir's ravages. Swain bided in Trebizond, overseeing the repair of his ships, until the Bucellarian thema had struck across the frontier in seeming pursuit of Andronicus and the Seljuks. Then he set sail toward sunset, his ships each carrying extra crews of Greeks and Genoese—for he designed to have them continue on to Constantinople after he and his companies had landed—and went ashore in early morning on a deserted section of the coast, where the banda of cataphracti and two alae of Hunnish and Maronite light troops awaited him with horses to augment the few which had survived the sea-fight in the buss ship's waist.

Swain's guides had drawn rough maps for him, and by these he plotted his path. It was always his habit in warfaring to design to do that which his enemies least expected of him, and his plan now was to ride diagonally across the intervening Greek land, cross into the dominions of the Seljuk Sultan at a point west of the ancient caravan track from Trebizond to Iconium, which Andronicus was reported to have followed, and then by hard riding overtake the Caesar and his allies.

In doing so, he would have the Bucellarian thema covering his rear and need only be cautious of enemies on his front and flanks. If he could not overtake Andronicus and Olvir in the land of Rum, he might hope for success in friendly Armenia. At the worst, he would be fast on their heels when they entered Jerusalem, and if he had misfigured the Caesar's intent and Andronicus fled to the protection of Massoud in Iconium, he would yet be in position to balk an attempt against the Holy City.

But as Swain himself said of this venture, "The carle who steers with the wind must sail with the wind."

The column rode at speed through the Greek mountains, the Huns and Maronites scouting ahead. If any of the vikingfolk complained of the pace, they were soon shamed into silence by tougher carles, who hailed them as "Soft Thighs," and besought them to seek unguents from the bower-women of the villages at which they halted. This gave cause for several brawls which Swain curbed with the flat of Skullbiter. But otherwise they had no incidents of moment before they crossed the empty belt of land barring the empire from the land of Rum. Here, at dusk, they encountered a small castle in a pass, which the Greek scouts encircled to prevent the escape of messengers of warning.

Swain would have assailed the castle out of hand, but Palaeologos counseled him to let the Greeks storm it by their own means. The cata-

phracti were attended by a band of engineers, who had small catapults and mangonels in sections on packhorses. These were rapidly put together, the Norsemen marveling greatly at the Greeks' skill. With the catapults the Greeks hurled fire-pots inside the walls to kindle the barracks and stables of the garrison, while the mangonels splintered the gates with the massy javelins they cast. When the place was ablaze the cataphracti attacked in column, dismounted, and burst in with scant difficulty, putting all the paynims to the sword.

Swain was secretly impressed, but pretended not to be. "Heh," he grunted, "we do as much with fire arrows."

Two days ride beyond the castle, a clump of white-cloaked heathen showed on a hilltop, paused to count their array and galloped off. From this point on they were continually shepherded by the Seljuks, with whom their scouts were frequently at lances' points, encounters which Swain encouraged because the prisoners taken gave him intelligence of the progress of Andronicus and Olvir, who had been pursuing the caravan road at a leisurely gait, confident that the main body of their Seljuk allies behind them could hold off the thrust of the Bucellarian thema, and ignorant of Swain's separate foray. But by this time, Swain made certain, his enemies must have word of his threat. He changed his plans with the suddenness that had made his name dreaded in the North.

The banda of cataphracti he sent forward to smash at the caravan road, ordering them to destroy all human life in their passage, and to press lightly along the road toward Iconium until he instructed them to retire and rejoin the thema. Disregarding the advice of his guides, he hurled the Hunnish and Maronite alae and his own and Palaeologos' men into a trackless tangle of mountains on his right. For Swain had the instinct for direction, and the means to encompass it, which is inbred in seamen. His vikingfarers never forgot this part of their venture. They threaded defiles where they must ride in single file; they breasted foaming torrents; they traversed verges with slippery footing, which declined to nothing—here were lost Halvord Geir's son, the farman of *Water Serpent*, and Ingi of Iceland, who did not reckon his father's name. For three days they did not see a hut or a human, only the eagles brushing their pinions around the sky-piercing peaks.

After three days they came upon the caravan road, far in advance of where the cataphracti had struck it, and the prisoners they seized at the first village told them what Swain had expected to hear. Andronicus and Olvir were but a day ahead of them, hastening to meet the Sultan Massoud, who was riding out from Iconium with a host to safeguard the fugitives.

"This is your chance to win favor with Odin, dwarf," Swain growled to Loge. "There will be many horses you can vow in his honor along this road."

MEN who were unhorsed begged seats of their more fortunate comrades or trotted on their shanks to stay with the column. There were few stragglers when the Maronite archers engaged Andronicus' rearguard two days later. In midafternoon Swain had the satisfaction of sitting his horse by the roadside, and watching his enemies form their battle against him.

"I know not if it be the Caesar's wit or Olvir's guile," he said to Palaeologos, "but those folk stand strongly."

The caravan road at this point traversed a narrow valley. Andronicus and his Greeks had their left protected by a village; Olvir and his vikings, dismounted, were in shieldwall in the center; the enemy's right was held by a dense clump of Seljuk horse, with a hillside to guard their flank.

"Too strongly," agreed the drungarios. "I like it not, Swain. Our best chance is to charge around the village, and take them in rear."

"So they look for us to do," answered Swain. "Their horsemen would be ready to meet us, and we should have Olvir on our tail. No, John, Olvir is the nut to crack here, and we shall do it thus. Guile and wit in richer measure always can outmatch guile and wit."

He placed Palaeologos and the Greeks on his left, dismounted his own men and arrayed them in shieldwall opposite Olvir and posted the Huns and Maronites on his right in front of Andronicus.

"Now we are as they would have us," he said. "At a foot-pace, and slow."

The arrow storm burst loose from both sides, and men commenced to fall; but Swain refused to hasten his advance. His line had crossed half the intervening ground before he tossed Skullbiter in air.

"Push home, Swain's carles," he roared.

The Greeks on his left reined in their horses, and as Swain's shieldwall ran in front of them they turned right and took the center position at a gallop. The Huns and Maronites were away in a cloud of dust, circling the village. Over the thunder of hoofs and battlecries Swain could hear Olvir's bellow of resentful surprise. For several moments the enemy shifted uncertainly. Andronicus and his Greeks started to advance, thought better of it and turned to guard their rear. Olvir's shieldwall shifted automatically to the V formation for resisting flank attacks. The Seljuks, unused to seeing footmen charge horse, were at a complete loss, and were just beginning to charge when Swain's shieldwall ripped into their ranks in the same V formation as Olvir's.

The Seljuks broke first. Their horses were frightened and bewildered by the serried ranks of bearded faces at eye-level, the sharp steel blades which hacked at their sensitive nostrils. If a horseman leaped the shieldwall, his mount was hamstrung and he seldom toppled from his saddle alive. A gap in the wall was instantly closed. It moved on with the ruthless precision of an avalanche in the Norse jokuls. The paynims were split asunder, galloped helplessly around the V formation, which reversed to meet a rear attack, and then fled the field in confusion, riding down the right wing of Olvir's shieldwall in their passage.

Swain wheeled his formation to take advantage of the opening. He could see Olvir's squat figure at the point of the outlaw's wedge, axe whirling desperately as the Roysterer chopped down horse and man in Palaeologos' ranks—the Greeks were as bemused as the Seljuks at being charged by men afoot, men who had the cool skill of the Norsefolk, inlaw or outlaw. In the distance near the village the gilded bulk of Andronicus towered enormous on his tall horse, his sword shimmering like a beam of lightning as he led his men against the attack of the Hunnish and Maronite alae, savage fighters, heathen and Christian alike.

"Ho, Bitling," Swain panted to Eric at his right hand, "we have the Roysterer trapped." And he raised his voice. "Let my steel cut your foul throat, Olvir. Swain speaks!'

Olvir never turned from his present task, but his bull-roar answered. "Swain often speaks—to little purpose. Stand to it, carles! Close shields to right, there! We have taken Swain's measure many a worse day."

Loge, whose duty was to keep Swain's back, fitted arrow to string. "A shaft under his ear would stop the Roysterer's tongue, Swain," he suggested.

"At your peril, dwarf," snarled Swain. "To the right, carles! Shields together, points up!"

"The Caesar's folk are yielding," cried Eric.

"Aye, forward, Swain's carles," shouted Swain. "One head for the Emperor, one head for Swain!"

Leading his wedge, he split into Olvir's right wing, and the outlaws' formation came apart as though a giant's hand had pawed it. The fight became a series of group battles, with Swain and Olvir raging through the confusion, Swain seeking Olvir, the Roysterer trying to pull his men back into formation, Palaeologos unable to intervene for fear of riding down Swain's folk.

The finish came faster than any one man's eye could have seen it, aye, or than any ear could have heard. Suddenly the outlaws abandoned the struggle and drew into a whirling knot of men hungry only for escape, carrying Olvir with them, Swain running in pursuit. And with equal suddenness came a blast of martial music from the lower end of the valley. Kettle-drums rolled, cymbals clashed, shawms and trumpets sounded brazenly.

"Too late, Swain," grunted Loge, the breath whistling in his nose as he strove to make his short legs maintain Swain's gait. "'Too late, quoth the swan, when the hawk missed.' The Sultan comes."

Swain halted, and dashed the sweat from his eyes. The lower end of the valley was covered by masses of white-coated riders, who choked it from mountain-wall to mountain-wall. Andronicus' gilded figure was halfway to them. The Huns and Maronites already were in retreat; Palaeologos gallantly was ordering his men to cover Swain's while the horse-tenders raced up with the Norsefolk's mounts. Olvir, from the midst of his outlaws, raised his axe in salute.

"'Swain speaks,'" he called. "No, no, I think Swain flees. But Asleif died well, Swain."

Eric said that he could hear Swain's teeth grinding in his mouth. But Swain was never a man to let temper be his helmsman.

"By the Hammer," he swore, "my luck has taken an ill turn. So much for landfaring! Mount, carles, and ride. John, we will take that narrow passage southward of the valley's gut. Do you see us there, and we will stint you after."

CHAPTER IV

THE HAMMER AND THE CROSS

IT may well have been that the Sultan Massoud suspected Swain's onslaught had been a lure to draw the Seljuk host into a trap set by the Bucellarian thema. His pursuit was fainthearted in the beginning, and was abandoned as soon as the Huns and Maronites were rallied to resist the Sultan's white-cloaked riders.

But Swain was heavy in spirit that night.

"This has been an evil day," he said. "We have lost scores of good men, and no gain did it bring us."

"Say the word, Swain," cried Eric, "and we will ride into the paynims' camp by night, and slay Olvir and Andronicus in their tents."

"No, Bitling, that would mean death for all of us, and mischance might irk us again."

"What will you do?" asked Palaeologos. "We are still enough to reach Jerusalem."

"That is my thought," answered Swain. "There is nothing to advantage us here in the land of Rum. It is the Sultan's interest to protect the Caesar. But in Jerusalem we can balk their plot, and plan some means of obtaining possession of Andronicus. As for Olvir—let me but win to within sword-reach of him!"

In the morning, Swain dismissed the Huns

and Maronites, bidding them rejoin the thema, creating all the disturbance they could in the countryside to divert the paynims' attention, and with the remainder of his men took horse for Armenia, which they attained without undue effort save for the harsh ruggedness of the ways they plodded.

It seemed a pleasant land by contrast with the land of Rum, although the mountains were as lofty, the passes as steep and the roads as crooked and uneven. But the people received the Norsemen and Greeks with glad courtesy as fellow Christians, which secretly amused Swain, who knew that most of his followers were in as bad odor with Father Peter at Kirkwall as himself. They were a proud people, the women serene and shapely, the men tall and lean—the best warriors on foot in all the countries east of the Middle Sea, Palaeologos said. And Swain could believe this because he saw with his own eyes that the Armenians were a people who lived, day and night, with their weapons at hand. The villages were walled; the castles crowning the lesser peaks were stoutly garrisoned; and beacon fires signaled the coming of the strangers from valley to valley. For the paynims ringed Armenia on all sides but one.

If Swain had accepted the hospitality extended by the Armenian lords he would have tarried months amongst them, but he bade Palaeologos explain to all that he was in haste to reach Jerusalem with tidings for the King of menace from the Seljuks, and they sped him forward, with thanks for his warning, which meant as much to them as it did to the fortunes of the Holy Land.

So at long last there came a day when Loge, hunched in his saddle, straightened abruptly and twitched his nostrils.

"Ho, carles," he shouted, "I smell the sea."

The column stiffened alertly, men's noses lifted like hounds' seeking a scent, and in the time it takes to eat a cheese-cake Loge's shout was echoed from hundreds of throats. That afternoon they encountered a patrol of Knights of the Hospital of St. John, attended by mailed men-at-arms and light-armed Turcopuli, half-breed Syrians of the countryside. They were in the Holy Land.

Loge glanced about him with an assumed air of bewilderment.

"The Holy Land," he repeated. "For the life of me, I see nothing holy in its seeming. It is as bare as our Norway, and as like to the land of Armenia as another codfish of the same spawning."

"Never let the Christians hear you say that," rejoined Swain. "And if it came to Father Peter's ears, you would eat cod for a year's penance."

"Aye, that is the curse of this Christianity," grumbled Loge. "The Old Gods were not so choice when you found fault with them."

The next day they rode into the city of Antioch, and one of Prince Raymond's knights met them at the gate to offer free quarters; but Swain was loath to trust his thirsty carles amongst the taverns, and again explained through Palaeologos that he might not delay his progress to Jerusalem, since he was charged with messages from the Emperor for King Amalric—or Amaury, as the Frankish folk called him. Both Greeks and Norsefolk murmured at this, and Swain allowed them what he called a "six horn stay," which was sufficient to fetch most of them reeling into their saddles. He was not at ease until he had them all safe out of range of the sloe-eyed beauties who lined the stately streets to stare invitingly at the battered, dusty column of warriors.

Antioch was inland from the sea, but after they had quit its cincture of walls, crowned by the mighty castle of the prince—the chief vassal of the kingdom—half-fortress, half-palace, their road trended to the right, and they made their night's camp within sight and sound of waves breaking on a rockstrewn, shingley beach. This was of little account to the Greeks, but the Norsefolk were as happy as lads who had been a month skallibound before the spring sheep-counting. They stripped off their mail, and plunged into the water like a seal-pack after the mating season, exclaiming at its warmth, scooping it up in their hands to taste. Aye, it was salt, salt as the water of Scapa Flow! Ran's Bath, the true road of the viking-folk!

THE second day they continued on the coast road, past the castle of Tortosa to the port of Tripoli. The sky was crystal clear, and once a jagged cluster of mountains loomed against it far inland, seeming to lower threateningly over the brown hills that rolled back from the sea.

"What are those jokuls, John?" Swain asked idly. "I know not why, but they have a look of danger, even as the fire mountains in Iceland which cannot be quenched by the winter snows."

The Greek shuddered, and crossed himself.

"Danger! Aye, you say truly, Swain. That is the land of the Assassins, the servants of the Old Man of the Mountain, Sinan, the Lord of Death. They are not of this world, those folk. They reckon nothing of life. They live only to slay at their lord's behest, believing that in dying as they slay, in the King's court or in camp, they will earn the reward of everlasting paradise. No man knows the treasure Sinan, and those who came before him, have wrung from frightened lords and rulers, as also from men who desired enemies put out of their paths."

"I should like to have words with this old carle," said Swain. "He must be as evil as Olvir or Andronicus."

"Never speak so, Swain," exclaimed Palaeologos. "Sinan's sight is death. No man has seen him, and lived. The Emperor, in Constantinople, would not be safe if the Old Man thought his death would be gainful."

Swain snorted contemptuously.

"This sounds like the tales the old women tell in bower-rooms when the east wind blows," he remarked. "And now I think of it, John, what you say is of a piece with a feeling that has been growing on me in this land. There is fear abroad. It is to be seen in the faces of the folk we meet. It is in my mind that the White Christ does not concern Himself overmuch with the people who would guard His Cross. But it may be that is because these folk are not worthy of His protection. They are soft, timorous bodies—save for the armored carles, who, you tell me, are Franks and not of this land."

So they rode on, day by day, threading the busy traffic of the coast road, which was like no other road Swain or any of them had journeyed before. Pilgrims of every race in Christendom, armored knights, barefooted friars and monks, Druse tribesmen down from their hills to bargain for the keen blades forged by the swordsmiths of Antioch and Acre, portly abbots on ambling mules, Syrian peasants carrying produce to the markets of the seaport towns, Genoese, Venetian and Pisan seamen, feudal lords with their trains, Jewish peddlers, merchants, beggars, vendors of relics—all these and many more kept the dust aswirl.

The Norsemen never tired of the strings of camels, whose swaying heads and mincing hoofs convulsed them with laughter. And always at frequent intervals, groups of men-at-arms or Turcopuli in the royal livery, who scanned every passerby and stopped not a few for questioning. Swain wondered at this, and understood why one evening when they heard a trumpet blast and the clamor of men's voices, and a band of the white-cloaked paynim horsemen broke from a nearby vineyard with Maronite archers hot in chase.

Palaeologos, riding beside him, answered his unspoken question.

"Raiders from the desert. They slip across the river Jordan, and hide by day. Thanks be to the Bodyless Ones, a few of those who travel this way will awake in the morning with uncut throats and full packs and purses."

From Tripoli the column rode to Beirouth, and on to Sidon, Tyre and Acre, a shrunken city of buildings scattered apart and lonely-seeming in the setting of its farflung belt of walls, which marched across the hills and valleys indifferent to all obstacles as though derisive of the insufficiency and weariness of the folk who cowerингly accepted their protection.

"Ho," exclaimed Swain, "they were men who built those walls. This kingdom has more need of men like them than of these shaveling priests who clutter the road, and dwell apart without begetting."

"The Emperor would agree with you," admitted Palaeologos.

After Acre they came to Jaffa, the port of the Holy City, and here Swain planned to bide several days to allow his carles and the Greeks an opportunity to furbish their mail and weapons and repair their gear. But it chanced that the morning following their entrance into the city he met a Pisan, who had voyaged to Norway and Swedeland and the Easterlings' cities, and had the Norse speech. A man of many words, and his tongue greased by wine.

"By the Mass," he babbled, "is this a new Crusade, Swain, or is all Norway on pilgrimage for its sins?"

"We are not so many," returned Swain, "seeing that in journeying hither we have lost a third—"

"Oh, I speak not of your company alone—a brave band, friend, right viking warriors, as is to be seen by one who knows the North. No, I mean they who came in the Sultan of Iconium's galleys, at the charges of the Caesar Andronicus. You would know of him, the tallest man in the world, men say, and brother to the Emperor."

Swain was staring at him, speechless. The Orkneyman's cheeks showed white through his beard; his nostrils were pinched in.

"A brave company, too," the Pisan babbled on. "Hard carles like yours, aye, Icelanders, some of them, berserks with hot eyes. You just missed joining with them, Swain. They passed up to Jerusalem two days since. Their leader was a blackbearded carle, swart in visage, broad in the shoulder. A famous warrior—"

"By the Hammer," gasped Swain. "By the Old Gods—and the New! I vow such an offering as— Out of my way, carle, out of my way!"

And he sped down the Street of the Shipmasters, roaring so that the folk scuttled into doorways in fright: "Eric! Ho, Bitling! Eric! Loge! The weapon call! The weapon call!"

THE column halted on the brow of the hill over against the Gate of St. Stephen. Across the stretch of level ground below, the Holy City fronted the farfarers behind her battlements with an effect of calm serenity which baffled Swain, frowning upon the scene from his lathered horse. Away to the left the Tower of David stood in solid strength at a corner of the walls, and in the distance across the housetops, beyond the Gate of Jehosphat, rose Tancred's Tower, where the walls angled abruptly to follow the verge of the steep declivity to the flat summit of Mount Moriah, crowned by the

stately pile of the Temple, the Royal Palace and the monastery of the Templars.

A beautiful city, Swain thought, and defensible, yet his practiced eye noted the patches in the bulwarks where catapults and rams had pounded breaches in innumerable sieges of the past. It had been taken—it could be taken again. A city, like an unfenced skalli, he reflected, was better defended by the bodies of fearless men than by masses of senseless stone. He thought of Constantinople, and its pleasure-loving Greeks, who trusted to its triple walls and moat broad as a river rather than to their own right arms for protection. The higher the walls of a city, it seemed, the less reliant upon themselves became its folk. The only walls the Norsefolk knew were swords and axes, bows and spears.

Yet there was a quality about this city of Jorsalaheim, which set it apart from others he had seen. There was strength in this quality to which he could not put a name, a strength he had not felt in the land up to this moment. And he recalled that both King Sigurd, Kristin's father, and Jarl Rognvald of the Orkneys had spoken of this in talk over the ale-horns. Throughout the headlong ride from Jaffa he had not once been able to bar from his eyes the vision of Olvir's leering face or from his ears the hateful softness of the giant Caesar's voice—until this moment. What did it mean? Had he been magicked? Was there some power unknown to him in this White Christ, whose spell had broken the hold of the Old Gods over the Norsefolk in the generations since Olaf the Holy had sent for Thangbrand Willibald's son to preach Him with bell, book, candle and sword?

By an effort, Swain forced his eyes away from the gracious spectacle of the Holy City. He became aware that Palaeologos and all the Greeks, even some of the younger of the Norsefolk, who were not long escaped from Father Peter's influence, had dismounted and were kneeling in the road. Swain was uncomfortable—and again, he did not know why.

"Why do you do this, John?" he asked as the drungarios rose.

"It is the custom, Swain," replied the Greek. "Men have been willing to die, aye, countless thousands of men, if they might kneel here and see the Holy City before they passed."

"But why?" Swain insisted. "Was it on this hill the White Christ died? It was on a hill, Father Peter told me, and Sigurd and Rognvald had knelt there."

He smote his knee at the recollection.

"No," answered Palaeologos. "That Hill of the Skull, as men call it, is on the far side of the city. But we kneel here because from this hill we see first the city where He—"

Swain turned in his saddle.

"Dismount, carles," he shouted. "And kneel as becomes you. If Sigurd the Jorsalafarer and Jarl Rognvald could kneel to the White Christ here in the dust, it is for us to do the same. Also, it is Christian custom, and by what Father Peter has told me," he added drily, "we are all Christians after a fashion—aye, including you, Loge."

"Odin forgive me," Loge muttered piously as he tumbled from his saddle.

Swain hesitated, looked back again to see that he was obeyed—surprising a look of awe in Eric's face—and then swung down from saddle, himself, and plumped to his knees.

"I have never liked Gods who expected men to kneel to them," he remarked to Palaeologos. "It was not the way of the Old Gods. But I was taught to do as the host did in another man's skalli. If this is what the White Christ expects from folk who come to His city, this is what Swain Asleif's son will do for Him."

He gripped the cross-hilt of Skullbiter, and stared out at the domes and towers and crowded houseroofs of the city, so placidly secure in seeming. It reminded him of his mother's face, and he recalled that in the end his mother had not been secure. She had died by Olvir's sword to save his sons, but he had no doubt that the serene confidence had never left her eyes. For so he had found her on the skalli floor amongst the bloody rushes. There had been no fear in her dead face, as there was no fear in the look of Jerusalem. Elsewhere in this land there was fear, not in Jerusalem. The city seemed to say to him, as his mother's face had said, "My enemy may destroy me, but what I am shall never die."

"This White Christ." He spoke abruptly to Palaeologos. "He was never a steel-eater? A warrior?"

"No, Swain," the Greek answered gently. "By what the priests tell us, His battle was for men's souls with the powers of evil."

Swain rose, and lifted Skullbiter by the scabbarded blade.

"Heh, this hilt is His Sign, John? It shall serve Him at need. What He needs—what this land needs—is men who will fight for Him, men who can fight with their swords and not behind walls. It is in my mind there is a good venture in this land. But first we must slay Olvir, and bargain with King Amalric for the Caesar's body. Those two are the powers of evil today."

He vaulted into saddle.

End of Part I

BATTLE OVERTIME

ILLUSTRATED BY PETER KUHLHOFF

The Jap's machine guns kicked up little spurts of sand fifty yards ahead of Deal. Unhurriedly, he raised his Springfield.

By

RAY MILLHOLLAND

A SWARM of Seabees were still working on the dock when a motor sailer from the USS ——— pulled alongside. As soon as he had made the boat fast, the coxswain gave an officious hitch to his .45 Colt holster and glared sternly at two marines in full kit facing him on the after thwart.

"Hit the beach, you two stowaways! And keep those pieces at port arms, because damned if I'm going to lug them for a couple of G.C.M. prisoners."

With exemplary meekness, Privates Deal and Magurth sprang up on a dock stringer and walked ashore, the coxswain of the motor sailer stalking behind with an official envelope in his left hand and his right thumb hooked over his web gunbelt.

But once their heels bit into solid ground, Private Magurth paused to light a cigarette and address a Seabee carpenter's mate sweating over a ship's auger he was driving through a big timber.

"Hey, swabbie, where's the fightin'?"

The Seabee spat disgustedly and nodded toward his rifle leaning against the timber.

"Stick around, man-eater, and you'll get your belly full any minute. Them flying monkeys have been over twice already this morning."

"You two prisoners get going," warned the coxswain.

Private Deal plucked the burly arm of his squat companion in disgrace.

"C'mon, Magurth."

"Get going, Magurth!" warned the coxswain sternly.

Magurth turned slowly to face his guard.

"The Marines has landed, cocky. Now wiggle your fanny back home. We know where to report."

THE coxswain's experience with marines was fairly extensive and he read correctly the coldly impersonal but deadly look in Magurth's small eyes. It wasn't from lack of courage but from prudence that he took a backward step and put ten feet between his skull and the empty rifle in Magurth's hands.

"This isn't getting you anything, Magurth," he said evenly. "I've got to get a receipt from Marine headquarters for two prisoners."

"You can have it right now," said Magurth blandly. "Whose signature do you want?"

Just then an air raid siren on a derrick mast cut loose with a howling warning.

"Beat it clear of these timbers before you get filled with splinters!" yelled the Seabee, racing past them with his rifle. "Hit a slit trench, you statues!"

Whether by design or accident, Magurth dove into the same slit trench just a fraction of a second behind the coxswain, who emitted an explosive grunt and lay perfectly quiet thereafter.

Private Deal, crouching low, raced after the Seabee, yelling, "Gimme a clip of ammunition! I can get that duck easy."

"Take it, you crazy fool," snapped the Seabee and tossed a clip at Deal's feet then flattened out in his slit trench again.

Watching the single approaching Jap plane from under the rim of his battle-pot, Private Deal took his time wiping the sand from the cartridges. He slapped the clip home and held his rifle with the butt just below his right elbow and watched the approaching plane as if waiting for a shot at quail.

The Jap pilot, spotting one man standing erect and a wide open target for his machine guns, flipped around in a tight turn and came at Private Deal, nose down. Confident and unhurried, Deal raised his rifle and clamped his jaw to the stock, tracking and waiting for a cold meat shot. The Jap's machine guns started kicking up little spurts of sand fifty yards ahead of Deal. Then Deal's finger stiffened.

But before he squeezed off his shot, a fifty-caliber machine gun opened up from a patch of brush twenty paces to his left. Even above the bellow of the diving plane's motor, he could hear those heavy slugs hammering into the engine cowling and through the windshield.

The plane's engine screeched to a dead stop. The plane bucked wildly, then swerved off and hit the shallow water of the harbor with a rending crash.

Out of the brush stalked a Marine gunnery sergeant, wearing a mixed look of admiration and grim disapproval.

"Jack, what the hell did you think you was going to do to that Nip with your Springfield —take his picture?"

Private Deal, withdrawing his eyes from the tail fin of the wrecked plane, looked at the gunnery sergeant and said, "Sarge, you stole that one right off my front sight. Gee, why didn't you give me another second, so's he could come in range?"

One of the other gun crew members pushed the brush aside and yipped, "Hyah, Deal? How's the chow back at that base hospital?"

The gunnery sergeant's expression changed.

"So you're Deal of Sergeant Keegan's outfit, eh? Where's your sidekick, Magurth?"

"Who's askin'?" inquired Magurth, walking leisurely toward them and tearing up a brown envelope as he came.

Private Deal took a quick breath and said, "Look, Magurth, what did you do about the —the coxswain?"

"Oh, him?" Magurth started to toss away the scraps of paper in his hand, then catching the gunnery sergeant's watchful eye, stuffed them in a pocket. "Slight case of shell shock, the cocky got," he explained. "So I packed him back to the motor sailer and told the crew to rush him back to sick bay. He'll be O.K. soon's the doc slips him a slug of whiskey."

The gunnery sergeant, not being aware of the significance of this part of the conversation, wiped his dripping forehead and sighed, "For a shot of hooch, right now, they could blow my leg off. Got anything in your sock, Magurth?"

"Nekked, so help me," declared Magurth, virtuously, though making no gesture toward pulling his trousers out of his leggings to substantiate the statement.

The gunnery sergeant straightened his battle-pot and said, "You Jacks better shove off. Keegan is needing somebody like you two pretty bad right now, if I know what's going on."

"Give us a bearin' and we're on our way,"

said Magurth, thumbing his shoulder straps to hitch his pack into marching position. "Any good bay'net fightin' stirrin' up there?"

The gunnery sergeant pointed to a low range of jungle-clad hills.

"You'll find Keegan just three fingers off that big tree on top of the ridge. If he's still holding out, I mean."

"C'mon, kid," said Magurth. "We'll make it in time for chow if we wiggle."

"And you'll get all the bayonet work you want, Magurth!" called the gunnery sergeant after them.

Private Deal trudged along, limping slightly as he favored the newly healed compound fracture of his left foot. He kept looking sidelong at Magurth.

"Magurth—"

"Naw, I didn't hurt the cocky. Just squashed the breeze outta him for a minute."

"Yes, but we were his prisoners," objected Deal. "Now he'll get the brig for not bringing back a receipt. You shouldn't have—"

"Save your breath for this hill," growled Magurth. "Anyways, when I took his papers, I give him a receipt on the carbon copy. I signed for General Buzzer Smith. What more could he ask for—a receipt from the President?"

"Gee, Magurth—"

"Nuts, nuts! By the time this thing catches up to us, the war will be over, kid. Forget it. . . . Now which fork of this damn path is a guy to pick?"

"The left one," said Private Deal. "That's where the heavy firing is."

"Then that's where we find Sergeant Keegan," said Magurth confidently. "That guy couldn't find a safe place to sit doing a hitch at the South Pole."

THEY found Sergeant Keegan tearing the lid from a box of hand grenades with his bare, bleeding hands. His forearms were bare and streaked with the blood of wounded men. He flashed one look at the pair.

"Magurth!—Deal! How the hell did you two—Never mind, get up there and go to work and relieve some of the walking cases on the left."

"Any bay'net work?" inquired Magurth, whipping out his blade and snapping it on his rifle.

"Look," said Sergeant Keegan turning his left hand palm upward and drawing an imaginary sketch on it with his right index finger. "This is a Jap machine gun nest that's been holding us up all day. And up in a tree, somewhere off here, is the best damn Jap sniper we've done business with yet. We can't get close enough to the machine gun nest to clean it out, because this sniper—"

Uninvited, Private Deal was already helping himself to ammunition for his rifle. He filled all the pockets of his web belt, then slung four extra bandoliers over his shoulder.

"Sniper's over yonder, unh?" he asked, nodding toward the left.

"Gimme some," said Magurth, dipping into the hand grenades. He laid a pint bottle of whiskey on the box, adding, "Somebody might get bit by a snake. S'long, Sarge."

Deal wiped the sweat from his hands then rocked his rifle bolt partly open, to make sure there was a cartridge in the breech.

Magurth laughed and said, "I clean forgot to get any of that stuff."

"Here's yours," said Deal, shrugging off a pair of bandoliers.

Magurth took them with a shrug of indifference. "I lug this stuff from hell to breakfast and lug it back again. Gimme the bay'net every time and a couple of these here hand gren—"

Zing! went a sniper's bullet off the crown of Magurth's battle pot.

A voice from the brush commented dryly, "There's a war on, Jack, case you hadn't heard."

Magurth squatted down and removed his helmet. He laid a thick finger in the deep crease and said, "Come from about over thataway, kid. Do your stuff on him. But make it snappy."

"Shut up," snapped Deal, concentrating on an unnaturally dark blur in the crotch of a tree about three hundred yards across a small ravine. "Now walk out there where he can see you again, Magurth."

"Are you two nuts?" growled the same voice from the brush.

"How's this?" asked Magurth over his shoulder, standing erect in the trail.

"Hold it." Private Deal's tone was coolly deliberate. "Move around a little, so's he'll notice you, Magurth. . . There!"

Private Deal's Springfield slammed back against his shoulder. A rifle clattered from the distant tree.

Magurth laughed and gave his belt a triumphant hitch.

"That's shootin', kid. Now c'mon down and watch me pitch a little bay'net stuff." Twenty yards further on, writhing through the underbrush like a tiger stalking its prey, he turned a scowl back over his shoulder. "Listen, kid, put your bay'net on. What the hell?"

Deal shook his head. "Spoils my aim for snap shots."

"Nuts," said Magurth and moved forward again.

Again Deal's Springfield spoke, this time from the bottom of the ravine.

"Not so close to my ear next time," growled Magurth.

There came the slow cracking of a limb, then a series of thumps, and a body hit the further slope and rolled down almost within

arm's reach as the two hugged the ground.

"Nothin' new on him," said Magurth in the disappointed tone of an experienced souvenir collector. "Nothin' but GI." He licked his lips and shifted his eyes toward the concealed machine gun nest, now silent for a moment. "Betcha I get a swell samurai sword outta that snake hole. Maybe another one for you, kid."

Instead of climbing the slope ahead, Magurth turned to the left. The bottom of the ravine was coated with greasy mud, over which Magurth propelled himself on his stomach, unmindful of the condition of his rifle, only stopping at intervals to scoop up a handful of sand and rub it between his palms to insure a good grip in case of an emergency.

Deal followed behind, exerting far more effort because he was keeping his rifle clean and in shooting condition.

Then Magurth stopped and motioned Deal up to his shoulder.

"No more shootin' from here on, see? We're working in behind 'em. Get a grenade ready."

Deal looked blank.

"Nuts," said Magurth. "You'd forget your pants at your weddin'. I brought extries, knowing you wouldn't. Here!"

Inch by inch, they crept up the rear slope toward the knoll into which the machine gun nest was burrowed.

Magurth grinned at Deal.

"First we toss in a couple apiece. Then we stick any that come out. Twist when you jab, see? The bay'net comes out easier. . . Now start pitchin'!"

Straight down into the sloping exit of the machine gun nest sailed two grenades, then another two. They heard four muffled explosions.

There followed one of those moments of weird local silence, when the crackle of rifle fire further along the line seemed to be detached from reality. Then wisps of acrid hand-grenade smoke drifted from the sloping tunnel exit.

"Ready, they're comin' out," warned Magurth, set with his knees slightly bent and his bayonet poised for a lightning thrust.

Because the light was a little better where Private Deal stood, he could see a Jap battle helmet rising from the inky darkness of the tunnel. Then out boiled the enemy, their rifles clattering one against the other as they rushed the tunnel.

Deal drilled the first one above ground through the throat, and the muzzle blast from his rifle tore the Jap's helmet off. He continued to fire, coolly and methodically until his rifle was empty.

"Shut that thing off!" howled Magurth. "You're killin' 'em before I can stick 'em. And my ears ain't made of GI tank armor, either?"

Private Deal followed Magurth through the muddy ravine keeping his rifle in shooting shape.

Deal was reloading with swift, unerring fingers, watching the Japs still scrambling out. Every time Magurth's rifle lunged forward there was a grizzly thud, followed by the grunt of a man at hard labor as Magurth wrenched free his bayonet.

"Get that one-armed monkey who's working around to my left with a knife!" barked Magurth, fending off one Jap's bayonet thrust and in the same movement slashing another's throat with his own bayonet point.

THERE was no opportunity for Private Deal to shoot the Jap with one arm blown off without risking hitting Magurth who was bounding from left to right, thrusting, parrying and dealing lethal backhand blows with his rifle butt. So Deal advanced on the knife-wielder with his rifle in bayonet-fighting position. He lunged but nothing happened. The wounded man chattered tauntingly and jumped back. Deal lunged again before he realized he had no bayonet on his rifle. The Jap suddenly plunged his knife into his own stomach, ran screaming to the lip of the ravine and dived over.

That was all. Magurth stood wiping his bayonet with a handful of leaves and eyeing Private Deal with supreme professional disgust.

"Now, little boy, put your bay'net on the end of your rifle and try to look like a marine, anyways, while I take your picture."

Private Deal turned green under the ears and pressed his left hand to his stomach.

"Kid, you—you didn't let one of them monkeys get you?"

Deal shook his head. "No, I just feel like tossing my cookies."

"Here—" Magurth rammed his hand deep into his slit trouser pocket and on down to the bulge just above his left legging, coming up with a small flat bottle. "Strike a good stiff one below, while's I go inside and look around."

Leaning his rifle against the side of the exit tunnel, Magurth drew his long trench knife and with a grenade in the other hand entered the tunnel. He was gone perhaps five minutes before emerging again with an ornate Japanese officer's ceremonial sword.

"I run outta matches," he announced, thrusting the sword scabbard through his web belt. "If you got any, you can go down and get yourself something."

Deal shook his head as he handed back the bottle to Magurth, who dropped it back down his trouser leg through the slit pocket lining.

Just then a trench mortar shell slammed into the mound of earth atop the machine gun nest and exploded.

Magurth raked a clod from his shoulder and yelled across the ravine, "Look out where you throw that stuff. You'll hurt somebody!"

An unfamiliar voice called back, "What unit are you from?"

"Unit, what the hell does he mean by a unit?" Magurth growled at Deal. "That didn't sound like no marine talking."

"Maybe some of those Seabees, come up with a trench mortar," hazarded Deal.

So Magurth yelled across again, "Listen you web-footed swabbie, come over and see for yourself!"

In a few minutes, a patrol commanded by a corporal appeared. They trained their automatic carbines on Magurth and Deal.

"Watch 'em," the corporal warned his patrol. "They may be Japs, big ones, pulling a new gag on us with them funny uniforms. . . Grab a cloud, you two! And too bad if you don't understand United States."

"You guys Army?" demanded Magurth, disdaining to raise his hands.

"Sure. Do we look like burleycue queens?" snapped back the corporal.

Magurth frowned his utter distaste. "Listen, this is the Marines' war. Go get yourself another one, you Army punks."

"Battle batty," the corporal explained over his shoulder to his patrol. Then to Magurth and Deal, "Snap out of your hop. We relieved your unit in this sector over an hour ago. Now beat it across the ravine. . . Wilkins, guide these men to Major Crampton, and tell him this machine gun nest has been knocked out. By the Marines," he added grudgingly.

FIFTEEN minutes later, Major Crampton, Army of the United States, extracted the story from the two mud-smeared marines.

"Are you sure that machine gun nest is silenced? How do you know it?"

Magurth patted the samurai sword in his web belt. "I got this outta there."

"You mean, you two went down inside *alone?*"

"No, sir," answered Private Deal, naively. "Just Magurth."

Major Crampton scribbled a note and passed it to a young lieutenant.

"Take these men back to General Smith's headquarters in a jeep. See that the general gets a full account of the extraordinary conduct of two of his men."

Twenty minutes later, after bounding and jouncing down the trail to Marine headquarters, the jeep pulled up in front of General Smith's headquarters tent.

Magurth got out, gave a last, lingering look at the jeep and said, "The bozo who said a soldier travels on his stomach was nuts. He travels on his—"

Deal jerked his arm.

"Come on, the lieutenant's waiting."

As they approached the general's tent, Magurth jabbed Deal warningly in the ribs.

"Keep your lip buttoned about them papers I tore up. Just act natural—dumb."

General "Buzzer" Smith listened stonily to the report from the young Army lieutenant. Then he swept Deal and Magurth with a cold eye.

"These are the two who did it, Lieutenant?"

"Yes, General. And Major Crampton says—"

"Thank you, Lieutenant," said General Smith, courteously but crisply. "I have Major Crampton's opinion in writing. You are at liberty to return to your post."

After the lieutenant had left, the general leaned back and rested his elbows on the arms of his folding camp-chair.

"In the twenty-one years and sixteen days I've served with the Corps, you two are the sloppiest, filthiest pair of marines I've ever had the misfortune to look at. Magurth, is that the way a marine keeps his rifle—smeared with corruption from buttplate to muzzle until it looks more like a glue paddle than a military weapon?"

"Sir, Magurth's been working"—Private Deal

Deal lunged at the Jap, his rifle in bayonet-fighting position — then he realized he had no bayonet.

swallowed with difficulty, then blurted out—"overtime, sir."

"What's that? *Overtime?*" blared the general. "Young man, where did you get the idea there is any overtime to being a marine?"

The strained expression on General "Buzzer" Smith's leathery countenance could have been either that of an angry martinet or a man about to suffocate trying to suppress a roaring laugh.

MAGURTH'S fingers fumbled tentatively around the hilt of the gold-mounted samurai sword in his belt. The general's eyes snapped down on it and regarded it steadily.

Magurth cleared his throat. "Maybe the General—"

"Now it's bribery, eh?" said the general. "None of that, Magurth. H'mmm, let me see it. . . Beautiful. Beautiful." He handed it back. "Now get out. . . And, Magurth, don't let anybody get that thing away from you for less than a hundred, or for—well, for you-know-what's-worth-a-hundred-dollars-around-here."

After they had gone, General "Buzzer" Smith called in his aide.

"Mallon, I've just interviewed two *marines*. The Army seems to have a little more charitable standard of excellence than I do. However, out of courtesy to another branch of the service, we'll waive our opinion. Send Major Crampton's comments on Deal and Magurth to the Commandant. . . But first send an orderly in here to clean up the filth that dropped off of them."

Magurth and Deal trudged up-wind—following their noses toward the galley tent. Magurth parted the fly-netting and peered in.

"How's chances, cooksom?"

Sergeant Keegan, seated at his private folding table, and enjoying the privilege of a late-comer's meal, looked up sternly over his coffee cup.

"Late for action, late coming out of it. Or did you two stay for the second show?"

"We was holding council of war with the Buzzer," said Magurth. "And we ain't et for—"

"Since day before yesterday," said Deal.

"The hell you rumble," growled Sergeant Keegan, banging his cup on the table. "Mess cooks, front and center! Chow up these two. . . Cripes, but you two are scummy. Why'n'ell didn't you shift before seeing the Old Man?"

"This is all we got," explained Private Deal.

Sergeant Keegan sniffed suspiciously.

"*Now* I'm wising up. How come you brang no duffle bags with you?"

"We got fast orders, leaving the base hospital," explained Magurth.

"Say, where's your travel orders?" demanded Sergeant Keegan, squinting hard.

"Lost 'em in battle," replied Magurth between gulps of wet hash.

The sergeant was about to accept that when he caught sight of Private Deal's hand dropping stealthily from his shirt pocket.

"O.K., Deal. Fork over."

Private Deal reluctantly produced a limp and crumpled piece of paper.

"Yeah, travel orders," said Sergeant Keegan, in the tone of a diamond expert appraising a piece of worthless beer-bottle bottom. "This is a twelve-hour pass—permission for Privates Deal and Magurth to be absent from the convalescent ward of Base Hospital Three-nine, until ten P.M."

Magurth waved off the indictment carelessly.

"That's somethin' else. . . Cooksom, how's chances for seconds on the slum?"

"Dated the thirteenth," mused Sergeant Keegan, unimpressed. "This is the seventeenth. A gunnery sergeant from the *Hula Girl* was just in here, with some scuttlebutt about two stowaways they caught hiding in the cabin of the captain's gig. And something else about them two mugs slapping the wind outta a coxs'n."

"Air raid. Stumbled on him diving for a slit trench," said Magurth. "Was he hurt any?"

"No, not *hurt*. Not hurt," said Sergeant Keegan. "But he's in the brig on B and W for bringing back a receipt for two prisoners signed 'Buzzer—B-U-Z-Z-E-R—Smith'!"

At this point in the proceedings, Private Deal lost all interest. He dropped his head on the table and began to snore.

"Cooksom, how about another seconds on that slum?" Magurth inquired.

"Magurth!" snapped Sergeant Keegan. "Pick up the kid and carry him down to my tent. Then draw a pick and shovel and sweat out a slit trench for him." He watched Magurth pick up Deal in his huge gorilla arms and stalk out. Then he added, "And if anything happens to the best damn sniper in my platoon, you'll wind up in the crummiest brig I can find."

Next morning, however, Private Deal was fully recovered. He wolfed a hearty breakfast, elbow to elbow with Magurth who maintained a chilly aloofness. They were both dressed in painfully new GI, supplied by the quartermaster sergeant at Sergeant Keegan's admonition: "The Old Man's sent for them. They gotta look like marines this time."

And thus Privates Magurth and Deal faced General Smith for the second time in less than twenty-four hours.

"H'MMM," said the general, sweeping them with his gimlet eye. "I've seen better, and I've seen worse." Slowly, he drew a carbon copy of some document from a pile of papers on his desk. "Magurth, I'm trying to locate a man on this island who signs himself 'Buzzer Smith.' Any acquaintance of yours, by chance?"

"Know'm well, sir," said Magurth. "Toughest, meanest, fightin'est marine—"

"That will do, Magurth," said the general, then turned and made choking noises in his throat before he could face them again. "Deal!"

"Aye, aye, sir!"

"Deal," inquired the general, "do you mean to tell me that you two marines actually sneaked past an entire ship's company of a ship of the United States Navy, in time of war, and spent three days on the plush cushions of the captain's gig?"

"Yes, sir," admitted Deal. "That is, up to the time we got caught."

"You mean you were caught sneaking out to glaum chow from the galley?"

"No, sir. We got caught when her coxs'n came to rig her to go over the side. About four hours before the *Hula Girl* dropped her hook, out there."

The general rubbed his chin, then walked over to an arms chest and took out a star-gauged Springfield rifle, upon which was mounted a telescope.

"Deal, I understand from Sergeant Keegan that you're pretty good at knocking Jap snipers out of trees." The general slid his hand almost caressingly along the beautifully figured walnut stock. "I won the Wimbledon match with this one year, Deal. I'm giving it to you to use until we run out of targets on this island. Take good care of it, son."

The general then turned on Magurth.

"I'd like the privilege of buying a drink for the best, toughest, lyingest bayonet-fighting man in the business, Magurth. But I'll have to ask you to take a rain-check. I'm clean out of the stuff."

"Maybe we can fix that, sir," said Magurth, diving deep down his trouser leg and coming up with a flat bottle. "It's safe, sir. I glaumed it out of the base hospital pharmacy."

"Magurth," said the general, "I've been watching that bulge in your sock for nearly two days. If you hadn't kicked in— Well, here's more mud in your eye, marine!"

Deep in the Fresno's plotting room they calculated swiftly. "Contact, sir," said Hervey. "Radar bearing two-five-two."

OH, SUSANNA!

By JACLAND MARMUR

ILLUSTRATED BY GORDON GRANT

COMMANDER SCOTT EVANS, fire control officer of the *Fresno*, had a keen sense for the judgment of men. That's why Lieutenant Braddock held spotting station number three on the cruiser's battle bill. The commander recognized at once that Charlie had what is known as stereoscopic vision. He could see in three dimensions, and Scotty could think of nothing more important to the excellent gunnery of his ship. But the commander really muffed it wide. The most important thing about Lieutenant Braddock wasn't his eyes at all; it was the fact that he had never asked Susanna to be his wife.

Charlie never forgot that fact. He was remembering it as the leading *Fresno* passed Langdale Point in darkness, hunting a Japanese task force into the bottleneck of Kula Gulf.

They spoke the *Fresno's* eight-inch rifles from this armored place where Charlie was, and at a time like that each man prepared as best he could his quiet inner core for battle. Tony, sightsetter on the main director, did it by slyly nibbling chocolate drops; Hervey, Jay circuit talker, kept humming a bawdy tune; and Ensign Gay was murmuring about that uncompensated trunion tilt the *USS Bandon*, next in the column astern, still held on turret number three. Scotty Evans himself was smiling drolly, neither alarmed by their youth nor dismayed by their careless attitudes. And Charlie Braddock remembered Susanna, the girl he had not asked to marry him.

Last time he saw her, she was heavy with his child. A girl looks wonderful, Charlie thought, carrying her man's young like the proud token of immortality. Especially Susanna, the deep mystery in her shining eyes, laughter gurgling in her throat. The kid was nearly a year old now. He had the fuzziest, reddest hair, Susanna wrote; just like his Dad's. She was going to teach him to say, "Oh, Susanna," pretty soon—just like his tongue-tied Dad.

Charlie grinned with memory. Because that's all Charlie Braddock said the night that moonlight gilded 'Frisco bay and Susanna's soft brown hair.

"Oh, Susanna," he had said, with a girl like that in his arms waiting to hear the rest. Just "O, Susanna!"

So her laughter had tinkled, and she had lifted her warm red mouth. "I'm terribly crazy about you, Charlie. I'll tell you what," she'd said suddenly, "let's you and me get married, right away."

And Charlie had looked at her, swallowed the lump in his throat, and only mumbled, "Oh, Susanna!" once again. But she had asked him, after a while, if he hadn't really known all along she belonged to him. Charlie had said, yes, he was pretty sure, but he just couldn't talk when he looked at her. And then Susanna had frowned.

"You must never do that again," she had said, the serious little pucker sharp between her brows. "When you're sure of the truth, you must speak it. You must, Charlie! You are tempting our fate too much if you don't speak out."

That's what Lieutenant Braddock was quietly remembering in the moments before fierce gunfire flamed in Kula Gulf between the dark New Georgia coast and the jungles of Kulambangra over across the way. Till Hervey heard something in the earpieces of his phones that ended his humming abruptly.

"CONTACT, sir!" he said. "Radar bearing two-five-two. Range one-three-five-double-oh. Illumination batteries stand-by. . . . Bearing two-four-nine. Range one—"

Tony popped the last chocolate drop in his mouth, forgot it and swallowed it whole. That place where the blue night battle lamps glowed eerily was soundless now. Commander Evans looked at them quickly, a sharp appraisal out of piercing eyes. Then Scotty smiled. He was satisfied. Deep in the *Fresno's* plotting room they calculated swiftly. A moment later, Ensign Gay had the meaning.

"Target speed one-three, course one-five-six," he drawled. "Target angle two-four-four."

Tony's big, thick-fingered hands played the main director dials to that voice. "Set!" he cried, almost at once.

"Hit first. Hit hard. Remember that!" Scotty's voice was quiet, passing fire distribution orders. "We take the leading target. Double concentration. *Fresno* and *Bandon*."

"Range one-two-two-double-oh. Scale five one."

"Slew 'em, Jack!" Scotty Evans snapped.

Charlie was peering at outer darkness now. He knew the *Fresno's* triple eight-inch rifles, following the repeaters in each turret, were muzzling the blackness held to proper train and elevation by instruments calculating constantly the relative movement and position of the enemy and this ship. Initial ballistics were applied, compensating for powder temperature, cold guns, wind force in the trajectory, time of shell-flight, and the rifling drift. Still there were errors to correct when men could see how the shellfire dropped. Hit first. Hit hard. The Jap had calculators, too; he also hurled exploding steel. Then the star-shell batteries exploded and weird, distant lamps that burst aloft came drifting downward with strange leisure. A fragment of the Kula Gulf took on fantastic incandescence. There they were! Huge shapes of the enemy, black in a hole of light, a massive heavy cruiser in the lead. *Fresno's* target and *Bandon's*—there she was. And Charlie marveled at the stillness of the voice he heard.

"Ready," it said, and the firing circuits closed. When the *Fresno's* gentle roll brought the pointer's crosswires on, her guns would speak. "Next astern has fired, sir."

Almost in the same instant his own salvo buzzer sounded. Charlie felt the jar, saw through the blind-screen of his telescope the near darkness flayed by dreadful flame-spears. He kept his vision taut on the Jap cruiser's silhouette while that first salvo hurtled through the air. And visual ranges kept pouring to the plotting room, fresh shell and powder passed, the guns reloaded. Nothing ceased in

(Continued on page 145)

HALF A

The blast of water swept the first mate away from the door and sluiced him down the passage. Strom charged into the storeroom.

AT THE rail Dan Mulqueen was standing by. His leathery fist clasped a cord from which dangled a striking-hammer. His eyes, squinted against the California sun, watched the goings-on of sailing day with an old-timer's tolerance.

Mr. Kingsley, the young mate, was being lowered over the side in a boatswain's chair. The mate wanted to inspect the repair made where a tank, swinging down onto a lighter, had nudged her rusty plates.

Of course, the marine super and some competent-looking shore guys in uniform had passed the job. But a young fellow, just promoted to chief mate, would want to show the world, the Old Man, and his crew what a crackerjack he was.

"Hold it!" Kingsley yelled and thick-bodied old John Strom took another turn on the line suspending the chair. The mate fended off with his feet and looked at the repair. Mulqueen got set to lower the hammer if Kingsley wanted it to test the plates.

Ball, the second mate, tapped Mulqueen's shoulder. Above the racket of the winches he started, "I want a splice—"

"Strom!" Kingsley yelled, very tough. "Lower away on the run!"

"On the run, sir!" Strom shouted down. Before Mulqueen could move Strom slacked the chair line.

Mulqueen jerked his head out over the side. The mate was shooting down. He smacked the water end on and went under with a bubbling yell. Mr. Ball laughed happily.

"He must ha' meant me, not you, John," Mul-

JACKASS

By RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS

ILLUSTRATED BY CHARLES DYE

queen told Strom and threw a hitch on the hammer line. "Let's hoist away easy."

Kingsley came up shouting and dripping. His dignity was on the bottom. Strom, pop-eyed, hauled him up with Mulqueen and a couple more tailing onto the line. Lightermen, stevies, gun crews, deck gang, everybody, watched Kingsley bat the water out of his new watch cap. Even Captain Locke paused in the high wing of the bridge.

MacGlashan, the chief engineer, who'd had words with the new mate about the anchor

windlass, looked grave. He knocked his cold pipe against the rail like a gavel as Kingsley's snapping black eyes came level.

"'Tis an unmanning thing," the chief engineer said to Mr. Ball, the second mate, "to go to sea with a young first officer who thinks he's a doughnut and therefore entitled to be dunked."

He shook his head at Mr. Kingsley. "That may look like coffee overside, Mr. Mate, but the truth of it is, it's seawater."

For the sake of unhappy John Strom, Mulqueen sucked in his gaunt cheeks and clamped his jaws on them to keep from laughing. He edged closer to his friend to give him a feeling of support.

OLD Strom was frozen as Kingsley bore down on him, swinging his wet shoulders, knotting his fists and signaling dirty weather with his coal-black eyes.

"Is *your* name Strom?" the mate asked, mighty vengefully.

"Yes, sir," said Strom slowly.

Kingsley's narrow jaw let go three inches in surprise.

"You heard me!" he said. "Is your name Strom?"

"Yes, sir," Strom said.

Pop Gormley, the old cookie, stuck his nut into it.

"The ship's jinxed!" he said. "Not tin minutes past I mixed 'em, too, sir." He pointed at Strom. "This wan, Mulqueen, ain't Mulqueen." He pointed at Mulqueen. "There's the other—that ain't the man he is. In fact—" He paused with a hand in his towseled hair, perplexed, bogged down.

The mate didn't take his hot eye off the square-bodied man who had dunked him.

"When you joined her this morning you were carrying a seabag marked 'Mulqueen,'" he snapped at Strom.

"Yes sir," said Strom. "I was carrying my mate's bag." He raised a thick arm. "Dan Mulqueen, there, was carrying my bag."

"What's that monkey business for?" Kingsley roared.

"It is not monkey business, sir," said Strom in his slow, respectful way. "The bag of a shipmate is never as heavy as a man's own bag. Mulqueen and I sign on together. We carry each other's bags aboard, sir, and always bear each other a hand."

The second mate was at Kingsley's shoulder, speaking softly.

"—back to sea for the duration. An' they're going farming together afterward. Twins, sort of."

"Keep out of my ear!" Kingsley said to him. "Twins? You mean, two halves of a jackass. Well, I'm the man to ride 'em apart!"

He saw the Old Man looking down. "You, Gormley, get back in your galley! Strom, unship that chair! And you"—he scowled at Dan Mulqueen, who was still blank-faced by the strength of his teeth—"what d'ye think you're doing? Take in that hammer!"

He shouldered through the mob, stiff as a dog set to bite, and made for the bridge deck to break out dry clothes.

Strom shook his head. "He will ride us, Dan," he said.

Mulqueen's stomach was working like a concertina.

"Just a young lad who's been promoted too fast the way they're turning out the ships," he said. "He won't bother ye."

Cheerily he poked his partner in the chest. "You can be the forra'd end o' the jackass, John. I'll be the unfashionable end. It's the one that carries the kick."

Strom didn't laugh. "That mate's lost face," he said. "He thinks we're foc'sle comedians out to make fun of him."

He wasn't right. When Mr. Kingsley came back on deck he called Dan Mulqueen over to him. He smiled at Dan. Smiled!

"This ship doesn't carry the rating of bosun, Mulqueen," he said. "But I need one to work this bunch of dock-scourings. You're a likely man. No pay boost, but you'll mess with the petty officers and have a room of your own alongside the carpenter's."

Mulqueen's chest swelled but he opened his mouth to refuse.

Kingsley's smile shifted to a frown. "It's for the good of the ship," he said sharply. He pointed forward. "Stand over 'em as they stow that special cargo. The major's been on my neck about how valuable it is—instruments, detectors, maybe radar stuff. The Army needs it badly in the Islands. I'm putting it in the storeroom space under the lower bridge."

With a queer grin he hustled away to look after the cases of shells they were lowering into Number Two 'tweendecks.

When Mulqueen haltingly told of his promotion, Strom grinned.

"Maybe I was wrong about that mate," he said happily.

"The young fellow knows he needs a strong hand to back him," Mulqueen said, jamming his cap on his head. "Well, he didn't choose so badly."

Strom glanced up quickly at the taller man.

Mulqueen touched his shoulder. "It's got nothing to do with the price of eggs when we get our farm running, John," he said. "I told ye how I would have come through with that Indian River orange grove if I'd just had more patience an' stick-it like you. Together we can't miss, John."

Strom's broad face beamed at him.

"I'll chase ye around with the rest of 'em," Mulqueen said. "But it's for the good o' the ship only."

He whacked Strom's brawny back. "Haul your freight aft an' give the carp a hand at securing Five. We've a convoy to catch an' no hatches on yet."

Strom moved at once. Mulqueen threw a hard eye on the stevies stowing the scientific stuff in the midship storeroom.

AFTER the way of ships the *Estelle Hallock* got her deck cargo of tanks and planes wired down and steamed out past the gate vessels. She found her place in the convoy, third row, sixth ship.

Together, grinning reminiscently, the two of them counted the escort vessels with appreciation; they had been to Murmansk with fewer and smaller naval craft and devil a blimp or plane.

The sun went down. The ship slogged over a long swell with no wind behind it, through a star-spotted night and a black sea. Long tropic Pacific reaches were ahead, where pay now mounted up faster than troubles. At least, it should.

Bosun Dan Mulqueen drove hard to get the work done on hull and cargo gear, though all the extra lookout tricks kept the men on the trot. Mr. Kingsley put a lot in his bosun's lap.

Was Strom getting sore? Once the squarehead had looked a bit queer when Mulqueen had bawled an order to him. No favorites—not in a ship at sea in wartime. You had to tie to that.

"Kingsley was no fool, for all he's so young, when he picked me for his right hand," Dan Mulqueen told himself, nodding.

One night Mulqueen came into the seamen's mess and got back to routine with Strom. The men off watch stared as Mulqueen unfolded the neat plan of the farm. True, the two had only an option on this chunk of Everglades muckland. But the minute the Germans yelled "*Kamerad!*" again and the Japs said "Uncle!" they'd close the deal.

Mulqueen planted a horny thumb on the paper. "To blazes with all these eggplants, John. I tell you, three acres more o' snap beans—"

"Eggplant—"

They were off. The kibitzers soon tired of listening to Strom's hard fight for eggplants. He'd worked on a California farm, Strom had, meaning to buy a little place. But he didn't know Florida snap beans or Florida muckland.

Mulqueen had practically won when he yawned, picked up his cap and left for the grandeur of a room of his own.

The *Estelle*, a fairly happy ship, trundled her cargo out toward the Islands. She kept station, unwavering, among the ships—black ships by night, gray ships by day—steaming east-

"Twins?" snarled Kingsley. "You mean, two halves of a jackass!"

southeast. Captain Locke stayed invisible, as an Old Man should. The Navy gunners stood to their guns and kicked about their boy-sized quarters in the poop. The second and third mates, rubbed a bit raw by Mr. Kingsley's kid-style airs, did some growling.

It was years since Dan Mulqueen had had a bosun's job. It made him feel younger, more useful, and he tried to please.

"That chunky fellow—is his name Strom?—is soldiering on the job, bosun," Mr. Kingsley said one forenoon watch when a gang was chipping down the main-deck waterways.

"Strom, sir?" Mulqueen said. The mate seemed hardly to remember Strom. "He's slow, sir, but he's thorough. A good man."

"If he's slow he isn't doing his share. Stir him up!"

Mulqueen went down to the gang. "Move that chipping hammer!" he said to Strom. "Pick it up an' put it down."

Strom's sweaty face grinned at him. Strom chipped faster at the rust. Kingsley was still watching.

Of course a great voyage chief mate would pick holes in his men. Mulqueen saw how it was. Some of them were no bargains.

The day before the *Estelle* and these other ships were to split off from the convoy for the Islands, Mulqueen and Strom were leaning against a tank on the well deck. Mulqueen maintained they'd need a farm tractor. Abruptly Strom stopped talking. His bleached blue eyes hung uneasily on Mulqueen's face.

"Look, Dan," he said, "Kingsley said he would ride us into two pieces. Is he doing it—through you?"

"What d'ye mean?" Dan Mulqueen demanded.

"Did Kingsley tell you he might ask the Old Man to make you acting fourth mate on the run home? Dan, if he's playing us for suckers I'd be happy that you—"

Dan Mulqueen felt his face burning. "I never thought to see this day," he said. "The heat's got you."

He swung up the port ladder.

"Dan!" Strom called. "I did not—"

THAT night, though Mulqueen was due on watch at four A. M. he couldn't get to sleep. By the main deck rail he stumbled into Pop Gormley. In the quiet darkness he could hear the old cookie sucking on his unlit pipe.

"Pop," Mulqueen said, "am I one that would ride a mate to make a hit with an officer—for any reason?"

"Ye'll be knowing better than me," Pop said slowly.

"Any man likes a bit of authority," Mulqueen said. "But would I break up a chance—an' it's my last—to get a farm with a steady partner beside me, just to be bossy?"

"How much do ye want the farm?"

Mulqueen laughed harshly. "How much do I want to miss chucking my money into waterfront gutters after the war? An' then go racing younger men for any berth on a ship—with my hair dyed black, fooling nobody? Don't I know how hard pavements get under an old seaman's feet?"

He smacked his hands together. "Am I that dumb?" he asked.

Pop moved a step closer to him. "One man thinks he's more the king of Ireland than the next," Pop said. "The truth of it is, man, Ireland's a republic."

He drifted away. Mulqueen scowled at the black sea.

It was still black, hours later, when Mulqueen heard the whistle signal from the commodore's ship ordering the splitting away of the island ships. He groped forward toward the foot of the bridge ladder. His hand found a stanchion. He stopped. Underfoot the ship heeled slowly as she swung to starboard. Leaving most of the convoy was like dropping the land under on sailing day.

Of a sudden he missed something. There should be a lookout's head showing, a dark blue, above the starboard rail of the lower bridge. The Old Man himself had ordered lookouts posted down there where the activity on the navigating bridge could not draw away their eyes. Mulqueen stared. No lookout!

"What the blazes!" he muttered. His keen old eyes turned mistrustfully to starboard. He swept the black sea through which they would cut on their new course. Suddenly his gaze slid past something; then leaped back. His eyes fucused. A slanting, narrow thing, like a pole.

They were swinging toward that ghostly thing!

Mulqueen's throat let go a roar to the bridge.

"Wreckage on the starboard bow! Starboard bow! Ye're turning into it! Hold her!"

On the heels of his voice the Old Man's voice cut at the helmsman. Slowly, dead slowly, the ship began to straighten out.

Mulqueen was leaping a step forward. By the head of the ladder down to the well deck he blundered into a man rising to his feet. Mulqueen grabbed him and shook him. The man resisted. Mulqueen let go a vengeful right fist at the fellow.

"You dirty rat, sleepin' on lookout!" he rasped.

The man did not answer. Maybe Mulqueen's blind blow landing on his windpipe had something to do with that.

From above came the Old Man's voice. "Steady! Hold her there!"

"We've cleared it, sir," Mr. Kingsley said.

His head and shoulders blotted out the stars at the head of the bridge ladder as he peered down at Mulqueen.

"Asleep, was he?" Mr. Kingsley said. "Bring him up!"

"Up, you rat!" Mulqueen ordered the man in his hands.

The man obeyed. And from a tortured throat he spoke.

"I did not sleep. I dropped flat—to see better."

It was John Strom's voice.

Mulqueen's heart turned over. Strom! He dropped his hand from the man's neck! And he was speaking the truth. A man without his own cat's eyes might have thrown himself down, trying to convince himself he saw a vague thing by lining it against the horizon.

Mulqueen opened his mouth to try to explain to the mate. Before he could say a word the whole ship shuddered under him.

He had felt a ship shake like that before. She was scraping over something down under her.

The Old Man rang down the engines. Mulqueen waited. Strom stood rigid beside him. Kingsley, frozen, loomed at the head of the ladder. The engines died. Then you could hear as well as feel that rasping deep under her.

Abruptly the scraping passed.

"She won't answer, sir!" the helmsman yelped. "Won't answer the wheel!"

"I'll handle you later," Kingsley snapped at them. "Hanson! Take over that lookout."

He disappeared.

Strom moved. Mulqueen caught at him. "John, man—"

"We're through," Strom said. His voice was

shaking. "Get your own farm. You'd sell out a mate—to be an officer."

He jerked his arm from Mulqueen's sweating hand and faded out in the blackness.

"Mulqueen!" the mate hailed.

"Yes, sir," said Mulqueen and thudded heavily up to the bridge. Close alongside her dark shapes, the other ships, slid past. The war had to go on. The *Estelle* lay still and helpless.

WHEN the sky lightened at dawn they saw what she had blundered into. A weed-covered derelict was floating level with the sea. One stump of a mast remained. Mulqueen reckoned it the wooden hull of some off-shore fishing craft—Japanese, most likely. Enough black devil had been left in its waterlogged bulk to set the *Estelle Hallock* forlornly adrift on a hostile sea.

By Mr. MacGlashan's reckoning, her bent propeller blades might move her at a crawl without throwing the tailshaft out of its bearings or the engine off its bedplates. But her rudder was gone. Finished. The *Estelle* rolled beam on to the long swell.

Dan Mulqueen knew how the ship felt. In John Strom he had lost a rudder, too. Strom's anger was red, glowing rage, a wrath that might never burn out. Without him, stubborn squarehead Dan couldn't hold a course.

Mulqueen had a look around the horizon. The *Estelle* was alone on deep blue water. There had not been enough escort craft to risk detaching one to stand by even for a freighter with special cargo. Weak sisters didn't get their hands held in this war.

The men of the gun crews were livelier than ever today. There'd be strained necks below decks by nighttime. The Japs, made nastier by unending defeats, lurked in islands now nearby.

The Old Man showed himself on the bridge. Aft on the poop men of the blackgang and men of the deck were working together. Like brothers. Kingsley was everywhere. Mulqueen was busy, too.

"The first thing is to get us off this sea," Mulqueen told himself. "After that'll be time to get us onto a farm."

The main trick was a rudder. The Old Man, in counsel with MacGlashan and Kingsley, solved that one before the day was gone. MacGlashan's engineers bolted a long piece of sheet steel to the keelson of a lifeboat to give her more of a grip on the water, an oversize keel.

During the work Mulqueen had a look at the sky, split into equal halves by the flaming sun, and another look at the sea, a white-flecked blue expanse. No Japs.

They launched the lifeboat and floated it around to the stern. It towed on a heavy line behind the ravaged rudder post. They ran a lighter line from the stern of the lifeboat through a chock on the port quarter of the ship to the barrel of a cargo winch. Another line followed the same course through a chock on the starboard quarter.

The *Estelle* limped into shaky motion. The winch took a strain on the starboard line. The towed lifeboat, turning like a rudder, threw the ship's head to starboard. It was clumsy, but it worked—in smooth water. Meanwhile the gang on the poop labored on a better sort of jury rudder.

Dan Mulqueen sought out John Strom.

"I told the mate, the moment I had a minute, that ye were simply flat down to get a better look against the sky—"

"Did he believe you the moment you had a minute?"

Mulqueen hesitated.

Strom shook his head. His eyes were hard.

"Don't bother to lie," he said. "Right along you've been picking on all hands to raise yourself with that mate."

"John—"

Strom jerked a thick arm toward the bridge. "They can log me or fire me for sleeping on lookout. That'll be better than going farming with you."

"You thick squarehead!" Dan Mulqueen flared. His fists knotted up. "You don't know the difference between sucking up to the mate an' doing your duty by your ship. To blazes with you!"

"To blazes with me, *Mister* Mulqueen," Strom said in the steady voice he used for repeating orders. He walked away.

Mulqueen knew well the stubbornness of John Strom.

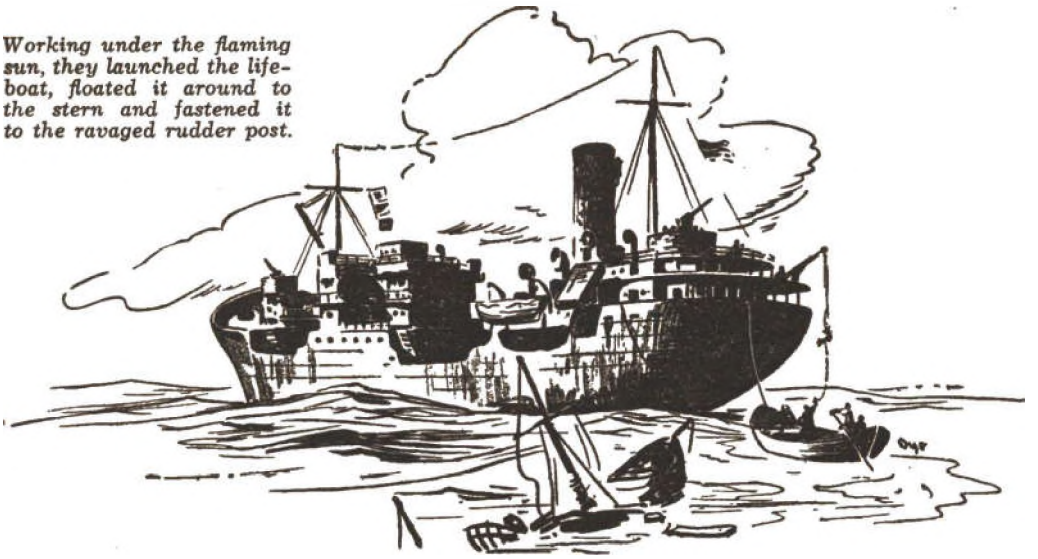
"Ye can't lose a war for a farm," Mulqueen told himself.

In the next three days the crippled *Estelle* crept on over the sea. Captain Locke doubled his lookouts. Sparks slept in his chair. The men of the gun crews lived at their stations. Mr. MacGlashan never let as much smoke as a cigarette puff escape up the stack. The engineers could get no more than four knots out of that bent screw. The tailshaft was hammering and thudding at her vitals under strain. The first rudder they built of sheet metal failed. The *Estelle* still towed her lifeboat rudder.

"Watch!" Mulqueen told a bunch in the messroom. "If your eyes fall out, stick 'em in again fast."

War was swirling furiously around those islands down under the western rim of the sea.

ABRUPTLY, in the forenoon watch, they heard a plane skimming above the bulging bellies of the white clouds. The thing circled the *Estelle* distantly. It rumbled away to the westward again. That was all.



Working under the flaming sun, they launched the lifeboat, floated it around to the stern and fastened it to the ravaged rudder post.

Sparks fussed with his key. Captain Locke, motionless on the bridge, gave him no job. Itching trigger fingers of gunners went unrelieved. So did the curiosity of the crew.

The Old Man changed course.

"It proves one thing, man," Mulqueen said most casually to John Strom on lookout forward. "We're getting in close."

"Good!" said Strom. "I have written a letter telling them I give up my share of that option on the land. I want to make port so I can airmail the letter."

"Look, John—"

"I am looking—sir," Strom said and shut his mouth and his ears.

"Mulqueen!" Mr. Kingsley hailed from the bridge. "Tell that man to keep a good lookout!"

"Aye, sir," bawled Mulqueen.

"Tell me, officer's pet!" said Strom through his teeth.

Mulqueen swung away lest he should swing his fists. The squarehead was certain he had sold out for promotion. He went aft to lend a hand on the rudder job. They were closing the island roadstead that was their port. But he knew a gale of wind would raise hell with that makeshift lifeboat rudder. And there was coral ahead.

The squarehead was right if by some devil's will he *was* currying favor with the mate.

"I'm not!" he said aloud.

"I know bloody well ye're not!" said the third engineer bitterly. "Get a grip there and lift!"

But Mulqueen never lifted. He stood stock still, listening. At the same time a voice forward hailed the bridge. The *Estelle's* whistle blared. Battle stations!

Motors rumbling in the sky—a bunch of them! He listened tautly. The increasing roar of motors full out, diving. That fast it came out of the puffy white vapor overhead.

A plane blasted through a cloud off the starboard bow—a single-motored fighter, pulling out of a dive. It climbed.

"American!" shouted Mulqueen. "I saw it on his wing!"

All hands relaxed. They were found. They'd maybe get cover all the way into port.

Other planes up there above the clouds were still making a terrible racket. It got worse fast.

A screaming meteor ripped aside the vapor off on the starboard beam. It came tearing at them. It was a Jap, two motored, with a bead on the *Estelle*. Guns blazed red along the forward edge of the Jap's wing.

Mulqueen dived to the plates. The deck leaped up to jar the wind out of him. The ship was surging high, kicked out of the sea. The blast of a bomb had crashed in his ears. Water cascaded over him. Close! The deck was drumming under shell fragments and cannon fire. The fifties on the bridge had opened up.

He lifted his head. His ears told him that the bomber's fire had cut across her about amidships. He thought of John Strom. Please God, the squarehead hadn't got it!

Swiftly his mind went whirring on. He knew suddenly that he *had* been too bossy. He had thrown his weight about with John. It hadn't all been for the ship. Some of it *had* been to feed Dan Mulqueen's conceit. The thought stabbed.

Had that blasted, grudge-gripping young lubber, the mate, made a dime dictator out of him for his own silly reason? Had he made

two pieces out of them? He wasn't sure. Maybe the blame was Dan Mulqueen's—the King of Ireland guy.

It was too late now. The squarehead would never take an apology. Dead or alive, he wouldn't be smoothed.

Heavily Dan turned his body to the port side and saw the Jap bomber, far off, starting to rise steeply from almost wave level. Closer racket, and a fighter—American—blasted over the ship after the bomber. The *Estelle's* guns quit chattering to avoid hitting it. The two planes, zooming, went shooting on. A second fighter came screaming down in pursuit.

"I wouldn't sell them Japs insurance," Mulqueen said. He listened. Racket still, but no longer nearby. He stood up and looked forward. The starboard lifeboat was splinters in its davits.

The *Estelle's* whistle let go a series of blasts. Fire stations! Fire? Mulqueen ran. He hoped it wasn't in Number Two, where the shells were.

Smoke was twisting up from the pierced steel midship house. The damage was just aft of the bridge, in line with the lifeboat above. The bomber's cannon, or maybe a chunk of bomb, had cut into the ship. He remembered that thereabouts on the main deck was that special cargo, the instruments and stuff the major had been so fussy about.

Suddenly another Jap bomber, weaving and banking, screamed into sight. A fighter broke through close behind. The two planes ringed the ship. A second fighter dove into action.

Kingsley, red-faced, shouting, was down in the working alleyway near the smoke, marshaling a gang. He was waving his hands. His cap was over one ear. His eyes darted up, as if trying to see through steel the planes making that appalling racket.

"Come on with that hose, you!" he cried. "Water! Give us water! Pass the word!"

Thoughts of the cased hell in Number Two kept him prancing. With relief Mulqueen caught sight of John Strom. Men had already unreeled one hoseline and there was Strom waiting for orders calmly, nozzle in hand. Even now, he wouldn't look at Mulqueen.

DAN tore down a fire-extinguisher and lugged it with him toward the fire. Smoke and the smell of burning rubber assailed his nose. But he heard no crackle of flames. Maybe he couldn't hear it with that battle merry-go-rounding over his head.

He stared down the passage at the door forward that led into the storeroom. By the looks of things, the fire would be there, in among the major's pet shipment. Too bad! He took a step that way.

Water suddenly stiffened the hose in Strom's hands. He staggered under the kick and turned the gushing nozzle to the steel deck. He repulsed Mulqueen's move to help him. He glanced at the excited Mr. Kingsley.

Mulqueen put a hand to the chest of a shouting man shouldering in with a fire-axe and pushed him back.

"Have ye a key to this door, sir?" he called to the mate.

"The key!" said Kingsley. "Gangway, there!"

He groped in his pocket, dragged out his bunch of keys and unlocked the steel door.

He opened it. Bad smelling smoke bellowed out. No gush of flame struck them; no heat. Kingsley slammed the door shut.

Mulqueen gripped the extinguisher. "Let me at it, sir!"

"Come here with that hose!" Kingsley roared. "Strom! Here, man! Lively!"

"It's only a bit of a fire, sir," Mulqueen said. "We can save the cargo. Leave me give it a touch o' this extinguisher."

The mate didn't seem to hear.

Strom, with the spouting nozzle down, struggled along the passage. He looked at the mate.

"Flood it when I open the door!" Kingsley cried. "Give it the works! We've got to keep the fire away from Number Two."

"Ah!" said Mulqueen in disgust. "The special cargo, sir!"

He set down the extinguisher as Strom shouldered past him with the gushing hose.

"Pour it on, Strom!" Kingsley cried. He flung open the door. "Now!"

As suddenly as the door clanged open Dan Mulqueen realized what he must do.

Mulqueen wrenched the hose from Strom's strong grip. He jerked up the nozzle and pointed it full at the mate's chest. The blast of water swept Mr. Kingsley away from the open door like a paper man. Mulqueen sluiced him on down the passage.

"Strom!" he said. "Get in there with that extinguisher. Put out that bit o' fire. Quick!"

Kingsley was down on the deck at the end of the passageway scrambling and falling under the impact of the stream. Watery sounds of protests came from him as on the first day of that voyage.

Automatically Strom picked up the extinguisher. Then he stopped, shocked, at the sight of the mate. Kingsley could as well swim up a waterfall as advance against that stream. Strom's eyes popped at Dan Mulqueen.

"In, John!" Mulqueen said.

Strom shook himself. He charged into the storeroom with the extinguisher at the ready.

Above the rush of water out of the hose a terrific crash sounded near the ship. Part of the roaring racket above her ceased instantly. Men out on deck cheered their lungs out. That could only mean the Jap bomber had hit the sea.

Dan, still standing off the mate, glanced in at

(Continued on page 141)

ILLUSTRATED BY CHARLES DYE

JEZEBEL

By FAIRFAX

THE STORY THUS FAR:

JEZEBEL is no ordinary jeep. She leaps off the assembly line, eager for the fray, and when she reaches the training camp, MOTOR SERGEANT TERENCE MURPHY, veteran of the last war, picks her out of the whole shipment for CAPTAIN SANDS. He assigns PRIVATE JONATHON JOHANSEN to drive her, and Johnny christens her Dorothea at first, after the girl he left behind him. Then comes the letter from the original DOROTHEA, saying that her heart belongs to another—and a corporal of Marines, at that! Disgusted with the fair sex, Johnny re-christens his beloved jeep "Jezebel," after the faithless lady in the Bible. He and Sergeant Murphy come to blows about the change, the sergeant maintaining that Jezebel is a godless name and besides, his son's fiancée is called Dorothea, but Captain Sands sticks up for Johnny's right to name his jeep.

The day Johnny and Jezzy and their outfit embark for overseas service, another letter from Dorothea arrives, in which she tells him she no longer loves the Marine corporal, a lad who seems to be in no hurry to get into actual combat. She begs him to give her another chance and to write her again, but Johnny is through with women and doesn't reply.

Crossing the Atlantic, Johnny notices an oddly familiar-looking red-headed chap who has just joined his company. Seeing him with Sergeant Murphy one day, he notices a resemblance between them and putting two and two together, he realizes that they must be father and son—and furthermore, that the redhead, who calls himself "PRIVATE SMITH," must be the Marine

On and on came the enemy. Cold, hungry and exhausted, Johnny bent over Jezzy's wheel. Tireless and indomitable, she carried him onward.

THE JEEP

DOWNEY

corporal who stole his girl. He figures he must have deserted and joined this outfit so that he could go overseas and thus win back Dorothea, who thought him a coward.

When they land with the first invasion forces in North Africa, Jezebel proves well able to take care of herself and Johnny too, winning a promotion for him by a spectacular scattering of a Vichy French patrol. A machine gun is mounted on her and "Private Smith"—alias RED MURPHY—is assigned to be her gunner.

Johnny and Jezzy are an inseparable pair, and Johnny's only infidelity has a regrettable denouement: It turns out that the alluring French girl who almost makes him forget that he is through with women is named Dorotea, so he leaves her cold—in fact, turns her over to his enemy, "Private Smith."

PART II

FANNING out from Casablanca, Oran, and Algiers, newly landed jeeps were coursing along the roads of North Africa in regular bevies. Jezebel, who always was sufficient to herself, had plenty of company had she desired it. Characteristically, she ignored her sister jeeps by day and on the dark roads at night she glared at them malevolently with her blackout lights like the hooded eyes of a hawk and, so it seemed to Johnny, actually tried to run them off the road.

Once Jezzy and Johnny passed a battalion of field artillery whose jeeps' names began with each battery's letter. "A" Battery's jeeps were named Anna, Alice, Annette; "B" Battery's, Barbara, Bessie, Betty; "C's", Caroline, Charlotte, and so on. They could, of course, very

well do without any "D" Battery and thus happily avoid any jeep with—well, a certain name. The system helped toward identifying a battery's vehicles, thought Johnny, but must have cramped the jeep drivers' style. Circumscribed as they were, how could they name their jeeps after the girl they left behind them?

However, it did not absolutely follow that all drivers craved to christen their iron steeds after the girl at home. Certain jeeps bore suspiciously fresh labels reading Anne-Marie and Yvonne and Yvette.

Johnny remembered the French girl in the garden. That had been a narrow escape. He'd almost forgotten all his stern resolves. Red Murphy had bobbed up none too soon. That bird had said nothing about it around the battery. Probably he was getting along fine with the dame, speaking French as well as he did, and didn't want any competition. Well, time might come when he'd have to explain a French Dorotea to an American Dorothea, and it would take some doing.

Johnny could imagine Red up against that situation. "Now, look here, Dorothea," he would protest. "This French girl's name was just like yours and she looked kind of like you—only nowhere near so pretty, of course—and well, there I was off in North Africa and lonesome as thunder, and I did talk to her a few times because she reminded me of you, but I swear that was all there was to it. I'm telling you the absolute truth. I am, I swear I am. Oh, dammit, woman, be reasonable!"

Johnny grinned joyfully. That's how it would be. As for him, he was content with his Jezebel. She never did him dirt. He took such good care of her and such obvious pleasure in putting her through her paces that the battery—even most of the battalion—began kidding him. He could not drive past a bivouac or motor pack without some GI piping up:

> Jezzy and Johnny were lovers,
> Lawdy, how they could love . . .

So it went, more ribald with each verse. But Johnny liked it.

The only discordant note was, as usual, the Murphys, father and son.

Red Murphy, alias Smith, came up to him not long after the girl-in-the-garden episode.

"Say, Corp," he said. "I seem to remember that when you got tired of that French babe the other day and wished her on me, you called me out of my name."

"I did that, Murphy," Johnny answered.

"See here. My name's John Smith."

"Yeah, and I'm Pocahontas."

A voice sounded behind Johnny. "His name's Smith, and I'll thank you not to forget it."

Motor Sergeant Terence Murphy stood there with blood in his eye.

"Why, what's it to you, Sarge?" Johnny asked with deceptive mildness.

Sergeant Murphy was confounded for a moment.

"Ye wild jeep cowboy!" he growled. "Ye don't even know the right names of the parts of your own car. Ye ought to be able to get people's names right. This man's name's Smith, I'm telling ye."

"You ought to know what his name is, Sarge," Johnny retorted with a wink.

Terence was infuriated now. "Ye're after hinting at something," he shouted. "I'll have ye—"

"Like to have me speak plainly?" Johnny asked. He was ready to tell the old man out and out that he knew this Red was his son and a deserter from the Marines. Not that he planned to spill it to any officer. He'd just rock the Murphys back on their heels with that bit of information and then they'd think twice about picking on him thereafter.

But Red stepped in now. "Look here, Johansen," he snapped. "I hear you tangled up with Sergeant Murphy once back in the States. He's an older man. I'm nearer your age and size. Come on back of those trucks."

"Aisy there!" interposed Sergeant Murphy angrily. "I'll not have any s— any man fighting me battles for me. Come along with me, Johansen, and don't be looking for the captain to come and save ye this time."

"Either or both of you Murphys," announced Johnny vainglorously, feeling pretty certain that the two of them wouldn't gang up on him.

They moved off purposefully, but before they reached the trucks the first sergeant's stentorian bellow resounded.

"March order! Make it snappy!"

The pup tents went down like so many houses of cards. Trucks roared into life and emerged from beneath their camouflage. The battery's orderly room and kitchen swiftly dissolved into baggage and was packed into vehicles by panting, sweating men. Now the trucks were on the road, towing howitzers, laden with men, ammunition, and equipment.

Jezebel, Johnny at the wheel, Captain Sands beside him, scurried about like an impudent sheep dog rounding up a herd of elephants. A motorcycle sputtered up, and its rider thrust orders and maps into the battery commander's hands. He studied them while his summoned officers came up on the double. His staccato orders were concise as he pointed to the map.

"We go to those woods. Halt there for chow and dark. There'll be a night march, so keep coupled up. More orders when we get there."

The young officers looked at him eagerly and tensely. Their eyes asked, "Action?"

"That's all, gentlemen," he said, and grinned.

Jezebel scurried off down the road, her motor throbbing with anticipation.

JOHNNY would never know the story of those days of battle until he read about it later. He knew that the Germans were in full retreat from Egypt before the victorious British, but he could not know that the crafty Rommel had found force and opportunity to strike at the Americans coming down on his flank. A soldier, even a motorized soldier, sees only a tiny segment of a widespread action. Tactics and strategy are for headquarters. Yet this he did realize before those days were over: Someone had made the wrong countermove to meet the Germans. The folly of a nation which never trained its men for battle until a war was imminent or had begun was taking a heavy toll. Those memories would always rankle.

Down toward Faid Pass swept the Panzers. Johnny's battery and all the artillery in range opened furious fire. It was not enough. Back streamed the infantry before the enemy's armor.

Back they rolled that wintry February through that Biblical land. Johnny, whipping his captain up to the observation posts in Jezebel, muttered to himself a too apt Scriptural passage that flashed into his mind. "'But the Egyptians pursued after them, all the horses and chariots of Pharoah (steel horses and chariots here) . . . Six hundred chosen chariots, and all the chariots of Egypt, and captains over every one of them.'"

On they came. And here was no Moses and no Red Sea and no miracle to overwhelm the onrushing foe. The tanks' guns spat smoke and flame and steel. The American howitzers and anti-tank guns barked back. Still the tanks came on.

Couple up to the prime movers and retreat before the guns were lost. There was nothing else for it. So it went through bitter days and nights. Bitter it was, that spectacle of an American army smashed back hour after hour and unable to hold.

Cold, hungry, exhausted, Johnny bent over Jezebel's wheel. Tireless, indomitable, she carried him on. There was gasoline a-plenty for her in the supply dumps. She drank her fill and was off. All too soon the Panzers would be along and capture those dumps. Out of their path Johnny and Jezzy snatched the battery's forward observer, his mission over, no infantry left in front of him to support. Over their heads burst the shells of a German .88. Those whiplash cracks followed them as Jezebel fled at top speed. The last one burst on the crest just as she sped down its reverse slope.

Out of the sun swooped German dive bombers. Jezebel swayed and almost overturned when a bomb crashed on a column of trucks she was passing. Again and again Johnny and Captain Sands heard the ominous drone of fighter-plane motors. Jezzy was braked to a sudden stop while her two riders dove for a ditch. Machine-gun bullets kicked up spurts of dust around them as they hugged the earth. Out there on the road Jezebel stood gallantly and took it. More than once bullets ploughed through her, and she was scarred with honorable wounds. But her vitals—her motor, her gas tank, and her tires—were not hit. Faithfully she carried them on.

Still the Panzers came on, snorting down on Kasserine Pass, down on it and into it and through it despite the valiant resistance of American infantry and artillery. The howitzers of Captain Sands' battery fired till the last moment—and beyond it. That calamity was at hand which any artilleryman dreads: the loss of his guns to the enemy.

Three of them got clear and away. A tank's cannon smashed the prime mover of the fourth before it could be coupled on to the gun. Over the hills the tanks rolled down on it.

Up to the last gun dashed a jeep. Pick up the survivors of the gun crew, were Johnny's orders. With yells a few grimy cannoneers piled in; others lay still on the ground. Amid a hail of machine-gun bullets, Johnny let in his clutch.

"Hold on there," one of the crew shouted. "We can't lose this gun. Come on, you men!"

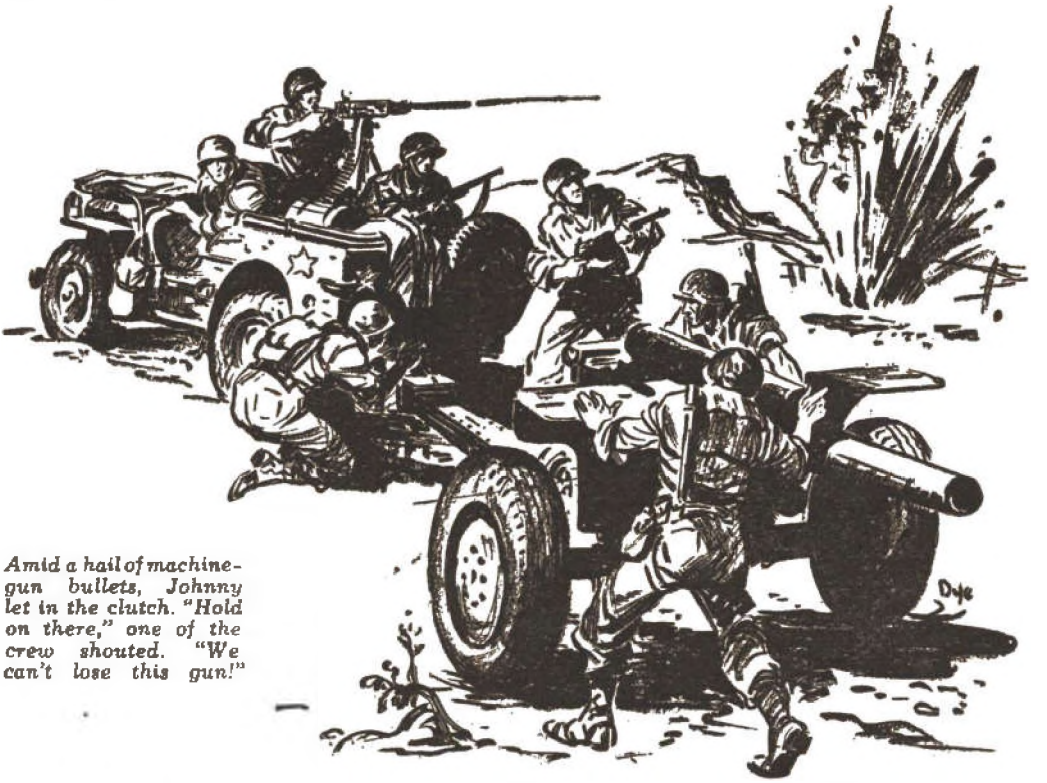
Johnny looked around and with a gasp recognized Sergeant Murphy. He piled out with the rest. They manhandled the howitzer up till its trail rested on Jezzy's spare tire and somehow lashed it there.

Fire from another quarter had momentarily diverted the attention of the tanks. It was enough. Tugging with all her might, Jezebel gripped the ground with her tires. She moved, struggled on, dragging the heavy howitzer. She gathered speed, the tanks' shells chasing her.

In the plains beyond the pass the Americans stood at last. Johnny remembered the words of the padre on the transport: "Stand fast in the faith. Quit ye like men. Be strong." Others who had heard them must have remembered, too. Those who never had heard nevertheless answered the same summons, sounded by the courage in their hearts. The history books might say that Rommel, with the British Eighth Army harrying his rear, had thrust as deep into the American lines as he dared. Yet had he thrust a little deeper, he would have overrun more gun positions, captured headquarters and destroyed vast supplies.

That he could not do. The Americans stopped him. Back whence they came rolled the Panzer columns, the Americans closing in on their rear.

The cost was counted, and it was a heavy price that had been paid. Johnny learned that one of those limp bodies lying around the rescued gun had been his friend. Corporal



Amid a hail of machine-gun bullets, Johnny let in the clutch. "Hold on there," one of the crew shouted. "We can't lose this gun!"

Wicks. What honor would we render such sacrifices, he wondered, other than decorating graves on Memorial Day? Would his country never learn to pay a greater tribute: the universal military training which would give us the ever-ready strength which prevents war? Only that would end the periodic need of these oblations of her young manhood.

When the battery had been pulled out of the line and was back in bivouac, Johnny surprised Sergeant Murphy standing beside Jezebel. He was patting her affectionately on the hood.

"Jezebel," he was saying, "ye're no slip of a jeep. It's a regular prime mover two-and-a-half-ton truck ye are. Ye're a grown woman now."

Jezebel, obviously in complete agreement, bridled becomingly.

Seeing Johnny, the motor sergeant suddenly withdrew his hand and stepped back guiltily.

"Johansen," he said in a grumbling tone, "I was just after looking over this vee-hicle of yours. I doubt if ye've been giving her the proper first echelon maintenance. If ye don't, ye can't expect her to stand up under the strain she's been getting."

"She's been under a strain all right, Sergeant," admitted Johnny. "Why, you might say Jezzy's been acting as a regular prime mover."

"So ye might," Sergeant Murphy conceded. And he half grinned.

CHAPTER VII

JEZEBEL GOES JUNKETING

THEY actually shook hands—Motor Sergeant Terence Murphy and T/5 Jonathan W. Johansen—after the ceremony in which each was decorated with a Silver Star; Johnny for his feat in breaking the French line with the fire of his Garand that day of the landing; Terence for his rescue of the battery's gun. As one man, they advanced on Jezebel immediately afterwards. With paint they had salvaged somehow, they proudly emblazoned a red, white, and blue replica of the Silver Star ribbon beneath her name.

"Sure and it's she who really won it," Terence declared, stepping back to view the handiwork.

"You said something, Sarge," Johnny agreed enthusiastically. "We just happened to be around at the time. Jezzy really did the job."

"These here aviators paints 'em a swash-ticker—"

"A swastika," Johnny corrected.

"Have it your own way, me boy. They paints wan iv thim things on the plane for each Boche they brings down. And the destroyer lads paints a German or Eye-talian or Jap flag on the ship when they sinks wan iv the

same. So we ought to paint us a half a dozen Vichy Frogs and wan GI howitzer on Jezebel here."

"No, Sarge. The Silver Star really tells the whole story."

"O.K. It's your car she is," Sergeant Murphy conceded magnanimously.

It looked like the beginning of a beautiful friendship. It might well have been, if the twain had not been granted a four-day furlough, in recognition of their feats, to visit Algiers—and if they had not been given permission to take another deserving soldier of their choice along. The trouble was, Sergeant Murphy insisted on choosing Red, alias Private Smith, and made his choice stick with Captain Sands.

"Judas!" Johnny complained bitterly to himself. "The old man *would* pick his son, of course. But why doesn't he have enough sense to realize I can't stand the guy? That bum swiped my girl! I know damn well he did me a favor when he showed up that wench Dorothea for the kind of a girl she is. But he didn't know he was doing me any favor, the dirty, doublecrossing deserter of a gyrene!"

But Johnny didn't openly object. He made up his mind not to let it spoil a rare opportunity, a tour de luxe, a junket in Jezebel. For they had permission to drive the jeep to the first Algerian city.

Old Murphy was in fine fettle as the party sped down the highway. With an execrable French accent he commenced singing *Madelon*, as so many of those old retreads from the last war did, given half a chance.

"*Quand Madelon vient nous servir à boire—*" Murphy Senior bawled lustily, assisted by Red with a far better accent.

Johnny's French had improved. He got it.

"Sarge," he broke in, "when Madelon or whoever comes to serve you drinks, will you lap 'em up!"

"*Beaucoup*, me boy," grunted Sergeant Murphy, and he continued to chorus lustily, "*Madelon, Madelon, Madelon.*"

Jezebel, seeming to feel a certain kinship with the legendary lady of the song, sprang forward, ticking off the kilometers. At length they came into view of the white city of Algiers, rising tier on tier on the amphitheater of hills surrounding her magnificent harbor. The furlough men stared at the spectacle she made until Jezebel, darting on, immersed them in the roaring Army traffic, American, British, and French, that made the streets into a continuous New York rush hour. Now Jezzy encountered a multitude of sister jeeps, trucks, lorries, camions, and streetcars on which civilians, soldiers, and Arabs clustered like flies. She threaded narrow Oriental streets and broad French boulevards.

Red, in the back seat, frequently urged stops as he intercepted bright glances from pretty French girls. Only a stern admonition from Murphy Senior restrained him.

"If Dorothea could only see him now!" Johnny muttered to himself.

An M.P. directed them to an Army garage, where Jezebel was ensconced. Gladly parting with the Murphys, Johnny wandered off to see the town. A bustle of vast activity in a large open square attracted him. American soldiers in fatigues and young Frenchmen in the green berets, shorts, and shirts of the *Chantier de la Jeunesse* were swarming over large packing cases. It looked like an assembly plant in full blast—which was just what it was.

"It's our Lease-Lend stuff for the French Army," a watching soldier explained to Johnny.

One husky GI swung with an axe at the metal band around a crate. It creaked and flew open. Johnny grinned with recognition. There stood a familiar compact chassis, with four-cylinder motor, wheels, and so on. Many parts were wrapped and still to be assembled. But Johnny knew a jeep when he saw one.

So did the crowd, but what they exclaimed in a concerted shout was, "*Voilà le pygmy!*"

"Pygmy, eh?" Johnny sniffed. "Jezzy wouldn't like that."

Pygmy or jeepski, as the Russians were said to call it, or "tough guy" as the Chinese put it in their native tongue, the jeep was all over the world, helping to win the war. And with the next outburst of the crowd watching the jeep assembled, Johnny was in complete accord.

"*Ah*," the French exclaimed, "*c'est formidable!*"

Small but mighty, jeeps *were* formidable, and Jezebel, Johnny knew beyond a shadow of a doubt, was the most formidable of them all.

JOHNNY strolled down tree-lined, metropolitan Rue Michelet, mingling with the throngs of French and Arabs, of French and British and other American GI's like himself. When he passed a particularly snappy nurse or WAC or WREN, he permitted himself an interested but wary glance. "Remember that wench Dorothea," he kept reminding himself. Now and then he stopped in at one of the numerous bars or sidewalk cafés for a glass or two of strong Algerian wine. A glass or two, he found, was enough, for Algerian wine "goeth down smoothly and at last it biteth like the serpent and stingeth like the adder." He liked to catch the eye of a Frenchman, raise his glass and toast, "*A là victoire!*" evoking a pleased response.

He explored the waterfront where he could gaze at the Allied ships of war and the transports and merchantmen with their sausage-like barrage balloons swinging high above them from cable moorings, barriers in the path

"Beside this baby, them dames in the Folies Bergère was practic'ly paralyzed!" Murphy's friend agreed.

of dive-bombers. He climbed streets that were all stairs, flight after flight of them, and explored that relic of the days of the Barbary pirates, the ancient citadel of the Dey of Algiers called the Casbah. Several times he and Jezebel toured the countryside where charming villas were set among the hills, villas with garden walls clad with brilliant flowers.

At night the city, deeply blacked out, was too dark and confusing for exploration by a stranger. Johnny adjourned to the light and good cheer of the American Red Cross clubhouse.

There was one night he and other soldiers fresh from battle did not enjoy. The long-wailing sirens sounded the air raid alert. Out in the street Johnny heard the clatter of wooden-soled shoes of men, women, and children hurrying to the shelters. No *abri* for him. He'd take his chances in his room rather than risk being buried alive in a hole in the ground. Ten minutes after the alert, the anti-aircraft guns opened up. The planes were overhead. Searchlights up in the hills crisscrossed the sky with their probing beams. The tracer bullets of the chattering .50-calibre machine guns wrote crimson dots, the 40-mm's glowing dashes, as they spat their high-explosive shells. Together they made the blue-black of the night seem the base of a Scotch plaid of red and green and yellow. The big 90-mm's barked, and the guns of the ships chimed into the terrific barrage. Vicious and distinct was the sharp, wicked cough of the rocket guns. Twice at a distance, once all too near, Johnny heard the terrifying, reverberating crash of bombs.

It was a magnificent display. Two barrage balloons floated down in streams of white flame. Johnny yelled as he saw a raiding plane caught in the searchlights for an instant, then explode as one of the guns scored a hit on it. Any Fourth of July fireworks would be a farce after

this. But when the All Clear sounded, Johnny found that his knees were shaking. It had been too much like the nights at Faid Pass and Kasserine Gap.

Johnny found he simply could not turn in and go back to bed. Feeling foolish, he got his flashlight and went out into the black streets—over to a certain garage in the vicinity of which one of those bombs sounded as if it had hit.

No, the hit was further toward the docks. Jezebel was all right.

It was in a little bar on the Boulevard Bugeaud, the afternoon of the day before they were due to start back to their outfit, that T/5 Johansen encountered Motor Sergeant Murphy. Terence, seated at a table with another sergeant, evidently an old crony, was in a highly expansive mood.

"Johansen," he hailed. "Pull in and park. Mike, this lad's our BC's driver and not a bad wan, though I say it what trained him. Johansen, shake with Sergeant Mike Ryan, a buddy of mine in the ould war. He's now with the M.P.'s, but we'll not be holding that aginst him."

"Murphy, ye ould rascal of a redleg, I'll be throwing ye in the clink this night yit. Johansen, have a snort iv vino."

"Ryan," announced Terence, "the spirit of song is on me. D'ye mind how back in Valdahon in '18 thim Frogs taught us—" He opened his mouth wide and bellowed:

Auprès de ma blonde,
Qu'il fait bon, fait bon, fait bon . . .

French and British soldiers at the other tables joined in until the place rang.

"Sergeant," Johnny ventured when the uproar subsided, "I gather you recommend the proximity of blondes."

"I do that. Ye ought to be trying it."

"Not any more," Johnny replied with decision. "By the way, where's your—I mean, where's Private Smith tonight?"

"Living up to me song, I don't doubt," Terence grinned. "It's partial to blondes he is."

"You're telling me!" sniffed Johnny.

"Enough," Ryan put in. "Terry, if you and the lad want to see the Casbah, it's time we got going."

"You mean the native quarter, not the Citadel, Sergeant?" Johnny asked. "That's off limits, isn't it?"

"Not with an M.P. escort, me boy. All we need is a car to save walking there."

"Got mine outside. Come on," Johnny said.

The three piled into Jezebel and drove to the old part of town where the native quarter lay.

Leaving Jezebel in the safekeeping of an M.P. post at the entrance, they plunged into the Casbah.

FROM a modern French city they had stepped back centuries into a medieval town. The three could barely walk abreast, so narrow were the tortuous streets, climbing, dipping and shadowy, with jutting eaves and overhanging second stories shutting out all but a thin strip of the sky above. Off to the sides opened dark, mysterious impasses. Merchants in shops that were hardly more than hollows in a wall did a busy trade in strange viands. Within a recessed room an Arab schoolteacher dismissed his pupils, who tumbled out into the street into the midst of a herd of passing goats. There sat a scribe inditing a letter for a bearded, turbaned customer.

Yonder in a little court was a well and cluster of flat Moslem tombs set about a shrine. Here and there glowed a window of colored glass, and in some walls were embedded handsome tiles imported long ago from Holland and Spain. Here indeed were the charm and picturesqueness of the Middle Ages, but here, too, were their filth and malodorous smells, the beggars with festering sores, the lame, the halt and the blind. Such, thought Johnny, must have been the Bagdad of Harun al-Rashid, for all the glamor of the Arabian Nights.

They threaded their way through the Street of Butchers, where goats' legs and sheeps' heads were displayed for sale. Terence and Johnny were beginning to turn a little green.

"Hold iverything," grinned Ryan, the M.P., "the best is yit to come."

He led them to the Street of Painted Doors and thrust through one.

"Hi, Fathma," he called, "I brought some friends to call."

It was a room with walls covered with vivid hangings and a richly carpeted floor. Brass jars gleamed in the corners. A slim Arab girl glided in. She was unveiled. Sprightly, darkly beautiful, she smiled at them.

"So that's what they're like behind all that camouflage!" exclaimed Terence. "We've been missing something."

"Not all iv thim," Ryan warned. "How about dancing for us, Fathma?" He passed the girl a wad of franc notes.

She smiled again and clapped her hands. Arabs entered with flutes and porcelain jars with drum heads. They struck into a weird rhythm. Swiftly the girl swept into a dance, all seduction and sinuous undulations. As she glided around the room, her diaphanous garments swirled about her.

Terence snapped his fingers and cheered.

"Ryan, me lad," he chortled, "Paris and the gals of the Folies Bergère had nothing on this!"

"You said something, Murphy," his friend agreed. "Beside this baby thim dames was practic'ly paralyzed."

Fathma swirled and swayed even more se-

ductively. Johnny gasped and blushed. It certainly was an odd time to think of it, but into his mind popped old Isaiah's description of such goings-on: "And walk with stretched out necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go and making a tinkling with their feet."

Nor was that the half of it. Johnny grew more embarrassed. The girl seemed to be dancing for him especially. The flutes shrilled and the drums throbbed as she wove about him, finally sinking at his feet.

"Say," said Johnny desperately, "maybe we'd better be getting back."

"'Tis time at that," Ryan agreed. "Me lootenant'll be looking for me. Say, me lad, Fathma seemed to take to you."

Johnny bowed stiffly to the girl and made a hasty exit. "Fathma," he said under his breath, "thy name is Arabic for Dorothea."

Jezebel was waiting for them. As they drove off, she started acting queerly. She twisted and jerked forward and swung from side to side. Johnny stopped and got out to look at the engine. The steeringwheel nut and sparkplug connection were loose.

Sergeant Murphy had taken another snort from a hidden bottle of vino.

"Nivver mind, Johansen," he shouted. "She's O.K. Jezebel was just showing ye she ain't going to let no dancing A-rab gal beat her!"

Terence and Red were in a state of suppressed excitement all the ride back from Algiers to their post of duty. Johnny could only find out that they had gone on board an American cruiser in the harbor the morning of their departure. Further than that he could not pump a word out of them. They passed off their secretiveness with vast and unconvincing nonchalance. Johnny was consumed with curiosity.

"What are these micks up to?" he puzzled. "They're all agog about something. What's the Navy to get so excited about? I know it's interesting in a way and all that, and comes in handy to guard convoys. Sailors like it, and no wonder. Aboard ship they get all the ice cream and cokes they want. They've got some big guns, I grant. But what's the Navy amount to, compared to the field artillery?"

He told himself it would be no great loss if the two transferred to the Navy. Then, in fairness, he had to admit that Terence was not so bad once you got to know him, and he was a corking good motor sergeant. As for Red, he wasn't a bad soldier at all. A deserter from the Marines, sure, and skunk enough to swipe the girl of another fellow who had gone off to the Army. But still a good man in a fight.

Several times the pair seemed about to speak —then changed their minds. Oddest of all was the marked consideration with which they had begun to treat Johnny. They were almost deferential. Here was the old man, who had tried to doublecross him and get Jezebel for his own, almost palavering over him. And Red displayed a strange willingness to let bygones be bygones. Maybe he was getting ready to pass Dorothea back on a silver platter. If so, the answer was, No, thanks, I'm not having any.

As Jezebel reeled off the kilometers, the solution hit Johnny like a ton of bricks. By gravy, this precious pair wanted something! That was what all this Johnny-me-lad and aren't-you-tired-let-me-drive stuff was about. They wanted something and wanted it bad.

Judas! Maybe they were still keen to snap Jezebel.

Johnny's teeth set. He'd see them in—well, in Germany first. . .

CHAPTER VIII

JEZEBEL AND THE DJEBELS

THE hills of North Africa—djebels, they called them—Djebel This and Djebel That. Up the long slopes of some of them spread sparse, dusty vegetation of a sort, but most were stark and sandy. Rocky pinnacles, like the battlements of castles, crowned many. They were grim, unlovely, in bitter contrast to beloved rolling wooded hills far away across the Atlantic. The Americans, discarding the tongue-twisting Arabic names, simply called them by numbers—Hill 609, and so on.

Maybe the French like them, Johnny reflected. By now they would have forgotten how their dead had strewn those hills when they made the conquest a little over a hundred years ago. Well, he supposed, the Arabs must like 'em. This was their homeground.

They were ominous, menacing, these djebels. Johnny was sure Captain Sands sensed it, too, as they bowled along the Gafsa road in Jezebel. Germans with machine guns and artillery would perch on them and have to be blasted off one after another. They, like the children of Israel, "had prepared for war and had shut up the passages of the hill country, and had fortified the tops of the high hills and had laid impediments." Impediments all right! Their devilish mines were all of that.

Yonder on the djebels darted little dusty whirlwinds, springing up in the sands. "Like ballet dancers, pirouetting and twirling," that war correspondent they'd given a ride to a while back had described them. "The Arabs," he'd said, "call them djinns—ghosts—and give them the names of dead friends." They increased Johnny's sense of foreboding.

Now he had to swing Jezebel far off to one side of the road. A long column of tank destroyers came roaring toward them—the fine new M-10's, with their deadly three-inch guns.

"Ha!" exclaimed Captain Sands, unfolding his

map case. "Going the other way, are they? The high-ups figure the Panzers are coming through up Tebourba way then. It's there or up ahead of us yonder—into that big plain beyond El Guettar. I hope to heaven they've guessed right. It'll be tough for us if they haven't."

"Maybe we're ready for 'em either way, sir," hazarded Johnny.

"Corporal," the Captain answered, "maybe you've got something there. Step on it. We're going into position to cover that plain."

Johnny stepped. Jezebel responded with a leap and a bound. When another batch of tank destroyers blocked her on a narrow part of the road, she sheered off. Straight at a djebel she sped. Up and over it she whizzed.

Jezebel took djebels in her stride.

The battery dug in its guns to command the plain—dug them in well and camouflaged. Self-propelled artillery was grand stuff, Johnny thought, but it had to be hit-and-run. You couldn't dig in bulky self-propelleds the way you could these 105 howitzers, uncoupled from their trucks. Hard for bombers to find or the enemy's guns to range on, the hows would crouch there in their earthworks and slug it out.

Johnny and Jezzy, temporarily detailed on courier service, scurried around the sector. Amazement filled the corporal. Never had he seen such an array of American artillery. There must be twenty battalions emplaced on the djebels and in the valley. Truck after truck rolled up to bring them ammunition. Round after round of the big H. E. shells was stacked in dugouts, ready to hand and well camouflaged like the guns.

Back by radio from reconnaissance patrols and forward observers came the warning, "Enemy tanks!" So it *was* El Guettar they were having a crack at. Rumbling down the main highway came at least sixty of the iron monsters. Above them flew the Luftwaffe and behind them rolled motorized infantry and 88's and 105's, going into position.

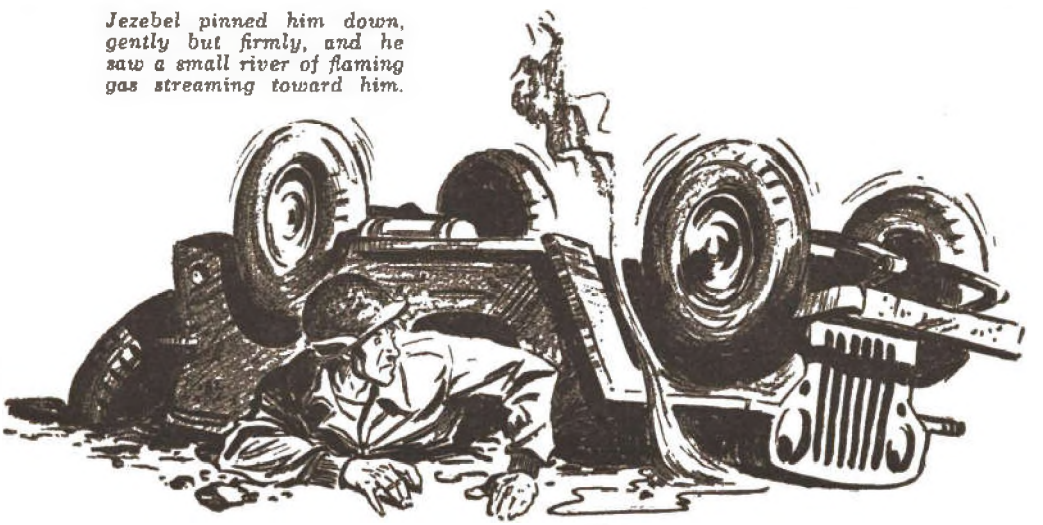
Joining of combat. Bombs and bursting shells, mortars, machine guns stuttering, the snap-crash of grenades and rattling rifle fire. Dust clouds and smoke and red-flaring explosions. Through the haze of battle sped Johnny and Jezebel. They tarried not. German 88's, it appeared, were not above sniping at jeeps. Johnny drove like Jehu, the son of Minshi, "who driveth furiously." On the fly he caught glimpses of the tremendous concentration of American artillery, pride welling up in him. The battalions, each with its fire direction center, were all tied in together by wire and radio. Whenever the enemy grouped in an attempt to break through, they flung massed fire, a terrific weight of shattering metal, on his advancing armor and infantry.

Still the Germans came on. They overran a forward battalion down in the plain, forcing the abandonment of its guns. But the foe could not hold nor carry them off. Tank destroyers had come boiling back into the fray. With the massed artillery and the gallant rifle grenadiers and bazooka teams of the infantry, they smashed at Rommel's armor. Under their converging fire, the Panzers broke off, turned tail and fled.

Johnny, watching, was filled with a glorious elation. Something told him that now, in spite of bitter fighting to come, the Germans would be thrust back and back until they came to the sea, and Tunis and Bizerte fell at last.

HE and Jezebel were scudding along the road on a last detail when a shell hit a gasoline dump they were passing. A flash and a roar, and Jezebel was on her back, with Johnny underneath. He seemed only bruised,

Jezebel pinned him down, gently but firmly, and he saw a small river of flaming gas streaming toward him.



but the jeep pinned him down, imprisoning him—gently, Johnny found himself thinking, but firmly. Jezzy was like that.

But under her edge he saw a terrifying sight. A small river of flaming gas was streaming straight toward him. He shoved and struggled. He could not free himself. He groaned aloud. Oh, God, this was an awful way to die!

The fire had lapped to within a few feet of him when he heard voices.

"Heave, ye tarrier!" roared familiar tones.

Two pairs of strong hands rolled Jezebel off him, righted her. He was snatched up and flung into her tonneau. Burning gas was scorching Jezzy's tires as she was driven out of it by a red-headed soldier. The other man turned and grinned at Johnny, slumping limp in the back seat.

"Supermen, or Murphy and Son, to the rescue, me lad," called back Sergeant Terence.

The battalion surgeon wanted to send Johnny back to the hospital.

"No bones broken, only bruises, soldier," he declared. "But you're bound to have gotten some shock out of that bang-up and you might fold up. I'll ticket you for the hospital and a good rest."

"Please don't, sir," Johnny begged. He knew that if he got shut up in a hospital, he might never be able to rejoin his outfit but be sent instead to some replacement depot. "Sir," he pleaded, "the battery commander needs me to drive his jeep."

The medical officer smiled. "Seems to me we got some other jeep drivers in the outfit, but O.K., soldier. Try it out. I'll mark you duty."

When Johnny emerged, Jezebel was waiting for him, with the Murphys in attendance.

"Knew ye wouldn't let the sawbones hook ye, lad," Sergeant Terence greeted. "Let's go."

Driving back to the battery, Johnny awkwardly tried to thank them for saving his life.

"Think nothing iv it, me lad," Terence deprecated. "All in the day's work."

"You fellers and I haven't always gotten on so good," Johnny put in. "I've held things against you. I'm sorry. Everything's more than O.K. now and forgotten."

Terence said, "We tried to pull a few fast ones on ye. There'll be no more iv that now."

"You see," Johnny went on, "I knew that Red here was—"

"Me son," Sergeant Murphy completed, "and it's proud I am iv it, but—"

Red carried on. "But Pop didn't want it known because he'd put his age down. Of course they knew he was in the last war, but he figured that with a grown son they wouldn't let him fight in this war. Or they'd be sending him back to the States as over thirty-eight."

Sergeant Terence snorted. "A grown son is it, ye're saying? Johansen, this boy of mine lied about his own age, too. He wasn't seventeen when he joined up. That's why he used another name."

"Gosh," Johnny burst out. "And you slipped your underage over on the Marines, too, didn't you, Red?"

The Murphys looked puzzled, then grinned.

"You must be thinking of my brother," Red said. "He's a Marine sergeant. It was him we saw on the cruiser at Algiers."

"So he's the fellow, not you," Johnny breathed.

"Now ye mention it," Terence interrupted, "there's a matter we might bring up. 'Tis a matter of a del-i-cate nachure. It concerns a lady ye know. Wance this here jeep was named for her."

Dorothea!

Murphy Senior spilled the story. It seemed that Dorothea had been stricken with a fit of conscience. She'd written her Marine that she couldn't marry him; not till she rid herself of a guilty feeling. She confessed she'd played a mean trick on a soldier she'd been practically engaged to—had thrown him over when the gyrene came along. Now that the soldier was over fighting in North Africa, he might get killed and die hating her. That, Dorothea had written, would be just too awful. He hadn't answered her letters, but she'd have to stay true to him, though her heart was another's. Johnny burst into a fit of wild, uncontrollable laughter at the conclusion of the recital.

"'Tis the shock," exclaimed Sergeant Terence, looking contrite and alarmed. "We nivver should have mentioned the girl yet."

"No, no, Sarge," Johnny gasped. "I'm O.K. Not shocked, just surprised. I'll fix it up so that when your Marine son sails home and lands, he'll have the situation and Dorothea well in hand. Tonight, as the song says, 'I'll write a V-mail to my female.'"

The Murphys were profuse in their gratitude. Johnny thought it just as well not to show what a relief and pleasure the whole thing was.

That night, with chuckles of satisfaction and glee, he wrote:

Dear Dorothea:
I want you to be the first to know. Hope you won't mind, but all is over between us. I've fallen in love with the grandest girl in North Africa. Her name is Jezebel.
Good-by forever—
Johnny

CHAPTER IX

JEZEBEL'S JINX

WHEN the battery got orders to waterproof all vehicles, they knew they were about to go places and see things—to go places amphibiously and to see sights that would be none too pleasant.

Johnny took two handfuls of the thick, sticky waterproofing goo and advanced on Jezebel. The jeep seemed to regard him with apprehension and distaste.

"Old girl," he told her, "this isn't exactly going to pretty you up like the lady you're named for when she painted her face and 'tired her head. But it will keep you from sputtering and going dead on me when we roll off a boat and start wading in to the beach."

He slapped the stuff on the battle-scarred jeep. He plastered it over her distributor, sparkplugs, breathers—on her dash, around the speedometer—on all parts where water could seep in and cripple her.

"Never mind, Jezzy," he consoled her. "I'll strip it off soon as we get ashore. Meanwhile you can do everything but swim. This stuff is your life preserver."

The time to embark arrived. Down to the docks rolled the battalion. Two of the batteries were assigned two-and-one-half-ton amphibious trucks—"ducks," they were called. With the aid of an A-frame, each howitzer was winched into a duck; after a landing the howitzer would be similarly hoisted out and coupled to its duck, which would then act as a prime mover and pull it into action.

But Captain Sands' battery kept its trucks to be driven, with howitzers coupled on, straight into a long LST—Landing Ship, Tanks. The ducks rolled on to other ships. Those low-in-the-water but seaworthy vessels (they had crossed the Atlantic under their own power) would carry them to the land they were to invade.

Swiftly and efficiently, the combat team—the battalion and the infantry it supported—loaded. With its mighty Naval escort, the invasion armada churned through the harbor and out to sea.

Following the LCI's—Landing Craft, Infantry—sped the battalion in its LST's. The ship with Captain Sands' battery aboard carried, forward, a long ramp to facilitate a landing.

Foremost of all the vehicles on board was a jeep, its driver reclining at his ease behind the wheel.

"Jezzy," remarked T/5 Jonathan W. Johansen, "we remind me of Antony and Cleopatra in their barge on the Nile."

But the Mediterranean, calm at first, soon ceased to resemble the Nile. Chopping waves tossed them up and down. Almost everybody became frightfully seasick. Not even the word that they were to invade Sicily interested anybody now.

All hands aboard passed a miserable night, a bad day, and another miserable night. Johnny and Red Murphy took turns holding each other while they bent over the side. Pity the men who had crossed the Atlantic in this thing! The Mediterranean was tough enough. Weak, without any interest in food or even in life itself, Johnny dragged himself over and curled up in Jezebel's tonneau. It was as if she cradled him maternally. He found that felt a little better.

Darkness before dawn of "D" day. Every man in the invasion fleet had his equipment on and was ready. How they were going to fight, feeling the way they did, they didn't know. Well, once on dry land, they could manage it. Anyway, they would have to fight and fight hard to keep from being pushed back into this confounded sea.

Now the Navy was letting go with its big guns at the shore defenses. The shells roared overhead with the sound of express trains. The white-red flashes of their explosions lit up the hostile shore.

Ready! Stand by! The LCI's, motors throbbing, raced for the beach. Johnny could picture them grounding, and the infantry and engineers spilling out into the surf. High wind and rising, rolling waves rocked the ships desperately. The weather seemed to be taking sides—the other side. Hell was popping ashore now. Johnny heard and saw it. *Even so, let me get there,* Johnny prayed. *Let me get on ground that's firm and steady.*

Ashore they'd be needing artillery. The battalion's LST's headed in at full speed. Overhead Johnny heard the ominous roar of enemy bombers. Yet, in that stirring moment, even they could be ignored. Besides, there was nothing you could do about them. Bombs whistled down, some finding their targets, but the battalion escaped unscathed.

Johnny saw doors open on an LST carrying another battery. A duck rolled out and took to the water like—well, like a duck. It scudded for shore, cannoneers grouped around the howitzer within.

But the second duck to land had no sooner rolled out and into the sea than it sank like a stone. Men floundered in the waves. Johnny tore his eyes away. His own LST was preparing for the dash.

Its long ramp was shoved out far to the fore. Pontoons, fixed underneath it, bore it up. The motor hummed in a rising crescendo. Straight for the Sicilian shore plunged the landing ship.

There was a grinding shock as it grounded on a sand bar. But the long ramp ahead had cleared it and stretched out close to the beach. The door swung open. Johnny, at Jezebel's wheel, suddenly found Captain Sands seated at his side.

"O.K., Johnson," called the officer. "Let's go."

Jezebel moved steadily out on to the swaying ramp. She rolled on forward.

"Steady," said the BC quietly. "Keep her in

low. Four-wheel drive, auxiliary transmission. Now! Let her have it!"

Jezebel plunged off the end of the ramp into the sea. She sank, and water lapped up to her floorboards. But she had settled now and was gripping bottom with her tires. On she struggled, up and out and onto the beach.

CAPTAIN SANDS waited only to see the first prime mover and its towed howitzer make land safely, too. Then off they sped to find an observation post. They established it and got communication with the firing battery, now in position. It was none too soon. Down from the hills the German tanks came rolling.

Johnny heard his captain's calm voice sending back firing data, heard the operator repeat the battery's message, "On the way." The howitzer shells screamed overhead. The captain made corrections. Now they had the range. One tank was hit. It turned and lumbered slowly back in retreat. There! they'd got another—it was vomiting smoke. And a third! It exploded in a flash of red flame.

But the rest came on, thundering down toward the beach, down through a draw that hid them from the observation post.

Captain Sands sighed and lowered his field-glasses.

"It's up to the battery now," he said. He turned to the field telephone operator and gave a sharp order. "Target: approaching tanks. Direct fire."

It was the chiefs of section at the battery and their steady howitzer squads, pouring in point-blank fire, that broke the tank attack—the attack which had come within an ace of wiping out the American beachhead.

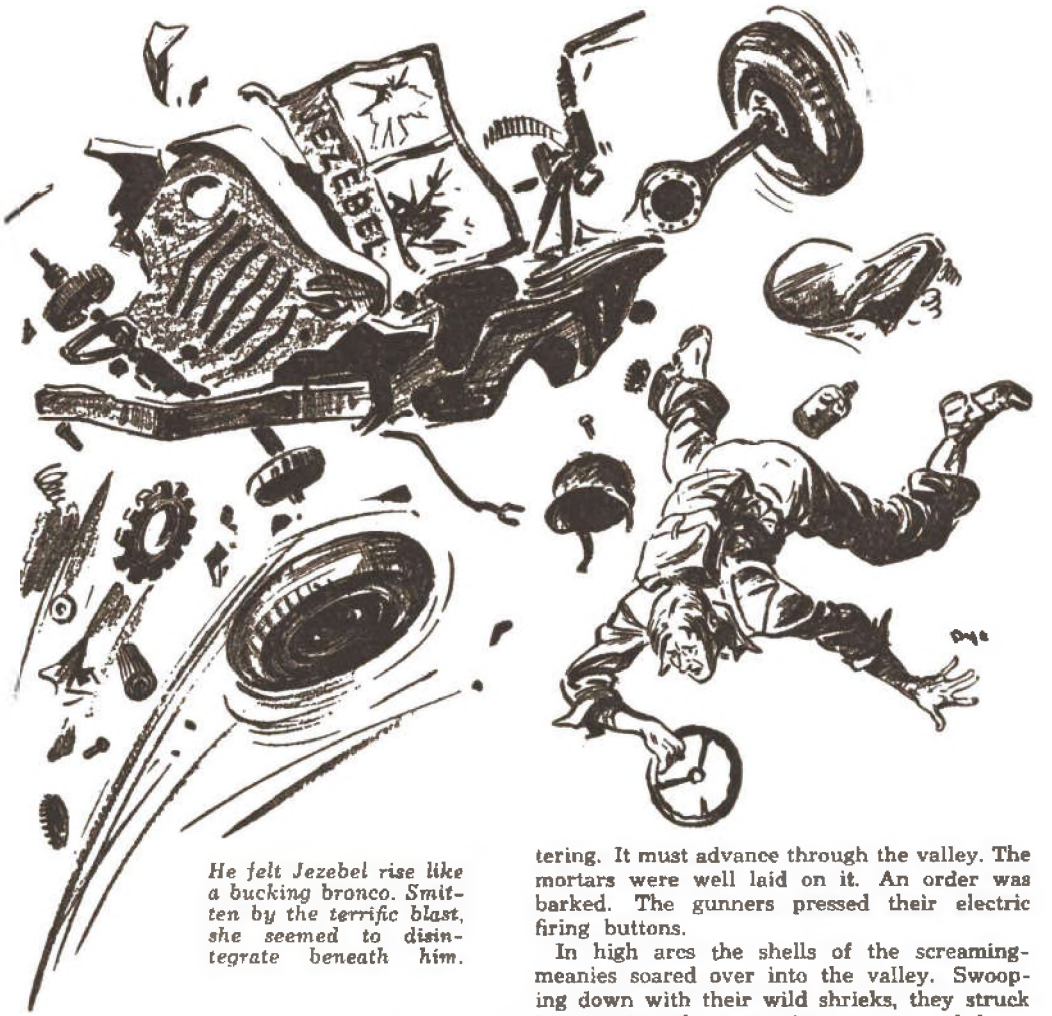
They pushed on inland in that steady, hard-fighting drive which would gather in thousands of Italians and thrust the surviving Germans across the Straits of Messina, winning the island of Sicily. The sun beat down on them intensely. Here again was height after height to be stormed. They were steeper and loftier than the djebels and they also must be paid for in blood. Every road was mined, every bridge was blown. Nevertheless the American and British columns were not to be halted for long in their determined advance.

No rest for the weary. Day and night it was march order for the battery until stubborn resistance was encountered; then, into action to blast away for the infantry or help them beat off an enemy counterattack. Johnny stoked himself on C rations and Jezebel on gasoline, oil and water. They kept going mechanically, the driver almost as much an automaton as the jeep he drove. He kept spurring himself into a state of alertness to watch for mines and for that open terrain under enemy fire where it was a case of being the quick or the dead.

How Captain Sands kept up was more than Johnny could understand. It was more than a case of physical endurance, for his was the responsibility for the battery and its fire. That fire must be delivered when the infantry needed it, and the captain or one of his forward observers must always be on the spot where it could best be directed.

This latest observation post they had chosen was close up to the infantry front line. It was so close that the sun's reflection on the captain's field glasses drew machine-gun fire. Before they could crawl back to a safer position, the telephone operator was hit in the thigh.

"Help him back to the jeep and take him to the aid station, Corporal," the captain ordered. "Don't waste any time in that valley back there. The krauts are likely to be throwing some stuff in there when this next attack starts. Get on back here as soon as you can."



He felt Jezebel rise like a bucking bronco. Smitten by the terrific blast, she seemed to disintegrate beneath him.

"Yes, sir." Johnny glimpsed the warm smile his captain had for his men, the look that made them swear by him and never let him down. Then he helped the wounded man back to Jezebel.

The faithful jeep carried them back swiftly through the valley. Infantry were coming up. Getting set for another attack, Johnny figured. A big one that will rock them back on their haunches.

Deployed though they were, the enemy infantry slowed him and Jezebel down on their return through the valley toward the OP.

In a draw behind the German front line, mortar crews in field gray loaded strange weapons. These were six-barreled mortars, called by the Americans "screaming-meanies" or "Screaming Lenas" because of the shrieking flight of their terrible projectiles. Observation from high ground had shown the German command that an American attack was mustering. It must advance through the valley. The mortars were well laid on it. An order was barked. The gunners pressed their electric firing buttons.

In high arcs the shells of the screaming-meanies soared over into the valley. Swooping down with their wild shrieks, they struck in a series of concentric patterns and burst with deafening detonations.

Johnny felt Jezebel rise under him like a bucking bronco. Smitten by that terrific blast, she seemed to disintegrate beneath him. Higher still he rose. Then he fell back, deep down into merciful oblivion.

When he regained consciousness, he was being carried on a litter into the dressing station. He raised his head weakly.

"My jeep," he demanded. "Where's my jeep?"

The rear bearer told him, "Your jeep's back there in about a hundred pieces, soldier, and it's a wonder you ain't."

Everything blurred in a fog of pain. When Johnny woke again, the surgeon was finishing bandaging him. A memory pounded in his brain. Jezebel had been smashed to bits. Jezebel was dead. Loudly and clearly he spoke out. "'Go bury her, for she is a king's daughter.'"

The medico looked down at him. "Never mind, soldier. You're going to be all right."

Again Johnny's voice rose clearly. "'And they went to bury her, but they found no more of her than the skull and the feet and the palms of her hands.'"

"I'll be hanged!" the surgeon swore. "I've heard 'em rave plenty but that's a new line. What's he talking about, Padre?"

The chaplain, helping with the wounded, answered in puzzled tones. "Why, it's the Bible. Second Book of Kings. But what a passage for a dying man to be quoting!"

"Hush," the surgeon warned. "He might understand. He's badly hit, but he might make it."

Drowsing off under the morphine, the lad on the table sighed deeply and murmured, "'So that they shall not say, "This is Jezebel."'"

CHAPTER X

JEZEBEL IS JUNK

JOHNNY journeyed through a series of hospitals. Most of that journey was hazy, for he was kept drugged to dull his pain. Vaguely he remembered the hospital ship that took him away from Sicily. She was white and shining and all lit up like a church. Her own searchlights played on the large red crosses painted on her sides, fore, aft and amidships. How unreal and ethereal she had seemed as litter bearer lifted him aboard! When he convinced himself that this was no dream, Johnny recalled urging somebody to blackout for heaven's sake. You couldn't trust the Germans not to bomb a hospital ship. They'd done it more than once. A woman's voice—a nurse—soothed him, and he slept again.

Then there was a train. Johnny's litter was secured in spring slings, another above it and another below. There, too, were doctors and nurses and ward men who fed and cared for him.

But the jolts were torture, and nightmares rode his fevered brain—shells chasing him and Jezebel, a mad dash to escape. The shells came closer, hovered and pounced. He woke, gasping and groaning. A soft hand pressed his bare arm. The hypodermic needle pricked and gave him peace.

An ambulance ride. Then a spacious ward in a general hospital. When mists of pain began to clear and perceptions to return, Johnny saw his torso had been inclosed in a plaster cast. His left arm jutted out from it, shoulder-high, supported by a rod embedded in the cast.

Johnny looked up, saw a medical officer watching him.

"Taking notice again, are you?" the medico asked.

"Yes, sir, I look like a bum piece of statuary. What's wrong with me?"

"Broken shoulder. The cast keeps it immobile so the bone can knit. Don't try to get up. Your right leg won't hold you for some time yet."

"Sir," Johnny begged, "give it to me straight. I can take it. Am I going to be crippled for life?"

The surgeon had a cheery smile. "No, lad," he reassured. "It will take a long time, but you're going to be all right."

Johnny heaved a vast sigh of relief. He thought how lucky he was. Coming out of himself, he looked around him. This room had been the lobby of a resort hotel at a noted North African spa where many came for the warm mineral waters gushing from its springs. Where fashionable throngs had congregated, now were rows on rows of cots. At first glance it resembled a medieval torture chamber. Some of the patients, limbs suspended in apparatus and in traction, seemed to be on the rack. In a sense they were, yet gallantly endured their pain.

"They've got guts," Johnny thought, as his leg started to hurt. "Got to show some of the same myself."

Capped nurses in brown and white striped seersucker were busy in the ward. One was rubbing talcum on the ebony back of a colored soldier in a cot in the next row. "Study in black and white," Johnny said to himself, grinning.

The nurse moved over to his cot and smiled. "You're better," she said. "Is there anything you want?"

Johnny replied, "Did any of my stuff get here with me?"

"I'm afraid not. Wait. There were some things in the pocket of the shirt they cut off you. I'll get them."

She brought him back a packet. "There's a photo there I'd like to look at," Johnny declared.

"Your mother?" the nurse inquired, looking through the packet.

"No. Mother died long ago.

"Oh, your girl then?"

"Haven't got one. Don't want one."

"You'll get over that, soldier. Here's the only photo I can find. Why, bless me if it isn't a jeep! Is it the one you drove?"

"Was. She got blown to pieces. Now she's just junk."

The nurse patted his hand. "They have lots more jeeps," she said.

"Not," Johnny affirmed, "like Jezebel."

To himself he murmured David's lament for Jonathan: "'Thy love to me was very wonderful, passing the love of women.'"

The night nurse came on duty. She stood beside Johnny's cot and gazed down at him.

She was little and blonde. Her gray eyes twinkled. Her snub nose was impudently gay, and her lips curved in a smile that was more a friendly grin. She wore a blue sweater and blue trousers, and hers was one of the rare feminine figures that can. Altogether she was cuter than a bug in a rug.

"Gosh!" breathed Johnny. "Hello."

"Hello yourself," she answered. "How are you? Better? That's swell. Is there anything I can do for you?"

IN all the nights that followed she never failed to ask those questions. She really meant them, Johnny learned. She really wanted to know how you were and wanted to do something for you. She was attentive and efficient and tender. But she stood for no fooling. Small as she was, she kept discipline in that ward. Johnny and the other patients followed her with their eyes and invented pretexts to get her to talk to them. Mostly she was too busy to talk long. After ten she would put out the lights and make them go to sleep.

Johnny felt that she gave him special attention, that she was extra nice to him. "Of course," he reasoned, "she's a lieutenant and I'm only a corporal, but after the war— Well, she sure is a grand girl."

One night his wounds were paining him and he could not sleep. In the gloaming of the darkened ward she came and sat on the edge of his cot, whispering to him and rubbing his head.

"Nurse," Johnny murmured, "you sure are a swell nurse."

"Thanks a lot." He could see that friendly grin of hers in the half light.

"Nurse, do you mind telling me your name?"

"Why, you know. It's Miss Forester."

"Sure, but I mean your first name. Of course I couldn't use it 'cause you're a lieutenant, but I'd kind of like to know."

"Oh," she said, "well, it's Dor—"

A sick soldier across the ward called her and she hurried off.

"That's that, Johansen," Johnny muttered savagely to himself. "You were forgetting things in your weakened state, weren't you? Remember what you promised yourself about women. You goat, you, won't you ever learn?"

When the nurse came back, he pretended to have gone to sleep. He never did find out that her name was Doris.

Johnny was able to get about with the aid of a crutch when he received orders to report to the Board.

"Board?" he asked the ward boy. "What for?"

"The Z. I. Board," the other explained. "If they don't think you can go back to duty for some time or not at all, they mark you 'Zone of the Interior' and send you home to the States. Wish you all kinds of luck, feller."

Johnny faced the board of officers. A kindly lieutenant colonel of the Medical Corps spoke to him.

"Corporal, your arm and leg are going to be stiff for a long time. You won't be fit for duty. We think we'd better send you home."

"Sir," Johnny pleaded, "I'd like to get back to my outfit. I drive the battery commander's jeep. Maybe I'm being too cocky, but I think he needs me."

The officer smiled warmly. "Don't doubt he does. But you'll have to go back to the States and get fixed up first. Later on I hope you can make it."

He rose and took Johnny's hand.

Johnny was still glowing from it when he sat down to write a letter to Captain Sands. He wrote rapidly.

Dear Captain:

Sir, this is to report that they're going to send me home to get me fixed up and won't let me come back to the outfit. Maybe later I can get over again and join you. Meanwhile Red—I mean, Private Smith—is a good driver. I guess you know Jezebel got blown up.

I sure hate to let you down, but I can't help it. The best of luck to you, Sir.

Faithfully,

Jonathan W. Johansen
T/5, Battery B

The writer gulped and dropped his pen to rub something from his eyes that had almost blotted the paper.

"Get your stuff together, feller," the ward boy called. "Your bunch leaves for the port this afternoon. Home, boys, home! Some guys has all the luck."

CHAPTER XI

JEZEBEL AND JOHNNY

THE transport, a new French ship taken over by the British, ploughed southwest through the Atlantic, homeward bound for the many Americans she carried.

Those aboard were mostly wounded and sick, but there were also officers and enlisted men coming back under the rotation-of-personnel policy, and young fliers who had completed fifty missions.

A fast boat, she was capable of thirty-two knots and she sailed without an escort. She could show her heels to any submarine. Only a pack lurking in her course might get her, or perhaps a lone raider with a lucky torpedo shot. Lookouts and gun crews stood no less alert. From them Johnny gained reassurance. It would be tough to be sunk now, like getting caught on a dash from third base to home. And abandon ship would be hard on the litter cases, men worse wounded than he.

Johnny gazed westward to the horizon. Home! He'd see his father again, his sweet kid

sister, his friends. His heart was high, even when sadness at leaving the outfit flooded back over him. After all, he had had no choice. He'd done his best to see it through. He glanced down at the Silver Star, Purple Heart, and African campaign ribbons on his chest. Said chest swelled a bit. Who could deny it deserved to?

The last day was a day of bright fall sunshine. Soon that blessed sight, the Statue of Liberty, would heave in view. The ship was full of preparations for debarkation and unloading. Johnny leaned over a rail, staring down into a newly-opened hold.

He asked a sailor, "What's the cargo?"

"Battlefield salvage," came the answer.

Some strange compulsion drew Johnny toward the hold till he could stare down into it, down at the mass of twisted, shattered metal—fragments of tanks, of guns, of trucks, of—

He almost fell into the hold. There in the mass was a powder-blackened section of a jeep. Grimed, once-white letters flashed up at him.

"Jezebel!" he cried. "You're coming home, too!"

A great peace descended on Johnny. What if Jezzy were scrap metal? Her wreckage would go to the melting pots and become steel for a new jeep. Like the phoenix she would rise from her ashes. Maybe he and the new Jezebel would rejoin the old outfit and go back into action together again.

When the war was over, well, he and thousands of others, he'd bet, would have jeeps of their own. Let who will have a shiny civilian car! A new Jezebel the Jeep and Johnny would scurry happily over the countryside on hunting or fishing trips, and she'd carry him to work.

Once more, majestic words from The Book flooded into his mind: "And they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks. Nation shall not lift sword against nation, neither shall they know war any more."

"And," Johnny added, gazing down at what remained of Jezebel, "they shall beat their wrecked jeeps into new jeeps. So long, Jezzy old girl. See you later."

The Red Cross girl on the dock was passing out sandwiches to the men trooping happily off the transport. She was returning to fill her emptied basket when she met a corporal of field artillery looking uncertainly about him. Her glance took in the tow hair under his jaunty field cap, the keen China-blue eyes, and the open, appealing look on his tanned face. She caught, too, the string of ribbons on his left breast, and her eyes saddened as she saw that he limped and one arm was in a sling.

"Hello," she greeted him with a bright smile. "I reckon you want to know where you can find a telephone so you can call your family."

"I sure do, miss," said Johnny, turning toward her. "How'd you guess?"

He kept right on looking, so hard that she blushed. Gosh, she was pretty! Her hair was burnished bronze, her eyes were the softest brown. Her nose was even saucier than his nurse's had been, and her lips, pursed as they were now, were just about inevitable.

"I'm sorry," Johnny apologized, "I'm staring, I know, but I just can't get enough of such an eyeful."

She laughed shyly. "Go ahead till you do," she invited. "I'll stare right back. A soldier home from the wars looks good to me."

They stood there, gazing deep into each other's eyes. At length Johnny snapped himself up and out of it.

"Look, miss," he burst out. "Tell me your name—your first name—please. I've got a silly superstition and I've just got to know."

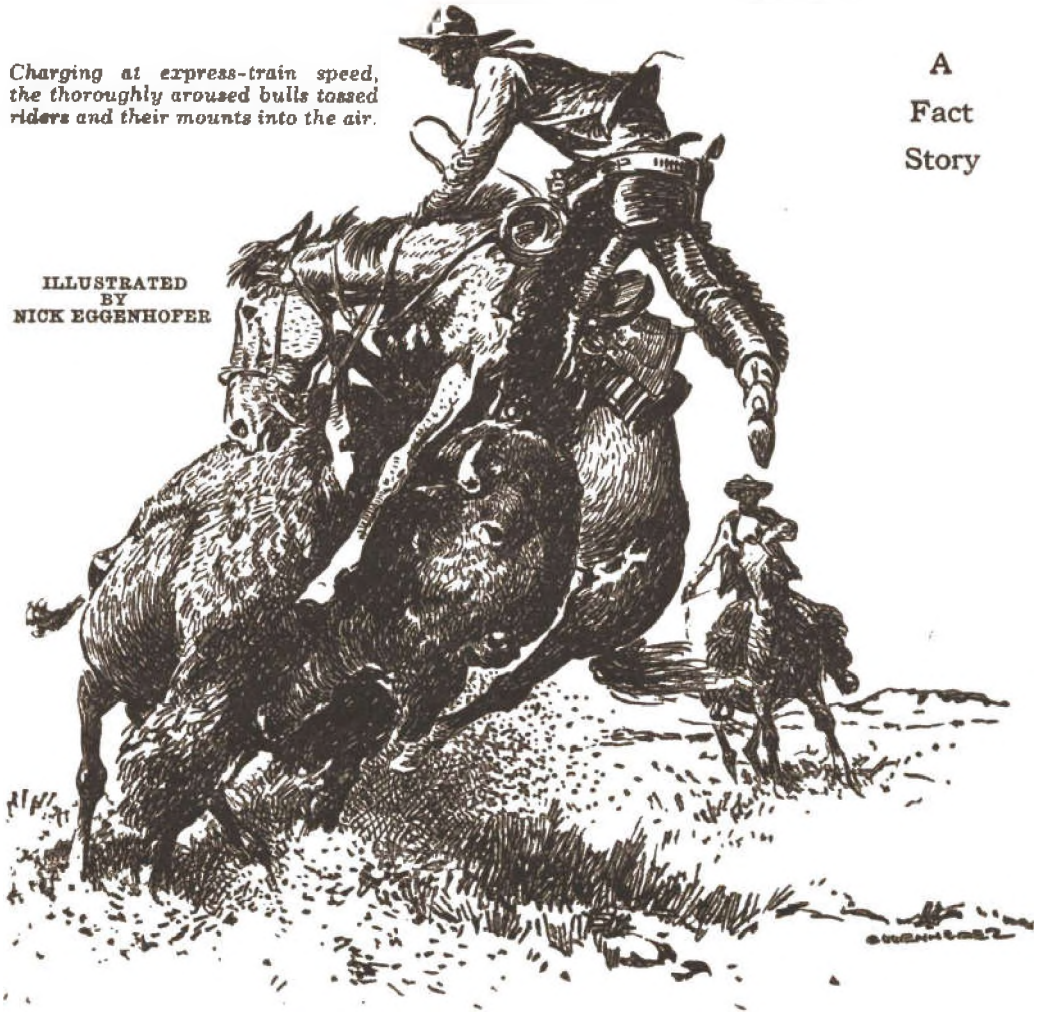
The inevitable lips curved in a smile. "It's one of those double-barreled Southern names. It's Jessie-Belle."

In those days it was no uncommon thing for a soldier, just home from the wars, to enfold a pretty girl, though a perfect stranger, in his arms and kiss her thoroughly.

Charging at express-train speed, the thoroughly aroused bulls tossed riders and their mounts into the air.

A Fact Story

ILLUSTRATED BY NICK EGGENHOFER



BISON ROUNDUP

By WILLIAM P. SCHRAMM

IN 1907 the Canadian government signed an extraordinary contract with Michel Pablo, a half-breed Montana Indian residing in the Flathead Valley. The deal involved $150,000 and close to five hundred American bison—in fact, the largest remaining herd of these stately beasts that not many years before had thundered across the far-extending plains by the tens of thousands. Strange indeed that this last sizable herd should be owned by a humble half-breed. But the contract called for the safe delivery by the Indian of the nearly five hundred shaggy beasts at Edmonton, from where they were to be taken to Wainwright Park, Alberta, and released.

The reason behind the Dominion's purchase was foresight, obviously prompted by the realization that the noble bison was well on the road to extinction through unregulated slaughter by the professional hunter, white and red sharing the guilt.

This contract brought about the most dangerous and unusual roundup ever undertaken on the western ranges. Before going into that part of it, the facts of how a bison-acorn was planted by a lowly Indian and nurtured into a

Pablo offered Allard ten thousand dollars if he'd bring two hundred bison into Ravalli.

bison-oak are far too interesting to pass over.

In 1873 Sam Walking Coyote, a Pend d'Oreille Indian, brought to the Flathead region four yearling bison from the Blackfoot country east of the Rockies. These animals were two heifers and two bulls, tame enough for the Indian to stake out to feed. Old-time residents in the locality recalled years later that in 1874 they saw Sam Weld doing this daily chore. Not long after his arrival with the four bison, Walking Coyote acquired the name Sam Weld.

By 1883 Weld's bison had increased to twenty head. Then Michel Pablo became its owner. Ten years later, by 1893, the herd had increased to a hundred head, it being augmented that year by an additional thirty-five animals purchased by Pablo from "Buffalo" Jones down in Kansas. By 1899 the number had risen to between two hundred and fifty and three hundred beasts.

The contract signed, a very difficult task confronted Michel Pablo: the rounding up and transporting of the big shaggy beasts, especially the huge bulls. The half-breed began by sending out an appeal for cowboys. The response was gratifying enough. Some fifty punchers answered the call, more for the adventure than the pay, because Pablo wisely engaged the men, not by the month, but by the bison—so much a head captured. Before starting out, the Indian built a number of extra strong corrals into which the bison were to be shepherded, if possible.

Then with the fifty odd cowboys Pablo began a roundup which was to last four and a half years.

When left strictly alone, a bison bull is almost as harmless as a barnyard bovine, but tamper with his liberty and in an eye's blink he becomes a demon incarnate. In the first week of the roundup a dozen of the cowpunchers lost their horses and several of the men themselves went to the hospital with broken bones. Charging at express train speed and connecting with their victims no less forcefully, the thoroughly aroused bulls frequently tossed riders and their mounts into the air, the unlucky horse then being gored. Strict orders having been given them not to shoot unless their own life was really in danger, the punchers could do nothing to save their horses; all the rider could do when attacked was to leap from the saddle, hastily mount himself on a companion's horse and make a getaway while the bull was occupied with destroying the unfortunate horse.

It being impossible to round up the big bulls, the outfit centered its whole attention on the cows and calves, and compared to the bulls, these were easy shepherding. In a fortnight about two hundred cows and their young were bunched and gradually driven to Ravalli, Montana, the designated shipping point.

Then Pablo ran into trouble of another kind. The good citizens of Ravalli could see no logical reason for the United States government to be out-bisoned by its neighbor to the north. Heated wires of protest were sent to Washington demanding governmental interference. But in the national capital the clamor was heard only as a whisper; it went unnoticed, much as did a similar plea made a few years previously by Howard Eaton, a public-spirited citizen of Wyoming, who tried to interest both the government and the American Bison Society in the purchase of the half-breed's herd.

Nothing coming from Washington to stop him, Pablo went ahead with his plans. Forthwith a body of irate citizens made him an impromptu visit, threatening to stampede the rounded-up bison some night if he didn't desist from shipping the beasts to Canada. But the Indian refused to be intimidated; by way of a reply he placed a cordon of armed cowboys around the bunched animals, letting out word that these men had orders to shoot on sight any night prowlers. No one showed up to molest the bison, and the two hundred cows and calves were duly herded into Ravalli's freight corrals and loaded into specially constructed boxcars. A fast freight carried them to Edmonton, where they passed into Canadian ownership.

BECAUSE of the lateness of the season and the fact that the remaining main herd had swum the Pend d'Oreille River and gone far into the upper region for winter shelter, roundup activities were abandoned for that year. During the winter the resourceful Pablo thought out a plan for capturing the big bulls. Around a narrow ravine with precipitous

slopes, he and his workers built a strong corral the following spring, the Indian's idea being that the bulls would not venture climbing the steep sides and if they did, the steepness would keep them from gaining enough speed to crash through the heavy fence.

Then, with the main herd back on the Flathead range, the rounding up of the bulls was undertaken in earnest. With more than a hundred of Montana's best cowboys the half-breed rode forth after his bison. After several weeks of strenuous and exciting work, more than two hundred of the beasts, half of them full-grown males, were forced into the ravine corral. In this drive, horses were lost by the dozen and more men suffered broken limbs in attacks made by infuriated bulls.

Now an appreciable number of beasts were trapped, but no way had yet been found to get the ornery animals out of the ravine and into the corrals at Ravalli for loading into boxcars. Considering the time and trouble it had taken to get the beasts into the ravine, no chances could be taken in losing them now.

For days Pablo and his punchers racked their brains, but they could have spared themselves that trouble.

One moonlit night a shaggy old patriarch bellowed the leader's call and then started climbing one of the ravine's precipitous sides, the entire herd following him. Reaching the top, the bulls had little difficulty in smashing through the strongly built fence, and this done the whole herd thundered off to the freedom of the Flathead's hinterland.

This catastrophe proved too much for the indefatigable Pablo. It made him give up in despair. Ravalli's citizens, of course, all but cheered openly, though too soon. A few weeks later, Charles Allard, a cousin of Pablo's and a well-known rider and cowpuncher, offered to help Pablo. Allard boasted loudly that he could corral any bison bull in the Flathead herd. It ended with Pablo offering Allard ten thousand dollars if he'd bring into Ravalli's shipping corrals two hundred bison, one hundred and fifty of which were to be full-grown males, otherwise the stipulation would not be valid. Allard cheerfully accepted.

With fifty picked cowboys Allard rode forth, and after six weeks of strenuous work he was successful in rounding up some three hundred beasts, two hundred of them fully matured males. All went well until a few miles from Ravalli, when the bulls apparently became of the mind they had gone far enough toward civilization, for suddenly they broke into a thundering stampede. Of the three hundred, Allard and his punchers managed to save less than a hundred and these they got into the yards for shipment.

After a brief respite, Allard fared forth once more with his punchers after the bison. But by now the big bulls had become so wild and dangerous that, after weeks of heartbreaking work, Allard failed to run down a single one. After taking another brief rest, Allard tried again, only to meet with failure. A third time he went, this time limiting himself to cows, calves and yearling bulls. He was successful in driving in enough animals to make up the balance of the agreed-upon two hundred and, feeling that his cousin had done well in the face of the obstacles confronting him, Pablo paid him the ten thousand dollars.

Three years had passed now and of the five hundred called for by the contract, only about three hundred head had been shipped, and these had been only cows, calves and yearling males.

Something that the Indian must be given due credit for is that he refused to abandon his efforts to fulfill his part of the contract with the Canadian government, in spite of the fact that he was the loser financially. His bison were not making him any profit money. At one time even his credit ran out and he was forced to get from the Canadian authorities an advance of five thousand dollars. And as Pablo said later, doubtless truthfully, every cent of this he spent for wages and equipment. Perhaps it was the hope that his bison would

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make him money in the end that kept him doggedly to the task.

At last the half-breed came upon a scheme for capturing the so far unconquerable bulls. At one spot an abrupt elbow turn of the Pend d'Oreille River set off a narrow strip of land. Here the terra firma rose perpendicularly, thus making the land strip almost escape-proof by nature. His plan carefully thought out, Pablo set to work reinforcing this nature-made trap. Places along the river's banks which he thought not perpendicular enough to insure complete safety, he fenced strongly. At the entrance of this river trap, the Indian set up strong corral fences six miles in one direction and four in the other, making two long funnel-like barriers that converged into the natural enclosure. These were then covered with brown cloth which gave the fences the appearance of being solid in order to keep the bison from making attempts to crash through them.

Then with one hundred cowboys, the pick of Montana's ranges, Pablo once more went after his bison. After weeks of spectacular and heroic riding and driving in which many horses were killed and many riders had close squeaks with death, the Indian's entire bison herd, with the exception of a few invulnerable old bulls, was safely shepherded into the river trap. Still more days were then spent in strengthening the enclosure's fences, and day and night a force of punchers "rode herd" around the beasts.

PABLO'S troubles were far from over, however. Again he was faced with the difficulty of getting the vicious bulls to the Ravalli corrals for loading into boxcars. It was finally decided to move them in groups of two or three, and to do this the cowboys had to perform prodigies of heroism, for with every ounce of their savage strength the huge bulls fought it out to the last moment with the men. Then came the task of getting the big brutes into the freight cars. These had been specially built for the bison, being doubly reinforced. Day after day the struggling cowboys rubbed elbows with death. Hardly a day passed that someone didn't get hurt and that valuable working gear wasn't broken. But at last two boxcars were loaded with bison bulls, and the men breathed easier. Their elation lasted only overnight.

Early next morning when the men of the loading outfit arrived at the railway corral, they found that during the night the bulls had kicked the sides of the two boxcars into kindling wood and made their escape to the wide open spaces.

But even this setback combined with the renewed jibes of the town's jubilant citizenry failed to cool the cowpunchers' ardor, nor that of the half-breed. It was realized then that the only way in which the devilish critters could be shipped would be by tying them down before loading them into the cars. Without delay a strong chute was put up and into this the bulls were driven one at a time and securely bound by all fours. Then with block and tackle, still struggling and bellowing defiance at their captors, they were lifted out of the chute and carried into the cars. With the shaggy demons thus shackled, carload after carload left Ravalli's railway yard, and every beast arrived alive and in good condition in Edmonton. By the time the last animal had been loaded, nearly five years had passed since the half-breed's first roundup outfit had set forth on the Flathead to begin this dangerous and unique roundup.

Given their freedom on the Dominion's grassy prairies, on what is now Buffalo National Park near Wainwright, Alberta, the beasts, once more led by the majestic bulls, soon quieted down and multiplied. By 1925, when the writer last saw the herd, it had increased to eight thousand or more head. Already there were three thousand too many on the reserve. The problem was solved soon after by transferring the younger animals to the Dominion's other northwest territories. It is said that the government thus moved more than seven thousand young bison with but little difficulty.

So, while it might well have been the case of Canada out-bisoning her good neighbor to the south, the foresight of it enabled the Dominion to remove from the danger of extinction North America's noblest game animal.

(Continued from page 8)

Later Senator Danaher told newspapermen he considered Author Smith's origination of the Destroyer-for-Bases deal the most important contribution made by a private citizen to the war effort!

F. R. BUCKLEY appends the following notations to "Of Treachery," underlining once again the parallel he has so often drawn in previous Caradosso stories, to wit: that there's nothing new under the sun, including chicanery and the double-cross, even—or particularly, we might say—as practised by the holders of juicy government contracts in wartime.

The proposition on which I have founded the Luigi Caradosso stories is, of course, that human nature is the same in all ages—it seems to me to have been more naked and unashamed in the sixteenth century, that's all. So then, as now, there were war profiteers, ready to make money out of other men's ideals and agonies; the only difference being that, when found out, they were dealt with a good deal more forcibly than we seem able to deal with the breed today. The profiteer in this story, "Of Treachery," was lucky. Had he fallen into the hands of the lord to whom he had sold his defective materials (and had he not had means to restrain his lordship's natural impulses) he would have died much more leisurely; about an inch at a time. Incredible as it may seem—and indicative as it is of the strength of some men's impulse toward dishonesty—one fellow actually sold bad armor to Cesare Borgia. To comfort those of our native rogues who think they're ill-used with eighteen months imprisonment for faking tests on essential munitions, I should like to give details of what befell that armorer; but this magazine has to go through the mails. Possibly it's permissible to quote what Henry II of England did—rather farther back in history, and in another department of state—when he found that the mint-masters in various parts of his kingdom were turning out money not up to the standard set for them. He called them all up to London and "mutilated" the lot. It sounds drastic, even though the men were admittedly guilty; but what the inflation caused by their bad coinage would have done to the whole population—and it innocent—would have been more drastic still. And the quality of the currency did improve. Forthwith.

One other point I may mention: it's a taboo—and surprisingly wide-spread—that no lady such as Angelina may be depicted as dying anywhere but in a gutter. This taboo wasn't observed in the Bible, of course, and *Adventure* doesn't seem to suffer from it either; but I will observe the proprieties by saying that this misguided girl may eventually have died there, for all I know.

When last I heard of her she was (as I have said) doing nicely.

Mr. Buckley, a versatile fellow who knows as much about the modern Merchant Marine as he does about Mediaeval Italy (and that's plenty!) has had to cease construction on the ship model he's concocting for our mantel to go on jury duty. Just before his enforced period of incarceration with his eleven empaneled confreres however, he asked us to thank Mr. Alfred W. Miller for the enthusiastic letter about "Watch Below" which we published in our March issue. There's a personal answer from the author on our desk waiting to be forwarded to Mr. Miller just as soon as he lets us know his address. "55 Liberty Street" just isn't specific enough. We've got to know the town, too!

WILLIAM P. SCHRAMM adds the following biographical material about Michel Pablo, maestro of the great "Bison Roundup," and a few words of explanation about the article. He says:

Michel Pablo was born at Fort Benton, Montana, in 1853, the son of a Mexican and a full-blooded Blackfoot maiden. He grew up at Fort Colville, Washington, and married a granddaughter of Jocko Finlay. Charlie Allard's father was a white man and his mother an Oregon Indian woman. He married a daughter of Louis Brown, first settler of Frenchtown, Montana. Pablo and Allard died years ago and were buried in the cemetery at St. Ignatius. Their descendants still live in the Flathead country near St. Ignatius.

In Radio, Montana, in 1941, there still lived Joe Marion, top hand for Pablo, an aging man from whose memory time had begun to efface the details of the great roundup. He stated that the entire herd did not number over four hundred head and

A WORD TO THE WISE

Waste paper is still an important war material—it's essential for packing ammunition. So in order to make sure there's enough left over to go 'round for your favorite publication, don't forget to save all waste paper and turn it in for scrap or sell it to your junk-dealer.

that the price paid was $400 each, including the calves, and that the last carload was shipped in 1911 to Alberta. Marion also said that he never was able to figure out how Pablo could have made any money on the deal, considering the outlay made for wages, supplies and working gear. Only in the last three statements, it appears, did fading memory hold out correctly.

The Historical Society of Montana was very generous in providing me with a mass of information about the round-up.

Note that not once do I use the word "buffalo," and for a good reason: There never were any buffaloes in the United States of America—unless it was in prehistoric times. A lot of people had to haul in their colors before "Believe It Or Not" Ripley a few years ago about this. Ripley stated in one of his trips that Wm. F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody never shot a single buffalo! About 12,000 people wrote him asking "how come?" And Ripley, as always, stood by his guns. Old Buffalo Bill really never did get a buffalo, because they were bison—not buffalo!

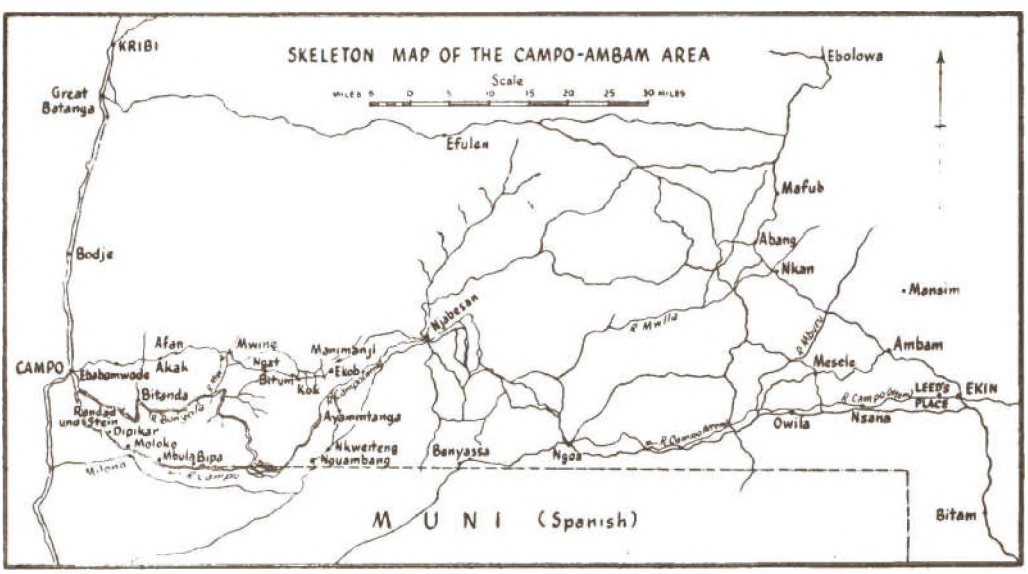
FAIRFAX DOWNEY dropped into the office the other day in mufti—it was the first time we'd seen him minus oak leaves for almost two years—and when we asked "How come?" he said he didn't have time to say more than "Hello" but would write us all about it. The following arrived in the mail a couple of days later, just in time to squeeze herein along with the conclusion of "Jezebel"—

Is it all right to drive up to *Camp-fire* in a jeep? Last time I rode up—with "War Horse." But that was about World War I, and in this show the war horses are jeeps.

Having served through the last war, ending up as a captain, Field Artillery, and still being pretty well preserved, I joined up for this one and was commissioned a major, FA, AUS. Had some fine service at the Field Artillery Replacement Training Center, Fort Bragg, N. C., where I was the adjutant and later a battalion executive. Lost a chance at battalion command and silver leaves when I was ordered to staff duty in Washington. Thence escaped to North Africa where my assignment of liaison with the French did not materialize; instead I served with several base outfits. I saw no action except four air raids on Algiers. After seven months, having picked up some kind of dermatitis, I was invalided home. Returned to duty, I served again at Bragg. Decided I was one of the older officers no longer needed, so was relieved from active duty at my request. Am glad to be back at my profession but mean to be of what help I can in this war as a civilian.

While I was in the Army, I managed to write two books: "Dog of War" and "Jezebel the Jeep." The latter, written in North Africa, is a tribute to my favorite automotive vehicle. Wish I could snag one after the war.

The adventures of Jezzy and Johnny, incidentally, are to be published in book form by Dodd, Mead & Co. shortly. (Watch your bookstore!)—K.S.W.



We thought it was high time that Adventure readers who have been trekking through the Cameroons jungles at the heels of "Trader Leeds" for so many months now should have a map of the region, so we procured the above from the Historical Section of the Committee of Imperial Defense to clarify the background and had Brian O'Brien indicate his cockney 'ero's 'eadquarters thereon.

ASK ADVENTURE

Information you can't get elsewhere

THE number on a Colt .45.

Query—I have an old Frontier Model Colt .45 which is still in good condition. The number 45-419 is marked on the butt. I take it the 45 refers to the caliber. Is this correct?

—D. E. Jonson,
Box 505,
Starke, Florida

Reply by Donegan Wiggins:—The serial number on your revolver means that it is the forty-five thousand four hundred and eighteenth revolver of that model made; the first two numbers have nothing to do with the caliber at all. And I'll gamble that it is still capable of mighty deadly work right today. The one carried by the first sheriff of Missoula, Montana, an altered cap-and-ball-to-cartridge one, hangs over my head as I write, and I've fired it enough to know it's perfectly reliable today.

IT'S slim pickings placer mining for gold these days.

Query:—I understand the government put out some literature during the depression on the old gold diggings which could still be worked at a profit. Can you advise me where I can secure such information?

—C. J. Gavelda,
506 Union Bank Building
Clarksburg, W. Va.

Reply by Victor Shaw:—You're right about Gov't bulletins put out in early 1930's on placers and some of the State Bureaus of Mining did this, too. But the call for these was so great that all were snapped up shortly and I know of none that were reprinted. Fact is, about the same thing occurred to the "old diggings" themselves, which means that today chances are mighty slim of finding any surface deposit that it would pay to work by any hand methods. Everybody and his pooch got after 'em during Depression.

I'll cite some areas that may be more promising than others, but speaking frankly, if you're lucky enough even to hit some pocket, it is likely not to yield enough gold to pay expenses. Tough, but true, and I give the low-down so far as I'm informed, not wanting you to get into the field and waste time and cash chasing a rainbow. Point is, the "good old days" are long gone and it's far wiser to hunt quartz-gold, as you have an even chance at that still, despite the federal bann on working gold mines now, that is, allotting no priorities on tools, dynamite, etc.

Now among areas less thoroughly explored perhaps are some of the streams in placer districts of northern California, in both Siskiyou and Trinity counties; yet many deposits there were worked in early days and long enough ago so that some may have had some enrichment since by means of spring freshets, and also some may have been but partially worked out. Same is true for old workings in the S.W. Oregon Althouse District, at head of the Illinois River branch of the Rogue River in Josephine County, also creeks flowing into the middle Rogue on the south side, from hills north of Galice in northern Josephine Co. These placers were all formed at the same time and in the same way as those in California, that is, numerous prehistoric gold-bearing beach and stream gravels lying in channels, which were further enriched when the topography was altered by the new gold-bearing streams later formed in that vicinity. Sounds complicated, but simple enough when geology of these regions is known. Anyhow, these placer areas are unique and rarely if ever duplicated elsewhere due to their peculiar geological history. (See Bull. No. 92, Calif. Bur. of Mines, Ferry Bldg., San Francisco). Data on gold

placer areas of S.W. Oregon are obtainable from Oregon Bureau of Mines & Geology, 704 Lewis Bldg., in Portland, Ore. Also a section on the Oregon placers in a report in Vol. 15, No. 6, 1933 issue, State College of Washington, Pullman, Wash.

I suggest you write to both Oregon and California bureaus for literature describing the several State placer regions. The best one in California is out of print, but can be consulted in the California public library, or the library of any large city, in Mines Section. Its title is "Gold Placers of Calif." and is known as Bull. No. 92.

It describes placer areas I refer to above, lying in creeks around the head of Trinity River, Trinity County; also creeks mapped as the Scott and Salmon rivers. The best places to prospect are the hill gulches at their heads, these hills being spurs and ridges of the Salmon Mts. on their *northern* slopes, in southwest Siskiyou County near county line.

You'll need large scale maps of these areas, also copy of State mining laws of both states. Apply to those State Mining Bureaus.

Sorry you didn't state if you've had experience at this type of prospecting or not. Makes a heck of a lot of difference! But in case you haven't, or even if you have, I suggest getting a copy of the book by Boericke, "Prospecting & Operating Small Gold Placers," $1.50, John Wiley & Sons, N. Y. C., or Mine & Smelter Supply Co., Denver, Colo. This is a most complete book of instruction on field methods, etc.

Best time for above areas is late April and early May, as high water from melting snow is then dropping fast.

THE wily weakfish.

Query:—I would like to have any dope—new or otherwise—you might have on weakfish: their feeding habits, whether they bite on outgoing or incoming tides, special rigs, lures, etc. I would also like to have the same information on butterfish, snappers and baby mackerel.

—G. E. Langhaar,
89 East Avenue,
Norwalk, Connecticut

Reply by C. Blackburn Miller:—Weakfish as a rule bite best on the flood tide—not always, but usually. The best bait for them in the surf is shedder crab and it is also good in bay fishing, but for the latter I prefer fresh shrimp with which to chum in a tideway. There is a knack to this, however, which, unless you know it, spells defeat. When you throw over a handful of shrimp, strip off line from your reel and then permit your baited hook to float down with the chum, slanting the tip of your rod towards the water as you do so.

Butterfish will bite on small pieces of fish or clam, as will snappers. In regard to mackerel (Thimbleye or Tinker) take a sardine can, punch it full of holes with an ice pick and hold it over the side, thus creating a "slick". Let your baited hook drift down with this and you will catch mackerel if there are any in your vicinity.

QUEER money.

Query:—I have in my possession a two-dollar bill, series of 1928D. It is the same as the regular two-dollar bill of that series except for the fact that the seal and the number are yellow, or gold. Can you tell me what this means and if it is of any value? I have shown the bill to a number of people, but none of them has seen one like it.

—Reginald Steeves,
36 Tremont Street,
Taunton, Massachusetts

Reply by William L. Clark:—Your two dollar bill is undoubtedly a homemade freak. The seal and the number on your specimen were originally red. Somebody has treated this with a certain solution which causes the red to change to yellow. Your note has no numismatic value at all.

TO detick a tick.

Query:—How do ticks bite? Or do they bore into the flesh? How do you get them out so as not to leave the head in to fester?

—Sam W. Finney,
Major, C.E.,
Bushnell, Florida

Reply by S. W. Frost—In attaching to man or other animal, the tick pushes its proboscis, or so-called "head," into the flesh. Strictly speaking, only the tongue or hypostome is inserted. This is a structure with backward-pointing teeth. When these are inserted it anchors the tick securely during the feeding period. This structure acts like a series of fish hooks which are easily inserted but difficult to remove. However, the mouth parts of the tick are soft and the tick can be treated with various materials to cause it to release its hold.

It is unwise to pull ticks roughly from the flesh and leave the "heads" to fester. A few drops of gasoline or petroleum will cause them to release their hold. Chloroform or ether are better and faster. A drop or two on a small piece of cotton can be pressed against the tick and in a few seconds it will release its hold and can be gently removed.

It is always better, if possible, to remove ticks before they attach themselves. Even four or five hours after exposure they generally are not securely attached. A piece of adhesive tape can be used to remove them. They adhere to the adhesive tape and can be picked up more easily than by the fingers. A small piece of bees' wax, softened by the heat of the fingers, is also useful in picking them up. A little time for detick-

ing, after returning from the brush, is worthwhile.

Many ticks remain on the clothing after they are removed from the body, especially if clothes are placed in a pile. The following day, if such clothing is used, the ticks are ready to crawl upon the body. Clothing can be freed from ticks by hanging pieces separately upon a line. The ticks have a habit of crawling upward and in so doing crawl off of the clothing.

THE Mackinaw boat of the upper Great Lakes.

Query:—What can you tell me about the Mackinaw sailboat?

This particular small craft was used rather extensively in one section of the Great Lakes years ago and derived its name, I believe, from the Straits of Mackinac or from the village of Mackinaw, which is situated on the northermost tip of the southern peninsula of Michigan. Though my home is in that locality, I have been unable to obtain any specific information on this boat.

If it will be possible for you to furnish me data on its dimensions, its sails and rigging, the purpose for which it was used, and the period of its existence, or direct me to any books or manuals in which it is mentioned, I shall appreciate it very much.

—Charles S. Taylor,
Captain, QMC.,
4729 Carondelet Street,
New Orleans, La.

Reply by Raymond S. Spears:—A Great Lakes sailor tells me it is around 30 feet long with a single stick and a leg o' mutton sail. The boat is shoal draft and light construction — boards. Probably — I am guessing—like the Chesapeake Bay skipjack, used in shoal waters, wide, spoon-shaped bottom (up at bow and stern, using sideboards instead of centerboard, at times).

The Webster collegiate dictionary says, "a flat-bottomed boat used especially on Upper Great Lakes." Century Dictionary says, "A flat-bottomed, flat-sided boat with a sharp prow and square stern. The advantage of the Mackinaw boat over the birch canoe is that its beam stands rougher handling, and that it can be drawn up on the beach without being unloaded . . . too heavy for portages. Largest Mackinaw boat was rowed by four or more persons . . . often rigged with a sail." In the book "The Great Fur Land," Robinson describes "inland boats." Of the shape of the ordinary whale boat, they carry a small mast, unstepped at will, upon which in crossing lakes, should the wind prove favorable, a square sail is set. A small platform or deck covers the stern of the vessel, upon which is seated the steersman, using at times the ordinary rudder-lever; again a long sweep, with one stroke of which the direction of the craft is radically changed . . . steersman is captain . . . the eight men under him being ranged as middle-men, or rowers. . ." The square sail and the leg o' mutton sail —probably in early days *any* canvas or even blanket—was used.

It is apparent that the "Mackinaw boat" covers a wide range of designs, and it probably was developed by the French voyageurs from the French fishermen's batteau model—"sharp prow and square stern" the "flat sides" flaring out—as used by the fishermen from France off the Cod Banks in earliest days. It filled the need between the frail canoe and the heavy vessels that must be anchored in harbors in time of stress, too big to haul ashore. It was rowed or sailed and, in larger sizes, carried several tons of cargo. It was changed from early rowboat to later sailing craft for service on the Lakes, among the islands, where portages were not needed. Fur-traders used it going to mouths of rivers, other camps and forts, collecting furs and delivering supplies.

"Mackinaw boat" appears to have been a term to cover most of the beachable board-rib construction craft larger than the skiffs, smaller than sailboats navigated without sweeps or oars. This is indicated quite clearly in the Great Lakes fur trade and transport of early days.

POST-WAR prospecting in Central America.

Query:—We are planning a three-year prospecting trip through the Central American states and Colombia, S. A., but mostly Panama and Honduras and Colombia, right after the war. We plan to prospect and if we locate anything big enough we then have capital waiting in the States to start mining on a large scale. Do these states require a prospector's license and what do they tax any findings?

I am a mineralogist and a fair geologist and I have had some experience in prospecting and mining but not in the tropics, though I have been in the tropics and the heat agrees with me.

We plan to take a small recovery plant that runs with a ½ hp gas engine and weighs about 250 lbs. We plan to have a 38 or 40 ft. sailboat, auxiliary motor and small motor boat to go up the small rivers. Also if we can, and you think it useful and practical we will get a helicopter.

We will go after gold and silver and platinum and precious stones; but will make tests for any useful metal, iron, copper, etc., as we have a contract with some large companies to pay us a bonus for any location that is accessible or can be made accessible and having large quantities of ore.

Our first stop in Honduras will be in the Mosqitia Dept., and north of the boundary river between Honduras and Nicaragua—I guess it is the Coco or Wanks.

I would appreciate your suggestions on

equipment and anything else you wish to tell me will be greatly appreciated.

Where can I get maps?

—Frank N. Perrin,
409 Pontiac Bank Building.
Pontiac, Michigan

Reply by Victor Shaw:—Yours of 7th inst. is of particular interest, because it seems quite certain that in Honduras, at least, your chance for success is high and also because you seem able to command the capital, or grubstake, that is absolutely necessary to insure this success. Too many would-be prospectors fail because inadequately equipped; for, as you perhaps are well aware, it still "takes money to make money" and in modern prospecting this is particularly true—especially in Central and South America.

Now you mention countries in Central America, also Republic of Colombia, S. A. All of these are well mineralized with ores of the precious metals, some also having gemstones, while others haven't. But this field, while very wide, has its advantages, also disadvantages, and in a case like yours I'd suggest that you make your choice—at first, anyway—by selecting the region having not only excellent chance for success, but also less of the obstacles to be overcome. These include adverse laws, natural disadvantages of poisonous snakes and insects and vegetation, and especially that of poor or bad climate, etc.

Now a reply to your letter (to be of much use) should be as complete and detailed as possible, which means a letter too long for such as this, or implies maybe *several* letters of query and reply. For in 25 years of this type of correspondence I've found that even a most detailed letter can really touch only the high spots of what should be known by one entering any country or region unknown to him.

In your case here, I'll first refer briefly to countries you name and outline possibilities of each as I have known about them, also what I consider their several disadvantages concerning prospecting.

COLOMBIA—This, being a South American republic, is outside of my territory, which covers only the North American continent. However, I'll mention that it is well known to be rich in gold, silver, and platinum, beside which it has quite a lot of emeralds. Much of its gold comes from extensive placers along the great drainage of the Magdalena River and its branches, especially in the Dep't of Antioquia, though it also has quartz-gold mines. Largest silver mines are in Dep'ts of Cauca and Tolima. These rivers also have considerable platinum mixed with the gold in their gravels. The emeralds have been known and mined for a great many years, being mined chiefly in the Dep't of Boyaca, more especially near towns of Muza and Cosquez roughly about 100 miles north and northwest from Bogota. These emeralds are the gem crystals of beryl, but are fine quality. They occur near Muza in crevices in clay-slate with calcite and black limestone. Doubtful if any open ground is left now. Trouble with placers in this region is that they all occur in the jungle country, where blackwater fever and malaria is common, thus being very dangerous for whites from temperate zone in North America. But gold and silver mining in the higher hills is in a better climatic condition.

For details of mining laws and all additional data on Columbia, write our *Ask Adventure* expert, Edgar Young, c/o *Adventure*.

PANAMA, C. A.—This country is very rich in gold, both placer and also the quartz-gold occurring in veins or lodes. However, quite a few years ago, and under a previous *presidente*, a concession was given an English syndicate to practically *all* the known placer and lode areas occurring in both northern and southern Panama; this concession to last for 99 years, of which about 75% has yet to run. So, this cuts out any and all prospecting in this Republic in its favorable areas. It is true that the Panamanian people today are against this arbitrary action having been taken, but thus far they have done nothing about it.

Concerning other countries of Central America: Most of them are so far as known well mineralized, with the richest said to be Nicaragua, with Honduras in second place. Costa Rica and Guatamala both have good possibilities apparently, but while local laws seem favorable for alien miners (especially in Costa Rica, not so much is known of their geological distribution, which makes it tough on the prospector. But, this doesn't apply to the Rep. of Honduras, of which more has been recorded recently and which I'll cover now in some detail, viz:

HONDURAS REP.—First, I want to state that neither this nor Guatamala to its north seems to be a gem region; in fact, barring some inferior so-called jadeite, I think there are no gemstones, of the precious type, though there may be some of semi-precious varieties. Nor, so far as I can find out, has much of any platinum been found, though any prospector going in there should keep an eye peeled for belts of the greenish-blue serpentine rocks in which lode platinum occurs.

However, so far as placer gold is concerned we now have something to go on in the report of an American mining engineer, Erwin Aymar, who spent some time examining the gravels of the Guavape River, which is a large westerly branch of the Patuca River in east-central and southerly Honduras. The Guavape lies chiefly south and west of Juticalpa, but it rises in the hills just east from Tegucigalpa and flows generally east to join the upper Patuca River just below Juticalpa. This area is in the Department (mining district) of Olancho. I got the Aymar report through the American vice consul, W. W. Hoffman, of Tegucigalpa. I said Aymar is a mining

(Continued on page 142)

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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.

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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 that 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.

Dogs—Freeman Lloyd, care of *Adventure.*

Fencing—Col. John V. Grombach, care of *Adventure.*

First Aid—Dr. Claude P. Fordyce, care of *Adventure.*

Fishing: *Fresh water: fly and bait casting; bait casting outfits; fishing trips*—John Alden Knight, 929 W. 4th St., Williamsport, Penna.

Fishing, Salt water: *Bottom fishing, surf casting; trolling; equipment and locations*—C. Blackburn Miller, care of *Adventure.*

Fly and Bait Casting, Tournament—"Chief" Stanwood, East Sullivan, Maine.

Globe-trotting and Vagabonding—Robert Spiers Benjamin, care of *Adventure.*

Health-Building Activities, Hiking—Dr. Claude P. Fordyce, care of *Adventure.*

Motor Boating—Gerald T. White, Montville, N. J.

Motorcycling: *Regulations, mechanics, racing*—Charles M. Dodge, care of *Adventure.*

Mountain Climbing—Theodore S. Solomons, 952 No. Hudson Ave., Hollywood, Calif.

Old Songs—Robert White, 913 W. 7th St., Los Angeles, Calif.

Old-Time Sailoring—Chas. H. Hall, care of *Adventure.*

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, Inglewood, Calif.

Swimming—Louis DeB. Handley, 115 West 11th St., N. Y., N. Y.

Swords, Spears, Pole Arms and Armor—Capt. R. E. Gardner, care of *Adventure.*

Track—Jackson Scholz, R. D. No. 1, Doylestown, Pa.

Woodcraft—Paul M. Fink, Jonesboro, Tenn.

Wrestling—Muri. 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 Hammel, 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.

Forestry, North American: *The U. S. Forestry Service, our national forests, conservation and use*—A. H. Carhart, c/o *Adventure.*

Forestry, Tropical: *Tropical forests and products*—Wm. R. Barbour, 1091 Springdale Rd., Atlanta, Ga.

Herpetology: *Reptiles and amphibians*—Clifford H. Pope, care of *Adventure.*

Marine Architecture: *Ship modeling*—CHAS. H. HALL, care of *Adventure*.

Mining, Prospecting, and Precious Stones: *Anywhere in North America. Outfitting; any mineral, metallic or non-metallic*—VICTOR SHAW, care of *Adventure*.

Ornithology: *Birds, their habits and distribution*—DAVIS QUINN, 5 Minerva Pl., Bronx, N. Y.

Photography: *Outfitting, work in out-of-the-way places; general information*—PAUL L. ANDERSON, 36 Washington St., East Orange, N. J.

Radio: *Telegraphy, telephony, history, receiver construction, portable sets*—DONALD MCNICOL, care of *Adventure*.

Railroads: *In the United States, Mexico and Canada*—R. T. NEWMAN, 701 N. Main St., Paris, Ill.

Sawmilling—HAPSBURG LIEBE, care of *Adventure*.

Sunken Treasure: *Treasure ships; deep-sea diving; salvage operations and equipment*—LIEUTENANT HARRY E. RIESENBERG, care of *Adventure*.

Taxidermy—EDWARD B. LANG, 156 Joralemon St., Belleville, N. J.

Wilderafting and Trapping—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, 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—MAJOR 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, "Ingle Nook," 30 Cornelia St., Wiley Park, N. S. W., Australia.

Hawaii—JOHN SNELL, Deputy Administrator, Defense Savings Staff, 1055 Bishop St., Honolulu, T. H.

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 MACGREAGH, 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.

Asia, Part 1 ★*Siam, Malay States, Straits Settlements, Java, Sumatra, Dutch East Indies, Ceylon*—V. B. WINDLE, care of *Adventure*. **2** *French Indo-China, Hong Kong, Macao, Tibet; Southern, Eastern and Central China*—SEWARD S. CRAMER, care of *Adventure*. **3** *Northern China and Mongolia*—PAUL H. FRANSON, care of *Adventure*. **4** *Persia, Arabia*—CAPTAIN BEVERLY-GIDDINGS, care of *Adventure*. **5** ★*Palestine*—CAPTAIN H. W. EADES, 3808 West 26th Ave., Vancouver, B. C.

Europe, Part 1 *Denmark, Germany, Scandinavia*—G. I. COLBRON, care of *Adventure*.

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*—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, 1261 Ouelette Ave., Windsor, Ont., 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, 952 No. Hudson Ave., 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, Vine and Hill Sts., Crafton, P. O., Ingram, Penna. **3** *Lower Mississippi from St. Louis down, Louisiana swamps, St. Francis, Arkansas Bottom*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, 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, Inglewood, Calif. **4** New Jersey—F. H. BENT, care of *Adventure*. **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.

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 for 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.

Anyone knowing the whereabouts of Robert Limbach, the best pal I ever had, last heard from in the Merchant Marine, please write me. Robert Wallish, 3522 W. 12th Place, Chicago, 23, Ill.

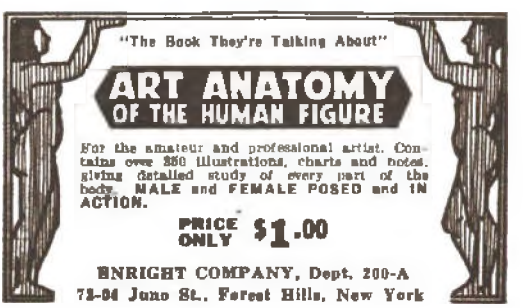
Earl Chew, formerly of Troop "B" 4th U. S. Cavalry, last heard of was a motorman on streetcars in Indianapolis, Ind. Get in touch with your old pal "Chink," otherwise Horace M. Henninger, 905 Irving St., N. E., 17 Washington, D. C.

George Kullrich, electrician by trade, home in State of Washington, whom I met in 1913 in Miles City, Mont., and corresponded with later at Verdi and Reno, Nev. Any information will be appreciated by Fin. Write me c/o *Adventure*.

Will anyone knowing the whereabouts of Robert Lipp, last known to be headed for Seattle, Wash., about July 4, 1942, please communicate with Larry Richmond, C-2 2nd Airdrome Bn. FMF, Fleet P. O., San Francisco, Calif.

Anyone knowing of the whereabouts of Thomas H. Dobbs, aged 71, 5 feet 9½, curly hair, blue eyes, was a prospector in Utah, Washington and Arizona, spent some time in Pocatello, Idaho, please communicate with his brother, John R. Dobbs. Morristown Post Office, Arizona.

Any oldtimer who can recall the name or the name and address of the pharmacist's mate who ran the sick bay at Main Barracks, Yerba Buena Naval Station, (Goat Island or Boat Hill to the gobs), during the Fall of 1918 will do a great favor by informing Bill Gianella, 1042 59th St., Oakland, 8, Calif.



THE TRAIL AHEAD

In our July issue E. Hoffmann Price takes us back to the Philippines to crawl once more through the whispering **cogon** grass with Kane and Datu Ryan and Haji Maulana as they harry the Jap with **kris** and **kampilan** and carve themselves a slice of—

"QUISLING FOR BREAKFAST"

—In occupied Mindanao. Bishop Jackson of the Evangelical Church of the Pagan Tribes, still riding Daniel-Come-to-Judgment, trots up in time to say a brief grace before the carving and pass the ammunition for the **lantakas** and bamboo cannon that blasted Colonel Yasuda's road-to-nowhere into a super-highway to Shinto heaven.

H. Fredric Young gives us "Bush Hideaway"—a stirring tale of Australia's back-of-beyond. . . . Frank Richardson Pierce carries us to Alaska in wartime in "Take Care of Things, Johnny." . . . William Du Bois brings us another adventure of Brevet Captain Carter and Sergeant Grady in the Floridas. . . . Walter Havighurst teaches "A Lesson in Knots" when he signs us on for a convoyed Atlantic crossing in the **Itasca.** . . . William Arthur Breyfogle, R. A. Emberg, James Vale Downie and many more tell unusual yarns. . . . Plus the next instalment of A. D. Howden Smith's great Swain serial, an oil-field fact story by Harry Botsford, and a wealth of informative features and departments such as can be found only in—

Adventure 25c

ON SALE JUNE 9th

(Continued from page 109)

Strom. Not much of a fire. The squarehead licked it in thirty seconds.

Strom stuck out his head, gasping. His watering eyes peered with awe from Dan to the mate. Clinging to the bulkhead, Kingsley was inching gamely toward the nozzle.

"It's out," Strom roared. "A chunk of shell cut an electric cable. That mate will kill you!"

"Only once, which is about right," Mulqueen said bitterly.

He jerked the stream of water off Mr. Kingsley and let it rush away along the steel deck.

"It started out true enough with the ship first and us after, John," he said. "But my head swelled bigger than the ship. Pass the word—turn off that water!"

Kingsley came the last few steps at a run. His streaming face was twisted in fury.

"Strom put out the fire with the extinguisher, sir," Mulqueen said loudly, as to a deaf man.

"You—"

The stream from the nozzle suddenly became a dribble.

"I'm sorry, sir," said Mulqueen steadily. "I must ha' got so excited that when you gave the word for the hose I thought my name was Strom. I haven't been myself lately."

Kingsley shook his fist in Mulqueen's face. "You're disrated!" he gasped. "You're—I'll—"

"D'you s'pose I lost my head, sir, chucking all that water around?" Mulqueen asked with slow emphasis. "Strom saved your special cargo with no water damage at all."

He looked at the mate meaningfully.

Kingsley closed up his jaws. He stared at Dan Mulqueen's face. Gradually he got hold of himself. He understood. No hose. No water damage. His fury fled.

Quickly he stepped into the storeroom. His voice, hoarse and not too strong, came back to them in the passageway.

"Forget that disrating, Mulqueen."

Kingsley came out and faced them. "You ought to be a bosun, too, Strom," he said.

"Me, sir?" said Strom.

"It's steady old seamen," Kingsley said, "who save the bacon for young officers. I know that—now." He headed for the bridge.

Strom gave Dan a hand with the limp hose.

"Kingsley wasn't splitting us," Dan Mulqueen told himself savagely. "It was me—and I did a job on it."

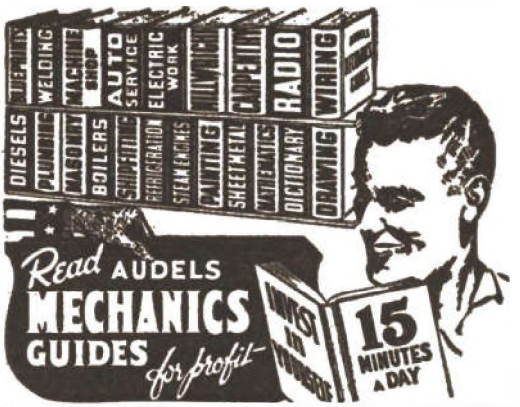
Suddenly Strom poked his fist into Mulqueen's ribs. "Maybe you're right about beans, not eggplants," he said. "We'll see, hey, Dan?"

On deck, men were still cheering.

"It would be more peaceful without a tractor," Mulqueen said. "We can do our cultivating with the two halves of a jackass."

Across the hose they grinned at each other.

THE END



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(Continued from page 136)

engineer, but (while he may be) he is anyway a qualified geologist, and will quote some portions from his report of a few years ago.

He says that regarding available pay gravels any of these river gravels almost without exception show colors wherever panned. He says that along the Rio Guavape for many miles extent, it is hard to find any surface gravels testing less than 50c a cu. yd. and that values below the surface at one foot depth are double that amount, or $1.00 per cu. yd.

Further, he says that at 4-ft. depth from surface, values average $2.00 a cu. yd. and increase with depth. The hitch was, he had no pumping apparatus and couldn't get below 4 ft. along the streams by shovel-work, as the ground-water level is close to surface. Hence the better places to work (lacking a pump) would be the higher bank and bench stuff. Aymar also states that due to numerous previous quakes, many streams have somewhat altered their courses, so any of these dry former river beds are among the best places for sinking to bedrock. At any rate, Aymar said values in placer gold increased everywhere so fast with depth, that undoubtedly the bedrock gravels will contain "enormous values."

He also refers to bench gravels he dug into where he found the bedrock lay very often as shallow as 8 to 12 ft. below surface. He also says that where the river changed course, leaving grassy vega with timber all being much higher than the present stream bed, there usually was 6 to 10 ft. of top soil covering 3 to 12 feet of old river gravels that rest right on bedrock and which "invariably carry heavy values in gold."

From this you can see that if equipped with a portable gasoline pump and one of those portable, knock-down placer machines put out by the Mine & Smelter Supply Co., Denver, (their "G-B Portable") it should be possible in such a promising region to make a very good thing in only 3-4 months of exploration and development. Also, if you've had previous experience at such work and know your theory of alluvial gold deposition, you'll recognize that the *upper* portions of such streams will as a rule have the coarsest gold. Aymar also states that a *minimum* grubstake will be $2,500, which means you just get by with very good luck, and that four thousand or even $5,000 grubstake for a season's work is really essential if you take in proper equipment and remain working for several months. However, thus equipped, it seems likely that returns should be large.

Now, Vice Consul Walter W. Hoffman got his data given above from the U. S. Bureau of Mines, Washington, D. C., (The Dep't of Honduras Rep.) I imagine you can get a map from the vice consul named, or maybe through the Honduras Consulate, 461 Market St., San Francisco, Calif.

I want to add that when going to Honduras you need a passport and to get a visa from the San Francisco consul costs $10.00. You also need a certificate from your local Chief of Police stating that you have never been arrested, and you also need a health certificate showing you have no contagious disease. All these are required when entering Honduras, beside which you have to have a bank deposit certificate showing that you have at least enough for a return passage from Honduras to the U.S.A.

Coastwise shipping (Pacific) has been discontinued, which means that you have to go via New Orleans by steamer to Puerto Cortez, and the 1st-class fare is $60.00. From Puerto Cortez you can go only 100 miles or so by rail. However the planes (Bellanca) of the TACA oufit will take you any place you choose to go and the charges are not too high and service is good and pilots are safe. You'll have to write the TACA office in Tegucigalpa for rates, or you could get these of Vice Consul Hoffman, there.

It is my considered opinion that you will do well to give up your idea of a coastwise boat, either motored or sailing craft, and there are plenty of adequate reasons for this suggestion.

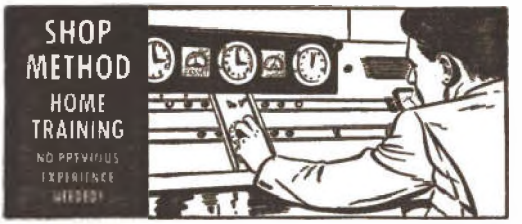
First, there is nothing in the mineral line to be found in the low jungled flat lands of eastern Honduras. Beside this the jungles have the same tropical dangers existing anywhere south to the equator, including the malarial and blackwater fevers. Therefore there seems to be no reason for going through this region, when you can fly over it and save time and health.

For, you see, your prospecting region lies up in the great central plateau region, which is a cool and healthy climate beside being the *only* mineralized part of the Honduras Republic.

Your wisest scheme will be to fly from Puerto Cortez to the large mining city of Juticalpa, in the Olancho mining district, and not very far from the Guavape River area, comparatively speaking. For your transport from there you use mules, which are bought for $15 each, with saddles extra.

You'll have to have a complete grub list for whatever period you plan to spend on the rivers, for you have to pack in *everything* in the grub line. A guide speaking both English and Spanish is essential.

If you have one-pole (adjustable) tents, with paraffined floor and plenty of skeeter netting for bars, you'll get by O.K. With floor sewed to a 3-ft. wall, you keep out the crawlers and dampness of rains. You'd find gas or coal oil pressure stoves handy and economical. You'd need a good tropical first-aid kit, clothing suited to southern California is O.K., and a similar camp outfit as well. Can buy most of it in Tegucigalpa, and/or Juticalpa. Firearms: a .30 or .35 rifle per each, with a shotgun (12-ga.) for the party.



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Vacu-matic Co., 7017-32B State Street, Wauwatosa 13, Wis.

(Continued from page 32)

There came the reports of Verbier's pistol, a muffled explosion nearby, another one, clear and shattering, the whistling of fragments somewhere. The old Frenchman had dropped the Jap before he could throw the second grenade, which had burst in the Jap's hand. Gerard had not been scratched.

Verbier stood in the doorway, still shooting, grumbling.

"Shouldn't leave one of them with a whole skull! How many times will I have to repeat that—" Then he shrugged, slid in a fresh magazine. He glanced down, saw what had been Ky-Nhat-Nam, looked questioningly at his young lieutenant. Verbier had not seen that leap forward.

"He—he—Captain, he deliberately threw himself—"

"I get it." Verbier nodded thoughtfully. "He was his old man's son, after all! Funny how blood will tell." He stood there, peering about, pistol poised. "You see, youngster, when a man's due, he's due. If he hadn't been with us, if you hadn't insisted—we'd be—" He broke off.

Ky-Nhat-Nam was sprawled face down, his body torn, his life gone. One of his hands was limp, the other bunched, and thin, blue smoke rose from between the fingers. Gerard saw this with horror, stepped forward. "Captain! His cigarette's still bur—"

Verbier appeared to go mad, clutched at Gerard's arm, dragged him away. "Come on, you fool, come on! Do you want him to have done it for nothing?"

Then Gerard recalled what that cigarette had been used for, so short a time ago. He remembered that point of fire creeping along the fuse. Ky-Nhat-Nam was dead; nothing could be done for him. And there was work to be done in the Tonkin.

He shut his mouth and ran. . . .

The explosion came as the leading plane started its first run. The crest blew up like a volcano. Hill folks for many miles around saw, heard and smiled. Ky-Nhat-Nam had vanished, but he would return when they were free.

THE END

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This advertisement, contributed to the war effort by this magazine, was prepared by the War Advertising Council in cooperation with the War Production Board and the Office of War Information.

(Continued from page 101)

all the ship while three men poised to judge how the first blow struck. Shell-splashes now; the talker watching the time-of-flight clock, crying, "Time, sir!"; and a second pattern of waterspouts whitening the field just as the enemy hull flickered with points of vivid orange fire.

"Spot one. Down one-double-oh. Left one-four."

Hearing that in his phones from the fore tower, Charlie Braddock frowned. He waited, his concentration intense. Spot two kept silent: he concurred. Then this was Charlie's instant, and his nature squirmed. Yet things went leaping past his brain. Ensign Gay, muttering about a trunion tilt the ship astern still held, throwing three shells in a salvo pattern wider than their own. *Fresno* and *Bandon* salvos dropped together—but not quite. That's what his instinct saw and knew. Two judgments passed—but they were not his own. Hit first. Hit hard. Remember that! Scotty had such a quiet voice. . . So did a girl named Susanna!

Her words spun without reason through Charlie's mind, reminding him what glory he had almost missed. When you're sure of the truth you must speak it! You are tempting our fate too much, if you don't. . . Suddenly Charlie's frowning ceased.

"Spot three!" he called. "I make it up five-oh. Right oh-one-two." And he added firmly, "I am certain, sir!"

Scotty's head came around, eyes narrow, lips apart. Strange voice from Charlie, hard as steel! He hesitated for a fatal fragment out of time. But the commander had a keen sense for the judgment of a man. He trusted it implicitly.

"We will use Spot three," he told Plot over Jay circuit phone. "Up five-oh. Right-oh-one-two."

The corrected salvo roared in its time. Great flame-jets plunged from the enemy hull. And *Bandon* was on now, too. In sixty seconds the Jap cruiser was one enormous mangled blaze, luridly silhouetting her column against the black night sky.

"Cease firing. Shift to target next astern and resume."

So they sank the Jap in Kula Gulf and Scotty was proud of such gunnery. When he had time to think of it, he smiled. That's what came, he knew, of instantly recognizing the natural gift of a man. And trusting it. But Commander Evans muffed it wide. The most important thing about Lieutenant Braddock wasn't his eyes at all. It was the simple fact that Charlie had never asked Susanna to be his wife.

THE END

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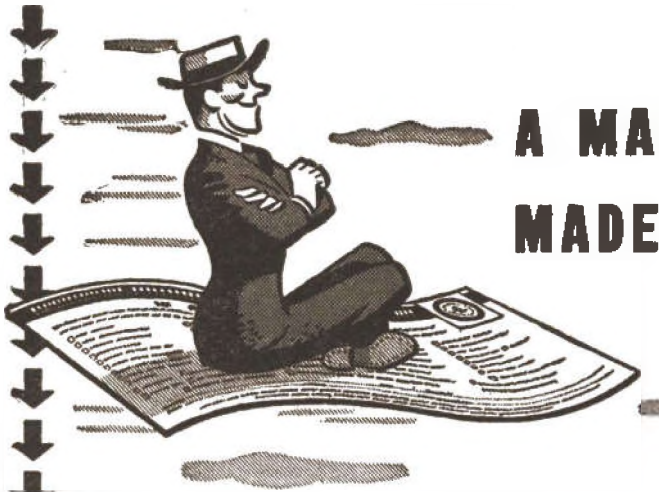

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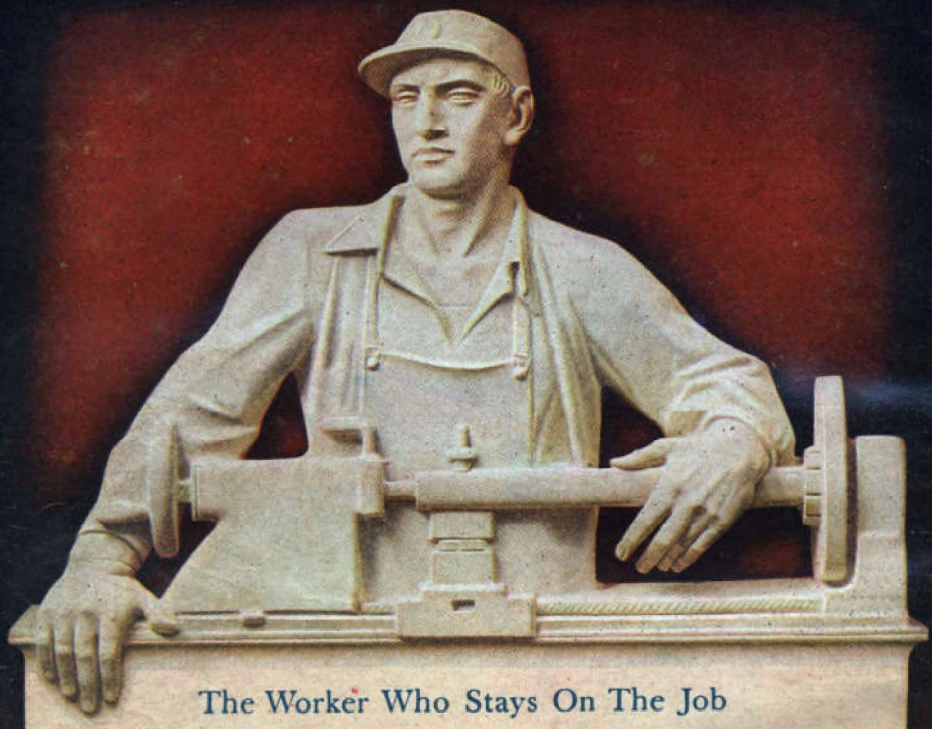

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