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O'LEARY IN ACTION IN ETHIOPIA

by Arthur Guy Empey

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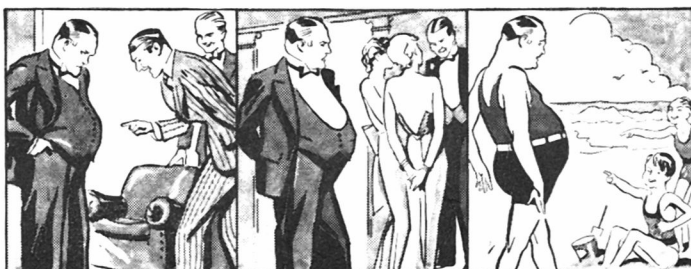
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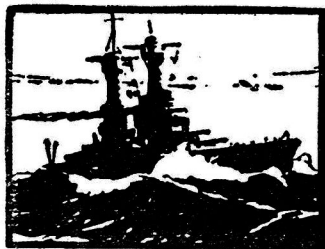
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Battle Stories



CAPT. W. H. FAWCETT, Publisher
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[[Dedicated to the fighting forces of the United States and Canada, whose gallant daring and deathless courage always have distinguished their deeds on land and sea and in the sky.]]

Volume XI

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"A Private Paradise"



THE bugle call had sounded taps, and out went every light,
So I hit the hay in my two-by-six to sleep throughout the night,
When suddenly a heavenly voice the evening's stillness rent,
'Twas good St. Peter's call for me, and heavenward I went.
It took me just one hundred years, I didn't journey fast,
But rather like an Erie freight or a troop train going past.
I wondered why we made no stops till I heard St. Peter say,
"Side-track all the generals, boys, there's a private on the way."

At last I reached the pearly gates, in awe I gazed around,
For there were forty majors all policing up the ground.
While in dismay a colonel stood from early until late;
He'd overstayed his one-day pass and couldn't pass the gate.
St. Peter came as I looked on and held within his hand,
My army service record and a red tape rubber band,
He looked it over carefully and shouted through the door,
"You've earned your place in Heaven, lad, you joined the Ordnance corps."

"I know you tried to go to France and help write history's page,
It's not your fault you had to wait 'till death came from old age;
Just bide your time, rest all you please; your time means nothing now,
The non-coms will do all the work, and captains sling the chow."
The barracks were of marble made, inside were easy chairs,
And captains fanned my fevered brow, while corporals swept the stairs,
The sergeants were the porters there and were supplied with mops,
And all the first lieutenants were St. Peter's kitchen cops.

We searched the "loots" for cigarettes, cigars and matches, too,
And made them carry twelve-inch shells until the day was through,
And when for lack of sunlight they returned from all their whirls,
They stayed in camp to scrub the floors while I had all the girls.
Infirmarys were also there where doctors, weak and strong,
Got three shots every morning and inspection all day long;
One surgeon with a broken leg got salts and three black pills,
I had him marked "for duty" to cure him of his ills.

At last I tired of pleasure, upon a feather bed,
I lay, no thought of reveille, I'd sleep 'till noon instead.
But all at once I felt a noise, into my ear it spoke:
"It's four o'clock; relief outside," and then, Oh! hell, I woke.
I grabbed my trusty rifle and in the morning air,
I guarded ammunition for the boys 'way "over there";
I walked my post in earnest until my feet were sore,
And proud to be with Uncle Sam, a private—nothing more.

Terrence X. O'Leary



The Green Lion of Judah! That's what this fighting Irishman is called in Ethiopia where, as a major in Haile Selassie's army, his exploits, such as the one you are about to read, are already becoming legendary!

THROUGH the African night two cavalry officers rode toward the twinkling fires of an army camp separated from them by a muddy, sluggish river. The horses of the cavalymen plugged gamely on, their heads hanging and their feet stumbling from sheer weariness. The officers were in no better condition. Their shoulders drooped and their chins sagged as they slouched forward on pommels. They looked like two ghostly

apparitions, covered as they were with white dust.

Since sunrise they had pushed across a tortuous plateau indented with dongas, those terrible steep-sided canyons fashioned out of the plain by the rainy season long past, and now about due again. Under the blazing Ethiopian sun, and in the smothering dust, it had been like riding through hell itself.

"Chin up, Pete," encouraged the taller

in ETHIOPIA



Two howling Askaris rode straight for O'Leary like demons out of the night.

By ARTHUR GUY EMPEY

of the two officers. "Shure, an' the first hundred miles are the hardest. If that native runner wasn't lyin', we'll soon be shakin' hands with Haile Selassie himself."

"A lot of good that'll do us," grumbled the other. "Terrence, you're plain nuts; the heat has gone to your head. Riding through forty miles of purgatory just to bid Selassie goodbye."

"Shure, an' ye're fergittin' I'm the Green Lion o' Judah, an' that Ethiopia lions must live up to the ethics of the jungle."

"All right, all right, Mr. Green Lion. But if we had hopped that narrow-gauge toy they call a train, we'd be in Addis Ababa now and pointed back to the good old U. S. A." The officer lifted his sagging chin and shot a questioning look at his comrade. "Perhaps you are figuring to stay a while longer in Ethiopia?" he asked sharply.

The one addressed rode along without replying. He was Terrence X. O'Leary, veteran of both the cavalry and the air service of Uncle Sam. In the World war he

had won the Congressional Medal of Honor for extraordinary heroism, as well as numerous decorations from the Allies. He held the rank of major in the Ethiopian army and was in command of a cavalry squadron.

Tall, of well-knit frame, lithe as a panther and slightly bowlegged, he was the ideal American cavalryman as pictured by the great Remington. The habitual sparkle in his clear, steel-blue eyes now, however, was missing. He pushed back his Stetson hat—he disdained to wear the gaudy head-dress of Ethiopia—and tugged on a lock of his tousled red hair, a habit he had when thinking.

His uniform was of a bright green hue. Although a native born American, there was a warm spot in O'Leary's big heart for the country of his forebears, the Emerald Isle, and he was in no way averse to publishing the fact at every opportunity. There being no iron clad rules in the rather democratic army of Emperor Haile Selassie as to the kind and the color of officers' uniforms, O'Leary had designed one to his liking.

In tribute to his really great knowledge of strategy, tactics and training methods, the officers and men under his command had bestowed on him the title of the Green Lion of Judah. It goes without saying that the color of his uniform had prompted them in selecting the color of the lion for which they had named him. Although his cavalry squadron was composed of Amharas, that proud, haughty, warlike race which rules Ethiopia and which is justifiably suspicious of all white men, to them O'Leary was second only to Haile Selassie himself in their respect and affection.

O'Leary's companion was Peter Maher McGuffy, a U. S. air ace of many decorations and O'Leary's inseparable pal during and since the World war. His uniform was khaki. He was no movie hero to gaze upon, this McGuffy fellow. Every inch of him spelled trouble for those upon whom he wished trouble. Stocky, muscular and broad-shouldered, he was tougher

than ironwood. He also listed the United States cavalry in his varied U. S. army service and now held the rank of captain under O'Leary.

"I asked you if you figured on staying a while in Ethiopia." None too graciously McGuffy broke the silence. "Forget the neutrality stall and get down to cases. I know you won't fight the Italians, and you know I won't, so rub it off the slate. Perhaps Karl Schlossen, that renegade German who—"

"Yes, Pete, he's the guy what's trouble' me. Look here, me and ye both are soldiers o' fortune, as the authors call it, an' fightin' leads us by the nose. Somehow we jist can't keep out o' wars. But this I ask ye—have we ever fought under two flags at the same time?"

"Hell, no!" McGuffy snorted in his indignation. "But this Schlossen vulture is now fighting under *three* flags, the Italian, Ethiopian and the French."

"Fightin'?" O'Leary spat between his horse's ears in contempt. "If the dirty rats only would fight, shure, an' ye could have a shade o' respect fer them. They ain't fightin'—they're sellin'. Vultures what live off of bloodshed. They're backed by a powerful and a dangerous ring of munitions makers who won't stop at anythin' to grab lousy dollars. If a guy ever tried to cross them he would be snuffed like a candle, no matter what part o' the world he hid in."

"You're telling me! I know it for a fact that the last shipment of cartridges they sold Haile Selassie had been condemned before the World war."

"And that ain't the half of it, Pete. They charged him double price, too. From them Italy gits the best at the lowest price, and Ethiopia gits the worst at the highest price."

"Well, what are you going to do about it?" demanded McGuffy.

"I'll bite, what am I?"

AGAIN the riders lapsed into silence. They now were close to the south

bank of the river separating them from the army encampment.

"Say, Pete," observed O'Leary at length, "I was jist sort o' thinkin'."

"Which means plenty of trouble," groaned the weary McGuffy. "Can't you let well enough alone?"

"I was sort o' thinkin'," went on O'Leary talking more to himself than to the man riding abreast of him. "Fightin' a gang o' greedy rats like them wouldn't be breakin' no laws of neutrality, now would it?"

"No, because you wouldn't live long enough to break them. Don't get any crazy notions like that into your skull, Mr. Green Lion, or you'll play the game solo. Peter Maher McGuffy is traveling back to God's country."

"Yeh, it ain't the first time ye've said it, and ye're still here." O'Leary bit off a man-sized chew and passed the plug to his pal. "We sort of owe Ethiopia somethin', Pete, and the old Lion of Judah himself. Quittin' 'em this way cold, in their time o' trouble gripes me."

"Hold it!" cried the startled McGuffy. "We can't fight Italy, even if we wanted to."

"If we fought Karl Schlossen's dollar-grabbers it wouldn't be fightin' the Wops. Shure, an' we'd be champeens of humanity."

"I agree with you, but they'd blast us out so quick we wouldn't know we were dead."

"If a dead man don't know he's dead, he ain't dead, Pete. I got a hunch Karl Schlossen is betrayin' Ethiopia while bleedin' the country of every dollar he kin squeeze out o' them."

"Right, but again I ask you, what can we do about it?"

"Sooner or later a guy has to die anyway, Pete," soliloquized O'Leary, "so what difference do a few years make? I'm bettin', before we see Haile Selassie, that Karl Schlossen's agints contact us. They've got somethin' up their sleeve, or they wouldn't o' been watchin' us so close lately."

"Well, we don't have to do business with them, do we?" challenged McGuffy.

"No, we don't have to, but we will."

"Says you! Count me out. I'm washed up."

Again the two cavalrymen lapsed into silence and rode wearily along.

On reaching the river bank they were challenged by a sentry and were passed across the crazy swinging structure which the Ethiopians had dignified with the name of bridge. On the other side the Americans paused and surveyed the shadowy tented city straggling in disorder on the plain. Solemnly they wagged their heads in disapproval and pushed onward.

"The poor fellows haven't a chance to win against Italy," remarked McGuffy. "More like a country fair than an army camp. This business of taking along the whole family when going to war isn't being done any more."

"The Ethiopians can't win, Pete, but take it from me, Italy can't either. Ethiopia itself will lick 'em. The country, I mean, with its rains, mud, fevers, dysentery, ticks, tsetse flies and all the rest. The big chicka is due any day now, and Mr. Il Duce will be stalled for months, sunk to his belly in mud what makes glue seem like cornstarch puddin'. Yeh, the Italians can't lick nature."

"Hist!" The sibilant signal came to them from the deep shadows on their left. "Major O'Leary."

"Yeh, that's me. What do ye want?" O'Leary nudged his comrade and nodded.

"Take their horses," was ordered in a low voice to a native soldier. "Gentlemen, come into my tent a moment, please." The voice was in English but marked by a decided German accent.

"Shure! Got anythin' to drink?" asked O'Leary, then in an undertone to McGuffy, "It's the rats themselves, Pete. They're nibblin' at the cheese."

"You can count me out," whispered McGuffy. "That's final."

"Okeh, but take yer cues from me."

"You should find some pretty fair schnapps," replied the mysterious voice.

TURNING their horses over to the native who had emerged from the shadows the Americans went into the tent. A stout, florid-faced civilian sat at a table with two other civilians, who in the light of the candle burning appeared to be of German extraction. A bottle of whisky and glasses were on the table. Without invitation the Americans helped themselves generously to the welcome alcohol and sat down.

"Coming to pay your farewell respects to the Emperor, gentlemen?" inquired he of the florid face. "Your six-year contract of training his cavalry expired yesterday, did it not, Major O'Leary?"

"Yeh, and me and Pete are free lancin' ag'in," replied O'Leary. "You belong to the Karl Schlossen outfit, don't ye?"

"You called the trick. We've had our eyes on you for the last couple of months. What are your plans?"

"I'm a bit hungry to see Broadway ag'in, Mr.— what did ye say yer name is?"

"Joseph Werner, special agent for Karl Schlossen." For a moment or so the German studied the Americans. "How would you like to get into the big money?" he asked slowly. "Not the kind of chicken feed you've been drawing for training black boys, but real jack."

O'Leary felt like hauling back and letting the German have it, but instead he smiled as though the proposition might appeal to him.

"That all depends," he answered. "What do ye call big money?"

"Twenty grand for you, and ten for Captain McGuffy."

"It listens good to me. How about ye, Pete?"

"Why not?" came the ready reply. "I didn't know there was that much money lying around loose in this country."

"Jist a minit, Mr. Werner," said O'Leary. "Ain't ye runnin' quite a risk puttin' such a offer to us right under the nose o' the Emperor himself? Suppose, now jist supposin', we should blab to him."

"You would be the one running the risk." The German laughed quietly. "You are too intelligent, Major O'Leary, to at-

tempt anything like that against Karl Schlossen."

"I wear a green uniform but there's no green in me eye. What do ye want us to do?"

"Instead of leaving Ethiopia, why not stay in command of your Amhara squadron, say for a week, and then return to Broadway—with money to spend?"

"I reckon it could be arranged." O'Leary helped Pete and himself to another drink. "What's the lowdown?"

The German smiled his satisfaction and leaned closer to the two officers.

"In a few days—perhaps tomorrow—the big rains, the big chicka, should start," he said. "Your squadron now occupies Devil Pass, which blocks our munitions road north. If, by a forced march, the column of Askaris—"

"Askaris!" ejaculated McGuffy. "Heaven help anybody falling prisoner to those devils from the Red Sea colony of Italy."

"Yeh," supported O'Leary grimly, "them Eriteans would skin him alive with their knives and would barbecue him on their spear points."

"One could not truthfully call your Amharas *angels*, Major O'Leary," said the German. "They are a good match for the Askaris, too good in fact. That is why Karl Schlossen is willing to pay thirty thousand dollars to allow the Askaris to push further north."

"But Schlossen don't give a hoot who wins the war," protested O'Leary, "so long as he kin sell munitions."

"I agree with you, Major O'Leary. If the Askaris can get through Devil Pass it opens the way for more ammunition—later. In fact, a war of much longer duration. A large shipment of cartridges has now reached your Amhara squadron. No discredit for the defeat of the Amharas can be laid to you—with useless cartridges. Karl Schlossen will take the blame and will furnish Ethiopia with more of the same brand—at the same price."

"Shure, an' that simplifies matters to me taste, Mr. Werner. When do we git paid?"

"I had anticipated your question." The German took two neat little packets from an inside pocket and tapped them on the table. "Here." He passed them to the American. "Count the money at your leisure. I presume," he added menacingly, "that Karl Schlossen shall have no cause to regret that he paid you in advance?"

"Now, Mr. Werner!" O'Leary's eyebrows went up.

"The Askaris will attack at midnight tomorrow," the German informed him. "If, at that time, your Amharas should be unprepared — totally surprised — well, in other words, if for some reason you had withdrawn them from their present defensive positions, Karl Schlossen would be very well satisfied."

"Say, Mr. Werner," put in McGuffy, "how can all this be arranged so quickly by your side?"

"The attack has already been set, Captain McGuffy. We were aware that you and Major O'Leary were coming and, also, were quite sure that you would agree to our plans. Even had you refused, the attack would be made. More blood would be spilled, that is true, but with defective ammunition the Amharas cannot stop the Askaris."

"How kin we reach Devil Pass in time?" asked O'Leary. "It's a two-day ride, mounted."

"There is a two-seater plane available, Major O'Leary. Of rather ancient design, but you and Captain McGuffy flew worse in the World war."

"How about the ammo of the Askaris?" inquired O'Leary. "Is it good?"

"Of the finest. In fact, an ammunition train of thirty motor trucks is waiting to get through Devil Pass right now, to be delivered to Ras Bola Kashah."

"I don't quite savvy." O'Leary tugged on a lock of his crimson mop. "Why should the Askaris deliver cartridges to Ras Bola Kashah, and him on Ethiopia's side?"

"When he gets the ammunition, and the money accompanying it, Ras Bola Kashah then will be fighting for Italy."

"Clever! Well, Pete, I reckon we best pay our respects to him what's about to die, Haile Selassie. Let's move."

POCKETING the blood money the Americans left the tent and mounted their horses. Thoughtfully they rode toward headquarters of the Ethiopian emperor.

"Ye know, Pete," chuckled O'Leary, "I'm kind o' thinkin' some Askaris is gonna ketch plenty o' hell at, or before midnight tomorrow."

"That's funny, Terrence, I had the same idea. But how about those three skunks back there?"

"When the party's over with, me an' ye are gonna fly back in the war-time jenny and presint our compliments to 'em."

"Not so easy as it sounds, fellow," demurred McGuffy. "Stopping those Askaris with bum ammunition will be no cinch."

"Use yer imagination. With the party set fer midnight them Askaris is gonna feel kind o' secure and be a bit careless. What's to pervint us from payin' them a social call first and grabbin' us their good ammo?"

"That's a thought, too. And the thirty thousand?"

"I don't know of a better charity to donate it to than O'Leary and McGuffy, Inc. Now if we were dealin' with honest men—"

"Yes, but we split fifty-fifty, Mr. Green Lion."

"Nothin' like that, and ye washed up with Ethiopia."

"Cripes, a guy can change his mind." McGuffy laughed. "I'm thinking that traitor, Ras Bola Kashah, will spend a few sleepless nights before long."

"His dreams won't be so happy."

In the tent the Americans had left three heads now were close together in further plotting.

"Not a bad day's work," remarked Joseph Werner. "We have evened the score Karl Schlossen owes them for stopping Vesta Baneh at the Pass of the Twin Lions."

"But the information you gave them is authentic," protested one. "It might backfire on us."

"Authentic information can be of no value to dead men," laughed Werner. "Half an hour after leaving the ground the motor will conk out and the plane will crash. There is no landing spot in the territory they must fly over to reach Devil Pass. Their bodies will be found in the wreckage and when the papers they carry in the packets I gave them are read they will be branded as traitors to Ethiopia."

"But the thirty thousand dollars?"

"That will further substantiate their treachery."

"A mighty dirty doublecross," said the least callous of the three, "if O'Leary is on the level and really intends to let the Askaris through the pass."

"You brainless fool!" snapped Werner. "All the money in the munitions combine couldn't buy O'Leary or McGuffy. That is why I was compelled to tell them of the treachery of Ras Bola Kashah, to convince them that Karl Schlossen was playing squarely with them."

"Supposing they tell the Emperor?"

"They won't. That pig-headed Irishman will keep it to himself. Right now he is figuring to wreck our plan and then expose us. Nor will he open the money packets before leaving. Within twenty minutes you will hear the plane take off, or I don't know my man."

LATE as it was Emperor Haile Selassie received the Americans in his headquarters. He spoke in Amharic.

"You have ridden far and hard, my brave officers, to bid me farewell," he said to them. "My heart is sad that Ethiopia is to lose your valued services, but I understand what is in your hearts. Your country is not at war with the invader and therefore it is too much to expect you to continue in our cause."

"O Lion of Judah," replied O'Leary in the flowery speech of the Amharas, "our hearts also are sad that we must part from the brave warriors whom we have trained and taught to fight in the manner of the

American cavalry. The Green Lion of Judah and his noble comrade, however, shall fly by plane to Devil Pass to say farewell to his beloved Amharas."

The Emperor's eyes lighted and he flashed the speaker a hopeful look.

"A fortnight ago, O Green Lion of Judah," he said softly, "you and your noble comrade bade farewell to your cavalry squadron, and then led them to glorious victory at the Pass of the Twin Lions."

"True, O Lion of Judah, but we were not fighting against the Italians, but against Vesta Banah and his thousands who tried to betray Ethiopia."

"The Askaris oppose your squadron now, O Green Lion of Judah, and they are not of Italian blood," replied the Emperor significantly. "The Askaris are fierce and cruel and merciless, and they are traitors to their own land of Africa."

"Ye see, Mr. Selassie," O'Leary unconsciously switched to his native tongue, "if somethin' funny should happen while I'm sayin' goodbye to me Amharas, well, ye niver kin tell." He winked at the Emperor.

"Well spoken, Major O'Leary," replied the Emperor in English. "The Lion of Judah prays that—t—hat—" He had to resort to his own language to finish the sentence. "—prays that the hand of Our Christian God again will intervene."

He clapped his hands and one of his many aides appeared, carrying a message in a tiny tube.

"O Green Lion of Judah," said the Emperor as he handed the tube to O'Leary, "here is a message from Captain Bakale, brother of him who died so gallantly in defense of the Pass of the Twin Lions. It came from Devil Pass before dark, by carrier pigeon. Captain Bakale implores the Green Lion of Judah not to leave his squadron."

O'Leary read the message and passed it to McGuffy.

"Great fellows, every mother's son of them," said McGuffy huskily after reading the message. "They'll be rather glad to see us, I bet."

"Not half as glad as I'll be to see *them*," returned O'Leary. He stiffened to atten-

tion and saluted the emperor. "On our return from Devil Pass, O Lion of Judah," he said, "we again shall say farewell." He grinned.

The Americans returned to the tent of Joseph Werner.

"We're ready to hop off," announced O'Leary. "Flyin' at night in that death crate ain't so hot, but the moon's coming up big an' that'll help us. How about a little oil to take along?"

"The plane is completely serviced, Major O'Leary, with sufficient oil."

"Schnapps, me dear man, schnapps. Me an' Pete have been ridin' all day and our joints are creakin'."

Armed with the bottle of schnapps, O'Leary and McGuffy followed Joseph Werner through the darkness to the antiquated plane, a Spad of the vintage of 1917. O'Leary climbed into the cockpit and carefully checked the fuel gauges. The indicators were on "full." McGuffy got into the monkey seat.

"Oh, I almost forgot," said Joseph Werner to them, "Karl Schlossen and two of his chief aides are with the headquarters of your cavalry squadron. When the As-karis successfully negotiate the pass Schlossen will do business with Ras Bola Kashah. Also he might have more work for you two. Good luck now and a happy landing."

He went to the prop and wound the old flying clock. O'Leary warmed up the crate and with a wave of the hand to Werner, which meant much more than that worthy dreamed, took off. At three thousand feet he leveled off and pointed nose west to fly over the country of which he knew every foot.

Here and there in the blue canopy above them cloud banks were forming, unmistakable signs heralding the approach of the dreaded big chicka. The edges of the clouds were tinted silver by the rapidly rising moon.

Pretty soon O'Leary motioned to McGuffy in the rear seat and pointed downward to a thin thread of silver winding across the plateau, finally to disappear in the rocky terrain beyond.

"A straight guide to Devil Pass," he shouted above the roar of propeller and exhaust. "Filled with crocodiles though, hungrier than hell."

McGuffy nodded sleepily and closed his eyes. Despite the noise of the plane and the wind stinging his unprotected eyes and face it was all the tired O'Leary could do to keep awake.

AS IN a dream the plateau beneath him glided to the rear and he was over the rocky area which Joseph Werner had alluded to so triumphantly as being the Americans' graveyard. At a sharp dive of the plane O'Leary came to with a start and righted the uncontrolled ship. He had fallen asleep. He glanced back at McGuffy. That worthy was snoring even louder than was the exhaust.

Again his hands grew heavy and lifeless on the stick and his head sagged forward. And again he awoke with a start. The motor was coughing ominously as though from a shortage of gas.

McGuffy now sat tense in seat staring anxiously at the pilot and an ear cocked in listening. O'Leary turned his head quickly to the rear and nodded. McGuffy sucked in a sharp breath. That nod had told him the worst. The gas was exhausted, and no place to land.

"The skunks doublecrossed us," yelled back O'Leary. "They fixed the gauges on full. Ye kin have all o' that thirty thousand, if it'll do ye any good where ye're goin'." He forced a sickly grin.

"You keep it," retorted McGuffy, also with a sickly grin. "You'll need it to buy ice with."

Again the engine coughed and missed, then coughed and missed again.

"Which do you prefer, Pete, to die on the rocks and let the buzzards eat ye, or drown in the river and give the crocodiles a feed?"

O'Leary wasn't trying to be funny, it was his way of asking his pal whether they should crack up among the rocks or crash into the river. There was not much choice between the two, for each apparently spelled certain death.

All the while O'Leary's as well as McGuffy's keen eyes were searching valiantly, but vainly, for a spot on which to set tail.

"Okeh, then, the river," called O'Leary, answering his own question. "We got one chance in a million. See that big tree ahead there on the bank. I'm gonna try an' tail-spin down on it. We ain't no more'n ten miles from Devil Pass, too, damn it."

McGuffy thrust a hand forward which O'Leary gripped and they smiled grimly at each other in their unspoken goodbye.

"Hold tight, here goes!" cried O'Leary as he threw the ship into the spin.

To O'Leary's dismay the motor conked out. There was no way of bringing her out of the spin. She must either hit the tree or— O'Leary left the thought unfinished.

Crazily the falling plane tumbled earthward. The floor, twisting and turning madly, now standing on edge, now upside down, rushed up to meet them. To their anxious gazes the tree seemed to be everywhere at once. There it was growing out of the moon. No! It had fallen off and was in the river. They were right on top of it. A hundred miles away. Over there! It had vanished.

Suddenly a crashing and rending and splintering of wood. Brace wires snapped and coiled like whiplashes. Branches and limbs slapped and buffeted them. O'Leary felt himself propelled head first through a maze of leaves and twigs and then out into empty space. He was turning over and over.

Splash! The wind was knocked from his body. He tried to suck in a breath. His mouth filled with water. Then his head sank into slimy ooze. Wildly he threshed his arms and legs to free himself. No use. He was imbedded too deeply. He couldn't breathe.

From the muddy bank across from the broken tree a crocodile slipped lazily into the water and disappeared in the direction of the disturbance in the water.

With a mighty effort O'Leary freed himself from the mud of the bottom and with a kick of legs shot to the surface. A

gasp for breath was followed by a gasp of horror. That ugly, shadowy thing coming at him? A crocodile!

Swimming desperately with one arm he drew his forty-five automatic. A fierce swirl of water close to him and two horribly opened mammoth jaws. Blindly he thrust an arm forward and pulled trigger.

He felt as though his hand had been blown off. But the crocodile had disappeared, as had his automatic. His wrist and fingers felt numbed and dead. Madly he struck out for the bank a few feet away. Just in time he reached it and quickly drew himself out of the water, for another crocodile had made a dash for him.

Dazed and puffing he lay on his back in the mud staring blankly into the air. Objects began to take shape in his vision. Damned funny, he cogitated confusedly, looked like a plane had crashed into the tree above him. Yes, he concluded, the engine had torn free from the fuselage and had buried itself in the soft mud near him.

But what was that hanging head downward from the broken limb? No, it couldn't be Santa Claus because that old gent had whiskers and a pot belly. His face seemed familiar though. He was singing, too. He never had heard the tune before but in a vague way the words brought back memories.

"You dumb Irish ape in the mud down there! Get up and cut me down before my eyes drop out. Come on, you green babboon."

Peter Maher McGuffy, and hanging by the seat of his trousers!

"Twist yer tail around the limb, monkey, and don't annoy me!" The dazed O'Leary was enjoying himself immensely. Leave it to Pete to amuse him. "If ye wanna come down ring fer the elevator."

A sudden ripping of cloth, a great agitation in the branches above him, and O'Leary thought the world had fallen on him.

"Now what'n hell ye mean by that?" he puffed as he struggled from under the weight holding him down.

McGuffy's hot flow of language was unprintable as he dug mud out of his eyes and ears.

A MILE in rear of the high rocky defile known as Devil Pass was situated the main encampment and headquarters of the Amhara cavalry squadron commanded by Major Terrence X. O'Leary. No confusion here, but order and military precision. Screened from air observation by thick, leafy trees, the way the pup tents of the cavalymen and the picket lines for the horses were laid out would have done credit to any crack white cavalry regiment. A thousand strong, the squadron was well equipped in all respects and boasted an efficient machine gun platoon, a signal detachment and a wagon train.

The acting commander, Captain Bakale, was a splendid specimen of a soldier, brown-skinned, erect and clean featured, he was a strict disciplinarian and what counted most, a true patriot. He took great pride in the squadron and believed his cavalymen to be invincible regardless of odds opposing them. As did his dead brother, he worshipped O'Leary and McGuffy. In fact, they were the only white men that he respected and trusted.

There was the one fly in the ointment for him, however, or at least three flies. The German, Karl Schlossen, and his two aides, under orders of the Emperor himself, had been allowed special quarters with a private telegraphic wire. This fact galled, and worried, this Amhara pupil of O'Leary's. According to his teaching, civilians, other than newspaper correspondents, had no place in a military machine on active duty. He would have overlooked this breach because of the Emperor's orders, but Karl Schlossen had proved himself arrogant and overbearing and had commenced issuing orders as to the running and the disposition of the squadron.

His thin lips compressed and fire in his keen black eyes, the Amhara captain stood before Karl Schlossen and his aides in the telegraphic tent. The sun was still low in the east.

"Dare you dispute an order of the Lion

of Judah himself?" demanded Schlossen angrily. "He has ordered that the two troops guarding the pass be withdrawn and that this camp be moved back beyond the trees."

The German was a big brute of prodigious strength, with the reputation for being a relentless killer. He had been cashiered from the Prussian Guards for cruelty to the soldiers serving under him.

"The orders of my Emperor are sacred to me," replied Captain Bakale proudly, "but I am responsible to him for the holding of this position. Moving the troops, as you advise, would leave the way open for the Askaris. I sent a carrier pigeon to Major O'Leary. He will come. If he approves, then I shall move the troops as ordered."

"These two Irishmen you worship have proved themselves to be traitors to Ethiopia."

"Either you are mistaken, sir, or you are lying," came the quiet answer although the Amhara stiffened perceptibly and his brown face flushed with anger.

"If it were not for the importance of the occasion," retorted Schlossen, "I would strike you down, you dog of an Amhara."

"I still am standing," came the cold defiance. "He who says that the Green Lion of Judah is traitor, is himself a traitor."

"Give me the message that just came in from the Emperor's headquarters," ordered Schlossen to the man at the telegraph key. He read from the blank handed to him, "'Major O'Leary and Captain McGuffy killed in plane crash. Papers found on bodies prove they sold information to the Italians at price of thirty thousand dollars.'" The German laughed sarcastically. "Do you believe it now?" he asked.

"It is a lie!"

"I am tired arguing with you," snapped Schlossen. "If you doubt the authenticity of the removal order, it is your privilege to first confirm it by telegraphing the headquarters of Emperor Selassie." He also had this detail fixed.

"I reckon I kin save ye the trouble, Cap-

tain Bakale," said a thick Irish voice in the doorway of the tent.

The Amhara wheeled about and his hand rose to the salute. O'Leary, plastered with mud from head to foot, stood in the opening covering Schlossen and his two men with an automatic. Beside him was McGuffy, also decorated with mud, and apparently enjoying the discomfiture of the staring Germans.

"Howdy, Captain," said O'Leary to the Amhara. "Sorry I can't return yer salute, but I'm kind o' busy with me artillery. Me and Pete have been listenin' fer the last few minits, and we shure were educated. Please, Mr. Schlossen, if ye move that hand another inch I'll blow yer teeth down yer ugly throat. Pete, to make up fer fallin' on me, frisk them three vultures. Kindly grab air, *gentlemen*."

"What does this outrage mean?" burst wrathfully from Karl Schlossen.

"Ye tell me," grinned O'Leary. "So me an' Pete are traitors to Ethiopia, eh? I wonder what ye buzzards call yourselves. But that ain't the issue. Captain Bakale, send me three Amhara sargints what ain't too polite to bite a baloney in two, if said baloney gits fresh. I want 'em to nurse these three wienies."

The captain saluted and hurried out. McGuffy searched the Germans and lined them up against a wall of the tent. O'Leary passed the automatic to him and sat down in Schlossen's chair. Grinning, he helped himself to a drink from Schlossen's flask, which lay on the telegraph table, then passed it to McGuffy.

"Now, me big brave gun-runners," he said to his prisoners, "fer the present Major Terrence X. O'Leary is in command. In case ye don't know it—the 'X' stands for ixcellint."

"You damned fool," mouthed Karl Schlossen in his rage, "do you realize what you are doing? I am *Karl Schlossen*." He paused to note the effect on the Irishman. O'Leary was grinning at him. "I said I am *Karl Schlossen*."

"Don't blame me, I didn't christen ye."

The German took another tack.

"What do these niggers mean to you?" he asked in oily tones. "Do you know that you are spoiling a five million dollar deal?"

"Shure, an' that ain't the half of it."

"Do business with me and I'll make you rich."

"Oh, yeah? Ye mean muddy, don't ye? Pete, these gentlemen wanna do business."

"That's what we're here for, Terrence, so let's not waste any more time."

"Meetin' called to order. Herr Karl Schlossen, ye and yer dirty paid rats have been working both ends toward the middle in this war. That last shipment o' cartridges ye sold Ethiopia ain't as good as wet firecrackers."

"Good enough for niggers at twice the price," growled the German.

"The ones ye sold to the Wops, fer them Askaris back there, are mighty good, ain't they?"

"You shall soon find it out, too."

"That's exactly the point I'm comin' to," retorted O'Leary with a smile. "The Askaris don't know ye from Adam. Pretty soon there's gonna be one helluva argument betwixt the Amharas and the Askaris. Open yer pink ear to this. The Askaris is gonna be firin' *good* ammunition, and they're gonna fire some of it at ye and yer two little playmates. Yes, sir, ye're gonna be right under the eye o' Major Terrence X. O'Leary, and ye're gonna fight like hell to save yer lousy hides. Now this is the joke. Ye're gonna defin' yerselves with the same kind of ammo ye sold Ethiopia. Kin ye laugh that off?"

"What do you mean?" The German was nervous and showed it.

"I'll make meself a bit clearer. Durin' the attack, ye three babies will be in a hole with a machine gun and rifles, fed with the lousy ammo ye sent me squadron. What more could ye desire ag'in niggers, as ye call 'em? Of course, if ye can't keep the Askaris back, they'll skin ye alive and make shields out o' yer hides."

THE German's answer was prevented by the return of Captain Bakale with three fierce-looking Amhara sergeants.

The brown faces of the non-coms lighted at sight of their beloved commander. They snapped to attention.

"Sergeants," he said to them in Amharic, which the Germans also spoke and understood, "I now am assigning you to an important, patriotic duty. These three carrion here you must guard. What will you do if they should try to escape?"

"Kill the carrion, O Green Lion of Judah," replied the senior sergeant.

"Now if they should refuse to talk at command of the Green Lion of Judah?"

"We shall make them talk, O Green Lion of Judah."

"Do you mean that you will torture us?" demanded Karl Schlossen of O'Leary.

"Hell, no! The sargints will do it. Captain Bakale, sit down, please, sir." O'Leary drew a chair close to his own. "Temporarily me an' ye are gonna run the Ethiopia-Italy war, ably assisted by our three baloney volunteers." He smiled over at the glowering Karl Schlossen. "I'm pretty nifty at Morse, Herr Sausage," he said, "and that's what ye been usin'. Please, now, the code call fer our mutual friend and compatriot, Herr Joseph Werner."

"I'll see you in hell first," came the defiant reply.

"Sargint," said O'Leary, "please make yer prisoner speak. Don't let me see ye torture him though. I'll turn me head away."

A roar of pain emanated from the German and he quickly spat out the code call.

"Thank ye, Sargint. From now on, Herr Sausage, ye best tell me the truth, or yer Amhara bye-friend will twist yer blond hair where it hurts most."

For the next half hour O'Leary questioned the German until he had secured all the information he desired. Posing as Karl Schlossen, he then telegraphed Joseph Werner that the pass would be evacuated by the Amharas according to the retirement order supposedly issued by Haile Selassie. He directed that the ammunition train of the Askaris should follow close behind the leading elements. Joseph Werner okehed the instructions.

An hour or more passed and the tele-

graph instrument clicked the welcome tidings that the ammunition train had been notified through underground channels and would follow orders.

O'Leary then ordered Joseph Werner and his two assistants to join Karl Schlossen in the morning, by plane. He then forced Karl Schlossen to write a message to the traitor, Ras Bola Kashah, commanding him to report in person before noon of the next day. This was despatched by a fast runner.

Telling Captain Bakale to take charge of the tent and to call them if a message should come through from Werner, the two Americans called it a night and went to get much needed sleep and rest.

Sleep and a bath made new men of them and again they were on the job. Anxiously they scanned the rapidly clouding sky. They realized only too well that their coming surprise of the Askaris would be but a temporary victory and that only a heavy rainfall could stop the advance of the thousands opposing them. A few hours of the torrential downpour would convert the plain in front and in rear of Devil Pass into an impassable morass that would defy all the power Italy could concentrate. But could the Amharas hold the pass until the event of rain? That was the question.

"Captain Bakale," O'Leary declared to the Amhara officer, "ye just as well know the truth. Stoppin' them Askaris will be a sacrifice mission. Once we grab the ammo an' throw 'em back there'll be hell to pay. By daylight every available Italian bomber will be rainin' fire from the skies on to our heads, to say nothin' o' the field guns farther back."

"With the Green Lion of Judah leading us," came the quiet and confident reply, "we shall be invincible. No Amhara fears death."

"Nobly spoke, old feller." O'Leary stopped to listen and a grin crossed his face. "A plane comin'," he announced, "and from the right direction, too. Me an' Pete will be in the tent with Herr Sausage. When Herr Werner arrives meet him with due military courtesy an' conduct him into

me presince. And do the same to Ras Bola Kashah. Oh, yes, send me three more non-coms as gentle and kind as the first."

IT IS needless to state that Mr. Werner and his two associates were disagreeably surprised when they entered the tent of Karl Schlossen to see O'Leary and McGuffy grinning sarcastically in welcome to them.

"Join the party, me byes," invited O'Leary. "Mr. Karl Schlossen is givin' it. Later, the six of ye are gonna demonstrate the difference betwixt good and bad ammunition."

"Major O'Leary," replied Karl Schlossen, "I warn you that this is your last chance. Will you—"

"My last chance? Ye shure are a optimist, Herr Sausage."

"What will you gain?" pleaded the German. "It is impossible for a squadron of cavalry to stop the advance of an army. If we are not killed—"

"Cut it! Look here, Karl Schlossen, me and Pete were born to be soldiers, and war is our business. But we fight fer principles, not lousy dollars. Shure, an' we'll be satisfied to die just in order that the makers of war—and that's what ye and yer backers are—swaller a little o' their own medicine. If yer medicine tastes bitter, bellyachin' won't help ye any—not with me."

"What—what of Ras Bola Kashah?"

"He'll be right alongside o' ye skunks. Now I'll do some warnin'. Don't try surrenderin' to the Askaris, 'cause ye know what them fiends will do to ye."

When Ras Bola Kashah stalked into the tent he was just as displeased as were the others. O'Leary compelled him to send instructions to his various chieftains to make no move until specific orders to that effect were issued by him.

With McGuffy and the non-coms in charge of the prisoners, O'Leary and Captain Bakale personally tested samples of the ammunition Karl Schlossen had sold to Ethiopia. It proved to be even worse than anticipated.

By nightfall the skies were completely clouded over, but as yet not a drop of rain had fallen. Ambushing two troops in Devil Pass, with another farther back in support, O'Leary, with McGuffy, led the remaining troops silently out on the plain in front of the pass for a surprise flank attack. He had placed Captain Bakale in command of the cavalymen in the pass itself. The prisoners were with the support. They would do their stunt in daylight, thus giving them no opportunity to escape under cover of the night.

With O'Leary and McGuffy in the lead, in column of twos and quietly as death itself the Amhara cavalymen cautiously moved south until they were deep into enemy territory. Each officer and non-com knew exactly what was expected of him.

Reaching the desired objective, the shadowy band of horsemen halted and sent out scouts, crawling carefully on their bellies, to apprise the waiting men of the approach of the wagon train. It was eerie work, out there in the blackness among the Askaris. Capture meant torture and death, and woe betide the wounded Amhara falling into the hands of the cruel savages from Eritea.

It is indeed the truth to state that the same fate awaited the Askaris unfortunate enough to fall before the Amharas. Altogether it was not the kind of warfare that appealed to the two Americans, but they had pitted themselves against the powerful munitions syndicate and there could be no other issue.

Supremely confident that their task was but a night march and that Devil Pass was unoccupied, soon the vanguard of the Askaris was heard approaching along the road, not two hundred yards distant from the ambushed Amharas. Distinctly on the night air was borne to straining ears the padding of hoofs on the sun-baked soil and the noise of motor trucks. The scouts returned and mounted up.

"Attention!" the low command given by O'Leary was passed rapidly along. This was followed by, "Form—Fours," then the order to wheel into line.

With sabers hanging to wrists and drawn automatics in the position of "raise pistol," the Amharas impatiently awaited the command to charge upon their hated enemies. Sensing what was in store the horses nervously pawed the ground.

O'Leary and McGuffy took position to lead the attack.

"Forward—gallop—*Yo!*" O'Leary belled in his stentorian tones. There now was no need for further concealment.

The horses leaped forward under the dug-in spurs of their riders and the long line galloped through the blackness.

Fifty yards from the road O'Leary threw over a shoulder the greatest command known to cavalry.

"CHARGE!"

GIVING vent to ear-splitting war cries which had descended to them from time immemorial, the Amharas rode like unleashed devils, thirsting for the blood of the invaders. Equally defiant, and hideous, other cries matched theirs from the Askaris guarding the ammunition train. Blue flashes of fire stabbed the night as the surprised soldiers wildly fired rifles and pistols in direction of their unseen foes.

O'Leary and McGuffy rode so close together that their stirrup hoods brushed. They realized there could be no controlling, or directing, the fight-maddened Amharas in the darkness, that each had vowed to kill as many Askaris as was possible.

Then resounded the clash of battle as the opposing sides met. Rifles and pistols cracked, sabers rose and slashed, men cursed and shouted and horses reared and fell. Both sides had gone mad with the lust to kill, it seemed.

Two howling Askaris, their long lances couched, rode straight for O'Leary like demons out of the night. His automatic twice spewed jets of blue flame and the enemy saddles were emptied. Riderless, the horses tore across the plain.

McGuffy was sorely beset. An Askari whose mount had been shot from under him had clutched the American's reins close to the bit and with a wicked curved

knife was trying to hamstring his plunging horse. On his right another Askari was jabbing at him with a spear, while on his left two more were hacking away at him with their sabers. He spattered the brains of the Askari on the ground with a slug from his automatic, then shot the one attacking him with the spear.

"Okeh, pal!"

A steel blade whizzed in a mighty right-cut and an Askari, almost decapitated, rolled from saddle and lay weltering in his blood on the ground.

"Thanks!" sang McGuffy as he swung his horse about on its haunches and sent a bullet crashing through the bones of a black chest.

Soon the automatics of the Amharas were empty and the fight was steel against steel. Although greatly outnumbered the advantage now was on their side, expertly trained as they were by O'Leary in hand to hand combat.

Distinguishable by their white skins the Americans were ganged by Askaris, each eager to give his life if he could but take one of the white men with him. Had not O'Leary and McGuffy fought as a couple they would have been slain by the tremendous odds opposing them, but each was wary for the safety of the other and lent assistance when assistance was sorely needed.

Finally they broke through the circle of savages surrounding them and O'Leary was able to note the progress of the battle. The Amharas were in command of the situation, but as was their nature, they had cast their military training to the winds and were bent solely on destroying the blacks.

O'Leary placed the bugle swinging about his shoulders to his lips and blew the "Rally." No response.

Again and again he blew it, but the Amharas paid no attention. Desperately he rose in stirrups and cupping a hand to his mouth shouted the order with all the power of his leathery lungs.

The effect was magical. From all direc-

tions, cheering like fiends, the Amharas galloped toward him and reining their horses back on haunches held their right arms aloft and brandished whatever weapons they held.

He thundered his orders in Amharic to them. Shouting their war cries they wheeled about and raced for the motor trucks which had halted on the road. Leaping to the ground and turning reins over to ready horseholders, those who previously had been assigned to the task clambered to the now empty seats of the ammunition trucks and started the motors.

On a blare from O'Leary's bugle the trucks moved forward, increasing their speed as rapidly as engines would allow. The mounted Amharas, some leading two and three horses each, galloped beside the trucks, screeching their cries of triumph to the heavens.

Near the head of the speeding column rode O'Leary and McGuffy, their horses leaping over dead bodies and the wounded of friend and enemy alike.

"Our only chance is to bust right through 'em, Pete," yelled O'Leary hoarsely. "The byes in the pass have made it too hot fer the head o' the column and the Askaris will be comin' back hell bent fer purgatory."

"Yeah, they're coming now," panted McGuffy. "Hundreds of 'em. I can see their shadows."

ONCE more O'Leary towered high in the saddle of his galloping horse and with bugle jammed tightly against mouth blared forth the command to charge.

The welcome order was answered by a barrage of throaty cheers and the brown drivers of the trucks jammed accelerators flush with the boards and started a race which seldom has been equalled in any war. Skidding and swaying dangerously in clouds of choking white dust the speeding trucks resembled horrible juggernauts of death as they tore north to meet the disorganized horde of Askaris galloping madly toward them.

Drunk with victory the Amharas clamored at the top of their voices for more

speed. With necks stretched out and riders leaning far forward, some belaboring their running mounts with the flat of their sabers, or cruelly raking them with sharp-roweled spurs, the horses racing beside the trucks soon were outdistanced.

The driver of the leading truck switched on his bright headlights. Less than fifty yards in front of him thundered a herd of stampeding horses ridden by devils gone mad, framed by swirling dust clouds. It was an awesome and terrifying spectacle while it lasted.

There was no escaping the destroying juggernaut charging down on them, the Askaris must have reasoned in the split second of time allowed them for the thought, so they must meet force with force.

The thunder of the terrific impact of the speeding truck against the galloping horses rolled and reverberated on the night air, to re-echo from the rocks beyond.

The truck swerved crazily on two wheels as it thudded against horses and men and then left the road and rolled over and over, where it lay on its side, boxes of ammunition scattered all about it. Its gasoline caught fire.

Unable, or more likely unwilling, to save himself, the driver of the following truck deliberately threw his racing vehicle into the Askari horsemen madly trying to escape from it. Over went the truck in a storm of biting dust and again ammunition boxes were spewed from its body. The third truck crashed into it with a deafening crash that ripped it wide open.

Then the fire of the first truck reached the rifle and pistol ammunition and hell itself burst loose in an earsplitting racket of exploding cartridges and the whine and whistle of flying bullets.

But apparently it was great fun for the Amharas on the remaining trucks and those ahorse racing so hard to reach the scene of disaster, because there now was a note of wild joy in their shouting which had been missing before.

"God, Terrence!" gasped the awed McGuffy. "It's awful."

"The damn fools!" O'Leary was hoarse

from shouting commands to bring order out of chaos. "If they had their way they'd drive them trucks into hell itself."

Spurring his jaded horse he raced toward the sixth truck tearing into the destruction. Reaching it he leaped from saddle and swung hold of the dashboard. By sheer strength alone he pulled himself aboard, knocked the driver senseless with a blow of his fist to jaw and seized the wheel. He turned the truck from the road on to the hard-baked mud of the plain and shot by the wreckage. The other trucks behind followed their leader. Three of them capsized and spilled their precious loads, but the rest got by safely and regained the road, which now had been cleared by the Askaris.

But the Askaris were not licked. From the roadside they poured a fierce but not very effective fire into the speeding trucks. Then the galloping Amharas came into the scene and the fight started all over again.

O'Leary cursed them as only he could curse when the occasion required, but a chirping canary would have been as potent. Trying to drag Amharas from a fight was like trying to free the ocean of salt. It just couldn't be done.

Eleven of the trucks finally reached the desired goal, the cavalry encampment among the trees. The Askaris who attempted to ride through Devil Pass had been turned back in disorder, with sanguine losses.

ON THE calling of the roll of O'Leary's troop, but ten Amharas answered, and these were the ones who had driven the trucks to safety. The rest were still out on the plain. An occasional shot wafted on the wind blowing gave grim evidence that at least some of them were still alive and fighting. Three times O'Leary called McGuffy's name, and three times silence resulted.

"Captain Bakale," he said huskily, "ye know yer orders. Distribute the captured ammunition and hold the pass to the last man. Ye now are in command."

"And the Green Lion of Judah?" came the significant query.

"I'm goin' to mosey around a bit an' look things over."

"Very well, I understand. The Green Lion of Judah will need a fresh horse to go look for his comrade."

The captain ordered a horse brought. O'Leary mounted and rode slowly back toward the plain. If his pal lay wounded out there, he would bring him back. If he lay dead? O'Leary's lips tightened.

A thought struck him. There was a bottle of schnapps in Karl Schlossen's tent. A drink for the dying McGuffy would be the most beautiful gesture he could make. Accordingly he changed direction and rode to the tent.

"You know," laughed a familiar voice, "in all our years together I've never been able to beat that green baboon to a shot of booze, but this time I've done it."

A grin spread over O'Leary's face and he beckoned to an Amhara non-com watching him. He talked in low tones to the native then quietly rode around to the rear of the tent.

The bottle still unopened, McGuffy looked up as the non-com entered and saluted him.

"Sir," said the visitor in Amharic, "the Green Lion of Judah lies sorely wounded and is calling for you."

Dropping the bottle McGuffy ran from the tent, and O'Leary entered from the rear. Quietly he opened the bottle, filled a glass and held it up to the staring Karl Schlossen.

"Herr Sausage," he said solemnly to the German, "sentiment has no place in war. I just found it out." He drank the schnapps and smacked his lips.

O'Leary was startled from his little joke by a low whine coming out of the south. Soon a terrific rushing of air overhead and a shell exploded somewhere in Devil Pass with a hollow, reverberating echo. The news of the Askaris repulse had reached the Italian batteries and hell had commenced, he concluded.

"Herr Sausage," he said to the equally

startled German, "and ye, too, Herr Werner, how does it feel to be on the receivin' end of yer bloody wares? Shure, an' it's just beginnin', too."

O'Leary hurried outside, but unlike McGuffy, had not carelessly overlooked taking the schnapps with him. He collided with his returning pal.

"You big ape!" exploded McGuffy angrily. "A dirty trick if ever there was one."

"Listen, rookie, when ye've been as long as me in the service ye'll learn not to boast about beatin' a veteran to his booze. *Duck!*"

Another shell rushed over and blasted a tree up by the roots. The Americans arose from the ground where they had thrown themselves and joined Captain Bakale

"Git all the men and horses into the pass," ordered O'Leary, "and keep 'em huggin' close to the rocks. Il Duce is a bit peeved, it seems, and is gonna throw some sanctions of his own ag'in us." Again the Americans flattened themselves as another shell screeched over and exploded about fifty yards from them. The Amhara stood proudly erect. "Listen, Captain Bakale," said O'Leary to him, "do ye know why I am here fightin' in this war?"

"Because the Green Lion of Judah is a born fighter."

"Yeh, that's one o' the reasons, but the big one is that I knowed enough to duck when a shell labeled with me number came over. A live soldier is a helluva lot more good to his country than a stiff one. Remember that, and perhaps ye'll live to see another and much better war than this."

"Very well, sir. We Amharas shall hold the pass in face of the Evil One himself."

"It'll take some holdin' though. The rain is the only thing what kin save us, and block the road to the north. Have them seven skunks brought to me in the pass. We'll give 'em the same chance as we've got ag'in the shells an' the planes, but when the Askaris advances in the mornin' they'll be on their own."

MANY nights of hell O'Leary and McGuffy had experienced under fire

in the World war, but this one matched the worst in their memory.

It was the first experience of its kind for the Amharas but they stood up under the ordeal nobly. That was the main trouble with them, they defiantly stood up and shook fists into the screeching barrage instead of taking cover. Nor could O'Leary make them do otherwise.

Scouts that had been sent south of the pass to reconnoiter came back with the appalling information that the plain was filled with Askaris massing for an infantry and cavalry attack, which no doubt would be launched at daybreak.

Anxiously O'Leary looked through the red-tinged smoke and crimson flashes into the sky. A rain drop fell on his face. Then another.

When daylight had broken O'Leary gazed about him and wagged his head solemnly. Everywhere he looked he saw mangled bodies of Amharas and gutted horses.

Flattened out a few yards from him and guarded by the contemptuous non-coms were the six renegade Germans, still unharmed, but their faces were blanched and their bodies shook and trembled. The Amharas leaned proudly on their rifles. O'Leary crossed to the Germans and spoke to them during a lull in the shelling.

"I'm not rubbin' it in, skunks," he said to the cowering men, "but how does yer medicine taste? Them things screechin' over is what ye sold at a big profit. Me only regret is that the rest o' yer lousy syndicate ain't here to figure profits with ye."

"For God's sake, Major O'Leary," begged Karl Schlossen, "don't keep us in this hell. I've learned my lesson. On all that's holy I swear that I'll quit the business."

"The only thing holy to ye bloodsuckers is money," retorted O'Leary contemptuously. "This is only the preliminary to the main bout. Wait till ye're out there with lousy ammunition tryin' to stop the Askaris."

"No, no, you can't do that to us," cried

Karl Schlossen. "It wouldn't be human. What right have you to condemn us to death? Who made you our judge?"

"The same right that you have to start wars and condemn others to death."

"You—you make us do it," whimpered the renegade, "but where will you be—behind a rock with a machine gun?"

O'Leary pushed back his campaign hat and tugged at his red hair in deep thought.

"There's somethin' in what ye say," he announced slowly.

"Then you—you won't make us do it?" came eagerly from dry lips.

"Look here, ye're gonna be punished, but I'll show ye that I ain't scared to stand by while ye're gittin' that punishment. I'll be right along with ye, but with this difference, I'll have good ammo and ye'll have the dead firecrackers. Now quit yer whinin', ye turn me stommick."

KNOWING that the Askaris would not attack while the artillery barrage was in progress, O'Leary moved what was left of his cavalry through the shelling to a line on the plain in front of the pass. The horses he turned loose. They would be of no advantage out there on the plain so why needlessly sacrifice the animals? Wildly they galloped to the rear to get out of the shellfire.

In the dim light he and McGuffy established the firing line for the last stand, setting up the machine guns at the most strategic points. The brown troopers sullenly lay down in their positions, wondering why their Green Lion of Judah wouldn't allow them to charge the enemy.

When everything had been arranged to his satisfaction, O'Leary and McGuffy joined the six Germans in a large shellhole to the left of the line. Each of the gun-runners had a rifle with an ample supply of the defective ammunition. A Vickers .303, water cooled machinegun poked its nose over the rim of the hole.

"Well, here we be, byes," O'Leary said to his prisoners. "Now let's understand one another. We all know we can't surrender, and why. There's one thing left for us, to fight like hell. And I ain't actin'

judge over ye either. If we're saved, the rain will do it. Ask yer own personal belief who governs the rain. Anythin' to say?"

"Yes, Major O'Leary," replied Karl Schlossen, "the hell of last night taught me a lot—changed my views considerably, too. At first I thought you were bluffing about your coming out here with us. You're a man, O'Leary, and I take off my hat to you. That's all, except that I'll swallow my medicine."

A runner reported to O'Leary.

"Sir," he said in Amharic, "Captain Bakale regrets that he cannot send Ras Bola Kashah to the Green Lion of Judah, because of a slight accident."

"A accident to Captain Bakale?" inquired O'Leary with tongue in cheek.

"No, sir, to Ras Bola Kashah. The knife of Captain Bakale slipped, O Green Lion of Judah, and Ras Bola Kashah was in the way."

"Presint me compliments to Captain Bakale and tell him we'll fight it out on this line if it takes all summer."

Mystified, the Amhara saluted and glided away. Hardly had he left than McGuffy pointed into the sky in the south and shrugged. O'Leary's eyes followed his pointing finger; an Italian bomber of the newest type. Pretty soon some trimmings would be added to the day's pleasure, thought O'Leary.

"Our syndicate made that hell-bird," called Karl Schlossen to O'Leary. "But if I ever get out of here alive they'll never make, or sell, another."

"How come?" asked O'Leary. "If ye shoot off yer mugg the big shots will fire ye."

"I'll tell you something you don't know. I am the head of the syndicate, and control eighty per cent of the stock."

"Ye're shure in a fine place to hold a board o' directors meetin'," laughed O'Leary.

"I'll tell you something else I intend doing, if the rain allows, and that is to offer you and McGuffy a directorship each."

THEIR conversation was cut short by a sudden and intense bombardment, but the Italian shells still fell into the pass.

Of a sudden the barrage lifted and the bomber withdrew. With loud yells the Askaris farther south rushed to the attack. Under the merciless fire of the revengeful Amharas their dead and wounded dotted the plain, but on they came, giving vent to their blood curdling war cries.

With a curse Schlossen grabbed a rifle and pulled trigger. An empty click on a dud cartridge. He worked the bolt and again fired. The same result. Joseph Werner had a little better luck because out of four attempts one cartridge exploded.

Mouthing a curse Joseph Werner made a lunge at O'Leary with the bayonet on his rifle. He would have killed him, too, had not Karl Schlossen swung his rifle butt against the skull of the assassin, braining him.

O'Leary glanced up at the slate-gray skies as if calling for help from the rain. His resigned shrug, however, discounted any thought that he was weakening.

"Hey, me gold star pupil," he cried to Karl Schlossen, "soon we'll be cashin' our pay checks. Grab some o' that good ammo fer yerself an' byes, 'cause them Askaris is nasty customers if they lay hands on ye."

"Thanks, but I'll take my medicine, Major. I think it is doing my soul a hell of a lot of good, if you should ask me."

A deafening roaring sounded in their ears, a monstrous black shadow shot out of the sky and a thin thread of silver streaked earthward, to disappear in the ground a few yards from the shellhole.

When the smoke had cleared O'Leary lay on his back, motionless, blood running down his face from under his campaign hat. McGuffy's body, face down and also inert, was half buried in loose earth.

Dimly conscious, but powerless to move, O'Leary heard the war cries of the savages drumming on his dulled ears. Through a haze he saw a giant towering over him and swinging a rifle by the barrel. Then his eyes closed wearily and his lights went out.

AGAIN consciousness returned to him. Somebody was pouring water on his face. It trickled into his mouth, cool and delicious. He again went to sleep, but was awakened by the cracking of a pistol almost in his ear and the shrill yelling of savages.

He felt a hand steal stealthily about his neck. A cold shudder shook his aching body. Feebly he opened his eyes and sucked in a painful breath. A horrible black face smeared with blood was grimacing at him and the hold about his neck was tightening. Suddenly the face came nearer, then was brutally dashed against his. He felt a sharp pain in his right side and consciousness left him.

That water pouring in his face awakened him again. Another hand stole along his throat and forced fingers into his mouth. Then something hard was jammed between his paining jaws. He was choking, something awful was cutting off his breath. Then his faculties functioned.

Schnapps! And he had been fighting against it? He swallowed a large gulp of the liquor, then another. He opened his eyes.

He must be under Niagara Falls, the way water was splashing into his face. But through the water he saw another face, that of Karl Schlossen. But was it a face? More like chopped steak with its cuts and bruises and blood.

"Hey, what'n hell is the matter?" gasped O'Leary. "Turn off that damn hose. Think I'm a fish?"

"It's raining, you damned fool," came the choked but joyful answer. "The big chicka. I had a helluva time saving you for that directorship. Twice the Askaris got into the shellhole, but I beat them back with my rifle. The one with the dud ammunition. One of them stuck you with his knife and—"

"Don't I know it? Where's Pete?"

"He's okeh. Captain Bakale is pulling him out of the mud. Will you accept that directorship or not?"

"Shure! Why not? Ain't ye me star pupil?"

An Unfought Battle

ARAP at the door of his quarters aroused General Omar Bundy, commander of the 6th American Army Corps. An officer acting for General Pershing handed the corps commander a confidential message directing Bundy to move his staff immediately to Belfort.

At Belfort, Colonel A. L. Conger, representative of Pershing, informed Bundy that on September 10th a great American drive would be made through Belfort gap with the Rhine as the objective. Secrecy was ordered but soon curious eyed "neutrals" were seen haunting headquarters.

Bundy and his staff presented plans for attack to Pershing who ordered brief delay.

Then Colonel Conger decided that the time was opportune. Using a fresh sheet of carbon paper he typed an elaborate report of plans to attack. The carbon was carelessly dropped in a waste basket. Conger took his message for General Pershing to a dispatch carrier and returned to his office within five minutes. Conger glanced casually at the waste basket. The carbon was gone! A German spy had filched the carbon. Instead of being alarmed, however, Colonel Conger smiled grimly.

General Pershing again ordered a delay but in the meantime there were furtive movements behind the German lines. Fully aware—through spies—of plans for the American attack through Belfort gap the Germans hastily marched three divisions from the defense of St. Mihiel to the defense of the gap.

German spies saw the French General Petain arrive in Belfort and flashed the news to Teuton officers.

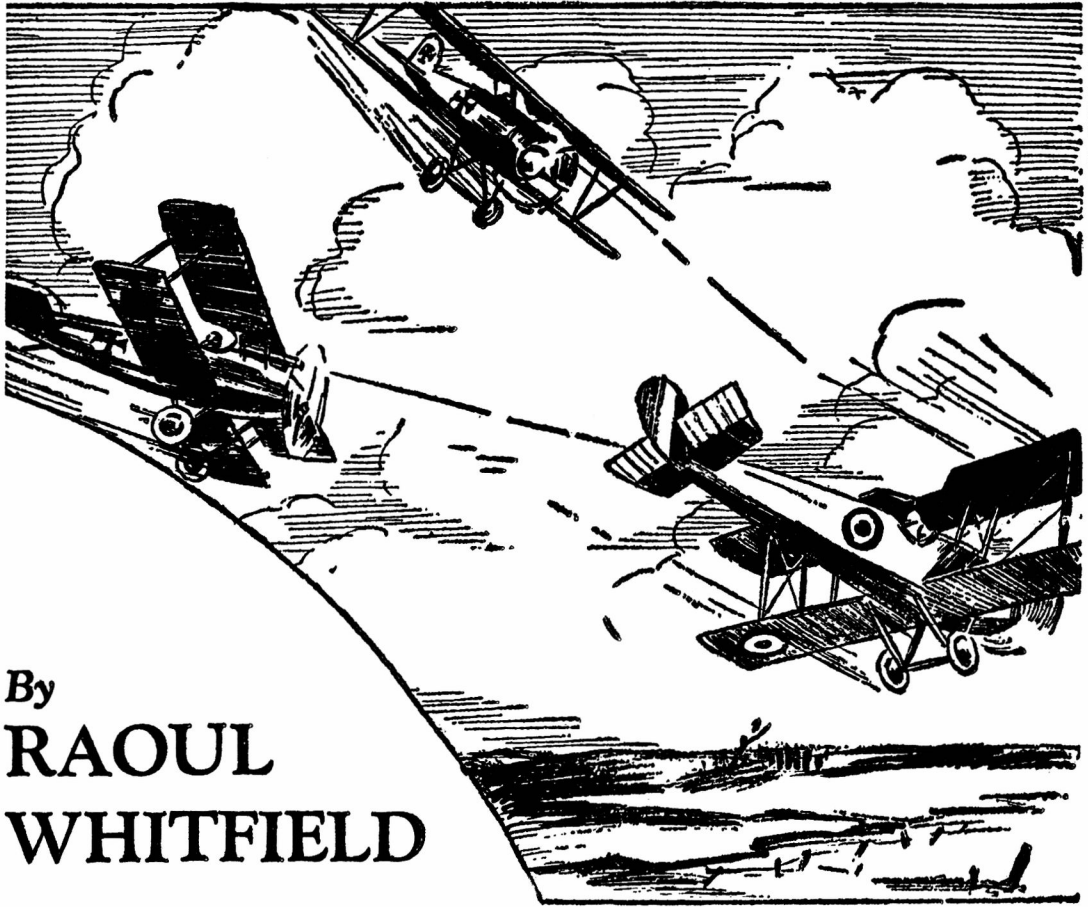
Then on September 12 the world was electrified by the dashing American victory in the St. Mihiel sector.

One of the greatest military ruses in history had been perpetrated on the Germans. In that secret conference at Belfort, General Petain had informed the staff officers that the plans for a great attack at Belfort gap were faked to draw German attention away from St. Mihiel.

Perhaps the success of the clever ruse was due to the fact that it was schemed by Pershing, Petain and three others and that later only a very few including Colonel Conger were told that the proposed battle of Belfort Gap would never be fought.



The Front Line



By
**RAOUL
WHITFIELD**

Windy Cummings could always dig up an excuse for anything until that day when, pounced upon by enemy ships, he couldn't alibi.

JESS HOWITT dropped the cards he was holding in a three-handed game of bridge, shoved back his battered stool, and swore disgustedly. A voice had drifted into the mess-room from the camouflaged barracks' corridor. And Jess was familiar with that voice.

"Hell!" he muttered thickly. "The wind's blowing in!"

Then the door was shoved open, and Jerry Cummings entered the mess-room. Al Pursely groaned. "Dud" Phillips

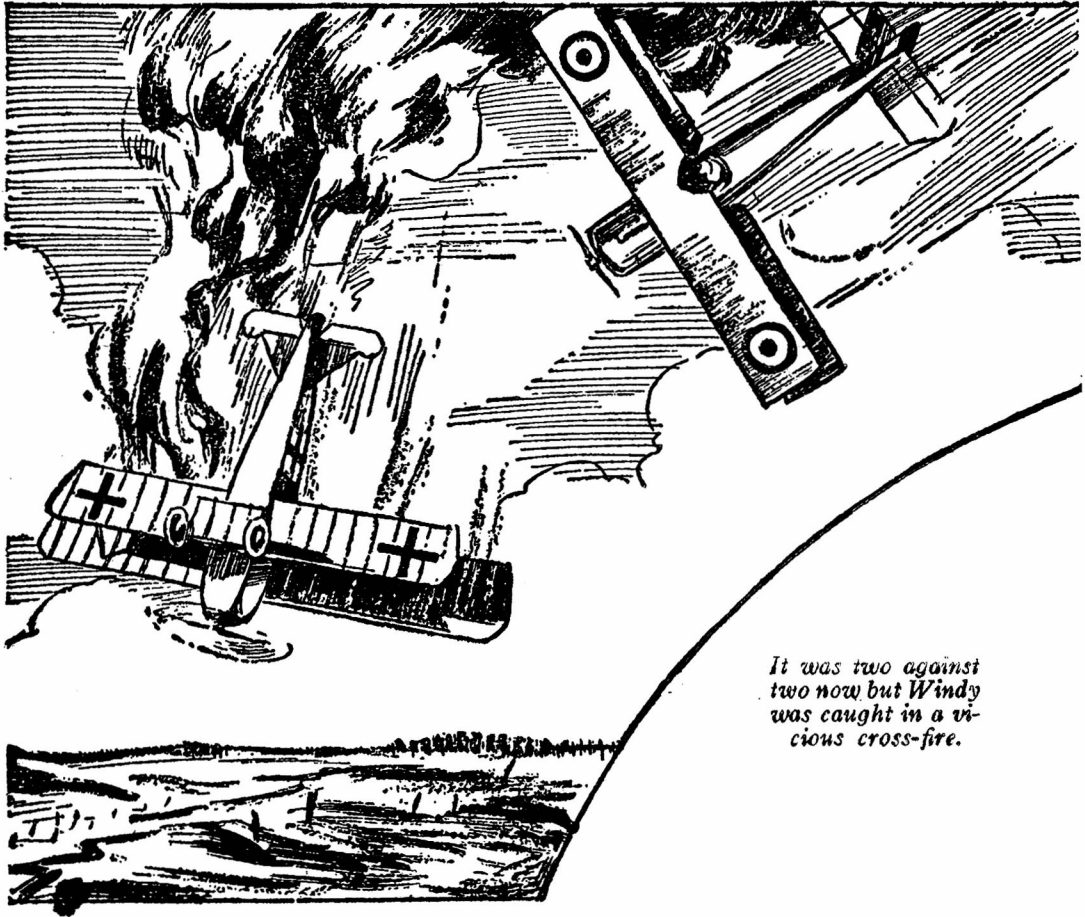
reached for a pack of stale pills, and talked to himself. Lieutenant "Windy" Cummings talked, too—but not to himself.

"War's over!" he announced loudly. "Just got word."

There was so much silence that the guns seven or eight kilometers distant seemed to move right in close to the tiny, reconnaissance squadron field. But silence didn't annoy Windy.

"War sure is over!" he insisted, "All over the front!"

Prop-Winder



It was two against two now but Windy was caught in a vicious cross-fire.

No one laughed. Windy stood just inside the door, a broad grin on his face. He was tall, blonde, good-looking. He had a goggle-glass cut at the corner of his right eye, and he used both of his rather long arms in gesturing. He always gestured when he talked.

"What's up?" he asked loudly. "Some dodo fail to come in? Do we shift fields over night? Has the C. O. cut the Paree leave-of-absence stuff? I just heard that—"

Jess Howitt got to his feet. He was short, thick-set and a veteran pilot in the outfit. He swore deeply.

"I had a swell no-trump bid," he muttered. "But the wind blew my cards away."

He moved toward the door through which Lieutenant Cummings had entered the mess-room. And Cummings had been so busy talking that he didn't get Jess' point.

"What wind?" he asked cheerfully. "Everything's closed up in here."

Jess narrowed his grey eyes on the blue ones of Windy. He spoke bitterly.

"Not *everything*," he stated. "But then, you can't be—"

"Got two Boche today," Windy cut in, not interested in Jess' words. "Yes, birdmen, I got two Boche!"

Dud Phillips ran a hand through his mop of red hair. He groaned.

"You must have talked 'em out of the sky," he stated grimly.

Windy stiffened a little. He had been grinning. The grin almost faded. But not quite. He chuckled.

"Got 'em between me and Hill Seven," he went on, "and I let 'em stay there!"

Some one swore. There was another silence. Hill Seven was over on the German side of the lines. Enemy pilots often winged west of it. In normal flight that would put them between Allied ships and Hill Seven.

"You would!" Jess snapped suddenly.

His words crackled out, and there was no joking tone in them. They had the quality of little bombs. Lieutenant Cummings turned his head a little. His smile was gone now.

"I would what?" he asked slowly.

"Would let 'em alone!" Jess snapped back.

He didn't mean it. The second the words were uttered, he knew that. But they were uttered. He was fed up on Cummings' line of chatter. And Windy didn't seem to notice that, or that the others were fed up, too—had been sick of his talk for a week or so.

"And you wouldn't?" Windy shot the question back at Lieutenant Howitt. His blue eyes were half closed.

Jess swore softly. "I don't give a damn how you fly your patrol, lieutenant," he said quietly. "But I've got a hunch you don't fly it the way you talk it. If you did—you wouldn't be alive."

Windy laughed. It wasn't a very funny laugh. His eyes went to the other pilots and observers in the mess-room. They weren't smiling. He spoke slowly.

"This outfit's taking the war too seriously," he announced. "Pretty soon they'll begin to think it's important."

Jess Howitt opened the door that led to the corridor. He spoke in a very low voice, but it carried—carried to every corner of the mess-room.

"There's only one thing that isn't important here, lieutenant," he stated. "Try and guess!"

THEN he went out, slamming the mess-room door back of him. And

once again the rumble of front line guns drifted past the heavy burlap over the small windows into the room. Cummings stood motionless, staring at the closed door. Then he shrugged his shoulders, turned toward the others in the room.

"Poor old Howitt!" he muttered. "Nerves'll wash him out in a few days."

And that got Al Pursely. That lieutenant bunked with Jess in the tiny coop at one end of the barracks. He was Howitt's gunner. He got slowly to his feet.

"Jess isn't a prop winder, Cummings. He doesn't roll out the *T* in the barracks. He was up here flying patrol while they were wet-nursing you through figure eights back at Issoudun. And he'll be here when you—"

He stopped. The expression in Lieutenant Cummings' eyes stopped him. They held laughter, mocking laughter. Al swore fiercely.

"It's no use!" he muttered. "In order to have feeling you must have—"

"There's just one thing I didn't get in that speech, lieutenant." Windy cut in sharply, but his lips held a faint smile. "That prop winder stuff—"

Al Pursely, his hands on his hips, smiled grimly. He shook his head slowly.

"Ask your gunner, lieutenant," he replied. "He's been with you while you were winding 'em."

He went from the mess-room. Cummings forced a laugh. It wasn't much of a success, and there was no echo of it. Cy Brant, Cummings' observer, wasn't in the mess-room. The tall pilot dropped down on a bench. A spit of rain was striking the window glass, shoved along by a cold north wind. Lieutenant Cummings reached for a pill. He had a good idea what Pursely had meant by the "prop winder" reference. It hurt him. But he didn't want to show that. And perhaps he'd been mistaken.

"What an outfit," he announced with an attempt at humor. "It's no place for a joke."

Dud Phillips—so named because he was making a collection of enemy shells

—smiled grimly. His dark eyes met the blue ones of Lieutenant Cummings.

"Jokes aren't so funny up here, lieutenant," he said slowly. "You haven't seen so many boys come and go—as Jess has. You've been up ten days—and you've done a month's worth of talking. Better roll up the T for a while."

He lighted one pill from the smoking stub of another. Cummings smiled faintly at him.

"Any other advice, lieutenant?" he asked.

Dud shook his head slowly. "It wouldn't do any good, lieutenant," he said in a very quiet tone. "It wouldn't be funny enough."

THE C. O. stood near his rough desk and fingered some maps. He spoke in a toneless voice.

"You've had four landings in ten flying days, lieutenant," he said slowly. "In three of them you killed your prop, made a dead-sticker. The other time the engine went bad. All four were on this side of the line, fortunately. I mention this because your observer has asked for change of pilots."

Lieutenant Cummings stood stiffly before Captain Lanner. His eyes were slightly narrowed. But his heart was pounding. Two hours ago he had spoken to Lieutenant Grayley about prop winders. He'd got his answer. And now he was getting another answer. Grayley was quitting him. He remained silent.

"Each time you went down with a dead-stick ship you risked yourself, the gunner and the plane. Each time you thought something was wrong. She handled sluggishly. You didn't think you could make the field under control. That was your report. Each time the crew checked the D. H. and found her all right. Any explanation?"

Cummings smiled faintly. "She felt rotten, sir," he stated. "Even after I cranked her, and took off—"

The C. O. grunted. "Once you did have an engine that let you down," he said slowly, interrupting. "But I find no

excuse for the other landings. They lost us time in the air, Lieutenant."

Lieutenant Cummings said nothing. It was a tough spot. The C. O. narrowed his eyes.

"Ever hear of a front line prop-winder, lieutenant?" he asked slowly.

Cummings flushed. "Lieutenant Grayley spoke of several, sir," he said grimly. "I hope you don't think—"

"I *don't*." The C. O. bit out the words. "Report for the dusk patrol, Cummings. You'll get your gunner, at that time. And the next time you have a dead-stick landing—"

He stopped. There was a faint smile playing about his thin lips. Lieutenant Cummings met the C. O.'s eyes, but he did not speak.

"Well, don't have one," Captain Lanner, his voice grim, finished. "That's all, lieutenant."

TWO D. H.'s of the dusk patrol were on the dead-line of the small field. Two other ships had got off, minutes before. And two more planes would take off in a short time. Six planes at dawn, six more at dusk, or an hour before dusk, was all that the Squadron could get into the air at present. Replacements had been heavy. And the Reconnaissance planes were not being ferried up from Romorantin any too rapidly.

Jess Howitt and Al Pursely stood near their ship. The prop was idling; Sergeant Wilcox was warming her up. Al glanced over toward the second ship. Windy Cummings was standing near the port wing-tip, adjusting his helmet and goggles. Al spoke to Jess in a low tone.

"Windy wasn't at lunch, Jess."

"Wasn't what?" Jess asked.

"Wasn't windy," Al came back grimly.

"He was very quiet. Grayley told him a few, I guess. Said he'd given him the dope on Horter and that Craighill kiwi. That stopped Cummings. Funny, too. I didn't think he could be stopped."

Jess Howitt watched the other pilot out of the corner of his eyes. Horter and Craighill—they had both been sent back

to Blois. And both had used strange methods to keep out of front line air. Their ships had always developed engine trouble, or control trouble. They missed patrol after patrol, but the Squadron crews could never find anything really wrong with their ships. They'd go down with a dead-stick, or with a wing low. On the ground they'd kill their props. And then, after a half hour or so, they'd wind them up again and wing back to the squadron field. It was their gunners, getting fed up on the performance, that quit them. And now Grayley had quit Lieutenant Cummings.

"Might be wrong about Cummings," Jess muttered slowly. "We've been getting some bum ships."

Al Pursely swore softly. "He talks too much!" he muttered. "Wonder who's riding with him?"

Jess shook his head. Monk Peters was coming out on the field with Bert Rogell, his gunner. And behind them came the C. O. He was usually out to wave the patrol ships off. He came toward Jess and Al. They stiffened, but he waved them out of it.

"Buzz from Battery Q3. Transport movement reported by Lieutenant Mann, flying a Nieuport for the Third Pursuit. We're sending two ships over to try and get a hit. You fly one, Howitt. Coordination is L5a, back of Hill Seven. Lieutenant Cummings will have the—" the C. O. hesitated several seconds, a flicker in his eyes—"other plane. Probably be a couple of Nieuports up above us, from the Third. Important—we won't wing over together."

THE C. O. pulled a helmet from his overalls' pocket. He jerked it over his head. Jess and Al stared at him. He was smiling; it was a hard smile.

"I'm riding the rear cockpit with Cummings," the C. O. stated simply. "All right, let's tin-can across!"

He moved toward the other plane. Jess stared after him. He saw Cummings stiffen. And then Al was speaking.

"The C. O.'s got guts!" he stated. "Sky riding with Windy."

Jess Howitt moved toward the front cockpit of the D. H. He was smiling faintly. This was one trip, he was thinking, during which Lieutenant Cummings wouldn't do any dead-stick landing.

Sergeant Wilcox climbed down from the front cockpit. He grinned at Jess.

"She's sweet, Jess," he stated. "Come right back!"

Jess grinned back at the sergeant. There was no ceremony—no military ritual—between the man who kept his plane right, and himself. And the sergeant's "come right back!" was a luck phrase. Somehow, it helped a lot.

In the cockpit, he gave the engine a final rev-up. Then he twisted his head. Al was standing back of the bracketed Lewis gun. He nodded his head. The ground-crew men jerked the wheel-block ropes. Already the Cummings-piloted plane was taking off. She got away with her left wing a little low, but Windy corrected for it as soon as she lifted off the soggy earth of the field.

Jess opened the throttle, moved the stick forward. He let the two-seater pick up plenty of speed, then zoomed her over the fringe of trees, east of the field. Both planes climbed slowly, heading directly for the front.

Jess banked to the northward, getting air between the two planes. He noted that Cummings was swinging more to the southward than a direct course to the target would warrant. Either Windy was using his head or the C. O. was directing.

They flew through a cold rain for perhaps two miles. When they came out of it, Jess picked up the other D. H. far to the southward. She was a speck in the grey sky. It was already commencing to get dark but if they could get a battery or batteries on the target, darkness would be in their favor.

Two small ships winged in from Germany, just under the ragged edges of grey-black cloud. Al spotted them at the same time that the pilot's eyes picked them up. He leaned forward across the

separating fuselage fabric, shouted above the beat of the engine.

"Humps!"

Jess nodded his head.

The two little ships were Sopwith Camels, probably English. They were heading straight back for the Allied rear lines, and were flying in close formation. Except for the speck that was the other D. H., Jess could see no other planes in the sky.

THE D. H. hit the front at three thousand, five hundred. Her Liberty was roaring in steady voice, as Jess banked mildly to the southward and winged across. He was using his head like an owl now and so was Al Pursely.

Farther southward, the speck was becoming a ship again. Cummings' D. H. was over Hill Seven already, Jess figured. He went in deeply, then banked around. The wind was on his ship's tail as she approached the map spot of the supposed transport target. He couldn't spot any movement below, at first but then, suddenly, he saw it. Grey-green color moving over a grey-brown road. Moving slowly. The road was bad. Narrow. A half mile from it, to the northward, a field was being shelled. Wasted ammunition—with a real target in motion.

They were winging toward two batteries. Jess jerked his head.

"Let her—out!" he shouted, and saw Al bend forward to release the aerial coil. Seconds later, sticking his head over the fuselage side, he saw the wire slanting back. They were almost over the road with the enemy transport now. It was a long line of trucks! Trucks and men!

The other D. H. was circling, getting back of the target. There were no other ships in sight but the clouds worried the pilot of the ship whose aerial was already out. Al's voice came to him.

"Bank her, I've pushed letters!"

They were beyond the target and a half mile toward the Allied lines now. Jess moved the stick to the left, kicked left rudder. It was a mild bank with the aerial wire out. But they came around

fast. He stared toward the road on which the transport was moving. Almost immediately there was a burst of red east of it. Then another burst, in the same spot. From the air it looked as though the battery shells were almost hitting the road but it was at least a two hundred yard miss, Jess figured.

He dove the plane and went beyond the target. Coming around, back toward the Allied lines, he saw that the Cummings plane had passed over the road once, was banking for a second try. The aerial wire was out.

The shells were bursting closer to the road now, nearer the transport. Troops were scattering to both sides of the road—but there was no place for the convoy of trucks to go. They weren't on the target yet. But perhaps the captain, working with the same batteries that Al was working with—could get a direct hit.

There was no A. A. fire; no enemy ships were in sight. And that bothered Jess. It was unnatural—looked like the lull before the storm. They were getting too many breaks.

He stared up at the clouds, turned his head from side to side. They were a half mile on the enemy side of the target now; he held her on the course for another quarter mile, then banked. His eyes went down to the road and the convoy. He swore softly. There was a white-red explosion and bits of material shot up into the air. Almost instantly there was a second explosion. Dark objects streaked up into the sky. Flame shot along the road at weird angles.

"Ammunition!" he muttered. "Direct hit!"

THEY were on the target now. More than one battery. And all Al had to do was to pound back the "extend in line" call. The road ran straight. He twisted his head to shout at the gunner-observer. Al's head was bent forward. He was pounding the key. And then Jess Howitt saw shapes slanting down from the clouds. A half dozen of them!

Al's head came up and there was a

grin on his face. But he saw back of Jess Howitt's goggle glass, saw the expression on his pilot's face. His grin faded. He twisted, swung the bracketed gun. Jess shouted hoarsely.

"Cut the—aerial."

Then he zoomed the D. H., half rolled her, let her slip into level flight, banking around. A Rumpler shape was in his ring-sights almost instantly. He squeezed the stick-trigger of the prop-synchronized machine-gun.

Tracer bullets drummed outward, upward. The diving Rumpler banked off. A tracer stream shot downward from her rear cockpit gun but it was beneath the D. H.'s landing gear. She dove sharply toward German soil.

Jess Howitt swore harshly. He thought of Captain Lanner, trapped in the rear cockpit of Cummings' plane. The C. O. being flown by a prop-winder! And then he stopped thinking about the other ship. The gun in the rear cockpit drummed out a short burst; Jess twisted his head and saw a shape diving toward the tail-assembly of the D. H.

He used stick and rudder, kicked the reconnaissance plane into a slip. But the gun in the rear cockpit kept on drumming out its leaden stream. Al Pursely was working.

Jess leveled the ship off, got a glimpse of two shapes in the sky, perhaps a half mile distant. But they were not attacking the reconnaissance plane. One of them was a small ship, an Allied ship. The other was an Albatross. At least one Allied fighting ship had arrived on the scene.

The American pilot banked away from the two combating planes. His eyes searched the sky. A thousand feet above was a Rumpler, a German reconnaissance type plane. She was getting ready to pique on the D. H. A mile away, banking, was a second Rumpler. She had winged wide of the dog-fight, and Jess guessed that something had gone wrong aboard her. That accounted for four of the planes he had seen, counting the one

he had downed at the beginning of the fight.

He glanced downward. Shells were bursting all along the road; there was another explosion of a truck, as he watched. Wreckage was scattered in the fields and direct hits were devastating the enemy convoy. Jess stared above the ground. And then, suddenly, he saw Lieutenant Cummings' DeHaviland. She was slanting down—diving toward earth!

Jess Howitt groaned. He zoomed, watching the Rumpler above. For some reason, her pilot had failed to pique. And in the next few seconds, he saw the reason. Off to the southward, the Albatross was going down in flames and the small Allied ship was roaring toward the Rumpler above. She was a Nieuport.

JESS nosed the D. H. down—he roared her with three-quarter engine, straight for the spot toward which the sister plane was gliding. That spot was a level field, but shells, Allied shells, were bursting on either side of it. Close to the ground, he saw Cummings get around into the wind in an almost vertical bank. Then his ship was straightening out, diving again.

Twisting his head, Jess shouted back at Al Pursely.

"Watch the sky! We're going—down—after Lanner!"

He saw Al nod, point upward. He thought he heard him shout something that sounded suspiciously like "damned prop-winder!" and that was the way he felt about Cummings. It was a rotten spot to let a ship drop out of the sky.

Jess had his plane down to within a hundred feet of the field now. He saw the Cummings' ship strike in a slow landing, almost a stall. He muttered a fierce prayer that she wouldn't crack up too badly, knowing that the ground was soft. He swore in admiration. She hadn't cracked up at all! The pilot had got her down; her tail assembly hadn't even come up.

Banking over the field, Jess stared downward. He saw Captain Lanner

standing in the rear cockpit. He saw Windy Cummings' head close to the captain's. If Windy could get down perhaps he could make it, too.

He dove again, glancing upward to get the position of the Rumpler. She was down to a thousand feet now, and still piquing toward the field. His eyes went to the plane below. Captain Lanner was standing in the rear cockpit and was waving up at the D. H. He was waving them off, signaling them not to land!

Jess muttered to himself. "We'll get down—anyway!"

Then he saw Cummings. The pilot was atop the engine—he was bent over, working desperately. The prop was dead, motionless. But Cummings, with something trailing from the fingers of his hands, was working hard. Al's voice came to Jess.

"Broken feed line! He's trying—a fix job!"

The American pilot zoomed the D. H. He twisted his head, shouted.

"We'll take the Rumpler!"

The German two-seater was close to them now. Her pilot streamed tracer bullets down, but they were short. Jess pulled the D. H. out of the zoom, got her over in a vertical bank. He figured that the enemy ship would pull up from her dive. But she didn't.

BANKING, he saw the German plane diving toward the German rear lines. She would land on her own territory, but she wouldn't get far back.

Jess Howitt roared his ship back toward the field from which they had drifted in the sky fight.

At three hundred feet he roared over the field. He swore grimly. Windy Cummings was gripping the D. H.'s prop—he was trying to wind her alone. In the rear cockpit Captain Lanner was crouched back of the bracketed gun. It was spouting bullets along the field. Gray-green figures were creeping in toward the plane!

Jess dove toward the line of the figures. He shouted back at Al.

"Ground straff 'em, Gunner!"

And then his gun was shooting death between the whirling blades of the prop down on the crawling line of Germans. Past them, he whipped the ship around vertically. And Al's gun battered down a hail of bullets until the ship was pulled over on level keel again. They raced back toward the landed plane.

"He's got her!" Jess shouted hoarsely. "The damned old prop winder—"

Slowly the nose came up, feet from the earth. The landing gear barely scraped the mud and then she was climbing.

MESS. Lieutenant Cummings was late in entering the room. When he came in the other officers rose silently. It was a decent tribute to a sweet job. Lieutenant Compner, the adjutant, spoke.

"Nice work, Lieutenant! Repair of a bullet-torn gas line, winding a D. H. prop up alone—that's sweet. All right, let's chow!"

They seated themselves. Jess Howitt was next to Lieutenant Cummings. He spoke quietly, after five minutes or so. Cummings had only uttered a few words.

"That was a sweet job, Cummings. Sorry I hopped you so strong. My mistake. But, say, how about those other landings?"

Lieutenant Cummings grinned at Jess.

"Two were the real thing, Howitt. The first two. Even if the engine didn't show it. But I nearly cracked up on the second. So I tried—" Cummings grinned more broadly than ever—"two more, just for practice. Then I saw I was in bad."

"Windy"—Jess Howitt's voice was cheerful—"you're sort of quiet. Changed a bit. Got the idea down there in the mud, eh?"

Lieutenant Cummings continued to grin. He nodded his head.

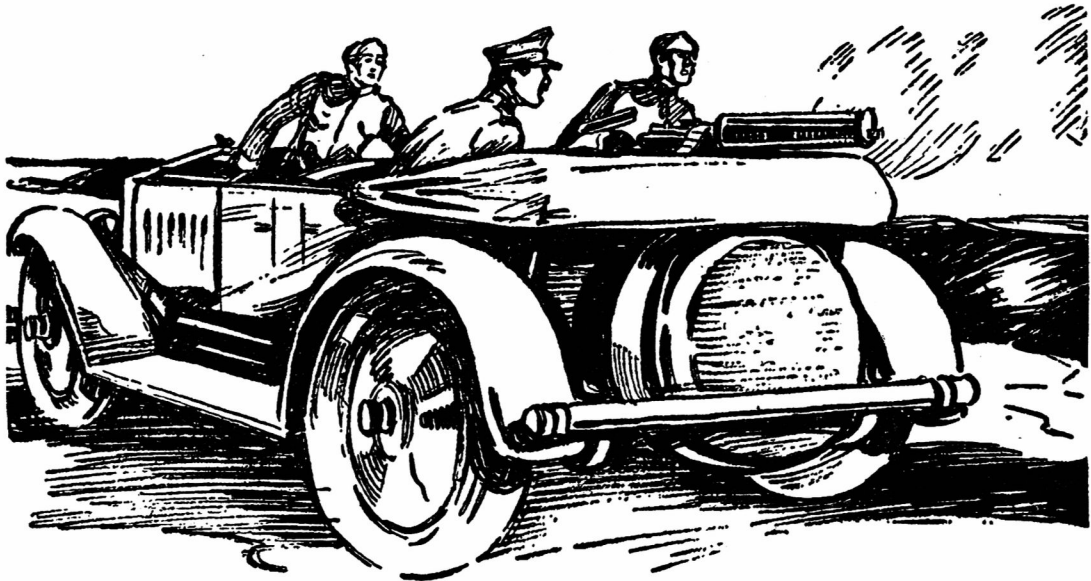
"Direct hit, Jess," he stated. "Got it while I was winding her up."

Jess raised his water glass.

"It was a pretty patrol, all around," he stated simply. "Happy landings, Lieutenant! But not too many of 'em!"

They touched glasses.

TRICKED by the



*Stout-hearted Bates had backed up the hill for them!
Beardsley emptied his revolver into the Turks.*

General Capon insisted on low flying in treacherous air. Mr. Atlee is at his best in telling here how Gerald Burke of Lawrence's spectacular force in Arabia dealt with the officious General in a fast moving tale involving battling with the Turks.

GENERAL CAPON was not endeavoring himself to his audience, which consisted of Lawrence, the leader of the Arab revolt, and Lieutenant Gerald Burke, R. A. F., the one and only flying officer attached to the Arab army. Outside the tent upon the floor of which on a priceless Persian prayer rug the three men squatted, the sheiks of Araby passed to and fro, flinging noisy greetings at one another. Beyond, stretched the endless Sirhani desert with the palm-trees and turrets of Azrak to the right of the foreground. The general, one of those blunt, bull-headed John Bulls whose almost sole credo is the effect that wisdom will die with them, did not think much of Lawrence's Arab force. "Rag-tag and bob-tail," he grunted as he gulped at his whiskey and soda. Lawrence said noth-

ing, having learned the gift of silence, but every now and then his blue eyes found his air-pilot's and danced the least ironically.

For Burke was the cause of the tirade. The general, who commanded a brigade of infantry on the right flank of the Palestine force, had flown up that morning to reconnoiter from the Arab front the approaches to Es Salt and Deraa, against which his brigade was to move shortly. Since Burke was better acquainted with the terrain than the pilot who had flown him up he had had the former take him over that area and they were but lately returned. His complaint was that the airman had been "Too demned cautious. Regular old woman, by gad!" Burke, it seemed, had refused to fly low enough in the Es Salt valley to suit his generalship. The general had not been able to

TURKS

By
Benge Atlee



Burke grabbed his rifle by the hot barrel as the Zaagi had already done. On rushed the Turks, their cry now hoarse with triumph.

see as he wished certain gun positions, and Burke's explanation of the dangers of low flying in that mountainous neighborhood he had dismissed as "demned eye-wash!" What General Capon had come to see he was going to see, by gad, and as soon as he finished his drink he would have his own pilot, a fellow who hadn't been polluted by "these demned Arab petticoats," take him over the territory again.

Burke, his face the color of brick, his dark eyes snapping with suppressed rage, said nothing, had nothing to say that one dare before a general. He kept flinging to his outraged feelings as a sop the thought of how sweet it would be to meet General Capon when the war was over and they were all in civvies again and land him one fair on the end of his whiskey-red beak. He didn't so much mind the old fool ratting him for not

having flown low enough over those perilous dolorite hills. Having had more than one nasty experience with their vicious air pockets his conscience was quite clear on that count, but it made him boil to hear Lawrence's army called a rag-tag and bob-tailed organization. He knew something of the untiring effort, of the patience nothing short of genius, that had gone into welding it together. He knew that but for Lawrence another whole Turkish army corps would have been free to oppose Allenby in Palestine.

General Capon placed his empty glass on the small carved table and rose to his feet. "I'll push off now, Lawrence," he said, "with a pilot who'll take orders—a fellow who doesn't suffer from these attacks of cold feet Burke seems such a martyr to."

"Very good, General," exclaimed the little Irishman, rising beside him. "Come

along, Burke," he added, thrusting his hand mischievously through the airman's arm, "we'll see the general off."

They proceeded down through the Arab encampment, past the long line of camel pickets to the cleared level space where the two aeroplanes rested. The general's aide, a pretty boy resplendent in red tabs, helped him into his flying coat and goggles, and thus arrayed he looked not unlike some amphibian monster. With the brusque grunt of farewell to Lawrence he climbed aboard the machine; his pilot, Beardsley, got into the forward seat, and they were off.

Burke was turning away with a muttered imprecation when Lawrence caught him by the sleeve. "Generals," he declared with the merest trace of smile, "were sent by Allah so that colonels and majors; captains and privates; sergeants, corporals and privates, can be employed to make good their blunders. Better go after him, Laddie, in your old bus. You needn't fly too close—might hurt the old boy's pride. But keep an eye on him. Give us a bit of a knock with Allenby if anything happened to the old buffer while he's our guest."

"Hang it," Burke exclaimed angrily, "it'd be a good thing for the Palestine army if he did crash in those hills! How the devil Allenby does so well with such a brigade commander I don't know!"

"The ways of Allah are inscrutable," murmured the little Irishman. "Up and after him!"

STILL cursing, the young airman strode to his own plane and presently was a speck in the sky westward. "It's because we're led by generals like old Capon," he raged, "that the war wasn't ended long ago. The silly old fool isn't fit to lead a camel-train, let alone a brigade. And yet a decent chap like Beardsley is forced to risk his life and his plane, and take all the blame if anything goes wrong, just because a bull-headed brigadier won't listen to reason."

Soaring above the Turkish camp at Maan he wished he had brought a couple

of bombs along. It'd be an easement to the spirit to see a dump or a few freight cars go up in a crash of smoke. By this time the Moabite Hills were showing up violet against the distant sky-line to northward and the other plane was a mile ahead. Far below to the left a shimmering spot of silver marked the Dead Sea, and a silver ribbon to the north the Jordan gleamed.

Beardsley's plane was heading into the hills and dipping down. Nosing lower and lower it finally began to circle over Es Salt, and Burke followed to a thousand feet. But still Beardsley circled lower, five hundred, three hundred, and Burke cursed because of the danger the other pilot was being put to in the treacherous air where mountain and desert met.

The Turkish soldiery, rushing about the encampment below, began to fire into the air with their rifles. But still, urged on doubtless by the foolhardy brigadier, Beardsley went lower. It was then that Burke forgot his qualms about low flying, and realized that he must do something to draw the Turkish rifle fire away from the other plane. But hardly had he put his nose down when Beardsley's bus wobbled, began slowly to sink, and a few seconds later was bumping over the uneven ploughed field above which it had been skimming.

His finger on his Lewis gun trigger Burke swooped down, but by the time he got there the Turkish soldiery were already swarming about the other plane and he realized he dare not fire without endangering friend as well as foe. Furthermore, the Turks, jubilant over the bagging of one plane were volleying furiously at him.

Deciding that Beardsley's bus was all they were going to get that day he took on height, and hovered over the village at an altitude of fifteen hundred feet, grateful that the enemy had no anti-aircraft guns in this neighborhood. His glasses glued to his eyes he watched the scene below. The general and Beardsley were being escorted between glistening rows of bayonets to the Turkish Com-

mandant's house, a great crowd of natives surging eagerly about them. He continued to circle over the village, not that he could do anything, but because he hated the prospect of returning to Azrak and breaking the news to Lawrence.

An hour passed. Suddenly the commotion increased below and he dived lower to get a better view. The two captives were being led out of the commandant's house, through yelling ranks of villagers to the outskirts of Es Salt. Finally, mounted one behind the other on a big camel and flanked by two rows of half a dozen horsemen each, they were led out of the village eastward towards the hills. They were being taken to Amman—to the railway—from whence doubtless by train to Damascus to appear before Djemal Pasha, the Turkish Commander-in-Chief. And wouldn't Djemal rejoice! This would be as good as a victory to the downhearted Turks!

For two miles he followed the cavalcade, racking his brains for something to do. But there was nothing. He couldn't land in those hills. He couldn't machine-gun the Turkish escort without danger to the two prisoners. At last he turned his nose reluctantly about and headed for Azrak.

LAURENCE laughed. He remarked that he was sorry for poor Beardsley. And then his face began to lengthen. They were standing in front of his tent and just then old Auda ibn Tayi, the Toweihha warrior sheikh went by. "Ho, el Auruns!" cried the sheikh, "where is the great English Pasha who went flying this morning?" In a flash the quick-witted little Irishman replied: "He has flown to Paradise, O Auda, and sits now surrounded by *houris*. Shall I have him call at your tent and describe the joys when he returns?" As the old warrior went off laughing raucously, Lawrence turned gravely to the airman and said:

"If the Arabs get to hear of this it's going to play the devil with their morale. They can easily magnify a thing like that into a first-class disaster. We'll have

to keep it dark for the present anyway."

"I'm deuced sorry it happened," Burke said contritely, "but I don't see how I could have prevented it."

"Cheer up! I'm not blaming you, even if others will."

Others would, Burke realized well. It was a pretty mess. Old Capon, it seemed, was more than an old fool, he was a British general. Burke had not realized until that moment how far-reaching the effects of the loss of such a personage could be.

One of the Rolls-Royce tenders, returning from a trip to Nuri Bey's position at Umtaiyi, purred by. From staring at it dumbly the unhappy airman suddenly grabbed Lawrence by the arm.

"It'll take the Turks three hours to get to Amman on their horses!" he cried. "Perhaps we could intercept them below Kissir in one of the tenders. It's only a little over thirty miles!"

The little Irishman's eyes lightened with the faintest ray of hope. "Jerry, my sweet lad," he eagerly cried, "if you deliver old Boodlebags here safe and sound I'll have you made a Sheikh ul Islam! Go to it, and may Allah be bountiful!"

He called out to the driver of the tender which was slowing down a short distance away and they dashed towards it. The windscreen of this particular car had been removed and in its place a Lewis-gun, salvaged from one of Burke's wrecked planes, had been riveted.

"Bates," said Lawrence to the cockney driver, "go and fill up with petrol. You and Lieutenant Burke are going on a joyride. And, Bates, you better put a few rifles and some ammunition in the back. You might need them."

The little cockney's face lit up. He knew what Lawrence meant by a joyride, and for the last few weeks life had been drearily dull for the drivers of the two Rolls-Royce tenders. He hastened off, was back within the quarter hour for the waiting Burke, and they set off immediately across the level plain in a direction that would take them to a place south of Amman where they could safely cross the Medina railway.

It was not until they had been on their way an hour, and were already climbing the rocky hills this side of that place, that a guttural Arab voice from the back complained: "The way is rough, El Bourque. Give me a camel to this iron creature for comfort any day."

Startled, Burke swung about to find himself face to face with the grinning Abdulla el Zaagi, leader of Lawrence's Arab body-guard, who had come out from under the tarpaulin where, until now, he had been hiding.

"What the deuce are you doing here?" exclaimed the astonished airman.

The Zaagi's grin spread from ear to ear over his two rows of perfect teeth. "By Allah, el Bourque, I heard el Batesh telling the driver of the other iron creature of the luck that had come to him. He was going on an adventure with el Bourque! And by the Beard of the Prophet where else would Abdulla also be going? While he gave the creature to drink I slipped in under this covering, and here I am. Have you a cigarette, *effendi*?"

Laughing Burke tossed him a half-empty packet of woodbines, and turning to the grinning Bates said in English: "We might have worse help in a tight place."

"Aye, sir," replied the little cockney, "'e's a right-plucked 'un in a scrap even if 'e is the worst thief in Harabia."

UNMOLESTED they crossed the railway, pushed on into the hills towards Kissir. It was hardly a road they followed, one of those camel-caravan routes that have been padded over since time immemorial by the heavy footed ships of the desert, and quite unsuited to motor traffic. Long stretches of narrow, rock-strewn track that swung to the very brink of deep precipices had to be taken in low gear, and as the afternoon wore on Burke glanced anxiously at his watch from time to time. The route joined with one out of Amman to descend into the Jordan valley, from which direction General Capon and Beardsley were being conveyed.

A flat tire, pierced by a jagged piece of flint, held them up twenty minutes and the Zaagi spoke again warmly of camel superiority. Finally, from the crest of a hill they found themselves looking down into a deep valley. The sharp-eyed Arab cried out suddenly and pointed. Far below, like insects against the white sand, a tiny cavalcade crawled northward. Since it would take them half an hour to reach the point where the trail, leading down the face of the mountain, debouched into the valley, Burke ordered Bates to shut off his engine. His first thought had been to intercept the Turks and hold them up, but he realized now that if he had to use the Lewis gun there would be the same danger to the prisoners that had forced him to hold his fire that morning. He determined therefore to let the cavalcade go past and try to surprise it by coming up unnoticed in the rear.

At last it trekked slowly past the foot of the trail and he gave the word to Bates. The Rolls-Royce began to grind down the steep declivity in low gear. It was a perilous way. Around the edge of cliffs below which the rocky wall fell away sheer for hundreds of feet, past places where their outer wheels passed within inches of the narrow rim of safety, down inclines almost as steep as the side of a house, and over rocks that jounced the car until the springs creaked in protest, they hurried in pursuit.

"Talk of terra firma," muttered Burke, as they swung for the dozenth time around the edge of nothing, "give me the air!"

The little cockney driver grinned. "Worse than Piccadilly Circus on Bank 'Oliday, sir!"

Abdulla begged another cigarette, declaring that only the mercy of Allah could bring them safely back up this mountain.

Finally, without accident, they made the floor of the Valley. By this time the Turkish cavalcade was passing over the top of a sandy knoll a half mile ahead. Bates gave the Rolls-Royce the full dose and the speedy car purred over the smooth valley floor at forty, fifty, sixty

miles an hour. By the time they got to the top of the knoll the Turks had all but reached the bottom of the further slope, and Kissir, set amid its waving palms, lay little less than a mile beyond.

"Shut off your engine!" Burke ordered the little cockney, as they began to swoop down the long incline.

He slipped a drum of ammunition into the Lewis gun, and swung her on her pivot to see that she was in working order. He thanked heaven that he had waited to let the Turks pass, for they rode in two lines on either side of the big camel and he saw that he would be able to enfilade them from the rear without endangering the prisoners.

"When I open fire," he grunted to Bates, as the silent tender swept almost to the bottom of the slope, "blow your horn for all you're worth."

THE Turks, less than a hundred yards ahead now, were just moving out on to the level, and still quite unaware of the bee that was about to sting them. The tender began to lose way. Burke let it creep a few yards nearer and then, sighting the Lewis gun at the right hand row of escort, opened rapid fire. At the same time, Bates slipped into gear and pressed loudly on the horn. Nor was the Zaagi idle. Some time before he had grabbed one of the rifles from the floor of the car, and when the Lewis gun spat he opened on the opposite line of Turkish horsemen.

Thrown into confusion by the unexpectedness of the attack, the Turks broke slightly away from the big camel. Burke had purposely aimed at their mounts to make them unmanageable. The little cockney driver shot the Rolls-Royce forward and swung her sharply about close to the camel which had halted and from whose back the two astonished prisoners were sliding. In another instant, and before the Turks had regained control of their mounts, they were in the back beside Abdulla and the tender was roaring off up the slope.

"Damme!" cried General Capon, once

more the pompous brigadier, "it was about time you came to our rescue!"

Burke made no reply, had his eye on the Turks who, with the exception of one of their number whose mount had fallen under him, were dashing up the slope after them. But no horses could catch the Rolls-Royce in this sandy valley and they would have a mile to the good by the time they reached the track leading up the rocky mountainside, where alone the animals could travel faster.

They swept over the top of the knoll at fifty miles an hour. Suddenly, too late to steer past it, Bates saw the deep hole in the sand immediately ahead. He had missed it on the way up, had been too excited then to notice it. Bump! *crash!* Bump! The big car all but capsized, skidded a hundred feet down the slope and came to a full stop. The rear right spring had snapped and the mudguard falling on the tire, made a perfect brake. They were absolutely stuck.

Leaping out they examined the thing. "Can you fix it?" Burke asked the little cockney anxiously.

Bates scratched his head, gazed with wrinkled brow at the broken spring. And then the pompous bulk of General Capon was thrust between them. "Damn," he bellowed at the little driver, "why didn't you look where you were going! Do something, man. What are you standing there scratching your head for?"

But Private Bates had driven an omnibus too long through the crowded streets of London to be perturbed by a mere general. Turning to Burke he said calmly: "I 'ave a couple of bits of scantling aboard we use to get 'er out of the sand when she's stuck. Maybe I could shore 'er up wiv 'em, but it'll take time." He glanced a little anxiously back towards the top of the slope, up which, rifle in hand, the Zaagi was already dashing bent on Turkish meat.

Bidding the little fellow do his best and speediest Burke turned to the general. "If you and Beardsley will help Bates, sir, I'll go with Abdulla and try to keep the Turks busy!" He grabbed a rifle and

bandolier of ammunition from the back of the car, and just before dashing off, whispered hurriedly in the little cockney's ear: "As soon as you have the job done get those two aboard and beat it. Abdulla and I'll do what we can to get out of the mess on our own."

He found the Zaagi on his belly at the crest of the slope loosing off at the enemy who, three-quarters the way up the hill, had hesitated under his fire. As he flung himself down the Arab gave him an ear to ear grin and cried: "By Allah, el Bourque, I am glad of this chance to send a few Turks to Gehenna! It would have been a paltry adventure without this!"

THANKING his stars for having intruded the Zaagi into this affair, Burke sighted along his rifle and opened fire. The Turks, who had dismounted and stood for shelter behind their horses, were plainly puzzled. Had they been able to see what had happened to the tender on the other slope of the hill they would without a doubt have charged up full tilt. But not knowing what nasty ambushade might lie in wait for them beyond the two spitting rifles, they took counsel together. Burke and the Zaagi gave them no peace. Two of their horses fell, bullets spattered the sand like rain about them. Suddenly, turning their mounts over to one of their number who dashed with them down the hill, they flung themselves to the ground, taking shelter where they could find it on the uneven ground.

The Turk is no mean soldier, however badly officered, and these ten horsemen were of the ranks, had spent a lifetime skirmishing these very hills and valleys. They began to spread out fanwise, crawling snake-like over the sand, and presenting the poorest of targets. Then they also began to open fire, the sand sputtering up in about the two defenders.

The Zaagi let out his battle-yell in triumph. One of the Turks pushing the least too recklessly forward, had slumped limply to earth, the blood glistening on his exposed brow. But the fan crept ever nearer. Clip after clip of bullets the two

defenders sent spitting down the slope, but those wriggling bodies continued to advance. Burke glanced behind. Bates had got a jack under the body of the car, and had the mudguard clear of the wheel. It would take him another quarter of an hour to secure the scantling in place on the rear axle.

The minutes crept on leaden feet. For the second time Allah added his bounty to the Zaagi's aim and another Turk slumped limp in the advancing line. But they were still eight to two. Could they hold them off until the repair tender got away, the anxious-eyed Burke asked himself a dozen times as he grimly sighted along his hot barrel. For himself and the Zaagi he knew now that death could be the only end. The Turks were so close and crawling nearer so that they'd be unable to make a break for the rocky hillsides when the Rolls Royce finally got away. And these fellows, having lost their valuable prisoner, would be in no mood to take others. For the Zaagi, whose grin of delight still creased his face, battle in death meant nothing but glory and an immediate translation to that Paradise of *houris* of which the sons of Ishmael dream constantly and steadfastly. But to die here uselessly, because a fat-headed old officer could not listen to reason, was bitter ashes in the mouth of the young airman and he could see no glory in it.

Suddenly, with a sinking feeling of finality, he realized that he was inserting his last clip of cartridges into the magazine. Flinging away the empty bandolier he grunted to the Zaagi: "Hold your fire, Abdulla! I have only five more shots!"

"By the Beard of the Prophet, el Bourque, I have none!" answered the Arab, his grin receding slightly.

The Turks, the nearest of whom were scarcely over a hundred feet away, became immediately aware of the absence of fire and held their own. Burke could hear them muttering together. Suddenly, one of them half-rose. He aimed fair at the fellow's breast. The Turk crumpled to the sand. For five minutes bullets spattered like hailstones about the two de-

fenders, and three times Burke was forced to fire on the ever advancing line. He had now but one round left, realized that it was only a matter of minutes before the Turks would come swarming up over them. Would Bates never get the car fixed?

THE Turks were growing bolder. Heads and shoulders were appearing here and there above the undulating sand rills, the nearest sixty to seventy feet away. Suddenly, at a hoarse shout of command they leaped to their feet, shrieking their battle-cry: "Y'Allah! Y'Allah!" at the top of their lungs. Firing his last shot which in his excitement went wide, Burke leaped to his feet and grabbed his rifle by the hot barrel, as the Zaagi had already done. Behind, the Rolls-Royce whirled suddenly into life. Thank Heaven, the others would be able to get safely away in the couple of minutes that remained in which he and Zaagi would be able to keep the enemy at bay.

The grin had returned to Abdulla's brown face, and his eyes were already fixed on the first Turkish skull upon which his rifle-butt would descend before he was battered down. His hands blistering from the heat of his rifle-barrel, Burke grasped it tighter, planted his two feet firmly in the sand. On rushed the Turks, their cry now hoarse with triumph. Forty feet—thirty feet—

Something was roaring up behind them. The toot of a horn and Beardsley's yell rose above the Turkish din. The stout-hearted Bates had backed the repaired tender up the hill for them! Grabbing the Zaagi, who had taken a leap forward, to meet the enemy, Burke dragged him back.

"Demmit, Burke, don't keep us waiting!" came the impatient bull-like roar of General Capon.

At the sight of the car the enemy, who all the time had been suspicious of an ambush, came to a stop, drew back slightly. While Beardsley emptied his revolver into the Turks, Burke and the Zaagi made a dash for the tender, leaped

aboard, and Burke slipped the clutch in. Just as the Turks sprang forward again the car shot forward down the slope. For a little the enemy bullets came pinging after it and then the Turkish yells of rage died impotently in the distance.

"By Allah," grinned the Arab, "that was a fight. We left some alive, though—ah, well, have you another cigarette?"

GENERAL CAPON paced apoplectically up and down Lawrence's tent. "I insist," he cried, "that you have this fellow fly me back to El Arish tonight!" He jerked a somewhat contemptuous thumb at Burke, who with the little leader of the Arab revolt, stood by the closed doorway.

"I'm sorry, general," Lawrence replied patiently, "but I will not have Burke risk his life further today in the hazards of night flying over the Sinai desert. He'll take you in the morning."

General Capon was in a most unpleasant mood. He had suffered severely that day in his most tender spot—his dignity—and yearned to get back to the adulation of a staff to whom his merest whim was a command.

"You dare to disobey my orders, sir—you, a mere colonel!" he thundered. "By gad, I've stood enough indignities from this ragtime force! Through the negligence of this fellow, Burke, I was captured by the Turks this morning at Es Salt. He could have landed and held them off with his machine gun while we transferred to his plane. Instead he flies off, leaves me to my fate, and I am forced to ride miles through the blistering heat trussed up on a filthy camel! And then my life is further risked through the rank carelessness of one of your drivers. Damme, Lawrence—"

As Burke, his patience worn to the quick, was on the point of bursting out in hot and insubordinate protest, Lawrence touched his arm. The little Irishman's eyes were that strange icy blue before which many an Arab sheikh had gone trembling from his presence, but there was a faint smile about his lips.

"I'm sure," he cut in quietly and with unmistakable sarcasm, "that General Allenby will sympathize with you, sir, when I tell him the *full* story of your misfortunes today, and how badly you have been served by my ragtime force. Unfortunately, an uncomprehending higher command sees fit to send all the brilliant generals to the Palestine front and entrusts this one to a mere archeologist. How could it be otherwise than ragtime? I shall apologize to Allenby for these outrages tomorrow when I see you safely back to Palestine."

It is doubtful if an irate brigadier ever slipped off his high horse more quickly than General Capon did just then. If there was one thing he had not planned on, and would take every step to avoid, it was having Lawrence carry the story of the day's adventure to General Allenby. For he could see by the uncompromising glint in the little Irishman's eyes just how and in what manner the tale would be told, and in what light he would be made to appear. Immediately his bluster left him. The possibility of being relieved of his command and shipped forthright home to England hanging above his devoted head like a sword lent him an unusual affability.

"My dear Lawrence," he exclaimed, "perhaps I have been hasty! The distressing hardships I have endured today have quite upset me. H-hem! Forget my outburst, I beg of you. And Lawrence, my dear fellow," he was rubbing his

hands somewhat uneasily together, "I don't think anything can be gained by bringing this matter to Allenby's attention. The C.-in-C. has enough to bother him these days without—"

"Just as you say, general," the little Irishman replied with a shrug.

General Capon seemed greatly relieved. He made humming and hawing sounds of gratitude. And then he finally suggested that perhaps a little drink might do them all a world of good.

"By the way, sir," said Lawrence, while it was being brought, "I think I should have a half dozen armoured cars up here, don't you? Allenby keeps promising—"

"My dear chap, I shall speak to him at the first opportunity!" exclaimed the now highly affable brigadier.

"And, sir," the little Irishman went on relentlessly, "don't you think Allenby should be told that Burke is really due for a Military Cross? Coming from you—"

"It shall be attended to! At once!"

"And Private Bates and Abdulla el Zaagi have surely earned a D. C. M. apiece. Don't you think so?"

By this time the somewhat goggle-eyed general, who knew not what he would be held up for next, was only able to murmur: "Quite . . . Quite!" He heaved a considerable sigh of relief when with the entry of the drinks Lawrence remarked, handing him his glass, "If this weather holds, sir, you'll be in Es Salt again next Monday."



Salvos of Death

By Jay J. Kalez

With a hissing sound like that of a giant snake, the sea burst through the bulkhead.



Alone on a sinking ship a daring gob goes into action single-handed against a German sub—and what he does is something for the medal makers to worry about!

RED MARLIN, gunner's mate, second class, United States Navy, had missed his ship! At least his ship was not at her berth in Brooklyn Navy Yard. Of that much he had made certain. Now, after combing every possible dockage from Hoboken to Bush Terminals, he was convinced that the six P. M. liberty order of the day previous, had been authentic as well as positive. He had over-stayed his leave once too often.

Red dropped into a brooding mood. The destroyer *Mullins* was too good a ship to lose, he thought. Besides it was home to him and had been for two years. Now, because of a few drinks and a wild party, he was stranded. Stranded with no excuse that would bring him anything better than a thirty day cruise in the brig and a transfer to some nine-knot mad house.

All this while his shipmates would be seeing action and incidentally, seeing

France. He might even get worse than that. He might get transferred to the west coast or to some dry land training camp to finish his hitch.

Suddenly a plan dissolved the gloom from Red's face. He knew his ship along with its squadron had been detailed to convoy duty out of France. The *Kent* and the *Duncan*, out of B squadron, had been doing that ever since his division had been assigned. Sailor's gossip was as authentic as an admiral's report when it came to news of destinations and basis.

The *Kent* and *Duncan* had been in and out of Brest several times. Most of the transports landed their troops at Brest. One thing was sure, sooner or later the *Mullins* would make Brest.

Red knew the chapters of his blue jackets manual. If he reported back aboard his own ship, though his over-leave might be a month longer, his punishment would be no greater. It was a deck court anyway he took it. They would find him guilty he knew, but when it came to handing out a sentence, old Captain Robinson would never count days against a man who used them up to get back to his ship.

Once he reached his ship he was safe. He might lose his liberty, yes, but he wouldn't be transferred. There was one hazard. If he should be picked up in between time, he would be charged as a deserter. That meant a general court and deserters rated the "book" under war time procedure. Now his problem was to find a ship bound for France and to get aboard.

Red still had his ship's liberty card. That would get him past the marine guard at the terminal gate. Wrapped in a newspaper, he carried the dungarees he had thoughtfully salvaged from the hose locker at the Navy Yard. The rest should be easy.

IN HIS rounds that morning he had noticed the supply ship *Montanian*, docked at one of the Terminal berths. There was no doubt as to the *Montanian's* destination. Of special construction,

her cargo holds had been converted into a series of refrigerator plants and cold storage rooms to enable her in transporting perishable supplies to the troops overseas. Red had been aboard her when she had docked at the Navy Yard to receive her two four-inch guns, for'd and aft. The *Montanian* had more than one advantage.

Being a Shipping Board vessel, her navy personnel consisted only of navy radio men and gun crew. The crew proper as well as the officers were of the Merchant Marines. This would almost eliminate the chance of his being discovered on board. No Merchant Marine captain ever gave a great deal of attention to his arm-guard personnel. He left that up to the navy officer in charge. On the other hand, the officer in charge had no authority over the ship's crew. It was upon this break of authority that Red hoped to fulfill his plan.

He would go aboard ship as a Navy man. The Merchant Marine quartermaster at the gang plank would undoubtedly never as much as question him. Once aboard the *Montanian's* structure below decks offered a thousand places to hide out. The maze of cooling rooms and freezers that partitioned the *Montanian's* holds allowed for many a roomy space suitable for setting-up quarters.

For his food and water he would depend upon his ability to forage. At night he would be able to appear on deck in his dungarees without attracting much attention. To the navy men he would be one of the ship's crew, to the ship's crew he would be one of the armed guard personnel.

Red walked hurriedly toward the Bush Terminals and soon reached the entrance gate. It was late afternoon and the exit gate was crowded with outgoing stevedores and longshoremen. A single marine guarded the entrance gate. Palming his liberty card in true seagoing fashion, Red stepped inside the entrance, shoved his card out at hip height and awaited the word to pass.

Red's seagoing attitude carried him by.

Without referring to the entrance's dock-age list, the marine passed him. A minute later Red was around a warehouse and out of sight.

He made his way straight to the wharf, where that morning, in his pacing of the walk outside the Terminal fence, he had seen the *Montanian's* camouflaged bow. She was still there but he had arrived none too soon. The *Montanian* was fully loaded and ready to clear.

RED hurried along the wharf to where a steep pitched brow ran from the dock loading platform to the *Montanian's* main deck. He never hesitated. Mounting the gangway he hurried aboard. The quartermaster at the brow head passed him with a nod. Pausing only to face aft and salute the colors, Red made his way across the deck to the companion way that led to the after well-deck below.

Luck was with him. The well-deck was deserted save for a few deck-hands busily engaged in stowing the cargo hoist gear. An open booby hatch for'd the main hatch stared at him as he descended the well-deck ladder. Red lost no time. Sliding beneath its hood he hurried below.

In his mind, Red had a definite spot as his objective. Descending down a series of ladders, made his way aft and finally passed the quarter-bulkhead. Here, just for'd the counter, lay the after-magazine wherein was stored the ammunition to supply the aft gun. The spot was ideal. The aft magazine, a newly added construction, cut the compartment into four quarters. Aft the magazine bulkhead was a neat little room totally cut off from the quarter and accessible only through the narrow passageway that led between the magazine bulkhead and the ship's plating.

Red smiled at the excellence of his hide-out. A great ventilator of manhole size tapped the plating overhead and forced down a strong draft of cool air. A series of electric bulbs lighted the compartment from all sides. Stowed ship shape between the quarter stanchions were heaps of canvas, rope and other deck gear.

Red was satisfied. There was little possibility of his ever being disturbed. The stowed gear was emergency tackle and outside of a chance tour of inspection by the ship's electrician, the aft magazine would make that part of the ship prohibitive to the remainder of the crew.

He soon made himself a suitable bunk, dragging pieces of canvas and rope into the compartment behind the magazine bunkhead. Time passed quickly. A slight throbbing of the deck beneath him brought him to realization. The *Montanian* was getting under way. The slow turn of her engines meant she had cleared the dock. He was on his way to France. A few hours more and the doubtful part of his plan would be over.

RED lay on his improvised bunk of piled rope and canvas, thoughtfully counting the days he had been at sea. By his crude method of scratching a check on the painted wall plating, today marked the beginning of the twelfth day under way. In two more days, at least, they should reach France. So far his trip had been uneventful. Red had fared well.

Each night, shortly after the mid-watch had gone on deck, Red would make his raid upon the galley and scuttle butt. Taking below with him a jug of water and whatever food he could annex from the galley lockers, he would return to his quarters and hold a feast.

It was such a feast that Red had just enjoyed. Fresh bread, hot out of the oven. Jam, cheese and bacon, left over from the officers' mess of the evening before. Red lay back on his bunk to enjoy a few more hours of sleep. It would soon be time for the morning watch to go on deck and then, for the rest of the day he must remain alert in case a tour of inspection should bring a seaman near his quarters. But now, Red could relax.

There was a dull thud, as of some great piece of flotsam striking the ship's side. A second more—then a thundering crash roared through the ship!

The great steel hull seemed to pause,

tremble from stem to stern, then lurch forward in a sickening stagger. Red felt himself hurled through the air to land in a sprawl against the magazine bulkhead. Though dazed, his mind grasped the realization. Somewhere forward there had been a terrific explosion.

Red gathered himself to his feet and listened. The engines were still working. He could feel their slow, dull pound. From somewhere forward, came a low rumble as of the feet of many cattle pounding upon wood. He thought he caught the faint echo of a shout but within the close walls of his hide-out all sound of the deck above was deadened.

In his mind, Red tried to classify the cause of the crash. It was not a depth bomb, that would have come from astern. The explosion that had hurled him from his bunk had been near amidship. It could be but one of two things. Either the boilers had exploded or else—. A whining moan of the ship's siren answered his thought. The *Montanian* had been torpedoed!

RED rushed through the narrow passage way that led around the magazine into the quarter proper. Past the magazine bulkhead, the trampling pounding changed to a rumbling roar. He stopped still, his eyes surveying the quarter's steel wall. The thin black line that marked the doorway through the compartment's bulkhead showed white with a spray of foam. The heavy bar of the doorway's catch, bowed at its seat. The hissing water spurted clear of the steel wall to land in the great puddle already forming over the quarter's deck plating.

An understanding terror gripped Red. He was trapped. Trapped behind walls of steel and water. That explosion had been just for'd the quarter bulkhead. Somewhere in the compartment ahead a great hole had been ripped in the *Montanian's* side. A hole so great the water had already flooded the orlop deck passageway level. Only the quarter's steel bulkhead kept the sea from crushing

down upon him. The *Montanian* was foundering.

Fear-stricken, Red stared helplessly at the intruding water. His sea mind grasped the situation. The *Montanian* was sinking fast. That constant shriek of the ship's siren and intermittent blast of her whistle meant she was being abandoned. Her crew was taking to the life boats or being removed by some convoying vessel. He was doomed. Sealed in a steel walled tomb. Escape seemed utterly hopeless.

The deck beneath his feet seemed to be growing strangely calm. The steel walls had ceased their throbbing tremble. The shrieking siren above deck weakened to a feeble moan. The overhead cluster lights began to gradually grow dim. Red understood. The water had reached the boiler room fires. The boilers, their feed gates left open, were slowly losing their head. The ship was no longer making headway.

In desperation, Red searched the room about him. His eyes fell upon the magazine doorway, its opening secured with a heavy lock, and Red grasped at a possibility. If he could open that door there was a chance of escaping through the magazine elevator chutes. He scanned the deck for a weapon, then remembered that in his bunk were some caulking irons.

Now, half feeling his way in the quarter's growing dimness, Red made his way through the passageway aft the magazine. With a sweep he tore the topping from off his bunk. It was too dark for his eyes to see. The single cluster of lights overhead showed with only a faint red lined glow. His hands groped about the scattered gear. His fingers touched cold steel. Grasping the weapon he made to raise it. Then, as if some unseen hand had bowled him over, he felt himself hurled across the room.

His ears seemed to go deaf. An unseen pressure seemed to force the air from his lungs. His body seemed to grow numb. There was a faint thud that he seemed to feel more than hear and then, with a roar, his senses returned to life.

THE air shrieked. There was the crash of steel against steel. Around the narrow magazine passageway rushed a wall of water that hissed like some angry monster. Through the compartment it swept driving all before it with a gale-like fury. A crash as it lashed against the counter bulkhead and back it came in a second onslaught.

Red struggled against the watery attack. Half dazed, he clutched an upright stanchion and clung fast. His feet were swept out by the current. His legs were battered by the water-hurled deck gear. Still he clung, the inky blackness about him seeming to roar against his defiance.

As suddenly as it had come, the rushing water seemed to calm. Now it expanded its power upward. Red felt it creeping up his hips. He tried to still the chaos of his brain. This was the end. If there was any hope he must think fast.

The boilers had exploded. The concussion had driven in the quarter bulkhead and now the compartment was flooding from deck to deck. The magazine door was now impossible. All was impossible. He was trapped, hopelessly trapped. It *was* the end.

Red felt a strange calmness come over him. In its wake came a surge of disgust, regret, then fury. What a ——— of a way to die. Just like a rat in a trap. Dying with no possible foe to struggle with except one that only laughed at his resistance. That wasn't the way he wanted to die. He wanted to die fighting. He wanted to struggle to the last breath. The cold water creeping up around his neck startled him out of his thoughts for a minute of stark fear.

He steadied himself against the stanchion. Should he give up? Should he just let go and get it over with? A rage seemed to fire within him. No, by God, he wouldn't. He would fight to the last. Fight 'till that water forced his body against the steel plating overhead and held him there. Fight! If he only had something he could fight besides that water. If he only had the Heinie who had fired that torpedo. If he—his head

struck against the deck plating above.

He loosened his grip on the upright stanchion and grasped the narrow edge of the deck beam overhead. The end was near. Another minute and the water would be flush with the plating. How black it was! So black the darkness seemed to glow. So black——.

Red's eyes opened wide. Ahead, a great round circle loomed upon the black water with a dull phosphorescent-like glow. He reached out his arm and brought his hand up in its center. He made out the dim outlines of his fingers. Still unbelieving he closed and opened his eyes. The circle was still there. Dare he hope?

PULLING himself forward through the water, Red brought his head into the center of the circle. The water was now so near to the plating above that he held his head far back in order to still breathe. As he entered the circle his eyes stared up. He was afraid to believe the impression of his own senses. There far above, a tiny circle of brightness shone down a tube-like path of blackness. It was the top of the ventilator shaft, its cowl blown clear by the force of the concussion below. There was a chance, now!

Red raised his head into the shaft's clearance. Reaching his hands up he braced them against the smooth sides. His finger nails caught at the protruding lap of the shaft plates above. They offered enough support to hold his body afloat. Then slowly he hunched his shoulders. They slipped easily inside the shaft's circle.

Rapidly, the water raised in the tube-like prison of the shaft's sides. Patiently, Red waited. He must save his strength. The water in the shaft would rise to a level with the water in the entire ship's hull. When he had been buoyed to that level, then it was time for him to start his climb. Eyes upward, he watched the circle of light grow larger.

Minutes passed. On up the ventilator shaft, Red fought his way. Bracing with shoulders, clawing with bleeding fingers,

he struggled to keep himself afloat. The water steadily buoyed him upward. Looking up, he gauged the distance yet to climb, then made a mental calculation of the possible success of his escape.

Some fifteen or twenty minutes had elapsed since he had entered the tube. Undoubtedly the shaft outlet came out somewhere along the forward part of the poop-deck. This meant the ventilator tube extended some ten or fifteen feet above the well decks. Before the *Montanian* would sink, the water must at least reach the level of the well-decks. This would mean the ship's hull was completely submerged except for her upper works. He must start his climb just before the well-deck level was reached. This would give him time to reach the top and get clear of the ship's side before she went down in a final plunge. He must hurry. Yet he dare not make a slip—it might prove fatal.

Carefully, he surveyed the distance to the circle of light overhead. He sighted an imaginary spot above, from where he would start his climb.

He struggled with an impulse to start his ascent at once. His reason fought against it. He would need every ounce of his strength in that climb.

His clothes were wet and slippery with a scum of oil that floated atop the water-filled shaft. That climb would be a struggle. He must allow the water to buoy him up as far as possible.

SUDDENLY he became conscious of the ship's slow, gentle roll. The *Montanian* must still be high out of the water to be sensitive to the sea's roll. He looked up again. The size of the circle above seemed to be unchanged. The roll of the ship was growing greater. The water seemed to have stopped its rising.

A wave of fear swept over him. Could it be that the *Montanian's* hull was already completely submerged? Had he misjudged his distance? Should the ventilator pipe outlet extend several feet above the poop-deck, this was possible. It had been over half an hour since the ves-

sel had been struck. It had taken but a few minutes for the water to flood the orlop deck from plating to plating. At that rate the vessel should have been hull down long ago. Now the water had stopped its rise. Had he waited too long? Was the *Montanian* about to make her plunge below?

Bracing with his back and knees, clawing with his fingers at the protruding plate laps, straining every muscle, Red struggled to ascend. The slow roll of the ship aided him. With every list, he pulled himself an inch higher, held for the back sway, then raised again.

Slowly he ascended. One foot, two feet, three feet; now slipping backward a few inches, now barely able to hold his distance as he fought for breath, now gaining the space he had lost. Up the shaft he fought his way. Now his body had cleared the water. Now he had gained a foothold upon the edge of the overlapped shaft plating. Now he had reached a point where the circle of rivet heads marked the deck collar. Up he struggled. Straining every muscle. Wedging his body with knees and elbows as he braced with feet and fingers for another effort. Gaining slowly. Rivet head by rivet head he climbed 'til at last his bleeding fingers clutched the rim of the shaft outlet.

Laboriously he drew his body to the shaft edge, caught his armpits over its rim and raising his head clear, breathed the cool, sweet air of freedom.

For several minutes he merely allowed himself to hang. He was too exhausted to draw forth the rest of his body. The climb had certainly been all he had anticipated. A few feet more and he would have lacked the strength to even have drawn his body over the rim. He had planned well.

Slowly recovering, he gazed about. The ventilator shaft outlet was but a few feet from off the poop-deck plating. To one side lay the cowl that the concussion had blown from its capping. A few feet ahead sat the aft four-inch gun, its breech open, the lid of its deck magazine thrown back. The deck was deserted. Deserted

and empty even to the vacant life-boat cradles with their out-board-faced davits.

RED pulled his body clear of the shaft rim and allowed himself to sprawl out upon the deck. He searched the decks forward. They were deserted. Every life-boat sling was empty, every davit facing outboard. The *Montanian* had been abandoned, completely.

He looked down at the aft well-deck below. The low rolling swells lapped over the few inches of freeboard and went washing across the deck. The *Montanian* was riding hull down to her waterways.

Red searched the decks forward for some object that would serve him as a buoyant. An elliptical life-raft on the forward boat deck caught his eye. As he gazed past it he sighted a far off cloud of smoke. The hazy black horizon held him. That smoke could be no other than the *Montanian's* convoy steaming away.

All about him the sea was clear of life-boats. Evidently the *Montanian's* crew had been picked up by the convoy escorts, the life-boats taken aboard or else scuttled by removing their tapering plugs, and the *Montanian* abandoned to her fate.

Red felt the sway of that unknown emotion which causes a true sailor to hesitate at abandoning his ship. Somehow that deck of the hull-down vessel felt strangely secure. More secure than any object that met his eye, as a suitable buoyant for abandoning. The *Montanian* rode as even keeled as if she was under way. There was something unrealistic about it all. By all his seagoing knowledge, the *Montanian* should have taken her final list and plunged under the sea long before now. The distance of the steaming convoy meant she had been abandoned for over an hour. What was keeping her afloat?

Searching his mind for some likely reason, the truth suddenly dawned upon him. He remembered the *Montanian's* structure. Her maze of heavy-walled refrigerator and cooling rooms. That was

the reason. Below deck, the *Montanian* was one mass of water-tight bulkheads. Each room was in itself a buoyant chamber. The ship's hull had been torn open and flooded but the compartments below still remained water-tight.

Red thrilled with his discovery. Either the ship had been abandoned because this point had been overlooked or else, disabled, the convoy had left her because of the danger and loss of time necessary to take her in tow. One thing was certain. She was still afloat and able to remain so as long as the compartments below held. He was safe for the time being. With the war zone system of sea-patrolling, his stay aboard should be short. No floating derelict like the *Montanian* could go long, undiscovered.

For perhaps ten minutes, Red lay upon the poop-deck resting and recovering from the strain of his climb. The breeze chilled through his water-soaked clothing and he moved into the lee of the aft gun-magazine. As he gazed out at the sea astern, a tiny line of white suddenly whipped across the water some few hundred yards away.

Red gave the wake of foam little thought and again turned his eyes ahead to watch the fast disappearing convoy. As he chanced to again glance astern, he froze still with amazement. There some three or four hundred yards astern was a submarine, its conning tower high, its deck awash, and a sailor crawling out of the conning tower hatch.

Red remained motionless, too astounded to move. Breathlessly he watched a second figure exit from the conning hatch and climb to the deck below. The two of them, from all appearances, were studying the *Montanian* through their glasses. Red crouched close against the deck magazine and watched. The *Montanian's* unsinkable tactics had evidently been too much for the submarine's commander.

Red planned quickly. He studied the aft gun's open breech. It seemed perfect. Its steel was brown with a protective coat of oil.

THE magazine's cover was open. Rising slowly he picked one of the giant shell cases from the cradle and hugged it in his arms. Then crouching low he stepped forward to the open gun breech, rammed the shell home and slammed the breech shut.

The next second he was at the gun-controls, his eyes to the telescope sight. The great gun swung, her black muzzle lowering into a line with the sub's low tower. Red trained her on the mark, allowed for the arc at such close range, depressed a bit and pulled.

The gun roared forth its defiance. Red held his eyes to the mark. A second, and the submarine's black tower lurched into a list, righted, then rolled easily in a passing swell. Red yelled in triumph.

The two men on the sub's deck scrambled toward the conning tower. Already the low craft was taking on a list. She seemed to settle lower. Red did not wait.

Scrambling for another shell, he rammed it home, trained on and fired. This time the submarine's bow leaped into the air, lashed out a tongue of flame.

A second later the submarine lifted her bow into the air and began to settle at keel end. Red saw the figure of one man struggling in the water near her side. Her sky pointed bow was ripped wide open. She was steadily sliding beneath the surface.

A few seconds and the great black hull disappeared. Red watched the whirl of her vortex. A single floating figure was struggling against its pull.

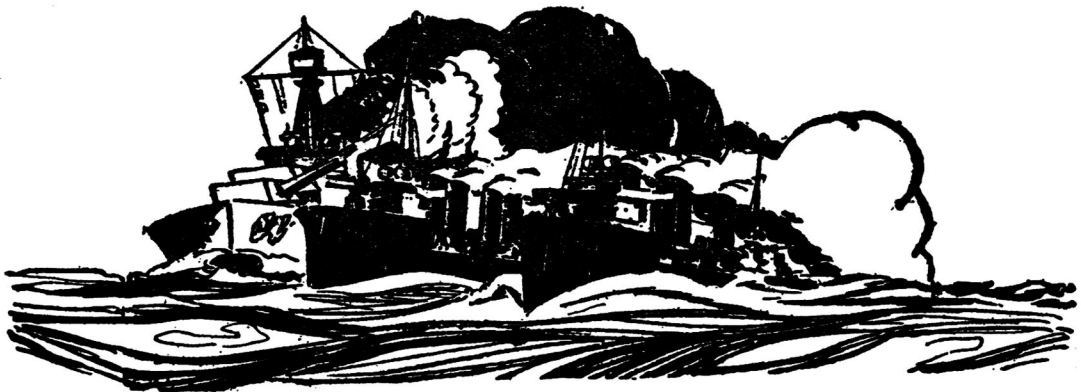
Red now watched the submarine's single survivor. The man, slowly approaching, held up one hand in a submissive signal. Red waved his arm in a wide swing.

"Come on, Dutch," he shouted through his hand-cupped lips. "I won't hurt you." With a swing he hurled a ring preserver in the swimmer's direction.

As the swimmer finally reached the floating preserver, Red saw he was just a youth. "Hang on, sailor," he shouted, and bringing the line in hand over hand, he pulled the German sailor to the ship's side. A moment later he had him safely on deck.

IT WAS late afternoon, when the German sailor suddenly rose to his feet and pointed to starboard. Red followed his direction. A thin column of smoke was ascending from the horizon. Red stepped to the gun and swinging it around, trained the telescope sights upon it. It was an approaching ship.

Suddenly, he leaped away from the gun's sights and throwing back his head bellowed a cry of joy. The startled German sailor moved away in fear. "Boy, it's her," Red shouted, pounding the speechless German on the back. "It's her. Old two forty-seven. The *Mullins* and nobody else. Sailor, I'm glad I got you along for proof, 'cause when I spill this yarn to the gang aboard they got to believe it. Especially the Old Man. He'll never red ink that record of mine as long as I can prove a mark-up of one direct hit on a Heinie U-boat."



Baptism By Steel

By MAJOR J. L. LAFOND

Tricked into a dangerous night patrol, slum-toters from the rolling kitchens show two hardboiled doughboys what soldiering really is.



The German's shot went wild and Curly, lunging ahead, plunged his bayonet up to the hilt.

DARKNESS was creeping in softly over what had been, twelve hours before, that dreadful symbol of death and destruction, No-Man's land. Like a shroud, blackness settled gently upon dead men clad in khaki and gray-green. It filled shell-hole, trench and dug-out with a weird sense of security so

that those who lived—the wounded, the tired and the half-crazed—took on a new lease of life.

Twelve hours of doom it had been for Company C of the 155th Infantry. Thrown in unexpectedly after a long, forced march, C had engaged enemy shock troops filtering into the Allied line

with artillery, machine gun and bayonet.

"Tin Soldiers," "milishy," "mama's pets" were a few of the choice words of derision hurled by the regulars as Company C plodded by toward the front, as replacements. But these names did not apply now. They were battle-scarred veterans!

As the darkness thickened, what was left of Company C crawled out of the trench and into a thick patch of shell-battered woods. There was still another mile to go, so a wild-eyed, haggard-faced young lieutenant said. It was inviting suicide to attempt further advance, but that was the captain's orders.

"Captain's orders, eh?" chorused Company C. "Well, let's get going."

Tough eggs — these newly-baptized warriors.

Suddenly enemy machine-guns set up their chatter and Company C flattened to the ground to avoid the leaden hail. To this incessant staccato was added the deep coughs of enemy field guns now in new positions.

"It wouldn't be so bad," complained Private Bill Jepson from his hurriedly-dug fox-hole, "if we had some grub. I ain't had a bite since this morning. But a guy might as well wish for T-bone steaks smothered in onions. Betcha 'Beef' Gorman and 'Curly' Harris are cuddled up nice an' snug in th' rear, laying alongside their rollin' kitchen, and scared to death as usual."

"I heard Captain Scanlon detail a couple of guys to hot-foot it back a piece to see what's holdin' 'em up. Say, Jep, it would be kind of nice to meet those two bozos right here, wouldn't it?"

"Gorman don't bother me none," Jepson said. "He's too fat and greasy. An' feeble-minded, sort of. It's Curly I'm achin' to see. That double-crossin' sissy. If it wasn't for him, wouldn't I still be top-kick of this here outfit, Granigan, and you corporal? Sure we would!"

"All you did was to smack him one very gentle that time, Jep. He didn't have no cause to go squawkin' to th' skipper like he did. An' the skipper didn't have

no right to bear down on us like he did right before th' whole company sayin' we'd been bullies long enough and so on! Curly's to blame for it an' he's got something comin'"

"Ain't I bin tellin' you he is!" growled Jepson. "An' him denyin' he never squawked—th' lily-livered coward that he is!"

"An' Beef quittin' us cold an' sidin' in with him!" Granigan exploded scornfully. "An' th' skipper sayin' he saw you bust Curly—everybody's against us, Jep."

An exploding shell beyond the woods drowned out further talk momentarily. Then, during a lull, Jep said, savagely:

"I bin a soldier too long to let a guy get away with that. Of course I busted him! But he could have taken it like a man. He had it comin', didn't he? Wouldn't let me tell him anything about soldiering, would he? Gold-brickin' until I had to put him on permanent K. P. duty. An' he loafed on th' job with Beef Gorman, didn't he? Was a top-kick goin' to stand for that, Granigan? Not much, he wasn't. Be nice to meet him? Say, guy, I'd rather lose a leg than not be here when he comes sneakin' in with th' shrm. I got something in my head, an' it ain't cooties, either!"

THE SOUND of exploding shells and the sharp barking of machine-guns drowned out conversation.

"I got a big surprise all doctored up for Curly," Jepson said when the din subsided. "I'm goin' to introduce that spud peeler to a couple of regiments of Germans. When we move up again, he's movin', too. Right up where it's easy to git acquainted. An' Gorman, likewise, just for good measure."

"Yeah," Granigan agreed dubiously. "That is, Jep, if we don't git bumped off before then. How you goin' to do it?"

"You watch my smoke," Jepson growled. "Lend me your spade while I scrape this hole a mite deeper. Looks like I'll need it. Captain's orders, me eye! We've done enough for one day!"

A whistle sounded suddenly and a ser-

geant crept down the thin line with an order for the men to move back a quarter of a mile where a narrow road elevated itself so that its banks gave protection against attack. It was an hour before what was left of the outfit got there.

Captain Scanlon, one arm hanging limp at his side, an ugly red crease across his left cheek, stood swaying uncertainly while he barked out orders that would make this new position tenable.

"And you, Jepson, and you, Granigan," he snapped as his flash light momentarily picked out the two soldiers from the group about him. "I want you two men to patrol on the left flank for at least five hundred yards. If the enemy is sifting through, I want to know about it. Sergeant Graham will lead another detail on the right flank, and Corporal Williams another for outpost duty in front. Food is coming up in a few minutes so you may wait until you've had something to eat. That's all."

As he finished two weary, bedraggled figures emerged from the underbrush and limped forward in the dying brilliance of a far-off star-shell. There was a subdued cheer from the tired troopers as they caught sight of the cans these figures carried, and they rushed toward them for their first taste of food since early morning.

Ex-sergeant Jepson scowled as he reached the sligher of the two new arrivals and said, assuming his most friendly manner:

"For just a young guy, Curly, you sure did noble. You an' Beef got some medals comin'. Musta bin busy with th' rollin' kitchen, eh? Kinda tough goin'? Well, you should have bin up here an' seen th' fun. Maybe you don't know it, Curly, but we lost half our gang today pushin' back th' Krauts just so you an' your fat friend, Mr. 'Beef' Gorman, would have smooth travelin'. An' still you took all day . . ."

"We did the best we could," Curly Harris said wearily. "We got here finally."

"Maybe if you waited 'till morning you

could have brought th' grub up in your messkit. That would take care of what'll be left of us most likely . . ."

"Quit pickin' on th' kid," Beef Gorman said in a gruff, tired voice. "He did th' best he could. Same as me. It's a poor time to be hatin' a guy. Maybe you think we had a picnic getting up here. You wouldn't believe half of what I told you . . ."

"Not any of it, Beef," Jepson growled. "An' as for hatin' a guy up here—that's my business."

"Seems so," Beef agreed soberly. "I wouldn't want it, though."

Captain Scanlon came up and barked out orders for the men to fill their mess-kits and go back to their stations. Jepson turned to him.

"We need machine gunners, sir. And Curly Harris, here, knows 'em from trigger to muzzle end. So he says. He went to gunnery school while at Camp Lewis accordin' to his record. Better stick him on one for tonight now we got th' grub."

"Harris' duty is to see that we get fed," the officer snapped. "When I want any advice from you, Jepson, I'll ask for it. Get your patrol on the way and be lively about it."

"Yes, sir," Jepson said meekly. "Come on, Granigan, we're shovin' off."

ONCE away from the road Granigan voiced a doubt. He said, in a hoarse whisper, "Ain't we goin' th' wrong way, Jep? What for we headin' south instead of east? Chinnin' with Curly didn't git you mixed in your directions, did it?" And when Jepson failed to answer, Granigan continued: "Suits me, brother. If we're lookin' for a cushy hidin' place, I'm for it. We earned our dollar today."

"We stop here," Jepson announced sharply as the two men came upon a narrow stretch of beaten path through the underbrush. "We stop right here an' wait for Mr. Harris and Mr. Gorman. They got a surprise comin'!"

"Listen, Jep," Granigan advised. "we're supposed to be patrolling and we're good enough soldiers not to forget it."

Fun is fun, but we ain't hidin' out, an' we ain't layin' down on th' gang just to mess with Harris and Gorman. They'll keep. Let's go to work on this job for th' skipper."

"We'll wait right here for those guys," Jepson insisted savagely. "We're patrolin' right enough, but we're goin' to have company. If they git bumped off while doin' it, that's their never-you-mind. See? Anyways, they're sure goin' to see somethin' about this war they'd never see behind a rollin' kitchen. Takin' 'em along with us will kind of square matters until we go back into rest billets."

"Jake with me," declared Granigan finally. "But won't they clutter up things on the patrol? Do more harm than good seems like. Especially if we meet up with a Jerry outfit that's nosin' around. An' besides, Curly's liable to squawk if we four get back."

"We'll learn 'em somethin'," Jepson promised. "Git ready. Here they come!"

Crouching in the brush, they heard Gorman's voice raised in complaint. They heard Harris urging him on. The food detail was on the narrow path, now, and running fast.

"Easy, you guys, easy," Jepson barked as he sprang out of his hiding place. His sharp command brought the two men to a quick stop. Jepson leveled his rifle against Harris' chest. Granigan had his piece deep into Gorman's quivering stomach.

"What's th' big idea?" Gorman wheezed, breathing hard. "An' who is it?"

A star shell revealed the scowling faces of the patrol and the fat cook gasped in fresh alarm.

"If it ain't Jepson and Granigan!" he whispered. "Crazy, or something, you two?"

"Just lookin' for company is all," Jepson said with a mirthless grin. "Captain's orders. Pickin' up all th' extra good fightin' men in case Jerry starts an attack. Of course he couldn't overlook you guys. I'm to take you out on patrol so's you get the feel of th' front. Then you're to stick around with th' gang an' help

out. That's captain's orders, too. An' we're certainly glad to have you with us!"

"You're lying, Jepson." Curly's voice was steady and unafraid. "And I'm going back to see the skipper about it. There's the food to think of."

JEPSON pressed his bayonet point against Harris' shirt. "Not so fast, Curly," he ordered. "You've got another guess comin' if you think you're goin' to see th' skipper. An' as for food! You won't have to worry none about that after you've finished th' tour with Granigan an' me. All any of us will need by mornin' is coffins. Hear them big shells sighin'? We bin dodgin' 'em all day. Dodgin' 'em and thinkin' fondly of you. Half th' outfit's gone an' th' rest is due to travel west by mornin'. I heard th' skipper tell Lieutenant Harding we was up Skunk Creek for re-enforcements. No nothing. But we got to stick. An' little Curly Harris an' good old fat Beef Gorman have got to stick, too."

"It's murder," Curly whispered tensely. "I haven't any weapons. I'd look good trying to fight off a German with a tin can." His voice grew unsteady.

"Nor me, either," Gorman added nervously. "I think you got your wires crossed, Jep. Th' skipper never said . . ."

"Captain's orders," Jepson growled. "'Bout face, you cry babies. Granigan, you grab off a couple of rifles an' some ammo when we hit th' left end of th' road. There's a small pile of both there that th' gang brought back. An' while you're at it, snake along a sack of grenades, too. Meet us off'n th' woods 'bout fifty yards to th' right. Git goin'."

"I'm gittin'," the ex-corporal replied as he slid away into the brush.

"Shake a leg," Jepson ordered. A prod of the bayonet pivoted Harris around. Gorman, too frightened by now to object or to resist, took up a position close to Harris. With Jepson in the rear voicing threats the three men headed for the rendezvous agreed upon with Granigan.

The ex-corporal greeted them impa-

tiently a few moments later. He slung the strap of the grenade sack over Gorman's head, gave Harris a rifle and ammunition and added his threats to those of Jepson's as the four took up the patrol.

"You got us all wrong, Jep," Gorman tried to explain. "You want to see us killed is all! Takin' out a grudge against poor Curly this way ain't going to get you nothin'!"

"No guy is goin' to make me th' laughin' stock of th' outfit, an' git away with it. An' if you think I'm goin' to sit in a corner after some smart-aleck has seen to it that my stripes are ripped off, he's got another guess comin'. Killed in action th' report will read by tomorrer. Keep movin'."

Jepson spoke jerkily, like a man suddenly paralyzed with anger. His long, patient wait to square accounts with the man whom he believed instrumental in bringing down the shame that was upon him had arrived, and his scheme, as bold as it was cruel, was pointed toward success.

AS A sergeant, Jepson had been a bully—but he had earned his stripes by good soldiering; and to have them removed in front of his company by his captain was a humiliation that had burned deep into his soul. Curly Harris had not been the only man in Company C who had felt the power of his fists. None, however, had run to the skipper about it. But this white-faced Harris, this weak-kneed guy who didn't know, or never would know the first rudiments of soldiering—to have a bird like him be the cause of a reduction to ranks! And there was Gorman to consider, too. A former pal of Jepson and Granigan who had deserted them for Harris—well, he had them both, now!

Jepson's mind, warped by the day's nerve-destroying fighting, was too dazed to plan for any other revenge than what was already in force. This patrol would lead to something in the way of revenge. And that was enough. If Harris and Gorman got bumped off, well and good. If

they didn't, they'd probably learn a heap of soldiering before that happened, which was well and good, too.

The patrol, by this time, was out far beyond the road. Enemy machine-guns, quiet for some time, suddenly took to chattering their songs of death in the areas in front of their positions. Something hot stung Curly's right arm, dropped him for a moment as though hit by a sledge hammer.

Jepson, on the aleart, said sharply: "None of that, you gold-brickin' slumtoter! Git up before I ram this pig-sticker down your gullet!"

Somehow Curly got to his feet. He sank his teeth into his lips to suppress the pain that raced white-hot up and down his wounded arm. He cried out sharply: "I'm hit!"

"You're lucky!" Jepson snarled. "Step lively, squawker. Maybe you'll stop another. You'll have something to write home about when you git through with this party. If you do . . . On your bellies!"

A hail of lead slugs sang inches above their heads as the four men flattened out. Gorman, shivering in terror, prayed aloud as he hugged the ground. When the machine-gun had shifted its fire to the right of them, Granigan prodded the fat cook with his bayonet point and the cook rose with a shriek and plunged forward, caught himself in a mesh of wire entanglements, fell flat again to writhe and twist himself free.

It was Curly, finally, who calmed him, helped him up, whispered words that stemmed the insanity fear had given him. And it was Curly who suddenly turned upon Jepson and said in a strange, but quiet voice:

"So you think you've got us, eh, Jep? Going to see that we get an education right up front? Where we can get bumped off. You think, maybe, I'm afraid to fight. Well, let me tell you something. I'm scared stiff right now, but no buck-toothed, bullying ex-sergeant is going to show me up! And let me tell you something else while I'm at it. I didn't squeal

on you—and I don't give a hoot whether you believe it or not. Now"

"That's good, Curly," Jepson broke in. "We'll see. Now keep movin'. Straight ahead. Don't try to beat it back; for if you do the Jerries won't have a chance to tickle you with a bayonet. I'll take care of that. We separate now, about five yards apart."

Curly's arm was throbbing intensely. He wished, as he stepped cautiously ahead, that he could pause long enough to put on a bandage, but he knew if he lagged even momentarily that Jepson would be upon him. Fear gripped him as he advanced, but he kept doggedly on.

"I'll show him!" he promised over and over with stubborn insistence. "No ex-sergeant can get my goat—even if I'm not a soldier"

A shell exploded almost directly overhead. There was a sinister sing and whine of flying metal. And then a groan from Jepson who began to thresh violently in the brush, his voice raised in pain.

"He got one like I did," Curly smiled grimly. "Let him suffer. Hey, Granigan," he shouted, "you'd better take care of that side-kick of yours. He stopped one, I hope."

MORE shells showered down. Rifle and machine-gun fire increased in tempo. Star shells and Very lights began to prick out ghastly blobs of light in the darkness overhead.

It was Gorman, trembling with fear, who found sanctuary in a shell-hole. His cry brought the others and the four crowded into it, hugging the side nearest the enemy. Jepson groaned and cursed. His arm, seen from Granigan's flashlight, was bleeding profusely from a ragged gash. Jepson implored his buddy to put on a first-aid bandage and Curly, grinning, said sarcastically:

"For a scratch like that? And you so hard-boiled you can eat elephant iron! Here, take a look at what I got!" Curly shoved out his blood-drenched right arm. "Nothing less than a leg off stops me on this patrol, now that I've been invited."

His voice trembled a little, but there was a calm, steady quality to it nevertheless.

"You gone plumb crazy?" Gorman squealed. "Say, Curly, you're so danged scared you don't know what you're sayin'. Patrol or no patrol, I've had enough. Let me doctor up that arm!"

Harris jerked away. "It's just a scratch," he said, and then continued to jeer at the ex-sergeant.

"Come on, Beef," he ordered finally. "We'll show 'em how the food detail goes soldiering!"

And before anyone could stop him, Curly had clambered up to the shellhole lip and eased himself over the edge. "Come on, you hard-boiled heroes!" he shouted wildly. When they failed to respond he shouted down to Gorman: "Prod 'em with your bayonet, Beef. We'll see if we can't give them something to write home about, too!"

Harris stood there, poised above the shellhole, rifle pointing menacingly down.

"You're goofy!" Jepson shrieked. "Don't be a d— fool! We can't go any further right now. Can't you hear them big babies bendin' over? Want we should stick our heads into one of 'em? Git back here before you stop one! I'm still runnin' this show. Th' patrol's over. We know what's up an' so does th' skipper. You come back here, Curly."

"Prod 'em, Beef! And prod 'em good!" Harris ordered. "Make 'em like it like we did. We're going places. Get 'em up, Beef!"

"Git goin', you goldbricks!" the fat cook ordered.

"Lay off, Beef," Granigan pleaded. "Can't you see Jep's hurt bad. We got to git him back to th' road. Quick, too."

"You don't hear me complaining," Curly chided from the top of the shellhole. "Hurry up, you fourflushers!"

Changing to whining, pleading figures, the two company bullies crawled to the top. Curly, assuming leadership, snapped out another order in a voice so harsh and commanding that even Gorman forgot his terror for a moment.

"Lead the way, Jepson, and don't try

to get lost. Captain's orders. We'll patrol as he said and heaven help you if you try any tricks. Let's go!"

"He's clear off his nut!" Gorman gasped. "Crazier'n a hoot owl!"

Fifty yards, and then a hundred the four men advanced. They finally reached a spot that Jepson said was the end of the area designated by Captain Scanlon.

"Another fifty yards—just for good measure," Curly ordered.

Through wire entanglements, in and out of shellholes, through underbrush as thick as a jungle growth, the four carried on. Overhead a vast confusion of sound shook the air. Jepson raised his face to the black vault above and hurled insane challenges to it. Beef Gorman laughed wildly. Granigan, frantic after a day of bloody madness, cried out in frenzied terror.

It was Curly who first came upon the German patrol five minutes later. Six ghost-like figures that loomed for a brief instant against the sheet lightning of mighty guns. He had one opportunity to shout out his alarm and then he was fighting for his very life.

A GERMAN rifle barked and he could feel the hot breath of the bullet as it sang past his ear. Something swished upward, grazed his chin—and then the German, losing his balance from the upward bayonet thrust, fell forward to wrap steel-like arms about the dough-boy's chest. A red mist danced hotly before Curly's eyes. He fought for breath as the pressure of those enemy muscles began to crush him. He brought his knee up into the enemy's stomach and the paralyzing blow took effect. The German relaxed with a grunt of pain and Curly squirmed free. He picked up his fallen rifle, swung it blindly at the shadow before him.

There followed a startled, agonizing cry, an appeal to mercy spoken in German, and then the burly shadow pitched head foremost into the brush.

"Beef!" Curly shouted. "Jepson! Granigan!"

None of the three answered his call. Before he could shout again a gun butt, describing a short arc, crashed against his neck and he fell like a plummet into a well of oblivion.

When consciousness returned it was to the accompaniment of cracking rifles, throaty cries, the scuffling of heavy feet. Then, shortly, above the din he heard Jepson's voice cry out in surrender.

The knowledge of Jepson's cowardice sent new vigor and strength surging through Curly's aching body. It calmed the fear that gripped him. With infinite pains he arose and inch by inch edged to the spot from where the voices had been heard. A star shell spread its ghastly glare and he saw Jepson with bloody hands held high in the air. Nearby, a German soldier grinning triumphantly. Without conscious effort, Curly brought his rifle to his shoulder, took careful aim and pulled the trigger. Darkness suddenly surged in like a flood as the German spun around and crumpled up.

And then Curly was at Jepson's side. "I heard you!" Curly said with a strange calmness. "I should have put a bullet through"

"We ain't got a chance," the ex-sergeant whined. "We'd better give up and"

Over to the right, Granigan was yelling for help. A gun-flash stabbed the darkness. Then the sharp, metallic ring of weapons on steel helmets, the sharp, vicious barking of automatics.

"Let 'em go!" Jepson begged. "Let 'em go!"

Curly's rifle pressed against his chest.

"One more word like that and I'll let you have it! You're traveling my road from now on! And you said you were a soldier!" Curly put all the scorn and contempt in the whole world into his threat. Jepson began mumbling incoherently.

As the two plunged toward Granigan, Curly oddly enough found time to pity the man at his side. He managed a few words of encouragement as he went along—and was repaid with curses.

The melee that followed was an unbelievable nightmare of lunging bayonets, dull thuds of gun butts upon tired bodies, cries of fear and pain and triumph inextricably mixed up. Once again Curly found himself in a hand-to-hand encounter with a stubborn foe. And again his bayonet tore through a gray-green uniform to victory.

Curly's face was bleeding now, from a bayonet slash. Blood trickled into his mouth as he engaged another German. A Very light splashed its ghastly light against the black curtain of the night. The German stepped back, shot from the hip at point-blank range and a bullet grazed the doughboy's ribs. The German was setting himself for another shot when Gorman, free from his foe, sprang forward with a wild cry, and, using his rifle like a spear, hurled it with all his strength. The German's shot went wild as the weapon crashed against his chest and Curly, lunging ahead, sank his dripping blade to the hilt.

"Good boy!" Gorman shouted. "We got 'em, kid! We got 'em!"

Thrown off balance by his desperate lunge, Curly had fallen upon the stricken German where he lay, for a moment, too exhausted to move. It was Gorman who finally got him to his feet and who stood by his side to fight off, single-handed, two more of the enemy patrol closing in.

"We got 'em!" Gorman wheezed as he shot blindly toward a spot where he thought more of the patrol might be lurking. "Maybe we don't savvy soldiering, being only slum experts, but we're learnin'!"

Gorman's voice was shrill, like one who suddenly has succumbed to hysteria; but there was a strange note of courage in it, too. "I'm workin' up a fever," he went on. "Ol' Beef, th' company cook, has gone rampagin'!" His voice suddenly faltered. "Hey! Hey! You ain't quittin' me, Curly? Don't you leave ol' Beef alone, kid. Oh, Lord!"

CURLY was lying at Gorman's feet, a grotesque, limp figure that stirred

only slightly. And like an enraged jungle beast, Gorman stood guard over him, feet spread apart, listening intently for any sound that spelled trouble. He called softly to Jepson and Granigan, but received no answer.

"Cooked!" he muttered forlornly. "Only me left!" A cold sweat covered him and he began to shake as from the ague. Soon, he argued, the darkness would be stabbed with a red tongue of flame and he'd be down beside Curly squirming on the earth. "Cooked!" he breathed in an agonizing whisper. "But we'll keep movin', just th' same."

Slowly he bent over and drew Curly into his arms. "It was a swell fight while it lasted," he said, lips touching Curly's ear. "Eh, buddy?"

A rifle cracked on his left as he stumbled with his burden toward the rear. "Never touched me," he grinned. He called out Jepson's name and then Granigan's and swore like a mule skinner when they failed to reply.

Carrying his unconscious burden he continued fearfully in a direction he guessed would eventually take him to the road, but the darkness, unlit now by artillery flashes or Very lights, confused him. One turn and then another found him not far from the spot he had recently left. His foot slipped along a shell-hole lip.

"We'll stop here, Curly," he announced. "An' when I git you fixed up as best I kin, we'll mosey some more. I'm aimin' to git me an' you back to that rollin' kitchen, captain's orders or no captain's orders."

He slid with extreme caution down into the crate of the shell-hole, muttering crazily to himself. Halfway down his feet encountered an obstruction. Something soft and giving that sent shivers of fear chasing up and down his back. His mutterings ceased. He waited patiently for the end.

"It's Beef!" a voice said below him, Jepson's voice. "I been tryin' to plug you ever since you showed on th' top, only my hand is nigh shot off. Lucky you

grumbled when you did. Granigan's passed out"

"I got Curly," Beef chattered. "He's out, too. How we goin' to git back?"

Jepson couldn't venture a guess. He didn't care much. He had stopped a couple and had lost a lot of blood. He said, wearily: "We're dead an' don't know it." A long pause and then he added: "I had crazy notions in my head, Beef. I seen how you two were goin' to it, whenever th' light showed. Like ol'-timers you was. An' I must have bin crazy . . . you know what I mean. I guess I just got you an' Curly all wrong. That's plain enough, ain't it?"

"Sure," agreed the cook. "We all got crazy notions, Jep. Maybe Curly here's got 'em. For a little cuss he sure can speak pieces with a bayonet. That was a swell joke you played on us two guys, Jep"

"You ain't goin' to say nothin' when we git back—if we do, are you, Beef? No squawkin', I mean. To th' skipper?" Jepson asked.

"Me?" snorted Beef. "Me, I'm just a cook. What I got to holler about? If we git back I'll say prayers for a week."

A groan from Curly still in Beef's arms.

"Let's go," came the muffled order as Harris tried feebly to free himself.

"Sh!" Gorman whispered. "He's nuts! . . . You take it easy, kid. We got plenty of time to go places."

DAWN was lighting up the sky. Shadows were retreating. There was a queer, unearthly silence hovering over the woods. Far off a desultory firing of rifles was going on and high overhead the silky, sinister sighs of an occasional heavy—but here, in the woods, there was no more of that nightmare that had filled the hours of night. War, here for a moment, was over. Life was sane and dear again.

"Th' skipper will tear my hide off when he learns I've bin tryin' to soldier," Gorman complained as he examined Curly's bandages. "We should, by now, be draggin' up more slum. Far as doin' any

good is concerned, this patrol might just as well never started."

"We learned something about fighting," Curly said, sitting up. His eyes rested upon Jepson's gray, impassive face as it rested upon Granigan's knees. "Wake him up, Granigan, and we'll be shoving off."

"All right," Gorman promised, winking at the ex-corporal. "In a minute. We got plenty of time. It's gittin' mornin' now, kid, an' we best take things easy. Don't want to git bumped off when we're so near th' gang. Jep's done in. You lay still an' git some more rest."

But Curly wouldn't have it that way. There was a wild, feverish light in his blood-shot eyes. He suddenly jerked himself free of Beef's arms and stood up unsteadily. He laughed at Beef's earnest protestations and started to climb from the shelter.

For a moment his head was raised above the shell lip. Then he slid back with a hoarse whisper of warning.

"They're coming!" he gasped. "A hundred of 'em!" He knelt beside Jepson and shook him fiercely. "On your feet, you goldbricker! If we get it, you do, too."

Jepson's eyes opened slowly. He mumbled something that the other three failed to understand. But he got to his feet, swaying a little and staring blankly into Curly's savage face.

"All right," he muttered finally. "All right. I'm coming. No slum slinger is going to show me"

"We're all nuts!" Gorman complained as though to himself.

Harris crept back to the shell lip. He turned and looked down at Jepson.

"Bring up that sack of grenades," he ordered. And when the ex-sergeant was at his side, breathing hard, he added, sharply: "Now show me how to use 'em. And do it quick."

Jepson explained in a dull, weary voice. "I'll toss one for a sample," he offered. "You got plenty of nerve. Tain't too late to say that, is it Curly?"

"Too late for a lot of things," Curly

retorted. "Now, listen. I'm not a soldier like you, Jepson, and I know we won't last a minute if we start using rifles. We'd shoot once and then be waiting for lilies. We'll wait here until they get closer and then give 'em four iron bouquets at once."

"Jake with me," Jepson groaned.

The four men, eyes just above the edge of the shell hole, waited tensely for the sifting line of the Germans. The gray-green figures, seen dimly in the early morning light grew to giant-like proportions as they slowly and cautiously advanced.

Forty yards, thirty yards—then twenty.

"Let 'em have it!"

Curly's cry rang through the woods.

THERE was no chance for the troops to escape. Before they could take more than a few steps the bombs exploded with deafening roars.

The air was filled with the cries of the wounded, the groans of the dying, pleas for mercy. Those who had escaped flying steel raised their hands and shouted "Kamarad" and walked toward the doughboys. Gorman, crouched down, now, and with rifle at his shoulder, took no heed of the cry of surrender but began pumping lead and several men fell. "No Kamarad stuff goes!" he shouted, once more mad with the lust of battle. It was Curly who kicked the weapon from the crazed cook's hands.

It was Curly, too, who first caught sight of a German machine-gun crew slipping away through the underbrush. He pointed the men out to Jepson. "Let's get 'em!" he shouted. "They're going to set up that gun somewheres and give us a bath!"

He turned to Gorman. "Grab yourself some prisoners and see if you can't get back to Captain Scanlon. Take Granigan with you. Jepson and I have some work to do."

The three members of the German machine-gun crew were setting up their light field piece; had it, in fact, trained

upon that area that included the doughboys' shell-hole when Curly and Jepson came upon them.

Curly refused to wait. With a wild cry he plunged straight ahead, heedless of the brush that sought to trip him.

The first gunner was waiting for him with a grim smile upon his broad face. He shot once with a Luger and Curly stopped and then staggered back uncertainly as the bullet grazed his leg. The Luger barked again and this time Jepson, weaving into view took it in the shoulder. He spun around and fell, got to his feet and plunged forward to Curly's side unmindful of the latter's slashing, clubbing bayonet.

Two gunners fell before Curly's vicious onslaught. The third started to escape, stumbled as he ran and then sprawled out as Curly's rifle blazed.

"You're doin' swell, kid!" Jepson said weakly. "What you aim to do next? Mop up on th' rest of 'em? Count me out if you do. I've bin tryin' to git out of this mess ever since I pulled that one on you last night. 'Captain's orders,' I said. There's no orders from now on unless you give 'em. I got a peach in th' shoulder, kid. Suppose you kin fix it up?"

"Soon as we get this gun back," Curly promised. "Maybe we can use it. Forget the shoulder, Jepson. I've got a peach, too. Now listen. You never did believe much about my record in the machine-gun school. Maybe I can prove it before we're through. You pack as much of this Heinie ammo as you can and I'll lug the gun. Come on."

After an epic struggle the two men reached the shell-hole and on the edge of it they set up the gun as best they could. And then they waited.

There was the sound of steps in back of them. Curly turned, rifle at the shoulder.

"Don't shoot," a voice pleaded from the underbrush to the right. "It's only ol' Beef and Granigan. We thought we'd stick around. Had an idear maybe we could help. Bin on our bellies restin' sort of."

Suddenly the sharp crackle of rifles and the bursting of grenades dinned in their ears. The sounds grew nearer and a moment or two later Curly, crouched behind the machine-gun, got a view of an advancing line of the enemy. Jepson guessed this line was the other half that had scattered from the shell-hole some time before. Curly wasn't interested in guesses. He said, grimly: "Whoever they are, doesn't worry me. They're stepping into a surprise party. Feed me that belt, Jepson, when I say the word."

"Here they come!" he breathed fiercely as he pressed the trigger for a short burst. "And here they go!" he added as the Germans, pressed slowly back by the fighting doughs from the road, filtered into the machine-gun's range.

A long, steady burst that reaped a grim harvest. Then another that took a toll. "Watch that belt!" Curly shouted. "Watch . . . hang on, you goldbricking . . . hey, Jep! Don't quit on me! Hang on, old-timer! Another minute . . ."

But Jepson, battered and bloody, was past all orders now. Gorman, blood streaming from his head, crept to the gun, took Jepson's place, his clumsy shaking fingers holding the ammo belt. A bullet cracked against the barrel and punctured the water jacket. The two men registered utter and hopeless despair.

Curly rubbed a bloody hand across his eyes. Germans were passing now, not fifty yards away. Running fearfully, dropping their rifles, their helmets, their packs. Back of them came the doughs. Curly's ears caught the sound of shouting voices. Triumphant voices. His eyes closed wearily. He whispered: "We showed 'em, eh, Beef? We . . ."

THE four men awoke in a dressing station. Curly, bandaged heavily about the head and shoulders, was on a cot in one corner. A familiar voice filled the room. Jepson's voice. The ex-sergeant was talking wildly about cooks.

"Never saw th' like since th' Somme, doc. Let me tell you somethin' more. If K. P. duty makes fighters like this Curly

Harris, believe me when I git able agin I'm for puttin' a lot of these here seasoned front-liners on th' job. I'll do it, too, doc—I mean if I ever git my stripes back agin . . ."

"Shut up!" growled the overworked surgeon.

It was pleasant to hear Jepson say that, Curly agreed drowsily to himself. A pretty good guy at that considering everything. And then, as loudly as he could he said:

"I never told the skipper about you smacking me down, Jeps. You got me wrong. He saw it that day, himself . . ."

"Doggone, if that ain't Curly growlin'!" Jepson broke in happily. "Hey, Beef! Granigan! Th' 'ol boy ain't dead! Imagine that!"

Captain Scanlon entered, his face etched deep from pain and worry.

"How's Sergeant Jepson and Corporal Granigan?" he asked the surgeon.

"We're feelin' swell!" This from Jepson and Granigan.

"And Harris and Gorman?" asked the skipper.

"We're swell!" replied these two in unison.

"And that's news that is news," laughed the captain. "I know all about it so don't talk. The mess has lost two good cooks but the company has gained two rip-snorting fighting men . . ."

The four began chattering as the captain took the surgeon aside and they continued to chatter until the officer departed. They quit only when the surgeon, smiling rather proudly despite his effort to appear bored and exasperated, said:

"Oh, for Cripes sake, can't you four tramps quit patting yourselves on the backs? Say a good word for me once in a while if you've got to talk. If I hadn't done a good job of plain and fancy hem-stitching you'd all be dead." He motioned to a passing ambulance man.

"Take this bunch of blow-hards out of here quick before they talk themselves to death—only handle 'em mighty easy. Captain's orders."

The SPY TRAP



Hoff dodged just in the nick of time.

***Kicked out of the navy through enemy intrigue,
Ensign Hoff proves in startling fashion his loyalty
to his country.***

THE door to one side of the huge dignified chamber opened, and twelve high-ranking naval officers, their faces somber and grave, filed silently to a little rostrum. With their entrance the low hum of whispered conversation stopped abruptly; a strained silence descended upon the dreary room.

The few official spectators craned their heads forward, trying to find in the solemn faces of the court martial some indication of what their verdict would be. The case had aroused tremendous interest in war-time Washington, and all who

could manage had come for the final scene.

He who was most vitally interested in what the decision would be did not look up. He sat there with impassive face, making aimless marks on a pad of paper with a pencil that trembled in spite of his iron control. A young man, this defendant, apparently not over twenty-six or seven, wearing a blue naval uniform with the single stripe of an ensign. Though he was pale, his face was pleasant to look at. A rugged face, with high intelligent forehead, bushy brows overhanging

By FREDERICK C. PAINTON



There was a murderous look on the German's face as his pistol spat.

sharp grey eyes, and a prominent nose of the type described as Roman. His thin slit of a mouth was even further compressed by the strain he was undergoing; and a slight scar on his cheek-bone glowed red against the whiteness of his face.

A civilian who sat next to him, evidently his attorney, whispered an encouraging phrase to which the young officer responded with a confident smile.

He sedulously avoided looking at an older officer, wearing the two stripes of a full lieutenant, who sat near the prosecutor's table, some fifteen feet distant. And the lieutenant no less refused to let his eyes stray toward the man against whom he had presented most damaging testimony. This was Lieutenant John Houser, in navy parlance a "mustang," but at the present time on the staff of Rear Admiral Harry Bentley, chief of Naval Intelligence. Fifteen years an enlisted man, he had risen to the rank of chief warrant officer. When America entered the war he had been jumped to lieutenant.

And now amid a dramatic hush, the

chief of the court martial rose, a yellow slip of paper in his hand.

"Ensign Keith Hoff, front and center," called an attache of the court.

With military precision the young officer stood up, and, shoulders back, chin high, wheeled smartly, and walked stiffly to the center of the railed off space in front of the rostrum. And now it could be seen that, while not tall, he was possessed of a chunky, powerful figure, with immense shoulders and strong arms. Not so much as a quiver moved him as he stood there, waiting for the officer to read his fate. His face was absolutely devoid of expression.

The sound of rustling bodies drifted through the room, a brief murmur, then an expectant hush.

THE officer looked coldly down his nose at the defendant, scanning him from brown hair to well-polished black shoes. Then he cleared his throat, and consulting the slip of paper, began.

"Having heard evidence," he said "presented herewith tending to show that

Ensign Keith Hoff has been and is guilty of high treason, it is the considered judgment of this court that the charge has not been sufficiently substantiated to warrant a verdict of guilty."

A sigh sped through the room; Houser frowned; Hoff's face lit up with a delighted smile.

"The association with persons under suspicion of dealing with the enemy could have been, as counsel for the defendant indicated, accident of contiguity, and it has not been proved that the defendant had any previous knowledge that these persons were of a suspicious character. The notebook of the defendant, presented in evidence, and containing pencil notes of a new model night bomber being constructed by the Designs and Projects Division of the Air Service, received the careful consideration of this court. However, counsel for the defense proved to our satisfaction that Ensign Hoff had a legitimate interest in aero-dynamics, that he was a civilian pilot since 1915; and finally, that the notes therein pencilled contained none of the vital information concerning the bomber which might have been useful to the enemy. Though reprehensible, this action does not constitute treason *per se*.

"On the other hand, the members of this court listened with deep dismay and chagrin to the evidence presented by Lieutenant John Houser, proving to our satisfaction that Ensign Hoff had been guilty of certain deeds unbecoming an officer and a gentleman. Especially, the testimony indicating Ensign Hoff to be an inveterate gambler was damaging. The fact that he owes considerably more money than he can pay, is adduced by us to show he is not fitted to be a commissioned officer of the United States naval forces.

"Taking all factors into consideration, it is the final, unalterable judgment of this court that the charge of treason be set aside, but that Ensign Keith Hoff be dismissed from the United States Navy in the interests of military necessity and for the safeguarding of the United States

of America."

For a split second after the deep voice had ceased, the well-known pin would have sounded like a falling tree, it was so silent. Then a murmur sped like fire.

Cashiered!

That was the verdict of the court. And it was translated by those in the audience to mean that while personally convinced of Hoff's guilt, the court martial could not find against him on the evidence adduced. Especially, as such a verdict carried with it a sentence of death, or if spared, then long imprisonment.

All eyes focused on the young victim. As the significance of the finding dawned on the young officer, an expression of amazement, horror and anger swept his plain face. For an instant he quivered like an aspen as he realized his doom. And doom it was. Dismissal from the naval service in time of war was disgrace—civil and military ruin. Within twenty-four hours when the nation became apprised of the verdict, Keith Hoff would be a pariah—an object of contempt to be shunned, ignored and condemned. He would be literally a man without a friend in the world—without a country.

HAVING read the decision the court martial chief permitted his eyes to rest on Keith. There was no pity in the regard; rather disappointment that the verdict was not more severe. Keith's scar glowed; his gray eyes blazed and returned the contemptuous gaze with a defiant one.

"That is all," said the court martial chief coldly.

All! The word struck like a sword at Keith's heart. All! Reducing a man to a slinking alley dog; breaking the hearts of a loving father and mother involved in the debacle of his own disgrace. All! What more could they have done but kill him?

For an instant his thin lips shook. But for an instant only; then he wheeled rigidly on heel and toe, returned to his seat and after picking up his cap and gloves prepared to leave.

As he approached the little swinging door in the railing, he encountered Lieutenant John Houser, also about to depart.

"Houser," he said in a flat voice. "You're a rotter—you were out to get me ruined. And—"

Houser had a large round face, like a full moon in which his tiny eyes set like two currants in a round disc of dough. Now he flushed and glared at his young accuser.

"Don't talk to me," he rasped savagely. "You renegade. Keep out of my sight. You ought to be shot."

Keith did not shrink before the epithets.

"Just the same, I'll even the score, Houser. You tried to ruin me because you love Madame de Viaski. And damn your dirty hide—"

Roughly Houser pushed the young ensign out of his way. "Get out of my way. And don't ever speak to me again."

Keith stood there watching the thin figure of the lieutenant. What thoughts passed through his mind none will know. As he stood there others regarded him, not with pity, but with either curiosity or a certain contempt. Those of the navy showed hatred, for he had disgraced their branch of the service. After a few minutes had passed the disgraced young officer shook his head as if to throw off thoughts of impending calamity, and left the room.

He made a fine figure as he issued into the warm February sunshine, but none knew better than he that he was wearing his country's uniform for the last time.

IT MAY seem to the casual reader that the court martial had been severe in thus precipitating ruin on a young officer, especially with such apparently slim evidence. But it must be remembered that the nation was in the throes of war-time excitement. More important still, a hysterical fear had swept the country when Germany began sinking transports and munitions ships with uncanny regularity.

With the sinking of the *Tuscania* earlier in the months—this was 1918—the reaction had been "Build more ships—ships will win the war."

But when the sinking of the *Caronic* and the *Alleppo* had followed, there was a wave of consternation.

"Can't we stop these wholesale sinkings?"

It seemed as if the final blow had been struck when the *Ansonic* had been torpedoed, and the heartless U-boat commander had shelled the small boats.

All these ships had sailed under sealed orders, their route of travel known presumably only to the Navy department. Yet they had been ferreted out in extraordinary fashion.

"How?" asked the public, and answered its own question with the word: "Spies."

No one had quite forgotten the activities of Captain Boy-ed and von Papen who, under diplomatic immunity as attaches of the German embassy, had built carefully an espionage system that astonished everyone when it was uncloaked by their deportation to Germany.

The immediate question was: has this espionage system been revived under new leadership?

There was still the recollection of the attempted dynamiting of the Welland Canal; the discovery of the German plot to frighten Canada so badly that troops would be kept to patrol the border and thus not launched against Germany on the western front.

The Allies, their backs to the wall, warned America. Germany, with Russia out of the war, had massed her manpower on the western front, prepared for such an onslaught in a spring offensive as might conceivably win the war. Her objective then could be won only if America were rendered impotent until the German hordes had broken through the war-weary troops of the Allies.

And Germany lent credence to this assumption by the way she greeted the news of the many sinkings. Church bells were tolled. The Kaiser gave public thanks

to Gott. The *Zeitung am Mittag* of Berlin said that Germany had found the answer to America's participation in the war—the submarine.

The *Volks-Zeitung* of Cologne declared that Germany had nothing to fear from American troops, for not enough to influence the decision would ever reach the trenches. They printed with glee, these German newspapers, the revolting details of 145 bodies from the ill-fated *Tuscania* washed up on the Scottish coast and buffeted by rocks into unrecognizability.

SO IMPORTANT was the situation that a conference had been called in the Army and Navy Building offices of Admiral Bentley to discuss measures. This was attended by army and navy officers, a representative of the Department of Justice and a certain dapper little gentleman who was known to be close to the President.

Houser as confidential aide to Bentley was present. Keith Hoff, as liaison officer with the Naval Radio Secret Service was also called in.

Of itself, this was nothing. But during the conference Bentley foolishly gave certain intimate details regarding the sailing of the munitions ship *Fleetwing*. Singularly enough the *Fleetwing* had been torpedoed three days out of New York.

Then it was that Secret Service operatives began to look into this young ensign with the German name. They found that he had enlisted on April 8, 1917, was a graduate of the University of Michigan. And what, to them seemed important, was that he was a mathematical genius whose detective stories had already begun to make a name for him. Certain operatives stressed at the trial the fact that he was an expert radio amateur. This, in fact, had obtained his commission to the Radio Secret Service.

Other operatives had discovered that the German espionage headquarters in Mexico, whither the known agents had moved with the declaration of war, seem-

ed well-informed as to all that happened across the border.

Each string finally tied into another until the night of the Red Cross ball at the Hotel Willard, a week previous. It was on this night, in the presence of a thousand or more prominent political, military and social leaders that Ensign Keith Hoff had been publicly arrested for treason.

Keith had been chatting with Houser, a Madame Marina de Viaski, a Polish refugee, and a Russian aristocrat by the name of General Andrev Potuska. It was at the home of the latter that Keith, according to Houser's testimony, lost three thousand dollars in fifteen minutes playing *chemin de fer*.

Startled Washington and the nation at large howled for speedy vengeance. And to the best of its ability the naval court martial had striven to please. At any rate, it had sent Keith Hoff forth, discredited and cashiered, and now moodily walking to the Racquet Club where he had made his home since coming to Washington.

IF KEITH HOFF thought anything about this net of circumstantial evidence which had closed about him, he did not indicate it by his appearance as he made his way to his club. His face was a study in restrained emotions. He had just swung the corner near the Woodward Building when a feminine voice called his name.

Keith turned to see a tall, well-built woman standing on the farther corner. An expensive mink coat covered her to her ankles, and surmounting her oval dark face was a chic black toque. By her side was a thin, languid man wearing the undress uniform of a Russian general.

"Keith," she said, extending him a small gloved hand.

"Marina," he responded in a low voice, bowing. He nodded to the Russian.

Marina de Viaski was a noted figure in war-time Washington. Beautiful in a dark, glowing way, it was not so much her continental attractiveness that made

her stand out as it was her welfare work done in the Navy Yard. Possessed, apparently, of unlimited means, she had set up a canteen which she personally managed; and every officer, madly in love with her, had praised her work among the enlisted men—and themselves, for that matter—to the skies. Keith was but one of many who worshipped at her shrine.

And now she favored the young man before her with a soft glance from long, slightly almond-shaped eyes that flashed vivaciously.

"They—that is—the verdict—" she did not finish but regarded him anxiously.

Keith laughed bitterly. "It wasn't guilty. Worse. Cashiered."

An exclamation of pity burst from her. General Potuska pulled at his drooping black mustache and uttered a grunt that might mean anything.

"My poor, poor boy," she said. "I know you are innocent. It's a terrible mistake."

Keith glowered sullenly. "Small good it will do me. I'm ruined now. The afternoon newspapers will read me out of the country. Once they tell the story I shan't have a friend in the world."

"I—I shall always be your friend and believe in you," said Marina de Viaski gently, and pressed his hand.

Keith thanked her with a fervent look.

"Come to the house tonight," she urged. "There you can forget for a while this horrible tragedy. Better still, we will go to Andre's and play."

Keith shook his head. "My presence might hurt you."

"Nothing can hurt me. Please come. I want you to."

She leaned slightly forward and her half-lidded eyes gazed deeply into his.

"If you wish," he acquiesced.

A few murmured remarks and he passed on. So he did not see the significant look that was exchanged by the man and woman he had left.

"My dear, why entangle yourself with him? To be seen in his company now is dangerous." General Potuska accompanied the question with a curious look.

Madame de Viaski smiled, revealing small white teeth framed in an arch of red lips.

"My dear Andre, you are too stupid to understand anything—or too lazy. I have seen the look this young man had in the eyes of other men—who were found dead later. I have my reasons."

"You always have reasons," bowed the general gallantly. "What a wonderful woman Machiavelli would have found you."

"Flatterer!" she returned, but pleased none the less. Madame de Viaski was somewhat headstrong and an egotist.

"What is it you want of me, my dear?"

"The usual. We shall go to your home first. We will play *chemin de fer*. You will win. Make the stakes high, and we will take his I. O. U.'s. That will prepare the way when we go to my apartment. Make him—shall we say amenable?"

Potuska regarded her with undisguised admiration. "My dear, I don't wonder that—"

"No names."

"Ah," he sighed, "if I only had your brain—"

"You wouldn't be a broken-down Russian general with a purchasable conscience," she finished. But quickly she seized his arm and pressed it. "I apologize for that, Andre. It was hateful. But it is because I love you and loathe your slothfulness."

THE debonair general took no offense. Instead, he smiled and pulled complacently at his mustache.

"One does what one can," he said. "I have been useful."

She made no reply.

"We should be married, dear girl," he continued. "We make a charming couple. After this *verdammte krieg* is over we can settle in this America. It is a land of great opportunities for such as you and I."

Marina de Viaski regarded him strangely. "What a rascal you are, Andre." But there was no bite to the state-

ment; rather it was a term of affection. "Knowing what you do—you could stay here?"

"Why not?"

"I shall probably marry you, Andrev," said Marina, her sultry eyes lighting passionately. "You are a handsome rascal, and I know you love me in your way. But if success attends us, I regain my estates in Galicia. We shall live there, of course."

"You are certain of success. However, anywhere with you, my dear," he finished gallantly.

IT HAD been a disheartening afternoon for Keith Hoff.

The clerk at the Racquet Club had glared at him. "We shall have to have your room by tomorrow noon." And no apology.

No wonder a black look was on his face as Marina de Viaski came forward to greet him at the general's home.

The warm touch of her hand thrilled him; and the sultry look in her long eyes had been succeeded by a softly sympathetic glance that was meant to comfort him.

"You look tired and worn, poor boy," she said, and unexpectedly reached up her lips and kissed him.

In an instant he had her in his arms, oblivious of everything. So he could not see the cynical smile on Potuska's face, Potuska who had strolled casually into the room, and looked at Keith as if he were saying: "Poor deluded fool!"

He coughed, and the scene was over. Marina became prettily embarrassed. Keith looked bluntly at the general, but the Russian chose to ignore what he had seen. As a matter of fact, both he and de Viaski avoided talking about either Keith's obvious love affair or the ruin which had overtaken him that day.

Instead they talked of the continent before the war, of pleasure, of Monte Carlo. And this suggested *chemin de fer*. The general looked inquiringly at Keith.

"Why not?" cried Keith in reckless de-

spair. "I've nothing to lose now but money and little of that."

And so they played this most fascinating of French card games, fascinating and difficult. To an American it is a combination of craps and blackjack, and there is no game extant in cards where you get as much action for your money.

As the evening wore on a singular look passed between Potuska and Marina, a look that foretold what was to happen. The Russian general held the bank; that is to say, he was possessed of the shuffled two decks of cards and had the privilege of making a bet. In craps he would be "shooting" a certain sum.

He laid down markers which amounted to three thousand dollars, the biggest bet of the evening. Keith, already two thousand loser, watched this with a frown. Marina made no effort to "fade" the sum.

There was a moment's pause. "Fade the works," cried Keith. His hair was wet and hung on his forehead. The gambler flush suffused his face, and he trembled with excitement.

In so saying he had taken the entire bet. Had he said only part—say fifteen hundred of the sum—Marina would have had to "fade" the rest, or the general would have had to draw down.

General Potuska raised his slim eyebrows as Keith tossed in a hastily scribbled I. O. U., but he merely nodded and said "*Tres bien*."

"Good luck, my dear," said Marina, pressing Keith's hand.

POTUSKA moved the steel card case in which the shuffled cards rested on end and slipped, first one to Keith, then to himself, then another to Keith. The next one he took to himself and looked.

He held the advantage since Keith must declare himself first. The cashiered officer glanced at his two cards. One was a face card which counts nothing in *chemin de fer*. The other was a deuce of hearts. Thus, the value of his hand was two. Since the values ran up to nine, Potuska had seven chances to beat him. Better draw a card.

"Carte!"

Obligingly the general slipped out another card and slithered it to Keith. It was the trey of spades, and Keith had to restrain a muttered curse. The value of his hand was five. Still Potuska might draw a card and go baccarat, the equivalent of "bust" in black jack.

The latter scrutinized his own cards carefully. The fact that Keith had drawn a card indicated that he had a low hand. But evidently the general also had low cards, for he called "Carte" and took one.

One glance, and he threw all three face upward.

"Seven," he called.

Savagely Keith flipped his card.

"Suivez," he grated. Suivez or follow in *chemin de fer* is like a "fader" continuing with the shooter in craps.

Now the peculiar thing about *chemin de fer* is that the winner cannot draw down so long as he retains the bank. There were six thousand dollars in the center of the table. If the general wanted to keep it, he had to say "passez la banque," which meant shoving the card-box to the next player—in this case Marina. But he also lost the advantage of the bank-holder, so he decided to "let it ride" and Keith tossed in an I. O. U. for the entire amount.

The decision as to the winner was quickly made. No sooner had the general passed out the cards than, with a single look at his own, he flung them face upward, crying: "Eight."

Like holding a "blackjack" in the game of the same name, holding a hand valued at eight or nine automatically wins for the bank in *chemin de fer*. Thus in less than ten minutes Keith had lost nine thousand dollars plus the two he was already in.

With a muttered curse, he tore up the cards, saying: "I've had enough."

"And so have I," said the general at a look from Marina. "Bad fortune."

"You might as well know here and now," muttered Keith, "that I haven't that sum—"

"No hurry," protested the general.

"Your chits are good. Say two or three days' time."

Keith looked a bit startled at this, but made no reply.

"Take me home, Keith dear," said Marina. "We'll have a whisky and soda—and talk."

A repressed smile crossed Potuska's face, but he gallantly got Marina's fur wrap and saw them to the door.

MADAME MARINA deVIASKI'S small house was as representative of her as the subtle incense which she favored. And the sitting room, through the open door of which her boudoir gleamed softly, was exotically furnished. A long, soft couch banked one wall, near the other stretched a chaise-longue brightened with orange-silk pillows. Onto this Marina coiled herself and Keith handed her a long Russian cigarette. His feet sunk deep in heavy rugs. An incense burner filled the air with a pungent, sweetish odor.

"Now, dear boy," she said, "let us be comfortable. Jan will bring me an absinthe. You—whisky and soda?"

He nodded; unobtrusively a stupid-faced Pole brought him glass, whisky and seltzer.

Marina remained silent for a minute or so.

"You were in the Radio Secret Service?"

Keith nodded. "Yes. We were doing good work, too."

"How interesting. Tell me about it."

"I can't," replied Keith. "You see we are pledged to secrecy. An important detail, you know. Preventing enemy information from getting out."

"But you are no longer pledged to secrecy—are you?"

"By George!" said Keith. "I'm no longer an officer. It's hard to realize it. Still one keeps his mouth shut on general principles—even with you, my dear Marina."

"Where did you say?" Marina spoke carelessly.

"I didn't say," laughed Keith, bending

over her. "You are charmingly beautiful, Marina. Like a tiger—or perhaps a leopard."

"As fierce as that?" she smiled, and half straightened up. Her eyes, her lips, her posture, all were provocative. A second later, Keith was kissing her passionately, her white arm stealing around his neck.

"No more—not just now," she begged presently. "I want to talk. I was thinking, dear boy, that there is nothing for you here in America now. What you need is a stake and depart for a new country—become a new man."

"Everything sounds well except the stake," said Keith gloomily. "I'm not only broke, I owe more than fifteen thousand including my losses tonight."

She looked at him subtly, her gaze on the scar on his cheek, her eyes appraising him.

"Keith, what would you say if I should tell you that you could have a stake—a fortune, and that very easily?"

He smiled bitterly. "I'd think you were trying to buck me up."

"Well, I'm not. I never was more serious. Keith, everything goes in war-time. There are certain people whom I know who would pay thousands for the information which is in your head."

There! The break was made. Narrowly she watched him out of calculating eyes.

"You mean betray my country?" he gasped, getting suddenly to his feet.

She seized his hand, contrition in her eyes.

"Please, dear boy, do not misjudge me. I—I—that is—I was thinking of you and your happiness. You are blackened, ruined in America. There is nothing for you here. This information, which would not change the end, would give you—a fortune. And—and, there are other things."

She looked down shyly, but her cheeks showed no blush.

Keith began to stalk the room, stopped near a mahogany desk, littered with papers, glanced unseeing at a charming fur-

edged negligee that Marina had neglected near the window seat.

"A traitor!" he muttered.

"And are you not now practically convicted of that charge?" she cried passionately. "Oh, I know the court-martial dismissed it. But how many people will believe you are innocent?"

"None—save you."

"Correct. No one except me." She regarded him shrewdly.

"Do you care for me, Keith?"

He strode rapidly toward her. "Marina, I love you."

"Then do this. Get the money. With what I have we shall be rich. We can live on the Riviera. Or Spain. Happiness."

Keith looked down at her questioningly.

"Are you a German agent?" he asked bluntly.

"No," she said quickly. "No. But I am on intimate terms with a person who I believe will pay—"

"How much?"

Again she paused. "A hundred thousand dollars for a written statement of watched wave lengths and information regarding the *North Star*."

A GAIN Keith stood up and moodily paced the floor. Marina lighted another cigarette and watched him through the curls of blue smoke.

"I can't," said Keith.

"Dear boy," she cried. "You must. What is there for you here? Suicide. Unless you have the courage of a jellyfish and live it out. You have the name—have the game—and me."

"But thousands of men will die."

"No," she corrected, "thousands of lives will be saved. No more small boats will be shelled. That was a stupid blunder by the U-boat commander and will not be repeated. Without American troops on the western front, Germany will win quickly. And the war will be over with hardly any Americans killed."

He made no reply to this argument.

"One hundred thousand, you say?" he asked.

"Not a penny less. I swear."

"By God!" cried Keith, turning savagely. "I'll do it. I'm a dog, am I? Then I'll strike back like a dog. Tell your man yes, but I must have the money before I talk."

"Spoken like a brave man," cried Marina. In her egotism it did not strike her that this was swift surrender, easy capitulation. She took it for granted. She rose lithely like a leopard, and her arms locked around his neck. They kissed and were still locked in tight embrace when there came a soft knock at the door.

It was Jan, the factotum. He looked strangely at Marina and spoke several words in Polish.

Marina turned to Keith. "I must leave you, dear heart, just for a moment. Rest here and smoke and think of our future happiness."

The door clicked behind her.

IT WAS very quiet in that room after her departure. A tiny Swiss clock, ticking furiously on the desk, sounded as loud as a Big Ben. As it was late—long after midnight—no noise came up from the street. The air, heavy with incense and slightly blue with smoke, swirled to a draft as if a door had been opened somewhere.

Keith Hoff stood motionless for perhaps a moment, his face a puzzling sight to see. His glance strayed from the door to the desk, an appraising, calculating gaze that, somehow, contained none of the dejection it had shown earlier in the evening.

Then swiftly he went to the door and listened intently. There was not a sound.

He nodded in satisfaction and tip-toed toward the inviting desk. But before he reached it something by Marina's charming negligee halted him. It was a corner of yellow paper protruding from a small pocket.

There was a faint crackle of paper as he examined it. But to Keith what was

written thereon was a mystery, a mass of meaningless words, gibberish.

"Code!" he muttered.

Quickly he produced a flimsy piece of very thin paper, a pencil and carefully copied the message. And he did not fail to reproduce it precisely as it was written, for code messages have a strange way of baffling the decipherer if they are jumbled in the copying. Then he pulled up his trouser leg, cut a slit in the silk covering of his garter and slipped the tissue into the pocket he had made.

This done, he raised his head in a listening attitude. Nothing but the ticking clock disturbed the tomb-like stillness. He glided softly to the desk. The obvious papers scattered carelessly around, he ignored for the moment, seeking instead some hidden receptacle.

Five minutes passed. There came a soft rasp of paper, a man's repressed exclamation of delight. Keith bent eagerly over. He had found, in a false pillar in front of the desk, a vital paper—the key to the code.

So engrossed was he in memorizing this that he failed to hear an almost imperceptible click from the door.

Suddenly there was a sharp sound.

Keith turned like a flash.

THE automatic spit a lurid flame. The crash of a shot blasted the silence. But Keith had dropped to the floor, and the bullet crashed loudly into the desk.

"Fool!" said a woman's voice, and before the gun could speak again a slender white hand had swept it down.

And now the door swung wide with a bang. Standing on the threshold was Lieutenant John Houser, the wildest expression of rage on his moon-shaped face. Beside him was Marina de Viaski.

"Fool, yourself," raged Houser, walking into the room. "Of all the stupid tricks, this was one of them. Why didn't you consult me? Why did you try to seduce this idiot? I could have told you it was no good. Now you may have ruined everything."

Keith had calmly got to his feet and

stood facing the angry Houser, his arms hanging to his side.

"Stick your hands up," snarled Houser. "You stupid little ass. You'll pay with your life for what you've found out tonight. As for you—" he swung on Marina de Viaski—"I shall report to Von der Gall your disobedience to instructions. I am in charge. I am the sole authority. By what right do you and that whipper-snapper general attempt to act without first securing my permission?"

He raised the automatic.

But once again Marina de Viaski struck it aside. "You are permitting your temper to run away with your judgment. Stop—"

"Stop, nothing," blazed Houser. "Fifteen years of work lost in a flash by idiots like you. Let go my arm."

"You are the fool," she replied loudly. "All is not lost if you will but stop and think. Shooting this man—yes. There will be unpleasant investigation. But suppose he is discovered in his room, dead with a bottle of cyanide of potassium beside him? What then? Disgraced officer unable to stand the shame takes his own life. What then, I say?"

HOUSER snorted, but for the moment mastered the ungovernable rage that had gripped him. The quivering in his massive face quieted.

"It might work," he said more calmly. "It will work—if this fool is playing a lone hand. And it happens that I know he is."

It was at this juncture that the telephone tinkled loudly. Houser started violently.

He favored the imperturbable Keith with a terrific look. The automatic wagged menacingly.

"If it is your friends—" he began, but meantime Marina de Viaski had glided to the stand. She spoke quietly into the receiver, and as she heard the voice, her face cleared, a smile swept over it.

"Michel—in New York," she said.

"Hold this gun on Hoff," ordered Houser. "I'll listen."

He picked up the receiver after first assuring himself that Keith was covered.

"Hello—Michel—Lama talking—what is it?" He listened, and gradually he, too, wore a smile as he heard a voice say: "The cargo of ten thousand bushels is ready for shipment tomorrow night at midnight. You had better verify the last. The bill of lading is made out. Send Johnson a note demanding payment at once. This verifies my telegram to Miss Mary."

"Good!" snapped Houser. "The bill of lading will be sent."

A few more words of a similar nature and he hung up.

"Thank God for Michel!" he said. "I was unable to get accurate information about the *North Star*. She sails tomorrow night. We must leave at once. I won't trust Obermeyer. This is our master stroke."

"You mean you are going to send the message yourself?" asked Marina.

"Of course. It is our big chance. A stroke, I tell you. With it my work will be done. They no longer trust me at headquarters for some reason. I shall win this chance and return to Germany by submarine. With the sinking of the *North Star* America will be stunned. She will be useless in the war."

Keith laughed. "What a fool you are, Houser! Do you think the loss of a few ships—even the loss of ten thousand lives—will keep America out of the war? If you do, you are as stupid as the rest of your spies."

"Ah, yes," muttered Houser. "I must attend to you."

"You had better," taunted Keith.

"Marina, search him. He was in your desk, and you're such a fool about leaving things about. *Gott im Himmel*, was a man ever cursed with such bunglers?"

Marina glided toward Keith. She made the mistake of getting between him and the gun. Houser cried out a warning, but too late. The next instant Keith's arms closed around her like a vise.

"A little different from the earlier em-

brace," mocked Keith, "but you'll pardon the necessity."

She struggled like an eel, but to no avail. Already Keith was worming his way toward the door, the woman's body between him and Houser.

The latter was for the moment nonplussed. The gun wavered hesitatingly.

"A fool I was not to shoot in the first place," he muttered. But it was no time for talk. Already Keith was within a yard of the door. With a snarl, Houser cast caution aside and advanced to attack.

It was exactly what Keith Hoff desired. A swing of his arm swept the woman's feet off the floor. The next instant she hurtled through the air and crashed into Houser, both falling heavily to the floor.

"Goodbye, Houser," called Keith. He darted for the door. The victory had been too easy.

He yanked at the knob. There stood the impassive Pole, Jan.

"Seize him, Jan," cried de Viaski in Polish.

WITH all his might Keith swung for the butler's jaw. He might just as well have struck a concrete wall. The man stopped, grunted, and then seizing Keith by the arm pulled him into a gorilla-like embrace. It took precious seconds to break from this; and by that time Houser had recovered. He swung a vicious blow which Keith was enabled to dodge only in part. It struck him under the ear, and he fell half-senseless to the floor.

Marina was moaning softly.

"None of that," snarled Houser. "We've got to act quickly. She sails tomorrow night," he repeated, "and we've a long distance to go. I suppose I've got to take you with me," he said, casting a black look at the Polish woman. An idea seemed to strike him, for his moon face cleared, and the glance he shot at the semi-conscious Keith was absolutely fiendish.

"Bind him, Jan," he ordered. Silken cords from the velvet portieres were serv-

iceable and shortly Keith, unable to struggle, was trussed up like a piece of mutton.

Houser gave the butler another order, and the man reappeared presently with a can of some fluid. This Houser liberally sprinkled on the bed, the floor and the hangings. Once he cast an amused glance at the prostrate man.

"Get your wraps," he ordered Marina. "Also a light portmanteau. And destroy all your papers. We shan't be back."

"Jan," he continued, "we are leaving for good. You will stand outside that door. Let no one come out—no one. Remain as long as you can, then ring an alarm. You understand!"

"Perfectly, excellentz!"

"Good. Ready, Marina? Your heaviest fur—fool! We go by air."

She looked startled. "What do you mean? How?"

Houser's face widened in a chuckle. "Admiral Bentley requests a plane for his confidential aide. We seek spies. Who will question?"

Coolly Houser produced a cigarette, took a wax paper from the box on the taboret and scratched it. It flicked, then settled into a steady blaze.

He applied the light to his cigarette, kindled it good, then with a flick of his fingers snapped the taper onto the bed.

Woooooof!

The gasoline-soaked clothing burst into fire with something akin to a small explosion.

Houser pushed Marina from the room. One look downward he cast at the helpless figure of Keith.

"It's no more than you deserve," he said, "putting your amateur mind against organization."

Then he passed through the door, clicking it shut after him.

KEITH HOFF did not appear half so perturbed as the situation warranted, nor had he been half as unconscious of all that transpired as his outward appearance had indicated. But he had to act quickly. Spreading with a fury and

speed that seemed remarkable the gasoline-soaked room became almost instantly a veritable furnace. Only the fact that Keith was prostrate on the floor, where the cool air hung saved him from inhaling flames and dying instantly.

The thick silken cords which bound his arms behind him had been coiled in a bulge and made a big knot. So jerking himself like a crab, he moved toward the flame, backed up to it and pushed the entire roll into the greedy blue flames.

There was a smell of scorched silk and wool—and a more pungent penetrating odor that brought a gasp of pain from the thin lips of Keith.

His wrists were blistered, his coat smouldering in a dozen places, but he was free. Off came the cords on his feet. But he did not make the mistake of standing up, for already he could scarcely breathe, and five minutes longer in that room would finish him. He crept on his stomach toward the door, stopping for a moment to get a heavy cloisonne lamp base.

Big Jan, his face as impassive as ever, stood watchfully outside, hearing the crackle of the flames, seeing the leaking yellow glow that came under the door jamb. From this stupor of watching he was suddenly aroused when the door flung suddenly open. The added draft made the flames roar high in serried yellow ranks, licking greedily at the man who dashed into the hallway.

Jan had a club, but before he could use it the blackened half-burning man in front of him flung a heavy object. Jan tried to dodge. But the vase smashed into his face and he dropped without a sound.

Half-stumbling, Keith made his way downstairs and out. He flung himself, panting, on the cool lawn. It felt so good to his half-naked body and he rubbed his blistered hands on its soothing surface.

By now the whole scene was lit with a scarlet glow. Whistles sounded. There was the patter of men's running feet. From far off came the raucous shriek of a siren, growing louder momentarily.

"I mustn't be found here," muttered Keith. Yet where to go? He realized he

had lost the trail as completely as if Houser and the woman had dropped off the earth. A plane, yes, but where? Apparently his adventure had come to naught.

Keeping to such shadows as the trees made, he managed to work his way down the street, if not unobserved then unchallenged. He paused under the light of an arc several streets away. Forgetting his smarting wrists, he concentrated on the problem. What to do next?

"The code," he muttered. "What a fool to forget it."

He reached into his garter and brought out the flimsy tissue.

"Houser is a capable man," he muttered, opening the paper. "I never quite realized just how capable."

He glanced at the paper. "Chinese code," he repeated from memory. "Strike out all of given word except the first letter. Well, let's see."

With the aid of the code he rapidly figured out the following message

NORTH STAR TONIGHT MID-
NIGHT WIRE FERTIG ROCK-
LAND HAVE SCHLIEFF IN-
TERCEPT FIFTY MILES
NORTH NOR EAST NAN-
TUCKET LIGHT VITAL TO
DESTROY LAMA

The message gave Keith a tremendous shock. Not that he had not expected an attempt on the *North Star*. Rather because the Germans, shrewdly expecting trouble around European waters, had chosen to make their bold attempt right under the noses of America. Here it would have a good chance of success.

"They would," muttered Keith, "show these insolent Americans what they can do. Now Lama—that's the name Houser used on the phone. Must be a code word. Probably the same man who telephoned sent this. This Polish woman acted as a go between."

He paused and restudied the message. Its significance was tremendous. And Keith now realized that he could no longer go it alone. With Houser winging

through the night on a forged order, he also would have to fly or be too late.

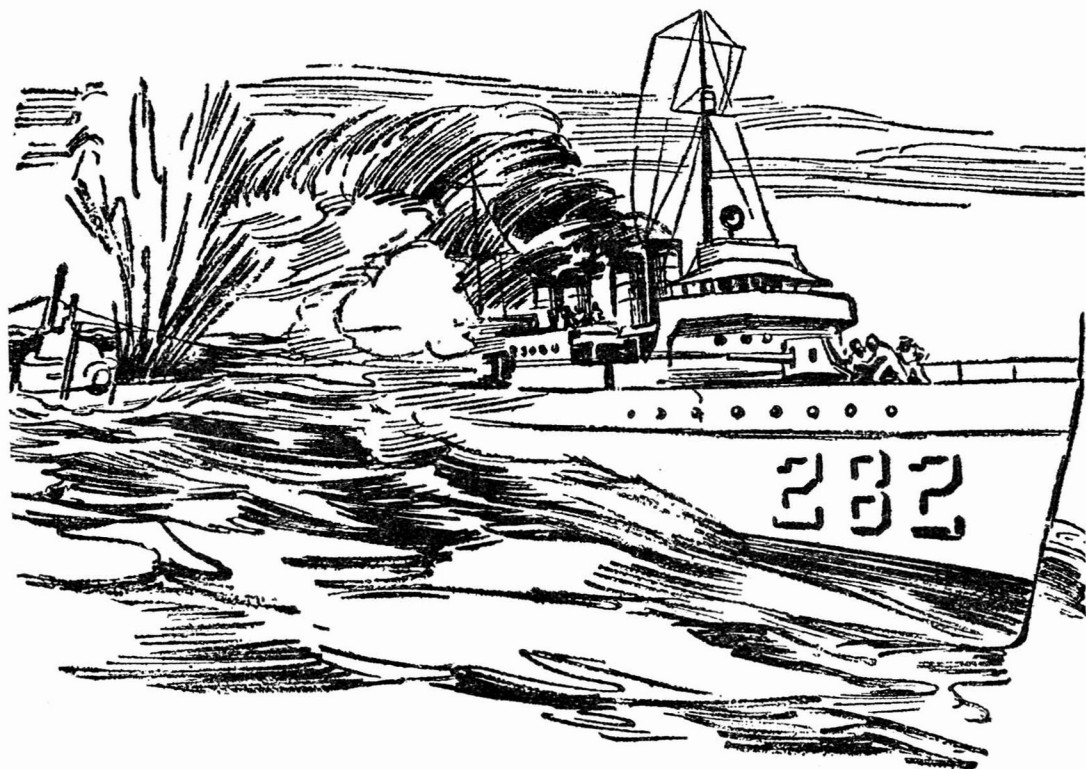
"Rockland!" he muttered. "Only one Rockland would do. Maine. Close to the Newfoundland banks. Hm, well, perhaps I can call Anacostia and stop Houser."

At the next corner he encountered a roving taxicab. This took him to an F street address, where he asked for and met Hugh L. Jaffrey, Department of Justice operative. Whatever he told Jaffrey, it was sufficient, with the showing of the uncoded message, to get action. A telephone call to Anacostia Field developed

as the crow flies, the jagged shores, cut every mile or more by deep indentations, is actually washed by the ocean for a matter of a thousand miles.

The Navy apprehended the possibilities. Sub-chasers, converted yachts and not a few torpedo boat destroyers maintained watchful patrol. But on such a cut-up, rocky, barren coast to know everything was an impossibility. So the Radio Secret Service maintained agents on every ship.

Hard luck had overtaken Keith and Jaffrey just after they left Boston. It was



The first shot narrowly missed the U-boat.

that Houser had gone. But it also produced another night bomber that went roaring through the night toward Boston. Jaffrey and Keith were aboard.

IF YOU were to choose any single spot in the United States where you could be near the heart of things, yet act in secret on your own plans, Maine would be your choice. The coast is at once the most desolate and rocky in the land. Perhaps two to three hundred miles in length

bitterly cold. The motor balked with fouled plugs. This repaired, a broken gas-line caused a forced landing, with near disaster when they landed in a field deep with snow. Only the pilot's skill kept them from nosing over.

So they were close to two hours behind schedule when they finally picked up Rockland Bay. The pilot circled twice, saw a plane in a field near the edge of the town and this time "set her down" with no difficulties.

Keith and Jaffrey were out instantly and after dancing up and down once or twice to restore circulation, made their way to the other plane whose pilot was tinkering with the motor.

"Where did they go?" asked Keith abruptly.

"You mean Houser and his wife?" asked the pilot.

Keith smiled. "It's no fault of yours, old man, but you happened to be carrying one of the most dangerous spies in America."

The pilot gasped. "Hell's bells! He had an order signed by Bentley and old man Forrester assigned me."

He stopped and scratched his nose. "Spies, huh? Well, what the hell do you know about that? Some guy came over as soon as I put the bus down. Name's Fertin, or something like that."

Keith looked at Jaffrey significantly. "Must be Obermeyer—that was the name in the code message, too. Well, we don't get any more here. Let's go to town."

LEAVING the dumfounded pilot muttering to himself, they set off across the field.

They prevailed on a man to drive them in his automobile. As they were going up Penobscot street, Keith suddenly cried out, "Hey, stop. Look, Jaffrey."

He pointed. There was a shop, bearing on the window the name, "Jasper Fertig, Electrical Supplies."

"By the horns of Neptune," rumbled Jaffrey. "Electrician. Just the dodge that would let him have wireless equipment unsuspected. Well, you're the doctor. Let's take a look-see."

Telling the farmer-driver to wait, they made their way into the doorway. But the door was locked. And trying upstairs over the shop, where Fertig or Obermeyer had his home, they found no one.

"If ye're lookin' for Jasper, 'spect you might find him out at his huntin' shack. He goes there a lot." This from the driver.

"By the rood of Hercules," said Jaffrey. "That's an idea. Maybe we'll—"

He did not finish, but climbed into the car. The way led over the hills that surround Rockland like the sides of a cup, then into a dirt road almost impassable because of the deep snow. Their only consolation was that others had been before them. Recent wheel-tracks showed that.

"Did you send that wire to the *Mermaid*?" asked Keith.

Jaffrey nodded. "Told them to have a chaser or something at the dock. Why?"

"Oh, I've a hunch we'll need it and all the others."

"His place is in them woods," said the driver, pointing.

Keith thanked him and had him stop.

"We'll sneak in quietly. But have your gun ready."

Keith, gun in hand, preceded the slower Jaffrey, and reached the hunt first. He had been proceeding cautiously, but quickened his pace as he saw the wooden door flapping open in the wind. On such a cold day, this would be hardly likely; he glanced at the chimney. No thread of smoke was visible. A vague premonition of defeat filled him.

HOWEVER, he crept stealthily to the door, and dashed in suddenly, words of command on his lips. But never were they uttered. The place was vacant.

He exclaimed in disappointment.

The latter looked at the young cashiered officer. There was disgust in the glance.

"Hmp! Looks like you've led me on a wild goose chase. By the—"

A crow of pleasure from Keith interrupted him. "They've been here. Look." He pointed to half-melted snow, dragged in by recent feet. "And look here." Under a plain kitchen table were grouped perhaps twenty storage batteries—three cell type. Fastened to their terminals were bits of copper wire whose ends gleamed brightly. Recently cut.

Keith ran outside. Once more he pointed, this time to a tall stately pine

which banked darkly against the last light of day.

"See those bands? That was his aerial—his antennae."

The weaving of the tree had caused the wire to saw a white band near the top which was plainly discernible.

Jaffrey looked at it. He rasped, "The man's pulled out and set up somewhere else. We'll never find him."

Keith who had gradually become more and more cheerful, laughed exultantly.

"There's where you're all wrong," he cried. "We've got him nailed to the cross. He's set up somewhere else all right, but we'll have him located in two hours if that sub-chaser is available."

"What I don't see," said Jaffrey thoughtfully, "is how he's going to send without batteries."

Keith laughed. "Easiest thing in the world in this state. He'll find himself a stream and stick a wooden paddle under a small falls. He'll get enough juice to reach Nauen if he had a big enough set. But we'll find him, never fear."

"How?" asked Jaffrey bluntly.

"Wait and see," was the retort.

AN HOUR later they were back in Rockland. True to Jaffrey's promise they found the SC324 tied up at the big dock which provides for the Boston night boats in season. Keith was now in his element. Introduced by Jaffrey to the young commander of the 324 whose name was Jackson, he immediately took charge.

"How many chasers?" he asked, when Jackson had admitted receiving a relay of Jaffrey's message from the mother ship *Mermaid*.

"Six. All laying up and down the coast, fifty miles apart."

"Will do. Let's get right to your radio man. Tell the *Mermaid* to assign wave lengths in bands one hundred and fifty meters each. Let each man stay on duty until relieved. Every message, no matter of what kind must be copied and relayed at once to us. You better shove off down the bay, so as to get clear of any land interference. But not too far. We want

to put it in a hurry when we start. What are the two nearest land stations?"

"Montreal and Boston."

"Good. Send them a message to hook on compass set and have an operator stand by until further orders. Prepared to act instantly at our request."

Jackson regarded Keith curiously. Then suddenly a great light dawned on him and he cried: "I get the idea. Sure."

Keith smiled. "I knew you would. We've used it before."

The ensign looked inquiringly at Jaffrey. The latter nodded. "The lad's in charge. We'll do what he says. We're after big game."

Jackson nodded cheerfully. "O. K."

They went aboard the little one hundred and ten footer. Sailors leaped to cast loose and the chaser chugged off across lower Penobscot Bay.

A few miles beyond Northport she hove to and they dropped a hook over the side as the tide was running strong. By now it was dark, but bitterly cold with a strong breeze from the northeast.

In the little cabin a second class electrician sat before a quenched rotary gap set operating in a vacuum, the highest development of war time radio production. He had an inside loop which he used instead of the antennae on the masts. At the base of this loop which could be moved in any direction was a round card, marked with the points of the compass. The rod, holding the loop, had an indicator attached to it that changed direction as the loop was turned.

Keith regarded this with intense satisfaction. The scar on his cheek glowed with excitement, for he was about to reach into the ether and catch his man.

At Keith's direction, the radio operator, who had been assigned the band of wave lengths from three hundred and fifty to five hundred, twisted his detector and revolved his loop.

Jaffrey watched all this activity with interest mingled with uncertainty and doubt.

"I think you're off on the wrong foot," he said, "damn if I don't."

"Wait and see," replied Keith. The operator had plugged in another set of head-phones and the young officer also listened intently.

Jackson turned to Jaffrey. "If they go on the air, he'll get them."

Jaffrey forebore to ask further questions and all sat there tense, waiting.

Keith had obtained a large-scale chart of the Maine coast that also included a part of Canada and Massachusetts. This he set in front of him, pencil and ruler beside it.

Suddenly he craned forward. The operator did the same, but whereas the latter took the signals and wrote them out, Keith, familiar with Navy Code, read them aloud: "SC325 receiving code signals wave length six hundred and fifty."

THE moment he had finished copying the message, the operator twisted his dial and tuned in on the wave length. But Keith interrupted him.

"Never mind that. Call Montreal and Boston. Tell them to tune in on six fifty and report immediately aerial direction signals received the strongest."

The operator had swung his aerial and marked on the compass card the direction the signals had come strongest from. Then he complied, opened his key and called the Boston call number. Once he had them, he sent the message and did the same for Montreal.

Then he threw his switch and cut in on the six hundred and fifty wave length. He was in time to copy a few meaningless words which stopped abruptly right in the middle of the word.

"They've either cut off or gone on the bum," he said.

"Call the *Mermaid* and get all the message they have," ordered Keith. This the operator did, copying that part which he had not obtained. The paper he copied it on, Keith shoved into his pocket.

"If it's the same code he used the other time," he said to Jaffrey, "we'll decode it easily. Meantime, we ought to hear from Boston."

Jaffrey shook his head bewildered. The

staccato orders, the strange technical phrases went over his head. But there was no time for questioning. The young operator had opened up his key and a minute or so later heard his call number WAM coming through the ether.

"Yes, this is WAM. Signals strong. What is it?"

"WBF Boston. How are you? Regarding message. Code signals received on six fifty. Compass markings on strongest signals fifteen points north of east. Anything else?"

"No, thank you. Please stand by."

Keith chortled in sheer excitement. With the help of Jackson he pinpricked Boston, took the bearing as by the given directions and drew a straight line from Boston north of west.

No sooner had he done this than Montreal signals, ringing and strong, thudded in the ear phones.

"WAM-WAM—this is PDN Montreal. Code signals six fifty as request. Compass direction strongest reception twenty degrees south of east. Do you hear?"

"PDN. WAM talking. Yes, signals clear. Thank you. Please stand by."

"Now quick," said Keith, drawing the new bearing. "What was your mark?"

The operator consulted the pencil scratch he had made when he too had been tuned in.

"Five points south due west," he replied.

Jaffrey went over Keith's shoulder and watched the operation curiously. What he saw was this: on the map there stretched a pencil line from Montreal in a southeasterly direction that passed near Rockland and out to sea. A similar line from Boston stretched northeast and intersected the Montreal line at a point about an inch from Rockland on the map. The newer bearing, the shortest of all, that from the sub-chaser inland, ran at a slight angle from due west. It did not intersect at the identical place the other two did. Rather it made a little triangle of which the other two lines made two sides.

"Are you that much off?" asked Jaffrey.

Keith working out the position, shook his head. "No. That's the saving of error. What this is, Jaffrey, is an infallible method of locating any radio sending station. A ship at sea which is in distress but has lost its bearings can be found if there are two other ships in the vicinity or a land station nearby and the ship keeps its wireless going.

HE PAUSED for a moment to re-check. "That compass director gives the direction of the signals. But since any average one or two watt set—by the signals this is a two-watt set—can send several hundred miles, simply to know the direction is not enough. So any station at any angle to the signal direction also tunes in and compass checks the direction it receives. Thus you have two lines crossing. But the possibility of error in using two stations is about ten or fifteen square miles — a lot, especially when you're in a hurry as we are. So we check by one more line. None will ever exactly meet. So we know that within that tiny triangle formed by the intersection of three lines is the radio station. That triangle represents not over a square mile."

Jaffrey nodded eagerly. "And on that map it's only about an inch from Rockland."

Keith laughed. "Well, the inch represents about thirty miles. I should say—" he leaned over and figured—"that it's about a mile northwest of Warren. What do you say, Jackson?"

The latter agreed.

"And is that what the Radio Secret Service does?" asked Jaffrey.

"Exactly. Every amateur in the country is cursing us for good-guessers, never realizing that we pick up his signals and run him down. And we've already caught three German agents. This will make the fourth. The only thing we can't do is intercept reception. Thus, Nauen in Germany can talk to this station we've just

heard on a good night like this but we can't know it."

Meantime, Jackson had hauled his hook and stood in for the dock. The chaser was making full speed.

"We can nearly get there by motor," said Keith, consulting a road-map, "but we hadn't better. I tell you, Jaffrey, this Houser is a dynamo. Quick-tempered, too much for a good agent, but he moves when he starts. Too dangerous to be loose."

"By the way, better radio Boston and find out if the *North Star* was warned," said Jaffrey. "Ask the Charlestown Navy Yard."

The reply did not come in before the chaser tied up, and the operator called them in vain.

"How's for a landing party?" Keith asked Jackson. The latter grinned delightedly. "On one condition, gladly. If I go in command."

Keith grinned. "Absolutely. Let's go."

IT WAS approaching nine o'clock when a big maroon car which Jaffrey's gold shield had commandeered threaded its way slowly up a long hill north of Warren. In it were Keith, Jaffrey, Jackson and three sailors who carried Springfields and had web belts fastened around their pea jackets. They also wore canvas leggings and watch-caps, for it was bitterly cold, close to zero.

Presently Keith consulted the map with the aid of a flash-lamp and told the driver to stop.

"It's directly north of here—in those woods," he said in a low tone. "You better have your men spread out, so as to surround the spot after we get it located. Ready?"

The click of loading bolts was his answer.

Keith struck a virgin path nearly north of the dirt road they had come by. Cautiously they passed through the dense pines whose thick branches sighed mournfully in the night wind. No one spoke, not even the sailors who were keyed to the highest pitch by the adventure.

After what seemed ages there came to them the gurgle of water. Keith nodded to himself. They were getting close. At a whispered direction from Jackson the three sailors spread out fan-wise. Just as they had taken their positions, there came a sputtering crackle. A weird blue light flashed, flickering and dying, accompanied by short explosions. By the flash which lit up the surroundings, Keith saw a little log-hut standing in the center of a clearing. It was from this hut that the flashes came.

There came a hum, broken, long and short. Then the flashing blue light once again, accompanied by a loud curse in German.

"Spread out," whispered Keith.

Like shadowy wraiths the three sailors stole around the house, as Keith and Jaffrey, with Jackson bringing up the rear, crept toward the door.

There was one window through which the blue light flickered. Beside this one sailor stationed himself, gun at port ready for instant action.

Keith, automatic in hand, stood in the little snow-cleared space in front of the door. He looked over his shoulder. Jaffrey's big head nodded in the gloom. Jackson's breath was coming in short gasps. Within they could hear the low hum of conversation, intermixed with an occasional louder expletive.

Slowly, gently, Keith lifted the latch. Then with one foot, he kicked open the door suddenly.

"Don't move," he cried. The three persons within stood as if petrified. Marina de Viaski on a backless stool, Houser, in mufti, bending over a radio set alongside an extremely fat man who wore big-lensed glasses that gave his eyes an owl-like look.

For a split-second, not even so much as a breath could be heard.

Then Houser muttered a terrible oath and began edging toward the window.

"Stand still," ordered Keith peremptorily. "We've got the place surrounded, Houser. Better surrender."

The man with the owl-like eyes watched

Keith's automatic in a fascinated way. In the interim when the cashiered officer's eyes were on Houser, his hand moved like a snake.

Click!

The place was in utter darkness.

KEITH swore viciously and fired, the yellow spurt from the gun revealing for a second stealthy figures moving. Then he plunged forward toward the window.

Another shot blasted the silence, and a man groaned. Marina gave a scream. The next instant Keith was locked in a terrible embrace; a man's hot breath on his cheek. He tried to bring his gun into play, but his opponent seized the arm.

Thus they staggered around, the unseen enemy attempting to get at Keith's throat. They smashed against the window, and the glass broke into tinkling fragments.

"Don't shoot," called Jaffrey to the sailor outside, fearful that Keith might be hit. Jaffrey struck a match; it went out, and he swore. He struck another which cast a sickly yellow glow over the room. By its light he was just in time to see Keith and his opponent whom Jaffrey recognized as Houser, topple out of the window into the snow bank.

Houser had hitherto struggled silently. Now he cursed and in an access of fury literally lifted Keith clear and plunged him down as if trying to break his neck. The cashiered officer took the fall on his shoulder, but his hold was broken and the next instant steel fingers closed around his neck.

"This time, damn you," cried Houser recklessly.

The voice gave the sailor his chance to identify one of the two dark figures that thrashed into the snow. He came forward, gun butt up. But Houser, suddenly aware of his danger, released his hold on the choking Keith and with a roar crashed headlong into the sailor. Another came up. But Houser seemed possessed of titanic strength, and the newcomer, confused as to whether he should shoot or not, waited too long.

The next instant the German agent dashed pell-mell into the woods. Before any one could exactly realize what had happened, he had vanished.

Keith staggered to his feet, his brain buzzing.

"After him," he cried weakly. "We've done nothing if we haven't got him."

Jackson took command of the situation and with two sailors ran into the woods, following the tracks by occasional flashes from his light. Keith made his way back into the hut. Jaffrey had found an old kerosene lamp which gave sufficient light for him to keep a gun on the now thoroughly cowed Obermeyer and the strangely stiff figure of Marina.

"What a fool I am!" said Keith, disgustedly.

He was about to say more when the sound of a distant shot reached their ears.

For a moment he thought Jackson had run Houser down.

But it was not the case. Rather the young sailor driving the car had filled his last mess-kit. Ten minutes later Jackson and his two men returned, gloomy and downcast. The maroon car was gone and with it Houser. They had come upon the young sailor's body tumbled alongside—shot through the temple and quite dead.

ALL STOOD disgustedly regarding one another, furious that one man could outwit five.

"I'll send out a general alarm," said Jaffrey, after a moment's thought. "Somebody'll be sure to pick him up."

Keith gave a start. The conversation in Marina de Viaski's apartment came back to him.

"Houser spoke of a submarine," he said, and suddenly remembered the uncoded fragment of a message the radio operative had given to him.

"Maybe we'll get a clue from it," he said. "It all depends on whether this is the same code."

He produced the paper. It contained forty-three words, meaningless words, but it told him that it was still a letter

cipher, undoubtedly the same as had been used before.

This proved to be the case. Uncoded eight German words remained which, translated, read: "U Eighty-nine one mile south Hurricane Island ten o'clock—" there it stopped.

"Hurricane Island?" repeated Keith. "Where is that?"

Jackson answered: "South of Vinalhaven. Just the place a sub could put in, too. Deep channel and a good dock."

"Well," said Keith, "that's our only chance—and last one. If he gets aboard that sub, goodbye. And he's got plenty of information that Wilhelmstrasse can use. Tie up that fellow there, and the wo—" he stopped as he regarded the still figure of Marina de Viaski in an old wicker chair. The once red mouth had dropped open, and the face was no longer beautiful. The eyes stared unblinkingly.

"My God! What's happened?" cried Keith. He crossed the room and bent over. She was dead.

Keith looked down at her, a moment's regret at seeing a once glorious creature so utterly robbed by death of all charm.

"Well, we can't delay here," he went on presently. "We've barely time to overhaul this man—if we can. Get Obermeyer to show us where his car is. They came up in it."

THERE is nothing quite so pathetic, weird and haunting as a deserted village. And one whose white bones gaped openly to the forces of nature stood on the cliffs of Hurricane Island. Once prosperous, the home of a hundred or more granite-workers it possessed naturally paved streets, for it was built on granite out-croppings. A small church was set amid a nice expanse of lawn. But the prices of granite dropped, the workings were abandoned, and the laborers departed, leaving the village just as it was.

Perhaps an hour and a half after they had left the dock in Rockland, Keith and Jaffrey were drifting quietly on the chaser a half mile off the pier.

What had become of Houser was still

a mystery. A lobsterman's dory, fitted with a kicker, was gone. Somewhere, Keith was sure, it lurked off Hurricane, but in that blackness to search for it would have been madness.

The young cashiered officer had early decided that the only logical place for the submarine to put in was near the dock. Here was a deep channel, as shown on the chart. And once it put in, Houser would be forced to show a light, or else the sub would. Then—

On board the chaser all was in readiness. A gunner's mate stood with his crew aft, a steel depth bomb, called ash-can, in the slot. Another seaman stood by the searchlight ready to cast its beam forth when ordered.

Amidships, outside though the damp cold was penetrating, stood Keith, Jaffrey and Jackson.

As they stood talking in low tones to one another, the chronometer struck musically four times.

It was ten o'clock.

A listener sat inside, headphones on. But that he could distinguish the churn of an enemy propeller from some late lobsterman was doubtful. However, Keith was taking no chances. The delicate hydrophones might pick up pumps, emptying ballast tanks so the submarine could rise.

Suddenly a light glowed far to the south, blinked rapidly in code fashion.

"It's Houser," cried Keith. "Let's go after him."

But Jackson, the commander, refused.

"There—" with a jerk— "you see the answering light. A sub. It's my duty to get that first."

His hand pressed down on the engine room telegraph. Full speed ahead, it said, and the Diesels thundered into a terrific roar. The searchlight burst forth, casting a pencil of light through the heavy night. This way and that, it searched like an inquisitive finger, finally coming to rest on a tall, thin pipe that protruded from a turret-shaped object.

"Sub and conning tower," cried Jackson. "Gun crew stand by and provide."

CLANG went the breech block, and a shell slithered into the three-inch semi-automatic Hotchkiss.

The gun-pointer aimed point-blank, catching that turret-shaped object on the fine black hairs.

"Fire!"

Boom!

The tremendous roar of the gun carried far on the still night. The shot missed.

Once again the Hotchkiss spoke—and once again it missed.

"Cease firing," cried Jackson, bitterly disappointed. "Bomb crew prepare."

The periscope was barely visible and even as it was pinned down by the inevitable, deadly searchlight, it vanished under a churning surface.

"Stand by," sang out Jackson, as the sub-chaser approached the still white water.

"Ready-y-y-y-y-y-y!"

"Fire."

Just as the chaser's stern passed through the disturbed waters the ash can, loaded with a deadly charge of trinitrotoluol, slipped with a splash into the boiling wake.

On sped the chaser. Fifty yards. Seventy-five yards—

Boom!

The tremendous concussion compared to the discharge of the Hotchkiss as a penny firecracker compares to a forty-two centimeter cannon.

There wasn't a chance of missing. Turning almost within her own length, the chaser's searchlight once more focused on the violently agitated waters. Pieces of flotsam could be seen. One U-boat had made its last dive.

The chaser's nose was turned toward the direction of the light first seen. The searchlight twisted and turned its deadly beam, searching. And it did not search in vain.

There a half-mile off shore, but running full speed toward the coast, was a wide-beamed dory with a single man standing at the tiller-lines in the stern.

As the searchlight caught him and

pinned him like a fly to the sea, he turned around once, his white face gleaming in the ghastly ray. But he did not stop, nor throw up his hands in surrender.

Keith nodded, half-admiringly. "He plays the hand to the last card."

The Diesels sang a mighty song and the sub-chaser surged ahead at full speed, rapidly narrowing the distance between itself and the pursued craft.

"He'll fight it out," said Keith. "You better get some seamen along the star-board side and give them ball ammunition. But we want him alive."

This was done. By now the sub-chaser, coursing like a hound after a rabbit, was almost upon the smaller craft. Those on the chaser saw Houser, his huge moon face gleaming in the light, yank out an automatic, steering with his left hand. His lips moved as if he shouted something—a defiance, but the voice was lost in the roar.

With a graceful twist the sub-chaser swept alongside, perhaps thirty feet intervening between the two craft. The Diesels churned the water to a froth in reversing.

"Surrender!" shouted Keith.

Houser probably didn't understand, but he got the significance and the gesture. His answer was to raise the automatic and fire twice, once at Keith and once at the searchlight whose fatal beam pinned him to the sea.

Both shots missed. His craft still went at full speed, aimed point-blank at the heavy rocky shore. Two sailors potted away at the motor, but apparently did not hit a vital spot. They were about to deliberately shoot Houser, when Keith cried out.

"We must have him alive."

There was no time to explain that without Houser's confession the espionage system would remain perfect, awaiting a new leader.

The dory now gained on the bigger ship, as it continued full-tilt while the chaser, afraid of unknown rocks and of cracking up on that rocky shore, had reduced its speed to bare steerage-way.

Suddenly the dory tilted high, tipped

violently, and practically vanished under the water, her bottom ripped out by a rock. Houser was precipitated into the water by the shock of the contact. The searchlight revealed him swimming strongly for the shore, about twenty-five yards away.

One of the sailors could not resist this. He raised his Springfield and fired. The first shot clicked a white froth just beyond Houser's head. The second must have hit him, for he suddenly vanished under water.

Keith cursed the sailor violently. Was Houser gone? No. There he reappeared, but he was hit, and badly, for his strength was no longer expressed in swimming, he merely tried to keep afloat.

The slowly moving sub-chaser drew close. Sailors craned out with boat-hooks. The penetrating cold water and his wound overcame the German spy, for suddenly his head disappeared. A string of bubbles came up. Keith thought swiftly. To save the man was worth any chance. Off came his coat, his hat and his shoes.

The next instant a splash marked where he had speared through the water in a clean dive. He struck directly over the bubble marks. Down into that icy water he surged, hands groping for contact. The first shock of immersion had numbed him, but the force of his dive carried him far enough.

Just when he had reached the limit of the propulsion, his widespread fingers encountered something—a coat-tail. This he clung to and stamped his way to the surface. But chilled as he was, his strength would not suffice and he was drawn under again by Houser's dead weight.

His lungs seemed to burst and he had about given up hope when his head broke water. Something struck him on the head, then hooked into his clothes.

"Haul away," someone sang out.

And the half-senseless Keith and the man he had rescued, wounded and unconscious, were dragged unceremoniously from the water. Upon that Keith fainted.

IT WAS about an hour later that Keith, ensconced in Jackson's bunk, became aware of his surroundings.

Jaffrey was sitting nearby, his small eyes on the young cashiered officer and in them an expression of intense admiration.

"How bad was Houser hit?" Keith managed to articulate, and found his voice exceedingly weak.

Jaffrey did not reply for the moment, but continued his thoughtful gaze. "By the shoes of Satan, lad, it was a wonderful thing—magnificent."

Keith grunted impatiently.

"Houser?"

"Not so bad. But he'll live. How about yourself?"

Keith smiled. "O. K. Just weak. It's been a tough strain, Jaff. Bring Houser in. We'll put him through the ropes."

Jaffrey got up and did as he was bade. Two sailors, followed by Jackson, brought the spy in.

"Great work," said Jackson, warmly, as his eyes lighted on Keith.

"Hmp!" grunted Jaffrey. "You don't know the half of it."

A terrible expression of hatred crossed the pale, dough-like face of Houser as he regarded Keith.

"But for you—" he muttered.

"But for me," said Keith, "somebody else would have got you. Now, Houser, what we want to know is—who are the confederates—who's operating the two inland stations?"

"Ask and be damned to you," snarled Houser weakly. "You'll get nothing out of me, you—" he broke off into a string of curses.

Keith very patiently waited until he had finished.

"You might as well come through, Houser. We know most of the layout. We simply need the evidence to convict."

Houser laughed raucously. "You know nothing. By luck you, a cashiered fool, trip me up. The rest of the machine will function. Who would have thought—" he broke off—"that John Houser would be brought down by a nit-wit trying to recover from disgrace?"

Keith looked at Jaffrey and smiled.

And hours later Houser did talk, explaining in detail the tremendous network of espionage which covered the United States so well that nothing could happen unless the Germans were aware of it. And there followed such a round-up of agents that for the balance of the war Germany's spy system was paralyzed and she made no effort to rebuild it.

Potuska was deported as an undesirable alien, which seemed to strike him hard, since he had hoped to remain. Houser, as he had foreseen, went to Leavenworth, for spy-shooting is not popular in America.

Keith, reinstated with rank of lieutenant, junior grade, was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal.

But it was Jaffrey who awarded the palm.

"Boy," he said, "after this war is finished you come over to the Department of Justice. By the sandals of Solomon, you're wasted anywhere else."

And the fact is that Keith did go to the secret service immediately after the armistice.





All thought of rebellion was blotted out with the smash of the revolver butt.

Pirates of No-Man's Land

Canuck artillerymen play a strange game in No-man's Land with startling results.

“ALL ready, Number 1?”
 “All ready, sir!”
 “Number 1, F-I-R-E!” At the officer's command a lanyard was jerked and the eighteen pounder spat a wicked stream of flame into the deepening Passchendaele night.

O-oo-ff! Zzzzzz—eeeeee! The missile was on its way east, then the sergeant gunner stood down and strode wearily toward his officer.

“Now what, Tom?” A faint grin spread itself over Sergeant Bill Morrow's features as he put the query. “Where do we go from here, sir?”

Lieutenant Tom Charters, in command of the 80th Canuck Field Battery, looked down at the shattered remains of his for-

ward guns. Numbers 2, 3 and 4 were completely wrecked, and Number 1 was heeled over. But even at that the remnant of the gun crew could have kept one busy for a few more useful rounds had it not been for the glaring fact that they had fired their last round.

Tom Charters and his sergeant had been with the Canucks since the Canucks first started to make real war history, at the St. Julien scrap, early in '15. They had stuck together since they parked their stock saddles on a cattle ranch back in the state of Wyoming and set out across the border in search of a scrap with the Boche.

Passchendaele was the last word in the big adventure. A heartless swampland, where the shell craters, full of clinging ooze, reached out and claimed many an infantryman and engineer to an icy death.

The Bavarian gunners had dropped a withering curtain over the 80th Battery,

By HAROLD F. CRUICKSHANK

which had stood to for thirty-six hours on S. O. S. work. Tom Charters and his sergeant, with the help of one gunner, Tim Kelly, had stuck to their guns until at last they found themselves apparently alone, their guns blown away from them, all save one which was almost a wreck. And, what was worse, no rations, and not a round of ammunition to serve to the dying Number 1 gun, which lay with a list like a torpedoed vessel.

"I said something, sir. It ran something like this: 'Where do we go from here?'"

"Got you the first time, Bill," jerked Charters, with a faint laugh which bore more than a trace of irony. His shoulders snapped back and he turned his eyes to the hell which roared and flamed in the east.

"Guess we'll move along east, boys!" Charters' words were hissed through his set lips. "There's not much of the old outfit left, is there? Ol' Number 1's in a bad way. About twenty more rounds and she'd have blown her belly out. I hate like the devil to leave her."

Zzzz—eeee—oooo—ouff! Kar-umph!

The three men leaped for a shell hole as the thunderous crash of a German heavy crumped into the gun pit. Number 1 lurched forward, then fell apart, a total wreck.

Lieutenant Charters sprang to his feet and called to his buddies. He was sore, peeved at the German gunners and all set now to go east in search of revenge.

The enemy gunners were active and a fiendish hail of shells smashed at the sodden swampland, where the Canuck infantry lay in a heartless waste of bog and mire. Carrying parties floundered forward, ducking the fury of the war gods' hate, plunging to their necks in the slimy craters to be pulled out by their pals, cursing, hungry, fed up with the weight of equipment and the nature of the wretched zone.

TOM CHARTERS mustered his remnant and drew them to the cover of a broken wall.

"There's not much of us left, boys. But there's a hell of a big slice of the war left to finish. How d'you feel like forming an independent corps of three and moving east? We're right out of touch and our cable all blown up. We may as well grab up rifles and ammunition and hitch up with the infantry. How about it?"

"Shure an' thim's the best words Oi've heard since Oi lift the States, sor. Be the soul av me third stepmother, there's no place Oi'd sooner be right now than intil Berlin. Lead on, Lootenint; let's get where they's somebody else. Shure, a whole army can't get along, so it can't, wit'out the men has grub o' some sort. The sooner we hitch ontill some sort av an outfit, the sooner a divil av a pile av wrinkles is gonna disappear out av the middle av Tim Kelly's waist loine."

Under the cover of desolate night, Lieutenant Charters sloshed forward to an isolated infantry detail which lay in a sodden swamp, chilled and miserable, but full of fight. This part company was cut off from its main unit and carrying on under a captain who refused to listen to his non-coms, who refused to see anything but the outlined hummock of Crest Farm, which was the key to a desperately sought objective.

"Who in hell are you?" The command was terse and far from the welcome Charters expected. He eyed the slim captain quizzically and grinned.

"We're a column of Yanks, Captain, out of a job for the moment. D'you need any help?"

"Help! Why, good God, man, I'll say we need help. But, but you're not even infantry. What the devil use will you be?" Charters didn't like the captain's tone a bit, but held himself in check.

"No, Skipper, we're artillery; but I reckon we can plug through these swamps and give quite an account of ourselves if we're allowed to function in our own way. We don't savvy the infantry manual of arms, but we savvy fight, if that's any use to you. If not, well, I

reckon we can still keep moving east on our own."

For a moment the captain was silent. He had never had a junior officer speak so frankly before; wouldn't tolerate it. Captain Carthew was known throughout the entire brigade for his pride and ego. Charters had him sized up as a prig, and Tim Kelly went even farther, whispering his opinion into the ear of his sergeant.

"Well, I guess we can put up with you, Lieutenant. You can take over my left half company. But I want you to bear in mind that you'll be directly responsible to me. I'm in charge here, and the deeper that's rooted in your mind, the better. What's this? A sergeant, eh? The very thing, just what I need. You'll remain here with me, Sergeant. I'll need you, as my company sergeant-major was killed. Very good, Lieutenant, take over and—"

"Say, Captain Carthew, just one minute. You may be running these poor shivering devils that you've landed into this swamp, but let me tell you, sir, I haven't taken over yet. You're not going to run me as though I'd just mushroomed out of an O. T. C. No, sir! I come from the wrong country to take that stuff: You may as well understand right now that you're dealing with a full-blown artillery officer who's been in the game since St. Julien. Sergeant Morrow and Gunner Kelly stick with me. We'll give you all the help we can. Now, if that doesn't suit, you can go to the devil, and we'll just ramble on till we find some outfit that is looking for scrappies."

THE chattering tattoo of a score of Maxims, firing from a row of pill-box defenses, drowned the volley of oaths which escaped the irate skipper. Never before had he been faced by such an outspoken youngster as Charters.

"Well, sir, my men are damned hungry," jerked Charters. "You think you'll need us?"

"You can do as you damned well please, Lieutenant," snarled the other. "If you want to help, take over my left flank. Maybe you'll find some food there and

possibly a dash of rum. I don't know for certain just how things are, and I can't say that I give a damn." With this burst the skipper turned and ducked away to the right flank.

A corporal came up, a strange figure coated with white slime. He shivered with cold as he stood before Charters.

"What's the trouble, son?" called the lieutenant, in a kindly tone.

In the flash of shell bursts the N. C. O. started as his eyes glimpsed the strange officer.

"It's the patrol, sir. I thought you was Captain Carthew. We been out for two hours in that damned swamp, up to our necks. The men have all gone, sir. Ain't nobody left but me. I came back for orders, as Heinie is getting ready to counter. By dawn he'll cut us all up. Cripes, but this is a hell of a place!"

Charters liked this youngster's tone. Here was someone who could give him the details he wished to learn.

"Where are we, Corporal? Who are we, rather; and what are we supposed to do, and where, and when?"

"We're what's left of A Company of the 740th; Second Division, sir. By right we should be slushin' it back to Ypres, relieved. But the skipper don't seem to be just right," the corporal touched his head with a finger. "We're isolated, cut clean off from brigade. Our lights are all wet and we can't get connected with anyone but damned scrappy Bavarians. The relief, if it had come up, was supposed to run through us and capture Crest Farm. But I reckon this man's army may as well try to capture hell itself."

Enemy bombing planes droned over, their engines' rhythmic beat increasing to an infernal roar. Then the thunder of smashing bombs! Up and down the Canuck lines, flight after flight of planes dropped their deadly hail of eggs. Men ducked to the cover of protective shell craters, but here they met a worse fate in the bottomless bog pits.

Charters groaned inwardly. "Poor devils," he murmured. Then his quick-thinking brain went into action. He must get

these men out of this trap—either forward or back. It didn't matter which so long as he pulled them to safety. Ahead was high ground, but also a damnable nest of Maxims which cleaved the night with a persistent spray of lead. Behind lay a desolate area of slime-filled craters, an impassable sector under a continued curtain of fire.

Charters got his men some food, poor stuff and uncooked, then he served up a liberal issue of rum to all hands. The quartermaster's assistant who guarded the precious rum store made no comment, although he let go his charge with considerable reluctance. He had toted in that rum jar over a couple of miles of hell. Now a strange officer, who was not even an infantryman, was giving each man an extra issue.

Men who had, a moment previously, crouched into the folds of the stinking sloppy marshes in utter misery, now raised their heads and chuckled. Here was a "white guy" on the job. They fingered the bolts of their Enfields significantly and stretched their cramped limbs in anticipation and readiness.

LIEUTENANT CHARTERS called Kelly aside.

"Think you can make it back to Battery H. Q., Tim?" he called. "Any battery H. Q. Try and get our eighteen pounders. Cadge a few dry lights, greens; and give 'em our location. Then try and fasten on to that gang of engineers that was bogged down by our old position; we need that carrying party and their duck boards up here.

"Go get 'em, Tim. Take a man with you. Think it sounds feasible?"

Kelly spat testily and shifted his chewing to another cheek. He gave a hitch to his belt and grinned.

"Shure, the job's wort' a try, sir. If Oi ever get t'rough Oi'll guarantee there'll be somethin' splashin' 'round this divilish swamp what'll put a pile av wind up them Boches. Don't worry about me, sir. Onct Oi get these mud dogs streakin' back the divil himsilf couldn't stop me."

"What's going on here?"

Charters turned to face the skipper, who had stolen up from the right flank.

"You've started to run this company, eh, Lieutenant? Who the devil gave you authority to issue such orders? You'll get a C. M. for this, as sure as you're alive. And you," the skipper turned to Kelly. "You'll stay right where you are. When anyone leaves this place they'll go out on my instructions, or on a stretcher."

Charters' breath came in short hissed gasps. It wasn't like the average Canuck officer to show the color of an utter cad! This captain was either drunk or shell-shocked.

Kelly's actions broke in on the lieutenant's search for a solution. The big Irish-Yank beckoned to the man who was to accompany him. He bit off a chew of tobacco and turned on his heel.

"Guess Oi'll mosey out, Lootenant. Looks like we need hilp more than ever." With that, Kelly was gone. His big frame ducked into the black, drizzling night, while the captain yelled in vain above the screech of shell fire and the whine of a driving wind.

Sergeant Morrow's hand had slipped to his holster and he waited for the clash between the two officers, a clash that seemed inevitable.

"I'd be reasonable, Captain. No need to flare up when cooperation is needed. We can go into this thing together and maybe win out. There's something wrong, sir. You're not acting natural."

With an oath the skipper sprang forward, but Morrow's strong arm caught him. Men gathered around as Charters and the sergeant struggled with the frenzied skipper, who shrieked his curses into the deaf night.

"Best let me put him out, Tom. Gawd! It's no wonder his outfit's in such a hell of a mess. The man's goin' cuckoo or else he's full of hootch. What'll we do?"

Charters wracked his brain for an answer. The thunderous artillery duel increased with devilish violence. Chains of flame leaped out of the dark chasms of

night to light the grim sector in a ghastly manner.

A sentry called out, and a Canuck Lewis crackled. Mills bombs crashed above the shattered stumps of a wood ahead. Rifles cracked. From the concrete fortresses on the heights Maxims swept a fierce stream of bullets above the heads of the attacking Bavarians who had, in the dark, bridged the vile morass between the lines.

CHARTERS whipped out his Colt and motioned to the sergeant. Freed, the skipper got to his feet, and his revolver whipped out, but the clatter of his Lewis guns held his hand. He wheeled and dashed for his right flank.

"Just fighting mad, Bill," yelled Charters. "We're going to have a lot of trouble with that guy yet. He's not responsible, and God knows what the outcome will be. Now, let's get into action. Take over that gun on the left, Sarge. The crew seems to be knocked out."

Charters' teeth clicked sharply as he sought to master the gripping force which tore at his mind. This was his first charge with a forward contact detail. With a shake of his broad shoulders he lunged forward to a box of Mills bombs and soon all thoughts of the captain were smothered by the fight at hand.

It seemed that the local counter-attack had been the signal for an increased stirring along the entire front. Away to the left French and Belgian batteries growled a seething, rumbling storm of death. 75's and 120's lashed at the inky void of night. Out to the right, where the Canuck main body of storm troops lay, a deadly artillery duel raged above the marshes.

But in the center, on Charters' front, a massed column of Bavarians sought to drive a wedge into a thin battered line. They must be held! Charters realized this only too well. As he lobbed his Mills, his mind took cognizance of every single meaning detail of this glaring fact. The entire campaign pivoted on his few yards of front, and the outcome of the Pass-

chendaele struggle depended on the work of his meager garrison.

"Hell!" he muttered. "If that captain had been reasonable we might have stood a show."

A whistle shrilled two sharp blasts on his left. It was a signal from Morrow. In a flash the young officer was at his sergeant's side. He bent his head low as he caught, in a flash of flame, the wave of Morrow's arm.

"Look out to the left flank, Tom," yelled the sergeant. "Just on the far downward slope of that ridge. He's man-handlin' a battery of whizbangs in under cover of this attack. If he gets established then it's good-bye." But Charters had moved over to a slightly raised tuft of marsh shrubs.

Morrow had been right. In the flash of shell bursts the young officer caught the silhouetted shapes of gun muzzles. A sacrifice battery was being established which spelled ruination.

Charters hissed a tune through his set lips. The situation seemed more and more helpless. If he only had a few fresh men, bombers, God! Then a thought flashed to his mind. It was an old thought, one that often occurred to the mind of the front-line soldier in moments of utter desperation: "A man can only die once." Bitter as the thought was, it served to stimulate Charters' mind and caused him to chuckle. He moved back to the sergeant, who sweated at the crackling Lewis.

Handing over the gun to a private, Morrow drew back at Charters' touch.

"How does the capture of those whizbangs appeal to you, Bill?" Morrow started back at the jerked query. Surely to God, Charters was showing signs of creeping insanity. Then Bill Morrow raised his head and his eyes caught the sinister shapes of the lean gun muzzles. His heart stirred with a desire for wild adventure. With steadier thought he felt that Charters' scheme, though daring, was not impossible, for the enemy forward troops were fully engaged in the bombing duel nearby.

"Sounds good, Tom. But how the hell can we get them?"

"Ask me," grinned the plucky Yank officer. "That's another story, Bill. Looks impossible, though. We'd never get past his pill-boxes."

A GERMAN plane zoomed up over the wood ahead, struggled desperately against a heavy wind, then banked to the north and hung over the new whizbang emplacement. Flashes of light burst from the pilot's signal pistol, then, with no warning a flight of 77's crashed in at the back of Charters' detail.

A runner dashed up and warned the artillery officer that the captain's men were in desperate straits on the right. The skipper was nowhere to be found. The last they had seen of him he had set out with a Lewis gunner to outflank the Bavarian attackers.

Charters issued a brisk order, which for a moment startled Morrow.

"Get back, runner, and pass the word to withdraw to this flank. To hell with the skipper, and his crazy schemes. Have the right flank pull in with us. Take all the cover you can."

"But, sir," cut in the sergeant, "won't that expose the right flank completely? They'll get clean through."

"Through, the devil, Bill. Don't you see that's just exactly the best thing in the world. Let him get through. Where'll he get to? Why, he'll be caught in the sweetest trap way back there in those rotten holes, cut off from his main forces. It's just the best news of the night, buddy. It'll relieve the pressure here, and give us a chance to make a sneak up on those whizbangs; and oh, boy! If we can ever get our hands on those Heinie lan-yards!"

Creee-umph! Crash Karr-ack-r-rash!

A salvo of 77's plashed into the stagnant muck of the swamp. A party of Bavarian bombers were caught in their own fire, and dropping their bombs dashed forward, seeking protection in the Canuck line. But, Charters hadn't time nor men to handle prisoners. He motion-

ed to the Lewis gunner who swung the machine-gun about. But Sergeant Morrow dashed up.

"Easy there," he yelled. "Let 'em come in, Tom. We can use their duds for our sneak to that battery."

Charters thrilled at the sergeant's suggestion. The battery venture would be a desperate enterprise in any case. Bill's idea would be worth while, until the British airmen got a line on them. If they could only pull this sneak!

"Kamerad!" The whine of a big Bavarian startled the officer. A half dozen enemy bombers floundered up and Charters intercepted a non com.

The other prisoners hung clustered in a miserable group while Charters plied the non com with a barrage of questions.

"How are you established over the crest?" he asked. "And, this new battery, how many guns?"

The Bavarian shrugged his huge shoulders and looked about him, peering into the uncertain light. The fire from his troop's potato-mashers had almost entirely given place to the whine and crash of Mills bombs, and the thrash of 77's which continued to fall short.

Dawn threatened to penetrate the eastern horizon and Charters moved forward a pace. But the Bavarian merely shrugged again. He had expected a much superior force at the Canuck lines. To be taken prisoner by a mere handful of mud coated, weary infantrymen was too much!

BACKING away stealthily, the non com sought to near his comrades, but Sergeant Morrow was beginning to see through his obstinacy.

"Better watch this bird, Tom," he warned. "I think he figures on makin' a break. Better tie him up and question him then."

With a snarl of rage the big *feldwebel* wheeled and plunged forward. Morrow moved slightly to one side and brought the barrel of his Colt down across the sergeant-major's temple. There was a dull

splash and the Bavarian slopped into the slimy folds of a crater.

Fearing complete annihilation by their own battery fire, the storming Bavarians had withdrawn to the cover of their impregnable concrete pill-boxes, and the battle-weary Canucks settled back in their devastated line to attend to their wounded and killed.

Under a smashing fire from German five-nines, a detail of stretcher-bearers moved back at a word from Charters. The Bavarians did the carrying, directed by slightly wounded Canucks who were able to walk.

Charters mustered his men—nineteen in all. Food was served up, which consisted of MacConochie canned mulligan, and hard tack. The young officer withdrew his detail to a point thirty yards along the left flank, where it seemed, if there was any choice, the ground was higher and the enemy shell-fire not so intense. Here an issue of rum was served, and save for a few sentries posted well forward, Charters permitted the men to get what rest they could.

"Well, Tom!" Sergeant Morrow took a sodden seat at his buddy's side. "What now?" The officer shrugged and chewed in stolid silence on a handful of bully beef.

Waving an arm to include the entire front, Charters called the sergeant's attention to the full meaning of the devilish night. Though the Bavarian counter attack was done and the storm of bombs and small arms over, yet it was merely a spark snuffed out of a mighty roaring furnace.

The enemy clung tenaciously to his high commanding ground along the Passchendaele ridge, hurling his best hand-picked infantrymen into the gaps cleaved out of his ranks by Allied artillery. But, the Canucks hung on, clinging like leeches to the ground they had won in four days' desperate struggle. There was no backing out for them. Heinie must be broken! That was the order which each man served upon his own mind. The Canucks were going east! And Charters

had been with them long enough to know that east meant east.

"We can't do much till we get word from Kelly, Bill," Carter shrugged and straightened his shoulders. "I wonder how the old boy made out!"

Sergeant Morrow slipped a huge wad of tobacco between his teeth.

"It isn't Kelly that's worryin' me, Tom," he drawled. "It's that skipper. Gawd knows where he's landed. Likely as not he'll have got himself captured. Now, I don't believe the poor devil's responsible. He's lost his goat, absolutely; and, can you wonder at it, in this hell?" The sergeant's arm swept the air in a wide arc. "We got it bad enough with shell-fire, but shucks! These poor devils of infantry, this rotten mud, and a hundred and fifty different methods of torture to confront; bombs, bayonets and gas. Hello, what in thunder's this?"

A RUNNER floundered forward and tottered as he made the high ground at the officer's feet.

Charters forced an issue of rum between the man's chattering teeth. In the feeble light of an indifferent dawn, he recognized the man as the runner from the right flank, the skipper's runner.

"What's gone wrong, son?" asked Charters when the man had recovered. "Where's the right flank detail?"

"Swamped, sir! Bugged up to the eyes in plain hell. There's no signs of the captain, and there's no men fit to move back here. The enemy seems to be holdin' his forces for some reason. But it looks like he aims to bust through. He's got a flock of light mortars moved up forward and he's registerin' to beat sixty, hittin' dead center with every burst. Damn if I know how he got his range down so pat."

"Yes, go on," hissed Charters as the man hesitated. "Unless what?"

"Unless the skipper's gone plumb goofy and dished us up to the enemy!"

Charters jumped to his feet, then ducked his head as a stream of machine-gun bullets swished over from the concrete nests.

"That changes our plans, Bill," he called. "We'd better move over to the right and locate that skipper. If this man is right, we'll be trapped no matter which way we move, unless we move back west!"

CHARTERS looked up as a Nieuport scout, its wing fabric fluttering loose in the wind that screamed through its shattered struts, circled to earth in drunken spirals. At a thousand feet black Archie bursts enveloped the sadly damaged machine in clouds of dull black smoke.

"Out of control," hissed Charters. "Poor devil's going to be damned lucky if he makes this side of the line."

A score of Maxims rattled from the ground, their bullets tearing through the crazy fuselage. Then with an attempt to recover, the plucky pilot tore off a wing and the plane crumpled like a wounded mallard.

A heavy piece of shell-casing ripped through the engine as the Nieuport commenced a swift drive to the swamp.

Charters dashed forward as the plane thrashed through a copse of meagre undergrowth to land with a sickening plosh into the soft quivering marsh. A salvo of screaming shrapnel cracked over the wrecked plane, but Charters ducked forward, Morrow and Bates at his heels.

The pilot was unconscious, but not too badly damaged. Maxims played a deathly tune from the pill-boxes, spitefully spraying the wreckage.

There was still a fair supply of issue rum left, and Charters soon revived the skyman, who was borne to cover by Morrow and Bates while Charters stripped the cockpit of everything that resembled a map or report.

"Well, they got me, eh?" The pilot's lips moved feebly as he looked up at Charters. The lousy Boche.

"Never mind," he continued, straightening up. "I've got the stuff here," he tapped his pocket, "that'll break up this little game of Jerry's. Once I get back to headquarters with my report you'll see some fun. I've got to be moving on now."

He turned to Charters and reached out a hand which the artillery officer was glad to grip. "Just hang on for a few hours and give me a chance to get our bombers lined up, and our batteries on the right track. You'll run through these devilish—Great Caesar! What's this?"

CHARTERS was on his feet, his head turned back. Through the thick smoke-mists had come the sound of voices—at least one of which was familiar.

"Yo heave! That's roight! Now yank on the divil's head. That's the system. Now, Lazarus, on ye get, ye lop-eared loafer."

"Whoa, dynamite! Steady there, mule, till I locate me bearin's."

Out of the thick mists came the thick-set frame of Gunner Kelly.

"Well, be the timbered sowl av Dugan's pet hawg, if it ain't Lootenint Charters, hissillf."

Charters gripped Kelly's hand and fired a score of questions at the Irishman.

"Aizy, sor! Read this line from C. O. Shure I got 'em all stirred up back yonder. They was relyin' on a scout plane who undertook to bring in a report. But, I reckon that poor divil's gone west—over there in the east. I got a whole flock av reinforcements back there wit' the mule. They's a gang av engineers packin' duckboards; an' damned if the ol' man didn't arrange to have a bunch av ammo sint up. The man ye sint out wit' me got a Blighty early in the game, an' be the sowl av Moses! Oi had to pack the little divil most av the way. Thanks, Bill." Kelly broke off to reach for the rum which Sergeant Morrow handed over. Charters was hurriedly scanning the written message from his C. O.

"Good work, Charters. Hang on for a time. We can spare you. Keep an eye open for Captain Carthew. Poor devil, he's crocked up badly and liable to wreck our plans. Kelly is worth a V. C. We're all set to get you out of that mess. If only we had that pilot's report we could clean right up. Hang tight and look out

for all kinds of good support. Infantry supports are also being rushed forward. That'll be all, Tom. Good luck! Branscombe."

Charters tore the message to little pieces and patted Kelly's shoulder. "Good stuff, Kelly! Now everything has taken on a brighter complexion. They're all steamed up in the rear H. Q. and you know what that means. We're going east, boys. Just hang tight till I decide on the next move."

Kelly's engineer detail moved forward with their duck boards. Day was slow in breaking to a full, clear light, and Charters breathed a little prayer of thankfulness for the thick, black smoke wreaths which mingled with the mists of the swamps. Certain useful work was accomplished in the uncertain light. A runway was constructed across the worst of the bog, and a Lewis gun post established at its near edge.

The Battery C. O. had sent forward a signal detail which under Kelly's instructions—a combination of good humored encouragement and lusty curses—had successfully established a line of telephonic communication.

Charters called up his old B. H. Q. and advised them of the contemplated attack on the whizbang battery. The pilot had been given assistance out; and Charters, together with Sergeant Morrow, Kelly, who refused promotion, and Bates, whom Charters appointed corporal, mapped out a definite line of campaign.

"It's like this, boys," explained Charters. "My idea isn't only to capture that whizbang battery for the glory that might result from such a scheme. But, that ground is high, it's dry, and commands a good field. Those whizbangs haven't done a lot of damage yet, but, just as soon as our main lines advance, those 77's are going to play hell. These chaps of Carthew's are about all in. I want to save them as much misery as possible. Now, we're apt to run into a pretty heavy strafe before we get across the swamp, therefore I want to ask you: D'you think the scheme too wild?"

IRISH spat testily and drew the back of a hand across his mouth.

"Shure an' Oi think we're wastin' too much time plannin'. Why av course the scheme is all right. Be the powers av Davey, sor! Didn't ye say we was goin' east? Well, all Oi can offer is: let's get to hell outta this swamp. If Oi'd knowed it was so wet here Oi'd niver av come back. Now there's the crazy skipper! How about lettin' me handle him? Oi can take a bombin' pathrol out til the roight flank an' mebbe sneak up on him. Oi'll jine ye at the whizbangs as soon as it's safe to sneak down the ridge. Anyhow, Oi've a way wit' crazy nuts."

"All right, boys. That's O. K. Now let's go! You, Kelly, go pick what men you require and move out before it gets too light. Take lots of ammunition and enough rations to see you through at least twenty-four hours."

Then Charters beckoned to Morrow and together they moved among the men, serving up clean ammunition and bombs.

With a wave of his arm, the Yankee officer darted forward for the duckboards, his detail following in crouched formation seeking cover from the meagre clumps of sparse swamp willow.

Bombers drew the pins from their Mills, advanced cautiously behind Charters, then, at his word, they lobbed.

Into the shattered copse ahead the Mills grenades burst with deadly results, catching a forward Bavarian post. Men scuttled back to the safety of the first pill-box, and Charters seized this opportunity for cover. With a yell he called on his men, taking cover from threatened Maxim fire, and crushed forward right on the enemy's heels.

Two Colts snarled themselves empty as Charters and Morrow cut down with their six-guns.

The Bavarians turned almost on the threshold of their pill-box, but the Canucks were ready and a wild engagement with bayonet, butt and bomb ensued.

"Give 'em hell, boys," yelled Charters, who had just finished a hand-to-hand with a huge Bavarian *feldwebel*. "Tear

'em apart, fellers." And the Canuck detail responded as only westerners can.

CHARTERS snatched a bomb sack from a wounded private's side, then waved to Morrow. Together they spun around the side of the concrete fort and in an instant came the muffled roar of their bursting grenades.

Charters cleaned out the pill-box and took possession of its Maxims. Few prisoners were taken, for the Bavarians were devilish scrappers and paid dearly for their attempt to cling to the important Passchendaele ridge.

A desperate struggle was in force on the right flank. Charters called to Morrow and pointed out to the seething state of the southern zone.

"What is it, Bill?" jerked Charters swiftly.

Bill Morrow lowered his glasses and ducked as another bullet skimmed by.

"By gawsh, Tom. I'll be do-hickied if that ain't Carthew. Take a look."

Charters took the proffered glasses and swept the ridge.

"You win, Bill."

"Hey, sir!" A private called from the far side of the pill-box. Charters dashed forward to where a man pointed to the north. The officer's brows elevated and he turned to Morrow.

"Trapped! By the holy dora, Bill! Look what's sneaking round us."

Swinging around the close-in German battery, a line of enemy reinforcements were going into attack, close on six hundred strong. Charters whipped out his message book and scribbled a note. Ripping out the leaf he handed it to a runner.

"Get back to the phone, son, and get B. H. Q. Just read this note off. There's no danger of getting anyone else for it's a through line. You don't need to report back here. Off you go now!"

Inside the pill-box Morrow was serving up clear instructions to men at the captured Maxims.

"Hold your fire low, an' when you get the signal, give 'em hell. If you hear a gawsh awful rumpus outside, don't wor-

ry! The officer has signalled back for a concentrated barrage. Just keep scrap-pin', an' hold fast."

Charters' whistle interrupted Bill, who swung out into the open.

"The battery, Bill. The whizbangs. It's the only thing left. We've got to get 'em now; or that column sneaking down around the ridge there is going to bust up our main attack. Look! They're lay-in' out gun-posts already." Then Charters turned to his waiting men.

ADVANCING in diamond formation, he swung a point to the east of north, in order to flank the battery and give his detail at the pill-box a better chance to cover his attack with their Maxims.

Death lurked from behind every fold, at every point of the compass; but Charters was going east. Going to avenge the infantry boys who had suffered days of hell in those heartless swamps. Not more than eight men and the sergeant remained. To their immediate left was a column of fresh Bavarians over fifty times their strength. There didn't seem much hope; but Charters reloaded his Colt and signalled for a dash.

The guns were swung about and trained on the battery, where the German gun crew prepared to destroy the breeches; but Charters was on the gunners before they could carry out their plans.

Hands went up and the Canuck officer took over. But, Charters turned wearily to survey his meagre detail. Not enough left for anything worth while. He wheeled about. The Bavarian infantry had swung over. They were heading right for the Canadians.

EEEE-ZZZZe-e-e-uff! Crash! Crash! Crrr-umph!

Charters breathed a sigh of relief. His message had gone through! B. H. Q. had got the range, and although they were hitting in devilish close, the British gunners were dropping a perfect barrage. A little short of the now deploying Bavarians, but enough to stimulate the waning spirits of Charters and his men.

Charters knew that the crashed pilot had got his location through. But, with all this new turn in the tide, he realized that his position was no less precarious.

A yell from Morrow emphasized this when the sergeant pointed to the south. A battalion of Bavarian infantry was pouring in to meet the oncoming main line. A Maxim crackled at the pill-box and Charters knew that his men were holding fast. He ordered his own Lewis and the captured Maxims into action.

Although the British planes had played havoc with the German batteries, a battery of whizbangs continued to strafe Charters' position. Savage shrapnel burst overhead and machine gun bullets whistled over from the north. The situation seemed hopeless. That is, although his work was done, and mighty well done, Charters felt that there wasn't much hope for the men and himself. They were almost completely surrounded, and the chances were that the main Canuck attack would be held up by the Bavarian reinforcements. But Charters was determined to scrape it out.

He directed his two guns; and spelled off the men.

"Too damn bad we couldn't get these whizbangs swung, Bill," he yelled to Morrow. "It's what I figured on."

HE SPUN about and looked up to the south ridge. A column of khaki clad men were charging down upon him. While another line deployed to attack the Bavarians who had now turned.

Charters reeled, but Morrow's strong arm caught him.

"Hold fast, Tom. Here comes Irish, and by heaven if he hasn't got Carthew with him."

Bill was right. At the head of the column, Irish at his side, was the slim figure of Captain Carthew.

"Hey, Bill! Lootenint! Here we come, be the sowl av Murphy's sister! We gotta whole army wit' us, so we have!"

Irish dashed into the gunpit and with the help of the infantrymen, under Charters' direction, the guns were reversed.

"You've been great, Charters," sang out the skipper. "Damned fine, sir. And that wild Irish aide of yours. I guess I owe him my life. I was damned near nutty when he found me."

He held out his hand to Charters. "Hope you'll forget the way I've acted. I've been under fire so long my nerves are shot." He paused. "You see, I've suffered from shell shock. Was ordered back, but I refused to go. There's something about this war that makes you hate to leave it."

Charters gripped the outstretched hand. "Forget it, old man. Can't blame you. Anyone's apt to go through the same thing."

The two turned about at a yell from Morrow. "Battery all ready, sir!" Charters staggered to a gunwheel, blood dripping from a wound in his right temple.

"Battery, prepare to salvo!" his voice jerked out the command thinly.

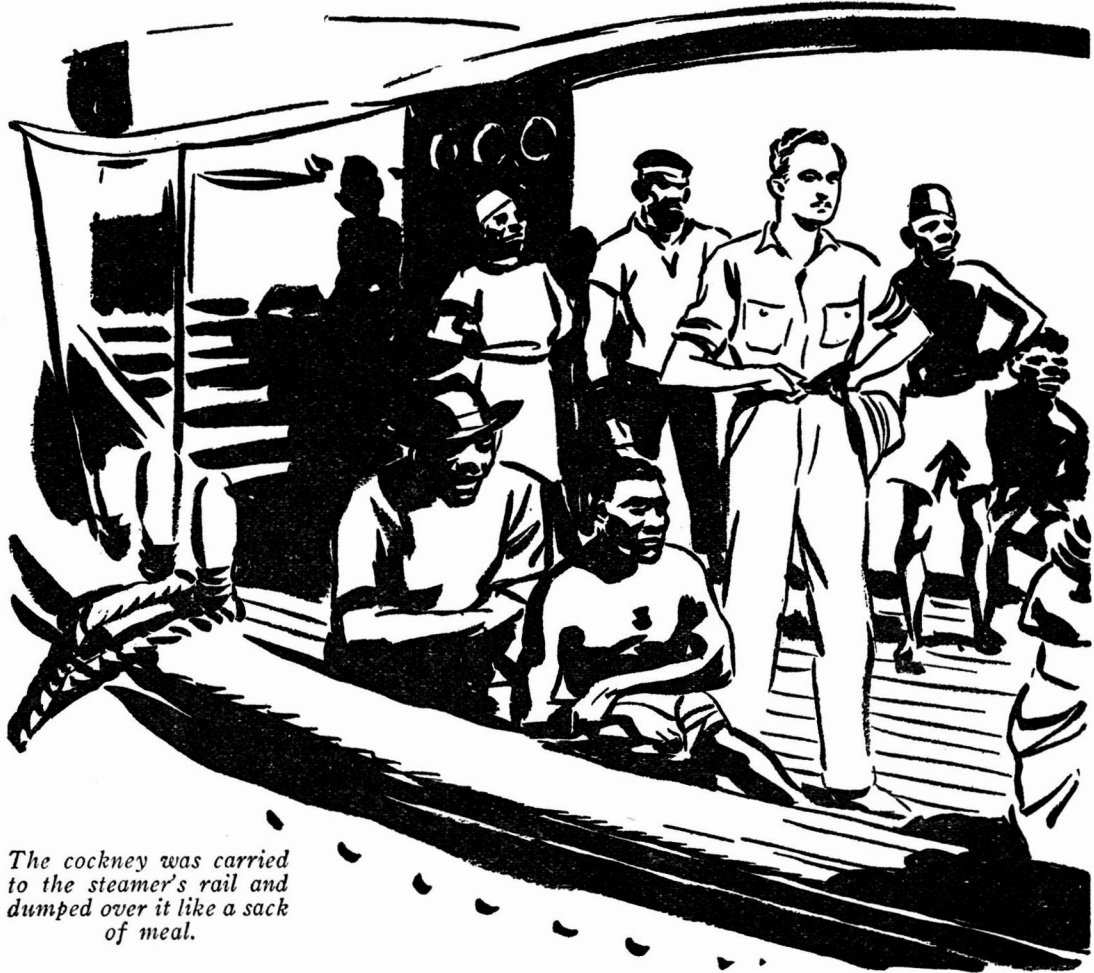
"All ready, sor!" yelled Irish in return.

"F-I-R-E!" At Charters' gasped command, four lanyards were yanked and a mighty roar shook the position. Then Charters took Carthew's outstretched hand.

"That's them, skipper. Four beauties, all headed east!"



Gun-Runners for



The cockney was carried to the steamer's rail and dumped over it like a sack of meal.

Stranded in Port Said without money or credentials, Capt. Underwood accepts a commission that leads him and his loyal followers into strange and perilous adventures.

By FRANK BUNCE

"LET'S GET this straight," Captain Grant Underwood said to the two men across the rum-soaked table. "You want me to take into Ethiopia the biggest shipment of munitions ever consigned there. Twelve million dollars worth. You want me to take them by the Malakal-Gambeli-Debra Kossos route, a dangerous way at any time, a death trail

now, with the lower Sudan seething in revolt, with all western Abyssinia infested by roving bands of *shiftas*! You want me, in other words, virtually to commit hari-kari for the profit of your United Munitions Corporation and the greater glory of Haile Selassie."

He stood up, a towering, lithe figure. His reckless eyes laughed, glowing with

the Lion of Judah



twin, red points of light, like the eyes of a mountain leopard after dark.

"Gentlemen," he said, "your proposition appeals to me!"

From the plumper, sleeker of the two men seated across from him a sigh escaped; a sigh of unutterable relief, as if some great weight abruptly had been taken off him. His companion, slender as a lath, cold-eyed, cadaverous, merely stirred a little. But to anyone who knew him well that slight stir betrayed an unusual depth of feeling. An earthquake would not have moved him so.

"There is something else you have

neglected to mention, Captain Underwood," he said, in his cold, precise way. "The danger of this enterprise is great; but so are the rewards! We have offered you five per cent. of the proceeds for delivering this consignment safely—more than a half million dollars, even with your expenses deducted. A tidy sum for any man; an immense figure, I would think—" his frosty eyes went around the grimed, bare walls of the squalid pension room in which they sat—"to anyone reduced to this."

Underwood laughed; a deep-chested roar of sheer amusement. "You don't

know the half of it, Craig. I'm not only reduced to living in this hell-hole; I'm in hock here in Port Said until I can pay my bill. I was to have gone into Ethiopia with Major Tarik and his Internationales, but I missed them by two days. And I couldn't arrange any way to go on further by myself without money or credentials."

"We have both for you," Craig said.

He put down upon the table a heavy purse, a sealed envelope, an array of documents.

"Gold—contracts—a letter identifying you to MacKinley, who has had charge of the expedition until now," he explained tersely. "I'd advise you to be especially careful of that letter. MacKinley doesn't know you, and anyone who managed to get hold of it could palm himself off as you."

Underwood took up the purse with veneration, stowed it carefully away into a pocket of his soiled linen coat; and after it, the letter. He took the pen Craig held out to him, but his eyes went to the empty rum bottles on the table rather than to the contract form the other pushed across the table.

"Ought to have a drink on this," he muttered. "Isn't every day a whack at half a million dollars comes my way."

While Craig and his secretary fidgeted, he went outside to the head of a rickety stairway and shouted: "*Walad! Boy!*"

There was no response. From the street outside came sounds of curses and prayers, of threats and sharp fear and shrewish argument: the voice of Africa, old, savage, harsh with cruelty. But in the pension itself was only silence, unnatural, sinister.

Underwood came back into the room, his thick brows knotted in puzzlement.

"Everybody seems to have blown, for some reason. Looks as if we'd have to get along without that drink," he commented. He seated himself. His manner was easy, unalarmed; yet his companions noticed that his eyes were alert, roving from the window at his left to the door, behind and a little to the left of him. And up and

down his back, under his coat of thin linen, one long muscle visibly crawled, like the transverse muscles on the back of a suspicious tiger.

WELLS, the secretary, spoke. "Perhaps we'd better—adjourn somewhere else," he suggested, a perceptible quaver in his voice.

"Too late for that now," Underwood answered. "If anything is going to happen—" His eyes bored into the man. "Have you any reason to suspect someone has followed you here, perhaps, to make trouble?"

Craig answered; coldly, emotionlessly as ever. "There are many people who might want to make trouble for us, our business being what it is. And one man especially who we believe to be stirring up trouble for us in the Sudan; who may have followed us here by plane . . . But let's forget that, and return to business."

He tamped the contract form suggestively.

But Underwood hesitated, frowning thoughtfully, his eyes, with the ingrained caution of the seasoned adventurer, still roving the room, his back muscles visibly crawling.

"There are two or three questions I'd like to ask first," he said finally. "In the first place, are these 'trade' guns and munitions you're asking me to take in?"

"They're not." Craig's voice was crisp and convincing. "They're fine modern weapons, every one bearing our trade name. The ammunition likewise."

"Good." Underwood's fingers tapped the table top reflectively. "Now, where are they?"

"At Renk. A mud-and-sticks town down the Nile from Khartoum. We shipped them by rail from Port Sudan, by rail and steamer barges. That far, it was comparatively easy. But then we ran into difficulties. To add to the danger from savages was the unseasonable low water. Our steamer grounded down—we'll have to take to dhows. And you know how defenseless a fleet of dhows would be against

dugouts or even an attack from the banks. Gregor MacKinley, a fine young man from our office who has been in charge, admitted frankly he couldn't go much farther by himself. So we flew up here to try to interest you."

"Why don't you ship the stuff by plane?"

"We can't get planes. Every ancient crate in this part of the world and every flier is already signed up with someone else."

"And the ordinary trade routes, in from French and British Somaliland and the Kenya colony, are closed now," Underwood mused. "Now what about the Sobat; the river that branches off the White Nile into the highlands of Ethiopia. That, naturally, will be only a thin trickle at this season. How do you plan to negotiate it?"

"I don't know," Craig admitted. "We're finding this problem too tough for us—that's why we've turned to you. You'll have to blaze your own way to Debra Kossos, in the Djimma province of Western Abyssinia, where you'll be met by a strong detachment of the Emperor's guards. From there on you'd be safe enough."

Underwood was silent a moment, and in that pause the stillness of the pension, its apparent desertion, was like an alarming voice. The night was still young; there should have been the usual bedlam of backgammon players and Zibit drinkers from downstairs, in the squalid barroom.

"One question more," Underwood said presently. "Why did you choose me to handle this?"

"Your question shows modesty," Craig replied. "On your record alone, you're the logical leader for such an enterprise. Though I admit there's an additional reason why you, and perhaps you alone, could get this shipment through the Shilluk country. I mean, the peculiar formation of your front teeth."

"What?" The adventurer stared in astonishment.

"Your upper teeth are slightly separated. They come apart in the form of a thin V. And while that may seem irrelevant—"

He broke off, his utterance choked by something he saw in Underwood's face. The big man had not moved a muscle, either of face or body; but into his eyes came a sudden blaze. His right hand slowly, almost imperceptibly, dipped down toward a bulging pocket of his coat.

And then a voice, indolent, silken-soft, but somehow chilling as a rattler's buzz, sounded from the doorway behind him.

"No more, that hand, Cap-i-tan Underwood," it said. "I have you covered, and your companions, too. Put up all your hands, please."

FOR a split second Underwood sat in frozen immobility, his hand suspended over the bulging pocket of his coat, debating a course of action. Then he relaxed. His hands came up and he turned slowly.

"Devereaux," he identified, in a low growl, without surprise.

The big, swart man in the doorway bowed, though the muzzle of the Luger in his hand did not waver. He was heavy-shouldered, heavy-jowled; but even in that mocking, slight movement, he showed a feline, dangerous grace.

"I am flattered you remember me, M'sier," he said.

Craig sat motionless; cold, inscrutable as ever. But from the pudgy Wells came a squeak of terror.

At that, the Frenchman's thin gash of a mouth—a murderer's mouth—quirked in ironic amusement. He came a step forward, into the room.

"You need fear nothing, gentlemen." He spoke softly as ever, but there was menace in the glitter of his eyes, vaguely obscured by some sort of cast. "No one of you will be harmed, if you are but reasonable."

"What do you want?" Underwood spoke curtly. The Frenchman's face was a familiar, evil one from his past. He knew there was no honor in the man, no reliance to be placed in his promises, once he had what he wanted. Devereaux acted on the principle that dead men make no trouble for anybody but the police.

Devereaux came a step nearer; and Underwood's alert eyes noted that he stopped just on the end of a ragged mat covering the warped floor between the door and the table.

"Only that letter of identification, M'sier Underwood," he said smoothly. "You see, from a little way down the second stair, I hear your talk, and I know that with it, I could have your caravan. There are those," he added, with a smile like a leer, "that would pay much more for those guns than your Ethiopian king. And it would be less trouble to guide it to them."

"You're talking like a fool, Devereaux!" Underwood snapped. "Alone here, against three armed men, you haven't a chance. You might get one of us, perhaps two. But not the third."

And as if to show his contempt for the other, he went toward him a short pace, stopping with his heels clinching into the ragged matting.

"Ah, but I am not such a fool," Devereaux denied. His face had darkened, his eyes smouldered, his mask of suavity stripped away. "I choose to show myself alone before you without anyone to hear too much of my business; but on the flat house roof not three short steps beyond that window are my two men, with guns on you—shotguns, M'sier, that do not miss, even through glass, that rip and tear the body up! Go—see for yourself!"

Underwood made no move, except to bring his left foot up in line with his right. And under his coat his tiger's back muscles writhed.

"I have planned well," the Frenchman's smooth voice purred on. "Downstairs, besides, is the keeper of the *pension* and others of him, bought to me and waiting for my shot. So you will see I am not alone." His finger tightened across the trigger of the automatic, his thumb clicked up its safety catch. "I have given you a chance. You may give me the paper alive, or I will find it over you, dead. I would have an answer."

"Then—here's your answer, Devereaux!" Underwood's voice rang clear, decisive. He swayed forward a little, hands

still up, but slowly stiffening, his heels gripping into the tear of the ragged matting. He dropped suddenly, face down, to the floor.

The matting skidded backward with his heels. Devereaux' feet slid with it, flying upward, and his automatic emptied into the ceiling as he spun backward.

A blast of sound, a crash of glass, struck upon Underwood's ears—the shotguns! A scream sounded behind him—Wells' voice—and he heard Craig cough retchingly, in a way he had heard many times on battlefields with men going down in instant death all around him. Darkness came to the room suddenly, as the high oil lamp, its chimney shattered by the shot, flickered, then died. But Underwood caught the sound of Devereaux' snarl, the blur of his face, and dived for it. Boots struck into his abdomen, stunningly, and he was hurled backward. He had a glimpse of the Frenchman springing up, a towering great figure of menace in the dark; heard shouts from below, the pounding of feet upon the stairs. Then he was rolling over, balled up in the seasoned rough-and-tumble fighter's posture of defense when down, as first Devereaux' boots, then his automatic butt, slashed down at him. Both missed, and before the attempt could be repeated, he was up, his bent knee fending off a savage kick at his groin. While the Frenchman swayed, off balance for an instant, he timed and released a blow to the jaw. One blow, and a short one; but it was sufficient. Cheek bone and flesh yielded to his smashing knuckles. Devereaux went down without a sound.

He whirled back to the table. Into his pockets he crammed the documents on it; pausing a split second to view the two bodies on the floor. Even in the dark he saw that Devereaux' threat had not been idle. Shotguns do not miss, even through glass; and they rend and tear the head and body, hideously.

The foremost of an upward rushing group of men was setting foot upon the stair landing when he emerged from the room. A revolver flashed almost in his face, and a stab of agony went through

his shoulder. But ignoring it, he avoided the choked stairway and went headlong over the rail.

A human form broke his fall. Locked, arms and legs, around the man, he tumbled down the stairs. Half stunned, he staggered up and rushed through the open doors of the deserted barroom to the narrow, bazaar-lined street.

A cruising *gharry* was just drawing abreast of him. He leaped upon its running board, motioning the driver to greater speed while he stowed himself into its rear seat.

"Airport. And step on it. *Hawameena—imshi arwaam!*" he snapped. Glancing back, he saw a baffled group of fisting men spill out of the pension just as the cab safely rounded a corner into the broad and busy Sherif el Aini.

DAWN found him dropping down to Khartoum, chilled to the bone from the night cold over the vast deserts of Egypt and the upper Sudan. At four that afternoon, so swiftly did he refuel and take off again in the United Munitions special plane he had commandeered at Port Said, he was feeling for a landing at Renk, a huddle of mud and straw pushing out upon a promontory into the White Nile. And an hour after, haggard, fevered from his neglected wound, he was facing young Gregor MacKinley from across a table in the upper-deck salon of a squat river steamer.

"I'm glad you've come, sir," MacKinley assured him, with fervor. He was a fresh-faced, rugged youth; callow, but loyal, and with the divine spark of courage in him, Underwood estimated. "The men are chafing—it looks like mutiny any time."

"Mutiny!" Underwood exclaimed.

MacKinley nodded somberly. "It's a bad crew, sir. The riffraff of a dozen nations. Mostly Arabic; a sprinkling of Armenians and Greeks."

"Have them rounded up for'd," Underwood commanded curtly, rising.

The crew, assembled for him, answered MacKinley's description well enough: a black-faced, scowling lot, for the most

part, of many racial strains. Desperados and riffraff, true; but men of iron, who would cut a conquering trail through hell at the back of a leader who had their respect and liking, Underwood guessed. He knew their kind.

He paced up and down before them, while their sullen muttering died slowly; pausing at last before a rat-eyed cockney.

"Men," he said, "we're going to start up river with daylight tomorrow." He paused, while his words were translated, in rough mutterings, into half a dozen languages by comrades of this strangely assorted crew to one another. He looked downriver. Snagged up against the banks were a fleet of dhows, the light of the dying desert sun gilding their towering lateen sails; clumsy looking craft, flat-bottomed, wide almost as they were long, but the most efficient form of transportation ever devised for low waters. In his nostrils was the unforgettable smell of the Sudd, carried downriver by a slight breeze; just visible in the twilight were the long hunches of crocodiles, slipping noiselessly down into the water in quest of their evening meal. This was Africa: unforgettable, squalid, bloodthirsty . . . the thunder clouds of war dark now over its greatest empire.

"We'll load the dhows tonight. We sail at dawn," he continued crisply.

The cockney before him came a step forward. His rat's eyes gleamed hatred, his scarred lips were snarled back. His hand fumbled at the handle of a broad Ghurki knife in his belt of rope.

"We ain't loadin' nuthin' Mister," he spat. "Not t'night or any hother night. Blimey, it's suicide t' try that river hany farther." He gathered courage from Underwood's silence, from the renewed mutterings of the men at his back. He swaggered closer, pushing his snarling rat's face up into Underwood's, his fingers closing over the handle of his knife. "This 'ere's our boat an' cargo now. Blimey, we'll git our pay out of it, an' not move it no farther, either. An' if you don't like that—per'aps you'll like *this* better!"

His hand flashed up, the knife gleaming in it.

That was the move Underwood had been waiting for. His right hand shot out, closing over the cockney's wrist. As the man howled in pain, he spun around, drawing the cockney's arm half up over his shoulder, lifting him off his feet. Held helpless, screaming in that grip which, with just a slight change of position, would have broken the arm at the elbow, the cockney was carried to the steamer's rail, dumped contemptuously over it, like a sack of meal. Spinning, he struck on the rotting wharf below.

"Tell Devereaux, when he comes, that his attempt at stirring up a mutiny worked no better than his attempt at theft," Underwood said down to the man, writhing in pain and helpless rage. "Tell him we're going on—in spite of him; in spite of hell and low water!"

He turned back to the crew.

"We're loading the dhows tonight. We sail at daybreak," he repeated.

There was a tense moment of silence while, Underwood knew, the fate of that expedition trembled in the balance. Then a murmur of assent went up, swelling into something approaching a cheer. Desperadoes and riffraff, these, the scum of many nations; but they would follow a man who had their respect and liking on a conquering march through hell!

IT BEGAN to seem a trail through hell, their crawling progress upriver, in the days that followed. The Shilluk drums were talking angrily when they pushed away from the mud bank that was the water side of Renk; the drum talk followed them along the twisting, sluggish river, lined with dense bush, choked with water plants and papyrus grasses torn from the wide expanse of the upriver Sudd. Twice they ran through showers of spears from natives ambushed along the banks; even more ominous was the desolation of landing stages along the route, which ordinarily would have been swarming with natives down to see the winged caravan go by. Somewhere ahead, Underwood

knew, the savages were marshalling, aroused by the baleful force that was using murder, thievery, rebellion as its twin weapons against the expedition.

On the third day the tug pulling their long line of boats left them, forced back by frequent mud banks. From there on they battled winds and shallows, straining toward Tufika, where the Sobat, with its head in the highlands of Ethiopia, emptied.

On the sixth day, miles out of Kodok, Underwood sat in the stern of the lead dhow, under a half-deck awning. He was exhausted, dull-brained, fevered. Since the start he had slept only in snatches of fractional parts of hours; and the pain of his undressed shoulder wound, increased by an attack of sandfly fever, was searing, unremittent torture.

He drowsed, there under the awning; awakened to shrill cries of terror. His first immediate impression was the shrill *zzing* of whistling spears very close. He saw a lance, pennant tipped, fasten itself into the gaff of the lateen sail and hang there quivering; saw broad head spears rip through the awning and bury themselves in the half deck floor and the bulwarks. One instant his senses registered these things with the dazed incredulity one feels rousing suddenly to tumult and alarm. Then he caught the high-keyed "*Hiyah! Hiyah!*" of attacking shilluks from far up and down the starboard bank, the excited yells of his own crews, and he sprang up, suddenly cool, clear-brained.

He cast a glance downriver. The dhows behind formed an irregular parade line, with three well out into the center of the stream, four more dangerously close to shore than even his own dhow, which was feeling for a channel scarcely fifty feet off. The shore itself was acrawl with naked savages; some from the half-shelter of the bush hurling their spears and lances, others crowding into a multitude of dugouts, that magically had appeared from hide-aways under the bank.

Whirling back, Underwood caught and blocked his Arab helmsman, fleeing toward shelter in the waist.

"Back, you fool!" he roared. His fist

crashed into the native's chest, sprawling him against the bulwarks. "Get on that tiller—keep her steady, easy to port—or we'll all taste Shilluk torture!"

The threat of his anger more than the threat he voiced cowed the Arab into obedience. He threw himself on the heavy tiller, halting the boat's unguided spin shoreward. Spears quilled into the bulwarks around him, and he sobbed with terror, but stayed at his post.

Underwood leaped down into the waist. With smashing boots he shattered the top of a box packed with half a dozen rifles, a UMC machine gun, ammunition—not even gun runners are given permits to carry exposed weapons in British-controlled Sudan. The rifles and loads for them he passed to the two other members of his crew. Seasoned campaigners both, they dropped to the top of the load and were firing methodically while he assembled the pepper box, brought it to bear over the starboard bulwark.

One violent burst from the gun blew the nearer dugouts from the water. Another drove the savages, howling, away from the bank in a narrow arc up and down shore. Given a breathing space, he glanced back, and cursed. The nearer boats were handling well, heading out toward the middle of the stream. But the two rear dhows, their helmsmen shot down, were beating in to the bank, a whole swarm of canoes converging upon them.

He leaped aft and heaved his weight against the tiller. The dhow creaked around to point her nose toward the port shore, her great sail filling as she came broad of the wind, her starboard side listing below the water level. For one desperate moment swamping seemed inevitable as the thick Nile water poured into her and her high mast split to the strain of the collapsing sail. Then she righted sluggishly, gaining way downstream as the current took her.

ONE OF the men in the waist had taken over the pepper box. Abruptly, however, it jammed, and while he fussed over it, a pennant lance, hurled

from one of the canoes, pierced his throat, and he slid slowly forward over the bulwark into the water. Beside Underwood the Arab sank, a spear haft quivering from his breast; and dark faces bobbed up abruptly to ring the half deck around as dugouts attached themselves like devouring black ants to the dhow's sides.

Underwood released the helm and caught up a rifle. He used the butt, not the barrel, and its smashing blows momentarily cleared the stern end. But more savages, tumbling in from the waist, menaced him behind. Pain seared his ribs as a thrust spear carved flesh from his ribs. He whirled to face this new menace, but a heavy Shilluk knife knocked down his rifle guard and the flat of the knife crashed upon his skull. Beaten to the deck, his vision failing, he fought on; with the last ounce of his strength, the last shred of consciousness, battling for the mercy of death from a spear point rather than survival for savage torture. His outflung arms clasped around two warriors, brought them crashing to the deck with him; the body of one stopped a spear intended for his own breast. He struggled back up to his knees against the howling crush upon him, and kneeling, unable to rise further, snarled defiance into the faces of the blacks.

And then an amazing thing happened. A giant warrior, with his spear raised, a blood yell welling from his throat, froze into silence and immobility suddenly as if his throat had been closed, his arm caught by invisible, mighty hands. Into his eyes came a look of wonder, plain, puzzling, even to the dulled brain of Underwood. An instant the warrior stayed stiff and still, his fascinated glance fixed upon Underwood's snarling mouth. Then he struck down a pair of stabbing spears, and his black throat opened in a glad, shrill cry:

"Abu Falja! Abu Falja! The Madhi! The Madhi!"

That cry went out over the river, dominating even above the shrill battle yells of his myriad, slaughtering tribesmen.

It stopped their shouting. Miraculously, a hush came, extending to the remotest reaches of the river.

While Underwood watched through failing eyes, in incomprehension, in incredulity, black forms went down in prostration before him; black lips murmured reverentially, in religious awe: "The Madhi! The Madhi!" That he saw and heard; then a veil of blackness fell over his eyes and the mercy of unconsciousness came to his pain-pierced brain.

NOT FOR many days—days obscured by the delirium and hot agony of his wounds—did he have an explanation of the strange climax to that battle. Then, propped up in the stern of a dugout at the vortex of a great mass of laden canoes laboring up the Sobat into the highlands of Ethiopia, he had the answer from MacKinley.

"It's your front teeth, sir," his second-in-command informed him. "They're separated a bit, you know, in the form of a thin V. And silly as it sounds, that's the reason they've made a kind of diety of you—that's why we were able to commandeer their dugouts and the pick of their warriors to take us up this river."

"I remember Craig said something of the sort, back in Port Said," Underwood reminisced. "Didn't get a chance to explain, though."

"The explanation is that the Madhi, the Shilluks' great leader in their rebellion of a century ago, had teeth like that. To most of the tribesmen, he has become a god. They think he's immortal and will return to lead them again. And when that giant chief, Leoka, who led the attack on your boat, saw those teeth of yours snarling up at him he jumped to a conclusion quite understandable to anyone who is familiar with the savage mind. He pegged you as the Madhi. The fact that you had been fighting like ten men didn't hurt your cause any. The Madhi was a powerful, magnificent fighter, too."

"A lucky mistake for us," Underwood said. "Not only saved our hides—but

without these dugouts we'd have been stuck in the mud banks long ago. And we can use these warriors, too."

Reports had come to them first through the British commissioner at Malakal, then from officers of the Sudan defense force at Nasir, on the Sudan-Ethiopian border, of the dangers of the wilderness into which they were pointing. Roving bands of *shiftas*—savage Ethiopian bandits—were overrunning the provinces, emboldened by the withdrawal to the fighting lines of the Dases and Djazamuchs who had kept order by the cruel, but effective method of cutting off the hands and feet of thieves.

At Gambeli, where they halted to transfer their cargo from the dugouts to a caravan of mules, the aged *shum*, whose guests they became by the unwritten law of Abyssinian hospitality, told them more about the depredations of the *shiftas*. They had pillaged coffee caravans hurrying out of the interior, massacred the Greek and Armenian traders; raided villages, slaughtering the inhabitants to the last man, carrying off the women and children into slavery. The day before, the *shum* related, in his halting, quaint mixture of French, English and the vernacular, runners had arrived from Gorei to tell of a foray the *shiftas* had made even into that largest town in the western provinces. They had been beaten off only after they had stripped the churches of their gold, many of the inhabitants of their possessions. Most significant of all to Underwood was the fact that they had been led by a white man, "of the French," reputed to have dropped in a "devil-bird" from the heavens.

"Devereaux!" he guessed. Only one man of his wide acquaintance would have the audacity, the perverted brilliance of imagination, the brutal force and understanding of the native mind and dialects to dominate and weld together these bands of savage outlaws. Devereaux, he knew, had been engaged in the illicit slave trade in this section the year before, barely escaping torture and death when captured by the Djazamuch Myassayana, of

Gorei. What more natural than that the Frenchman, foiled first at Port Said, then in the Shilluk country, in his attempt to capture the rich prize of this caravan, should make another attempt to seize it by wresting control of the country through which it must pass?

HIS fever gone with the suddenness common to tropical ailments, his wounds healing satisfactorily, Underwood gave thought to his choice of

it a chance, if not to avoid Devereaux altogether, at least to draw him into battle on even terms.

Underwood was one to plan deliberately, and swiftly. All that night at his direction his Galla *nagadis* labored, transferring his cargo of arms and ammunition from the boats to a long string of pack mules, loading other animals with food, tents, blankets and sundry like supplies. At daybreak the party was in motion; at dawn well into a pass between the hills



The warrior stayed stiff and still, his fascinated glance fixed upon Underwood's snarling mouth.

routes. The most direct way, and the easiest, was through Gorei, slightly to the south and west. But this route, he anticipated, would be ambushed; and he decided finally upon the more difficult, longer way to Mt. Djergo, northward, and across it to Debra Kossos, where he would be met by a detachment of the Emperor's guards. It was a way never before traveled by a white man, fearsome and mysterious to even the guides the *Shum* had placed at his disposal. But he saw in

that enclosed the Sobat headwaters to the north. Ahead jogged a detachment of Shilluks, their pennant lances streaming in a light wind of morning; others of their tribe formed the rear guard. At the head of the caravan Underwood rode, accompanied by a half dozen picked warriors and his chief syce, Damisse. MacKinley commanded the rear guard.

All day they followed a faint camel trail, older than the pyramids, that on the rockier places faded out altogether. And

that night, encamped on a great plateau that seemed the roof of the world, or the face of another planet, dark, mysterious, haunted by ghostly shapes of gray that sniffed and howled in baffled savagery outside the circle of their fires, they listened to drum talk.

It began from behind them: from at, or near, Gambeli. It was caught up from somewhere to the southward, and it held a baleful threat.

"It say," translated the syce, Damisse, in the halting English he had learned as a "boy" to various exploring parties, "That ferengi-man go away not as thought. It say the way we follow, and an answer say go stop, go catch, go kill."

Underwood nodded understanding. He went outside his tent and stood looking out over the brooding plain, the throb of the drums still in his ears, the hot blood stirring in his veins. Around the fires his Shilluk warriors slept, lightly, as warriors sleep, ready at the faintest alarm to spring to their feet in howling fury! In the penumbra of the fires, sentries paced, unwearied, vigilant; proud to serve this weatherbeaten great fighter with the separated teeth of their dead Madhi.

"Come on, Devereaux!" he muttered, with satisfaction at the sight. "You've marked up a score against me that must be settled—in hot lead and whistling steel! Drop in any time. You'll find us ready to receive callers—especially callers of your kind!"

But day followed day, and the caravan straggled over the peaks of the Debra Djergo without interference or alarm. Traveling the way obscured by centuries of neglect, of the trade armadas that had brought gold and ivory from darkest Africa to the marts of Palestine and Babylon, they passed from the highlands to the wide valley of the *Kobarr Ferro*—the Great Branch. There the chill of the uplands gave way to a sticky heat, and the bare rocks and belts of stunted juniper were displaced by rolling plains of tall pampas grass, slashed by a hundred unbridged, turbulent rivulets.

Here were villages, for ages cut off

from contact with the outside world, where the language was a weird mixture of forgotten Hebraic and Negroid dialects, where the warfare reddening the frontiers to the north and west was unheard of, and a white man a startling visitor from the skies. From these villages, Underwood drew supplies: fresh meat for his men, camels and mules to replace the exhausted beasts of his caravan. And for everything he scrupulously paid, in the ingots of salt, which was the only unit of currency recognized in this buried land.

NEVER was there the slightest sign of a hostile force. Yet, climbing out of the valley by a tortuous, narrow trail, he moved with redoubled caution. Maps were blank for all this area, and distances at best could be only vague guesses; but he estimated that their party was within two days' march, or three at most, of the safe rendezvous of Debra Kossos. From a high point on the trail he had a glimpse, through field glasses, of its serrated top, painted brilliantly with the flowerings of the profuse, low trees that had given it its name. With his eye he measured the distance between, allowing for the deceit of high-altitude lights and shadows. Sixty miles away, perhaps eighty. Not more.

But between was something else upon which his glasses rested longer. Standing directly over the dry washes which any party must follow in that tumbled country, was a low, flat hill of barren rock. It seemed altogether deserted, like everything else within his range of vision. Yet all through the afternoon, as the caravan first mounted to the crest of the last great range remaining between them and their goal, then descended, he kept his eyes on it. Toward sundown, he was rewarded by a glimpse of movement of human forms, on the hill's summit, against the crimson skyline.

He commanded the caravan to a halt, called his chief syce to him.

"That *djebel*, Madhi?" the Galla repeated, in his mutilated English, gazing

toward the hill. "Ah, that is an *amba*—an *habss* where the sons of the Negus, save the rightful first-born, have been stayed until late."

Underwood's memory came to his aid in filling the gaps left by the limited vocabulary of the syce. *Ambas*, he recalled, were the high, steep hills—rock-walled bastilles, natural prisons—upon which, in former times, all members of the Amharic ruling families, except the regent and reigning head, were doomed to spend their lives to prevent their plotting against the throne. Underwood's mind leaped ahead to the implications of that fact. As a prison for royalty, the mountain would have been securely fortified; and a shrewd enemy, seeking to intercept the passage of his party, would naturally establish himself there. In imagination he could picture the carnage that would be visited upon a caravan forced to pass beneath. Rocks thundered down from each end of the pass—a hail of lead and steel descending upon the milling mules and men—in a matter of minutes not a soul would be left alive!

He commanded a halt for the night. While the tents were being pitched, the pack animals looked after, he sat immersed in thought. It was a tough job, thinking about what he had to do. Dislodging an enemy from a rocky fortress was a task many of the master generals of history had found unprofitable. Since, however, he held his power over these savages because of their belief in his superhuman powers, he did not appear to be thinking. He seemed to be making magic from a small glass ball in his hand; one of the trinkets he had brought with him as a possible present to some hostile chief. He was the typical white man of the tropics, keeping up appearances.

Rolling the little glass ball, his thought slowly took form and direction. He called his chief syce.

"Damisse, you told me, I believe, that you once studied for the priesthood?"

"Aye, Madhi." The Galla had fallen into the habit of addressing him so, though Underwood had his doubts as to

the man's sincerity. He was a merry, reckless rogue; a savage in habit, but intelligent above his kind, and something of a free thinker.

"And you gave up the study because you could not behave yourself quite as a man of the church should?"

"I gave up the study by being asked to. By what you would say request. I was the wild dog," the Galla said with gusto, his merry eyes twinkling.

Underwood looked out over the vast, rugged valley stretching away from their encampment; a restless, purple sea, in the twilight, lapping that rock-walled Gibraltar of the *amba*.

"But do you think you are enough of a priest still to deceive men not of the church themselves? A band of lawless *shiftas*, say—and a Frenchman?"

The Galla's eyes grew alert, suddenly. "I think so, Madhi. But—"

"And do you think if the gates of the fortress on top of the *amba* yonder were thrown open, a force of men attacking at dawn, could win their way into it, Damisse?"

"It is possible," the Galla said. His voice grew plaintive. "But must I go alone, Madhi?"

"No. Not alone," Underwood answered.

He called a guide to him. "Bring me the oldest and raggedest *shamma* you have, Hailu. And some of the *matrea* root that stains brown the face and limbs." He turned back to the Galla syce, and laughed in deep-chested amusement, while in his eyes twin points of light flared like sparks in the eyes of a mountain leopard after dark. "Call me not Madhi, any more, Damisse," he said. "Henceforth I am Ayaleu—an afflicted beggar, deaf, dumb, and blind—traveling under protection of your most reverend personage—and stopping with you tonight for shelter at the *amba*!"

KABATA, the *shiftas'* captain of the watch, was a vicious fellow and suspicious enough; but he saw no harm in admitting to the *amba* for the night a

wandering priest of the church and a miserable beggar with sightless eyes and a great bend in his back. Even among *shiftas* travelers are taken in from the night cold and damp; though the travelers must not be too much surprised or angered if they awaken with everything of value taken off them. Priests and beggars, unfortunately, could not be good prey; Kabata shrugged regretfully, but gave them entrance, only complaining a bit about the labor involved in winching the great bronze gates open and shut. So he was surprised and even a little shocked when his *ferengi* chief, the Ras-Monsieur Devereaux, came roaring out of the fortress hall, kicking and cuffing the priest and beggar along before him.

"*Sacre!* What manner of pigs are you?" roared the Frenchman at his guardsmen, in the vernacular. His evil eyes were bloodshot from the *tej* he had been drinking, and they flamed with anger. "Did I not tell you to admit no one—no one at all—and to shoot down without question any one who asked admittance?"

"But Ras-Monsieur—" Kabata began protest.

"Silence!" Devereaux's slap sent him spinning. "Put them out—and if they drop over the cliff in getting down in the dark, so much the better!"

He was turning to go back to his solitary, impatient drinking, when his eye was caught by the blood marks left on the worn stones of the court by the beggar's bare feet. His red-rimmed eyes fastened on those feet with sudden suspicion. He approached the beggar, looming large over the other's twisted, rag-clothed form.

"Your feet are soft," he said, in the silken voice which, in him, was like a rattler's warning. "Soft and quite small, for a *skengallia!*" He bent to peer into the beggar's black face. "There is something about you, yes," he murmured, a black frown of suspicion settling upon his brow.

The beggar did not move and his blank eyes changed expression not at all. But

slowly, almost imperceptibly, his right hand was stealing into the folds of his ragged *shamma*.

The priest spoke quickly. "My brother is afflicted, O Ras. He does not see or hear or have tongue. Your pardon."

The Frenchman's hand smote him suddenly over the mouth. "Silence, pig!" he roared, his suspicion, in the way of drunkards, resolving itself to rage. Vaguely satisfied in his *tej*-soaked brain, he swung back to his captain of the guards.

"Take them away. Throw them in the dungeons to rot," he commanded, and strode with unsteady gait back into the fortress' great banquet hall. An instant later his voice was raised in a howl for more *tej*.

Down a dank corridor, Kabata pushed the two, crowding them from behind with the muzzle of his ancient, huge revolver. To the priest's whimpers of protest, he turned a deaf ear until he caught the clink of silver from somewhere under the ecclesiastical *shamma*. Then he said "Ah!" with interest, and stopped suddenly. This was a language that he understood.

The priest took out a leathern purse, shook a handful of thalers from it, letting them glint temptingly in the light of Kabata's torch.

"Yours," he murmured enticingly. "All yours if you do not put us to the dungeon where we rot." His voice, though muted, reverberated eerily from the vaulted walls of the corridor.

The guard looked over his shoulder, indecisively. This was much money, but he feared the Ras' wrath. Then a way of compromise came to him. His face puckered into the shrewd knot typical of the bargaining Amharic. He took the silver.

"You shall have a room," he soothed. "A good room, not a dungeon." He diverged to another, narrower corridor, alive with crawling and feathered things that gave back with shrill squeaks and hisses before the torch's advance. He put a key into a door some way down the passage, swung the door open. "This," he said.

The priest went in cautiously, the beggar following. And suddenly the guard banged the door to behind them, the key grating in its lock as they whirled. His chuckle of satisfaction was audible to them as he went away, his footsteps echoing from the corridor's stone floor. He had struck a good bargain.

The beggar straightened in the gloom. He loomed gigantic, powerful, then, and his eyes gleamed with twin red points of light.

"We've been sold, Damisse," he commented dryly. "Outwitted by a Galla *shifta*."

A match crackled in his cupped hands; stayed steady even when he took in the full foulness of that prison.

"A dungeon could not have been much worse," he said, with a shudder. "Though it may be we can contrive some way out of here."

He struck a second match, and its flare was the signal for a vicious hissing from scorpions on the floor, along the walls, a great migration of massed lizards. He examined the door, and a glance showed him it was impregnable against assault. Not even iron shoulders and sinews of steel would avail against its bronze weight.

HE TURNED his attention to the window. Hewn from solid rock, it was protected by a latticework of beaten metal. He shook it experimentally, and a thrill of hope went through him as it wobbled in his hands.

"Madhi," Damisse said despairingly, "a try by the window would be of no use. It looks out only to the sky."

Underwood disregarded him. His huge hands were gripped around a perpendicular bar of the latticework, straining with all the strength of his great body against the bite of that ancient metal into stone. Quite suddenly it yielded, with squalling complaint. The latticework flew outward.

He looked out. Below him, across one hundred yards of perpendicular rock, was the tilting face of the valley. Above, to

either side, appeared nothing but bare rock. But putting out an exploring hand, he felt a crevice to which an expert climber might cling. Gripping his finger ends into it, he inched his body through the window.

Damisse's voice was raised in a wail of terror. "Madhi—you will be killed—"

"Quiet!" Underwood snapped the command in a tense, muted voice, fearful of being overheard. "Wait here—protect yourself as best you can against the scorpions—I'll come back for you at the head of a conquering army!"

He swung himself up and out. One instant he dangled dangerously, then a groping hand touched another bulge on the rock's face, higher up. From slender hand-hold to hand-hold he went, fighting upward by slow, perilous stages, to the rim of the fortress wall. Across its top he flattened, gasping, listening.

From toward the main gate, by which he and Damisse had been admitted, came a sound of singing; thick voiced, stammering. Evidently the guard posted there had followed the example of their Ras and indulged themselves in *tej*. He closed his ears to that and strained to catch any sound from the plain below. For a long time he heard nothing; then there struck upon his ears, lightly, but unmistakably, the tramp of marching men. His Shilluks coming to throw themselves against the great rock stockade!

And the gates must be opened for them. That thought beat insistently in his brain as he snaked across the top of the wall, dropped lightly into the fortress court. He reconnoitered the guard. Two of them were stretched out upon the stone flags in drunken slumber; another was unsteady at his post. But between them and Underwood was another guard, a dim shape against an embrasure in the wall. A Mohammedan, he guessed, whose religion did not permit him to drink.

Cautiously, Underwood tore a piece of stone from the crumbling parapet, flipped it over the wall. At its rattle on the rock below, the guard straightened to atten-

tiveness; leaned over the parapet, his gun ready in his hands.

Underwood leaped, a powerful, pantherish figure in the night. The guard's cry, as he whirled, was snuffed out as Underwood's fingers closed over his throat. A swift uppercut to the abdomen crumpled him forward, with no more noise than the slight cough of a man whose lungs have abruptly flattened.

Over his shoulder, Underwood looked toward the guard at the gate. Kabata, the one man left on his feet, seemed not to have heard. Stealthily as a shadow, Underwood dragged the guard into thick shadows, stripped off his ragged uniform and cap and clothed himself in them.

He took up a post by the embrasure, his face turned outward to the plain. Clearly now his ears picked out of the night the tramp and stealthy stir of men. And over the jagged eastern peaks the first gray pennants of false dawn were floating in the sky. His Shilluks would be on time!

Other ears than his had registered those sounds. From the tail of his eye he saw Kabata jerked upright, listening suspiciously. He approached Underwood, suddenly sobered as a good soldier is at the first hint of danger.

"Ali, give ear," he said, in the vernacular. "It seems I hear—"

He got no farther. Underwood turned, the rifle turning with him, and crashed down the barrel upon Kabata's skull. The guard captain crumpled.

A slight noise behind caused Underwood to straighten abruptly from his examination of the inert figure. He relaxed as he recognized Damisse's face, rising over the parapet. It was white with terror, but set in lines of invincible resolution. Though in deadly fear of his life, the Galla had followed him up. Another of the world's Invincibles!

WITH the Galla at his back, Underwood stole over to the gate. The two other men set to guard it still slept drunkenly, and along the walls were no more sentries. Underwood turned his at-

tention to the giant windlass used to open and close the massive portals.

"Damisse," he commanded softly. "Stand over those sleeping guards, while I force the gates. And if one so much as stirs in his sleep—"

"But, Madhi," the Galla protested, "to open the gates is the work of many men. Let us first kill the guards, then I will help you."

"Kill no one till you must!" Turning away from him, Underwood put his giant strength against a bar of the windlass. It resisted, while his muscles cracked; then moved a little, with a complaining squall. He threw all his tremendous muscular force into the work, and the bronze gates slowly drifted outward, their hinges squealing with a sound like a trumpet blast in the night's silence.

He heard, behind him, one of the guards sit upright, with a cry; heard the cry choke off as Damisse's gun butt came down upon his skull. A second dull thud told him the Galla had lost no time in disposing of the second man. But from the fortress hoarse voices were raised in alarm, and Underwood bent with redoubled energy to his task.

It was a maddeningly slow, exhausting job. One revolution of the winch pried the gates apart only a matter of inches; another less than a foot. Muscles cracking, his breath coming in great sobs, he was starting on the third round when the vanguard of the aroused garrison rushed out of a corridor into the court.

Damisse's rifle stabbed the darkness with a lance of fire. One of his enemies fell, and the others, in momentary panic, retreated into the corridor.

Another revolution of the winch; the great gates gaping open a few inches more! Then from the fortress corridor came a renewed hullabaloo, dominated by the giant, cursing voice of Devereaux. Out into the court washed a great wave of men, the Frenchman's tall form whipping them on. Again—twice more—Damisse's rifle spoke. He was answered with a sheet of flame, and he

sagged down, his choked cry joining with the vicious spang of bullets into the wall behind him.

Leaving the winch, Underwood sprang to him. A glance showed him the lion-hearted Galla was quite dead; pierced by a dozen bullets, he had been dying when he had fired his last shot! Dropping swiftly on his belly behind one of the dead guards, Underwood fired over it. Three times he fired; three *shifta* shapes wavered down in the spectral light of early morning, and the rush of men toward him wavered.

From their rear came the voice of Devereaux, cursing, reviling them. In deadly fear of him, they reformed, charged back. In vain Underwood emptied his gun; he had just time to spring to his feet before the mass was on him. The rifle was torn from his hand. Under a welter of bodies he went down. But, dazed by blows, fighting with the last ounce of strength in him, he still heard to his left, from the gate, the stuttering roar of a pepper box!

Before even the stabbing, smiting forms on him were blown away, with shrill cries of terror or gurgled sobs of death, he knew what that roar meant. MacKinley and the Shilluks had arrived!

The sound gave him renewed strength. He pulled himself upright, out of a shambles of dead and wounded men. He had just a glimpse of MacKinley's face, like the face of an avenging angel from behind a UMC gun mounted at the aperture in the gates; of his Shilluks, their pennant lances waving, their black throats opened in their shrill war cry, squeezing through the gates, swarming the walls, racing in vengeful pursuit of the fleeing *shiftas*. Then he was twisting away, by instinct, from a rifle butt, crashing down for his skull. He caught the blow on his upraised arm, felt the bone go as he looked into the snarling face of Devereaux!

Agony seared through him, but he held

to consciousness, and closed with the burly Frenchman. Exhausted, dazed, he was hurled back against the parapet. Dimly, he saw the Frenchman's rifle lifting for another blow. He awaited it in stunned immobility, unable to move to dodge or lift a hand. But with the gun coming down, Devereaux stiffened suddenly. He leaned a little backward, swaying on his heels, a gurgle coming up into his throat. The rifle clattered down from his nerveless hands, and he collapsed backward; his fall pushing clear through him the spear of a Shilluk springing from behind to the defense of his Madhi!

Underwood stood there, braced against the wall, while MacKinley sprang to him, threw his arms around him, exclaiming over his wounds. But Underwood gave him no attention. His wavering vision was riveted upon tall warriors in trim khaki and flaming headdresses of lions' manes, charging on horse-back through the gates, now thrown wide open.

"Who—who—" he began, from a tightening throat; and with the instinctive gesture of an invincible fighter, swayed to reach for a gun.

But MacKinley restrained him. "Those aren't enemies, sir—but friends! Friends and allies . . . His Imperial Highness' Royal Guards—summoned by our runners from Debra Kossos—to guide us to the capital, in triumph."

With an effort Underwood pulled himself together, as the guard captain, plumes waving, swung toward him. He looked around at his Shilluks, straggling back, gore-smeared, from successful pursuit of the routed *shiftas*; at his other men of many nations, mixed breeds, wan in light of early dawn, bleeding, scarred from many wounds, but undefeated, unconquerable.

"We accept the escort, with thanks," he murmured. "It's a graceful gesture, but unnecessary. With a crew like this at my back, I could cut a conquering trail from here to the other side of hell."

When Snipers Duel

*A nerve-
tingling story
of No-man's
Land*



IT WAS foggy that morning near Pont-a-Mousson, and curly wisps and streamers of white shredded up from the little valley snaking between the spines of low-sprawled hills knifing the horizon. Dawn had just grayed the heavens, bringing with it a murk of clouds to darken the sky. Now and then a fine drizzle of rain swept down on the teeth of a damp wind. The slickered, olive-drabbed Americans in a trench gashing one of the ridges overlooking the vale could not see the brook crawling through its center, no less make out the German positions across it and on the opposite slopes. Visibility was almost nilled by the wet, clammy blanket of cloud and mist.

But there was one person on the near, or American slope of the hill, who could see, and he was carefully laired in a very clever, very inconspicuous place of his own choosing and contriving, aided and abetted by innocent looking camouflage. The fact that he had survived three days in hostile terrain alive and undetected spoke full well for the artfulness of his concealment. He had made his presence

well known to the Yanks atop the hill, and his name was anathema in their trench and dugouts.

And on that murky morning he was squinting upward toward the brow of the hill with lynx eyes, the stock of a Mauser rifle resting easily against his shoulder as he lay flat on his belly in the weeds and grass. Kurt Schnaebel, *kaiserjager* and sniper de luxe of the Imperial German Army, knew his front sight and windage when it came to picking off inquisitive heads poked over parapets or laggards who dallied in crossing a bit of broken down trench wall angled to his right. A very patient fellow was *jager* Schnaebel, he chewed tobacco incessantly and waited, wary as a jackal. And rarely, very rarely, did he miss.

He had been holed-up there since crack of day, and bar accidents, would remain until dark, when he would retrace his tracks across the brook to the Jerry positions beyond, then sleep the night. And next morning, early, he would slip again to his sniping post and drill another Yank or so. Those *verdammte Amerikaner* were



The Westerner summoned his strength for another shot, sighting through blurred eyes.

stupid, *ja!* He would send more of them where they would not catch cold, thunder weather, yes!

He eased his gray-green torso sideways, peering at the open bit of caved-in sandbags and corduroy marking the U of a neat little death trap. A shadow flitted across the spot, another, a third. The *jager* grunted, shifted his cud of tobacco to the other cheek and cuddled the butt of his Mauser against his face. New bunch coming in, from the look of things, to take over—men with rifles and packs scuttling across the opening like hares. He had not shot that morning; it was light enough, now. *Jager* Schnaebel's finger caressed the trigger of his Mauser as his narrowed eyes squinted along the sights and glued upon that gap above. The next *schwein-hund*—

His finger crooked gently, and the sharp report of a rifle cracked from the slope. Herr Schnaebel grinned, spat darkly, and quickly levered a smoking cartridge out of his Mauser.

"Six," he grunted laconically.

PPRIVATE Bart Sellers, 1st Platoon, Co. M, 298th Infantry, swiftly about faced at the sound behind him. It was not

a nice sound and he had heard it before, many times. A spitting thud, a gasp, a slithering, nasty fall with the jangle of accoutrements on a trench floor. He looked down at the twitching heap of olive-drab in the muck—a bundle of thrown-away clothes that had a second before been his *compadre* and buddie. Red Lucas. Red, who had been trailing him Indian fashion along the duck-boards, and whose ribald and obscene jest, just flung, still rang in his ears.

Down, now, all sprawled out, his tin hat knocked a'winding and a stain of crimson trickling down his face that was redder than his hair. Dripping from his chin. Not even kicking now—cold turkey.

Bart Sellers stared, slack jawed, uncomprehending for a minute. He wiped a dirty paw across his sweaty face, took a step backward, stared at the halted, whispering, cursing file of men. "Spilled his guts," muttered one. "Cripes! And I gotta cross that place next!"

Sellers eyed the fatal gap dully. Sure the guides had told 'em to pull in their necks when passing it, as a sniper had it ranged and was shooting things up lately. He remembered, now—damn well he remembered. But they told you so much

bushwa in this cockeyed *guerre*, especially a new outfit coming in—fellow didn't pay much attention to what a lot of *soldats* tried to feed 'em, *soldats* who were going out for a rest . . . he hadn't shook a leg getting across that place himself—and now old Red . . . deader'n a door nail—

"What the hell's coming off up here!" snarled Top-kick Bill Tandy, shoving his way through the column. "Whadda you bozos think this is? Wanta let that Kraut son fit some more of you with a jack-pine kimono, huh? Why don't you yank that lad outa the traffic and keep stepping, huh? Here, get outa the way!"

He shoved the hesitating soldier back roughly—the one next to the gap—and leaning down, grabbed Lucas by the leg and hauled him out of the opening behind the trench, examining briefly. "*Finee*," he growled, wiping his hands on his pants. "Right through the conk, and never knew what hit him." He got up, motioned the files on.

"Git goin', Sellers," he commanded. "You can't do no good here. Tough luck. Pull the rag out, now."

The big soldier hesitated just a second, looking down at his bud. His swarthy face was contorted with fury and his mouth was a crooked scar. "*Adios*, Red," he said stiff-lipped. "They parted your dog-tags, *compadre*, but they's going to be a lot of those Krauts who'll wish they had died when they was litty babies."

He heeled and stalked off up the trench without another word or glance. And if there had been present any former acquaintance of his who hailed from the cactus and chaparral country along the Rio Grande that one would have given him a wide, wide berth. For down there Bart Sellers was a tough character with a dangerous record, known from Laredo to El Paso on both sides of the Line. He was smiling as he strode along, but it was not a nice smile. It was a smile that had sent chills of terror up the spine of more than one resolute hombre. It was the smile of a devil!

Assigned to his dugout he shucked off his pack, twisted a brown paper Durham

cigarette and began to clean and oil his rifle very carefully. The other occupants of the dugout said little to him, for they had seen and observed several instances of his temper when crossed or aroused, and they let him severely alone. And all of them knew that Red Lucas had been his buddie. They watched him covertly and busied themselves with their several affairs.

Bart Sellers was a big fellow, big without an ounce of fat. Hairy chested and hairy armed and a body like whipcord, light of foot and tread of a cougar. Dark visaged and hard faced, with flickering green eyes and a mop of rock-black hair, and a mouth like a knife slash. At times he spoke with just a little accent in his words, a soft Spanish slur mixed with the lazy Texas drawl. Bart Seller's mother had worn the mantilla of Mexico; his father was a leathern-visaged Western *ranchero*. And a dangerous and deadly spawn of that union was the fellow so grimly policing his rifle in a dugout in France that drizzly, misty morning.

He had dropped lariat and branding iron on just such a wet day one April, discarded boots and Stetson and six-shooter for spirals and tin hat and Springfield to sit in on a game being played in the Land of Poppies. And Red Lucas had gone with him—Red, his *segundo* and right hand vaquero back on the Rio. And now, now old Red wouldn't shoot up any more spig *cantinas* or tilt a shot of *tequila* to where it would do most good. He wouldn't dance any more in the moonlight to the tune of *Cielito Lindo*—wouldn't ride that pinto pony through the mesquite and huisache and prickly pears—

A second's carelessness, then keno. Just like blowing out a match!

BIG BART snapped the bolt of his rifle home viciously, spat out the blackened stub of cigarette glued to his lips and without a word or glance at the other soldats in the *abri* shoved open the gas blanket and stepped outside. As the dirty folds of the curtain fell behind him one of the soldiers said, "That fellow

would just as soon kill you as spit. Rather do it, maybe."

"I wouldn't say nothin' about him if he was dead and I knew it!" exclaimed another, a carrot-top named Touchstone.

The subject of their remarks continued down the narrow trench, his six-foot-two frame slightly hunched so as to keep his steel hat below the level of the parapet. Scores of sharp eyes were scanning the No-man's land out in front of the rusty barbs, for the fog and mist had thinned considerably and visibility was good as far as the brook, even a bit beyond. Now and then a gun would thud hollowly from one side or the other, and a shell would wail over the hill or churn up a geyser of dirt and rocks near the crest. The lines were rather far apart and little activity was afoot.

Sellers posted himself at a slit in the parados and gazed out and over the slope with narrowed, smouldering eyes. Somewhere, out there, denned up like a coyote or a *javelina*, was the son who sent Red Lucas on the long trail. Somewhere on that shell-pitted, weedy, bunch grassed shoulder of hill, hidden like a Spig quail. Well, he had hunted plenty of 'em—

Inch by inch his wary eyes combed the area. Sharp eyes, hunter's eyes, experienced and full of Western cunning. A long, long time he stood there, scarcely moving, hugging that slit in the sandbags. But all he saw was the ruffle of the tall grass in the wind, the curve of the brook, the brown sear of the slope beyond crowned by its scraggle of wire. No use looking for him that way, he decided. Couldn't make heads or tails of the land—grass too high and thick. But one thing he knew well, and that was the German "snatcher" was on this side of the creek, where not a sign of life showed.

Absently he built another cigarette, glancing back along the trench. A harassed and worried company commander was raking the terrain with glasses, and a fidgety lieutenant was standing by eating one tailor made cigarette after another, apparently with quite a bit of wind up over the whole affair. Sergeant Tandy, legs

apart and arms on hips and with a cud of tobacco the size of a hen's egg in his face, regarded the gap in the trench dourly, every now and then spitting blackly against the parados. Men avoided that deadly U like a plague spot, and those who did have to cross it went with the ducking speed of a football tackler.

The captain lowered his glasses, frowned, and passed down the steps into his dugout, the nervous lieutenant trailing. For just a minute longer Bart Sellers stared out across the dun and brown expanse ahead, his green eyes twin pools of venom under the thick black smear of their brows. He nodded slowly, almost imperceptibly, to himself.

"Your ying-yang is mine, squarehead," he muttered. "I'm gonna use your conk for an ash tray, and make a necklace out of your teeth for that estaminet frail of Red's back in Belrain. You're *spoke for*, damn you!"

Grinding out his cigarette under heel, he trailed his rifle and stepped briskly across the gap and on down the trench.

A few moments later a shadow darkened the entrance to the captain of M Company's dugout, and that worried officer glanced around annoyed. As his eyes fell upon the big, black-browed fellow standing there he gave voice to a short, "What the devil now?"

Bart Sellers came straight to the point. "I want to get that Kraut sniper," he replied shortly. "Want you to detail me, sir."

The captain stared at him. "Well, detail you to what?"

"To the job," said Bart grimly. "He got my buddy this mornin', and is still above ground. I don't aim for him to be, long."

Captain Watson smiled a bit ironically. "Just how, Sellers, do you propose to go about getting this fellow?" he asked. "You don't know where he is, no one does. I looked over every bit of that ground this morning, myself, and could see nothing with glasses. The outfit we relieved were unable to locate him, and I have a report that they tried with several patrols. Every sentry and lookout now posted reports

nothing stirring. I'd like to get him myself as far as that goes; his activity is bad for morale. But—you see!"

Bart Sellers let the trace of a smile edge his lips as the company commander turned away with a shrug. "You ever hunt much game, cap'n?" he asked slowly. "Deer, wild hogs, cougars and the like? Ever hunt Mex partridges in the sage and mesquite, sir?"

The captain hadn't. His knowledge of firearms was mostly confined to rifle range and school of fire as set out by military tactics.

"Well, I have," said Bart. "All of 'em, and then some. You ain't never goin' to nail that hombre down yonder in the grass by lookin' for him from up here. He's got to be stalked. And stalked *right*."

"H'm." Captain Watson regarded him thoughtfully. "Perhaps you are right, Sellers. Just what is your notion about this—what do you propose to do?"

"Nothin' till early in the morning," said Bart. "I figure that feller works by union hours; he'll hive-in out there all day, knock off tonight, then git back on the job before daylight. And I aim to be somewhere out there in them weeds round about daylight, too—between here and the creek. I'll git one of the boys up here to help me a little—kinda plant a decoy. And if he's down there, anywhere, I'll find him. And find him ain't all I'll do."

The captain considered this briefly, staring at the grim-visaged Bart. Then deciding suddenly, he brought his fist down upon the rough pine table with a bang. "By gosh, you might do it, Sellers!" he exclaimed. "It's just a matter of luck, anyhow. If you want the detail, it's yours. Finding that fellow is just about the same as looking for a cootie in a shirt seam—but that is your lookout. From now on you are relieved from all duty until further orders, and assigned to special service. Handle this affair your own way, but for Heaven's sake get that sniper, somehow. That's all. Send Sergeant Tandy here as you leave."

Bart Sellers saluted from his grounded rifle, and sparks were popping in his

slitted eyes. "Thanks, cap'n," he nodded. "I'll get that frankfurter, or else—*Si, senor*." He pivoted, and the gas curtain dropped behind his stalking figure.

THE dark afternoon slid slowly into early twilight. Bart Sellers, sprawled on his chicken-wire bunk in the dirty dug-out, had completed all his plans for the early morning foray. The snatcher had not shot any more soldiers, but he had sent several bullets whining through the death trap or bouncing off the parados, just to let the Yanks atop the hill know that he was still on the job. Sergeant Tandy, skeptical of Sellers' stunt, had nevertheless agreed to carry out the buck's plan regarding the decoy the following morning. "What the cap oughta do," he growled, "is send out two or three patrols and mop the weeny up with iron eggs. He might get a few of us—but we'd get *him*."

Sellers smiled thinly, and grunted. "He's my meat, sarge."

"Yeah?" The noncom spat darkly. "Better not let him see you first then, big boy—or you'll have your guts spilt all over Ponty-Mousson."

Bart Sellers pursed his knife-slash mouth and blew that note of flagrant contempt known as the "raspberry." Sergeant Tandy swore and stomped out. "And I'd bet," he snorted to himself as he weaved down the trench, "I'd bet two months' jack against the hole in a Salvation Army doughnut that the son of a horned frog will be *lucky* enough to get him, at that!"

Night settled down over the front, ushered by a drippy dusk. Now and then a flare would flame palely in the gloom, to plop and quickly fade out. Sentries stood their post with sodden slickers and little trickles of water leaking from their tin kelleys. Bart Sellers had conned the terrain beyond the rusty barbs until he knew the lay of it perfectly, and turned in to catch a bunch of shut-eye before his take-off. His plans were all made—the men who were to work the decoy understood their part—sentries and lookouts had been instructed and warned about shooting promiscuously.

Bart Sellers slept—soundly and loudly.

It was that black hour before dawn. Rio Bart Sellers stood at a shallow place in the trench, far to the right of the death-trap and in a section held by another company, ready to embark upon his hunting trip. He had not needed to be waked up by the prowling Tandy, although that worthy accompanied him to his jump-off. He wore a yellowed leather jerkin, and a Red Cross knitted helmet in place of the steel helmet. A trench knife hung at his belt, an automatic pistol was holstered against his leg and tied down, and he carried his rifle and plenty ammunition.

It was darker than a stack of black cats; cold and drizzly and foggy. No activity had been in evidence during the night, and now a curtain of silence lay along the front, unbroken by shot or flare. An uncanny, deathly quiet. With rags in the bore and around the bolt of his Springfield to keep out the moisture, Bart Sellers was all set. "Well, so long," he said. "See you later, sarge."

"Mebbe," grunted Tandy. "The damned snatcher is still above ground, remember."

"He ain't gonna be a hell of a while longer," said Bart. "*Chow.*"

Sergeant Tandy watched him snake through the gap and disappear down hill. After warning the adjacent sentries again about shooting blind, he hooked it back to his own company sector.

BART SELLERS scouted warily downgrade, moving silently as an Indian. The hill dipped gently toward the zig-zaggy little brook at its base; the ground was pocked and cratered with shell holes, the weeds and grass grew knee high and were sodden with moisture. About halfway to the brook he angled to the left toward the front of his company sector and the curve of the stream. Presently he heard its ripple over the stones; made out, in the milky curtain of fog, the tall sedge lining its banks. He had seen no sign of prowlers in No-man's land.

Dawn was slowly paling the east, a wet dawn with a chill drizzle and wind. It would be some moments yet before day-

light . . . Bart suddenly stiffened, then crouched noiselessly in the grass, every sense alert. The sound of shuffling feet came from upstream, drew closer, and through a banner of wreathing gray came the darker blots of five or six men, creeping with eerie stealth. They passed within a dozen feet of him—so close he could see the silhouette of their gobboon helmets and hear the muffled clink of their equipment.

Then they were gone, downbrook, and there was nothing save the blackness and white mist and weird shadows. "A kraut patrol," muttered Sellers. "Hooking back to their lines. Maybe my hombre will come sneaking along pronto. Gotta work over a little, though."

He found himself close to the brook, which, about that point, was the center of No-man's land. Moving silently, he reached the edge, parted the reeds and listened long and carefully. Over to the left he heard a sound, very slight, but still a noise as though someone had stepped on a loose stone. It was not repeated. And after a while he cautiously crossed the stream and slunk up the enemy slope.

Have to work carefully now. Might be outposts stuck out here, but it was yet too dark to lay doggo in the wet grass and watch for his man-killer, so he decided to prowl around Boche territory a little. Better not get too far, though, for through the darkness, some two hundred yards up, the black posts of the German wire struck stubby fingers on the skyline.

Again Bart flattened, for the crunch of boots came upgrade from the brook, and outlined against the misty dawn came stalking a soldier with coal-scuttle helmet. He spoke in low gutturals to someone, and was answered by a party off to his right. A flare plopped palely from the hill; evidently it was a signal, for the fellow changed directions slightly toward it. He stumbled once in a shell hole, and swore.

His route would lead him directly over the flattened Texan, and Bart grinned his devil's grin. He lay on his stomach like a dead man, his rifle carefully put out of the way. On came the German clumping through the grass, growling in his throat

and evidently out of humor about something. He ran foul of the prone figure, and tripped again, almost falling.

"Thunder weather! What is this?" he snarled, balancing himself and turning around. A rough hand grasped Bart's shoulder to roll him face upward. He rolled too easily. Far too easily. For Bart Sellers struck like a rattlesnake. His arm shot out, and thumb and fingers closed on the German's throat like a vise. The Boche let out a choking grunt.

Back along the Rio men knew and feared those fingers and arms of Bart Sellers, for they were tempered steel. The surprised German, taken utterly unawares, was *kaput* before he knew what it was all about or could raise an outcry. Bart twisted upward, and still holding his man's throat in a strangling grip, rose to one knee. And his green eyes and bared teeth were those of a killer, as he got his other knee under the nape of the German's neck and deliberately flattened the palm of his free hand upon the Hun's forehead. For just a second he hesitated, looking at the squirming man—

Then he pushed—hard. The body slumped after a sharp crack, and Rio Bart eased it to the ground. Swift fingers felt over it, brought to light a wallet, a Luger and other knickknacks. Sellers thrust the first two mentioned articles in his pockets, picked up his rifle and slid away downhill, still smiling his devil-smile.

"One for you, Red," he muttered softly.

HE CROSSED the brook, his eyes darting warily up and down its gurgling reaches. They glanced up at the lightening sky. They swept the misty, grassy hillside. Then he eased into a crump hole deep in the matted weeds, and waited. Dawn was breaking murkily.

Those Boche across the creek would find their buddy, soon as it came day. Bart smiled grimly. Snapped that son's neck like a match stem; a noncom, he was. They'd be scratching their square heads and wondering—wondering quite a little, he reckoned. Wished he could smoke, but it was too light now. He could nearly make

out the American wire on top of the hill—looked as though the fog was gonna lift earlier this mawnin. Hoped so.

It was cold and clammy and wet as a well digger's back in that shell hole. A shot of liquor, a cup of java and a cigarette would taste *bon* right now! Lucky that Boche stiff over on the hill hadn't raised a row and given the alarm—might have scared the snatcher off of his day's work. Bart figured that the patrols were out in front of his company's to see that no spotters were slipped out in the night to nail the sniper. For he hadn't run across any until he approached the brook at that bend.

Bart Sellers was a good waiter. Patient, deadly. He was well screened in the crater, and carefully parted the weeds and grass so he could see all around. The mist slowly shredded until he could make out the ragged strands of wire on the slope ahead, the lip of the parapet, the snaking trench along the crest. He was a bit too far to the right of his company, for the U-shaped broken wall of trench was some distance to his own right. He guessed he'd better ease over that way just a little.

No snail ever crawled along on his belly slower or more silently than did Bart Sellers as he inched out of his crater and started angling through the grass. Every now and then he would stop a long time, perfectly motionless, and listen. And his eyes, alert and wary as a lobo's, sought that death-trap on the hill constantly. Onward he wormed, from shell hole to hummock, wringing wet from head to heels and plastered with clayey mud. He wiped the water from his face with the back of a hairy, dirty hand.

A figure flitted across the broken trench wall. Bart froze, tense. The tip of a rifle slanted a second above the Yank paradoss—two tin hats showed for half a second, disappeared, then one bobbed up again, just behind a rifle barrel. Bobbed up, lingered there—

A rifle cracked on the hillside—the helmet jerked down abruptly. His comrades had done their part.

And the green eyes of Bart Sellers were those of a panther stalking his prey. And

that prey was out there in the weeds—to his right and a bit to his rear toward the brook. A good bit over that way. Bart saw no flash, but he gauged the report.

Very slowly he pivoted on his elbows, and then began his snail crawl toward the brook. Angling in a direction that would bring him to the rear of his enemy. In about an hour another decoy would pop up in the trench above; he might be able to spot the Heinie better then. The son of a gun was shore holed up *bon*—he'd say that for him. One or two shells whooped over, but there was no rifle fire. Up there at peepholes and lookout slits in the sandbags many eyes were watching the play being enacted on the slope below—a grim drama that was going to mean death for somebody. The captain—that cigarette-eating looie—old hardcase Tandy, top cutter, all looking—Bart Sellers grinned.

Captain Watson, binocular glued to his eyes, swept the expanse of hillside beyond the barbs—and could see nothing. Just wet, wavy grass, gapy shell craters, high weeds. Not a sign of life. Sergeant Tandy, profane and growling, chewed tobacco constantly and barked at his decoy detail, who, with rigged up blouses, tin hats and rifles were baiting the sniper.

"Easy there," he admonished the carrot-topped buck named Touchstone. "Don't go jamming that kelly along the parypet too often. Next time stick the blouse into the gap—jumpy like, savvy? And wait till I tell yuh to do *that*, see?"

"I see no signs of Sellers out there, lieutenant," said the captain. "I'm afraid he has been captured, or worse. And the Boche is out there and on the job, we know."

KAISERJAGER Kurt Schnaebel, holed in his crump crater and hidden by weeds and camouflage, chewed tobacco stolidly and kept his gaze fixed upon the trenches above. His Mauser lay across one arm, his toes dug in the dirt, the other hand, with arm thrust forward, held open a slit in the screening blanket which he fired through. There seemed to be quite a bit of activity up above this morning, *ja*.

He was a chunky, thickset fellow, with bullet head and close clipped poll, heavy jowled and blue eyed. And the Boche knew his okra when it came to body-snatching. His post was so cleverly concealed that a wandering patrol might stumble right into it without realizing its presence. He felt very secure.

As an olive-drabbed and helmeted figure lurched into the gap he fired quickly, and smiled grimly as the tunic and tin hat nose-dived abruptly.

"Seven," he said. He did not know that Sergeant Tandy was carefully redraping number 7, a blouse and helmet over a rifle, and eyeing the little tear in the olive drab. "That Kraut can shoot," admitted the non-com grudgingly. "Glad I wasn't inside it."

Bart Sellers, flat on his belly in the grass, had seen that second shot. There had been no flash, but he knew exactly where the fellow was hidden by the report, for he was not far away from the Texan. Just a little bit ahead, and to his left. Big Bart had squirmed his way to the rear of the Boche's handout.

Jager Kurt Schnaebel had a puzzled look in his blue eyes, a crease of frown across his forehead. What kind of game was that those *verdammt* Yankees were playing on top of the hill? Twice, now, helmets had popped up above the parapet—two, three times an ungainly sort of object lurched into the gap and flopped there, then was quickly withdrawn. Thunder weather! It was a mannikin, a dummy of some sort dangled out there by those stupid swine. Trying to make him show his hand, eh? Well, one would see.

Herr Jager turned over on his stomach, and holding his Mauser in a pudgy right hand, inched himself out of his hiding place and began crawling along a dim trail writhing away to his left. He was just a green snake bellying along the ground in the grass, and some twenty-five yards away he slid down into a duplicate copy of his first sniping pit. It was identical in every way with the one he had just quitted; camouflage, twined weeds and grass, scooped out hole for his body, screening blanket.

Bart Sellers, watching like a hawk, saw the barely imperceptible movement of the grass, sensed rather than saw someone worming along there. The Kraut was changing positions—coming his way. And when the rustle of weeds stopped the sniper was not over thirty yards from the flattened, frozen Texan. The faint snick of a rifle bolt came to his ears, but low in the grass, he could see nothing.

The early morning had darkened suddenly, and a brisk rain squall was sweeping up the valley. Only in very low places did the mist wreaths hang, but the murky sky made the day dismal. Now and then, in the gap, the dummy still waggled grotesquely, but no answering rifle crack came from the slope.

Bart Sellers, never taking his eyes from the spot where the grass had ceased its whispery rustle, slowly, very slowly, breathed himself upward on a left elbow, raising his head to look through the top of the weeds. His eyes were two slits of venom, his knife-slash mouth a thin, cruel line. Perhaps the Kraut had seen him, he didn't know or care, now. It was a duel to the death, out there on that wet slope under a darkening sky, with the first big drops of rain beginning to pelt down. Higher—just a little bit—

They saw each other at the same time!

On their knees, their rifles flamed, and the two reports blended as one. Coal-scuttle against knit helmet, forest green tunic and yellow leather jerkin, Mauser vs. Springfield. And the crack of the reports sounded like one, lone shot.

The *Jager's* bullet struck Bart Seller's on the left hand as it grasped the barrel of his gun, just below the knuckles, and sheared away the first two fingers as it flattened against the steel and ricocheted off with a baffled whine. The Texan's bullet caught Kurt Schnaebel square in the throat, and he pitched face forward with a gush of crimson from nose and lips.

The body-snatcher of Pont-a-Mousson had ceased to function.

Biting back an oath of pain, Bart Sellers looked grimly at his pulped hand a moment, tied a handkerchief tightly about

his wrist with the aid of his teeth, got to his knees and crawled over to the body of his late antagonist, trailing his rifle. The fellow lay in a pool of blood, and was quite dead.

"Keno," Bart muttered softly. "All square now, Red. Treat him rough, bud-die."

He glanced uphill, where the dummy still waggled in the gap, and grinned without mirth. He took the sniper's rifle, ammo belt and belt buckle, slung the camouflaged gobboon helmet in the crook of his gory left arm, and got to his feet. Turning to the German lines across the brook he made a very ribald raspberry, waved the two rifles defiantly, then wheeled and started up the slope toward the American wire in long, zigzag strides, paying no attention to the sudden crackle of rifle fire that burst from the crest beyond.

Bullets whined and thudded into the earth hard by, but Big Bart never hesitated. He could run fast for a large man, and in a very few moments he snaked through a wire gap, hurdled the parados and flung himself into M Company's trench, panting and blood spattered.

An excited, milling gang of olive-drab men immediately surrounded him, all talking at once.

Captain Watson, pushing his way through the mob, ordered the men to disperse. "Do you want to let the Germans drop a shell now and wipe out half the outfit?" he barked. "Fall back." Then, to Sellers, "How, in God's name, did you do it?"

"Stalked him," said Rio Bart. "And I brung you his gun, bandolier and tin kelly for a souvenir. I gotta get this mitt policed up."

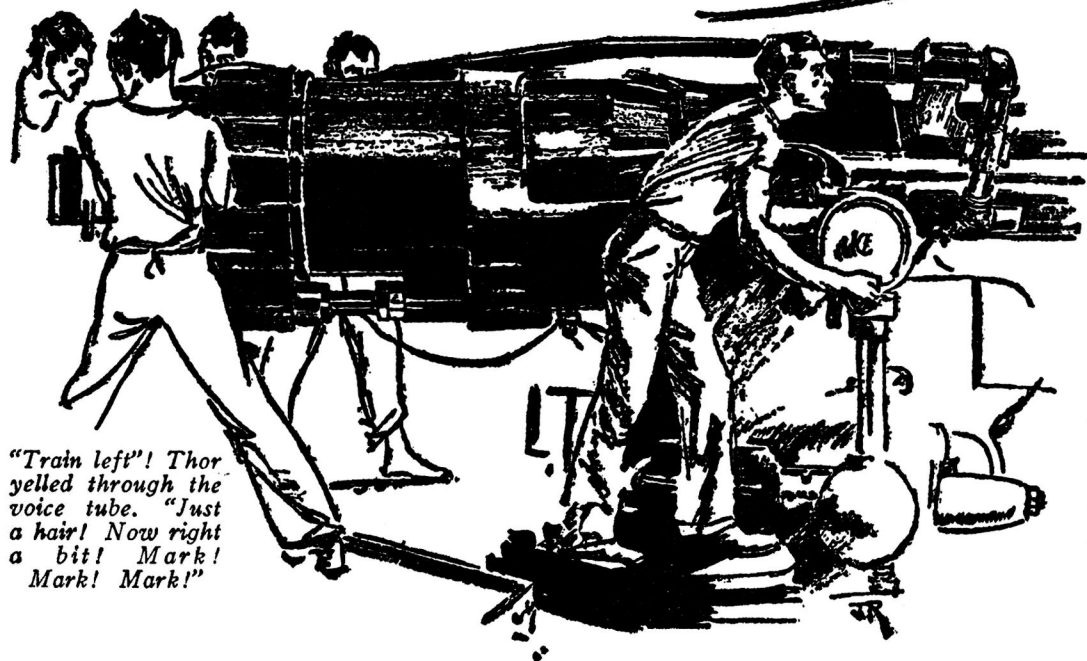
"Lucky," said the captain. "Very lucky. Oh, well—anyhow, the Hun's laid out. And you rate a hospital. All right all around."

"Yeah, lucky," muttered Sergeant Tandy. "Some says so. Damned smart shootin', I calls it." Aloud, "Good work, Sellers. What you aimin' to do now?"

"Spit in my messkit and call it a crop," said Private Sellers.

Targets for the KAISER

By LLOYD KOHLER



"Train left"! Thor yelled through the voice tube. "Just a hair! Now right a bit! Mark! Mark! Mark! Mark!"

When those old battle wagons go into action you can lay to it, mates, that there will be plenty of simon-pure, nerve-tingling excitement. If you don't believe it, read this splendid story of the sea.

THE four battleships lay anchored in the calm, greenish-blue waters off the coast of Virginia less than two hours' run to the navy's southern drill grounds. They wallowed peacefully in a perfect line formation, and at the head of the line lay the flagship *Columbia*.

Almost directly abaft of her stern, swinging lazily with the tide on their black, steel tethers, lounged her three sister ships. One full, proud division of the fleet which, with the dawn, would steam confidently forth to attain, if possible, new records of naval marksmanship before casting their lot with the British ships in the North Sea.

Each of the men-o'-war were cleared as for actual battle; boats and davits on

both quarterdeck and forecastle were down and stowed; life-lines had disappeared; steel hatches made ready for instant lowering. On two of the ships, ambitious turret crews were swabbing out the muzzles of the great twelve-inch guns.

But on the flagship all was singularly quiet; for everything, with the exception of minor details, was already in readiness for the test. Men stood about idly in groups and gossiped, and the subject was always the same—tomorrow's firing on the range and what they would do when they sighted Germany's men-o'-war.

One group of sailors which was congregated near the eyes-of-the-ship was noticeably larger than the others, and far more boisterous. Here a heated argument was

in progress. In the center of this group, doing most of the wrangling for the plainly more confident and aggressive faction, pranced an excited, wiry and bald-topped coxswain, whom the gobs called "Baldy."

"I don't believe in arguin'," the coxswain almost shouted, "but money talks, I says, so if yuh don't think our gunpointers—get me, I says *gunpointers!*—can trim the whiskers off'en that bunch of amateurs, why, just put yer coin where yer mouth is."

A BOISTEROUS laugh from the third division backers followed his words. The first division sailors had been as loyally backing their own turret to win. The coming firing on the range was a vastly different affair than the routine range work heretofore. They were in the war now, and some time soon, they hoped, they would be dropping shells on Kaiser Bill's men-o'-war. This was the last range practice, a personal, important affair and excitement was white hot.

One of the first division sailors, turning to leave the group, caught sight of a blond, smiling gob who was coming rapidly forward along the fo'c'sle toward them.

He turned to the flaxen-haired seaman who had almost reached the group.

"Hey, Thor, this bird is givin' youse forward-turret guys the razzberry. Says the Kaiser more'n likely send you kisses when he finds you birds are at the guns!"

"He don't have to repeat nothin'—I'd have heard that without strainin' my hearin' even if I'd been down in the double-bottoms," Thor Storkerson declared good-naturedly.

"Well, Whitey, if yuh got ears as yuh claim," laughed Baldy, "put yer paycheck where yuh got yer tongue!"

"How much do you want us to cover?" asked Thor. His face was flushed and his blue eyes flashed.

"Ah, save yer pennies, Thor," laughed Baldy. "If I want yer money I'll take it away from yuh more honest-like in a crap-game down in the double-bottoms."

"How much do you want us to cover?"

BALDY pulled up his jumper and extracted three rolls of green and yellow bills from a money-belt.

"Here's three hundred and fifty bucks of third division money that we'd like to see covered, pervided youse birds is got nerve enough—"

"Nerve!" Thor sneered, his blue eyes flashing angrily. "Our outfit's got as much of that stuff as your division, Baldy."

"Yeah! Then youse birds all cover our roll, eh?"

"Just keep your money handy, Baldy, an' it'll be covered before the firin' starts."

A few minutes later, on the port side of the forecastle, Thor came upon "Spic" McMein, his swarthy-faced firing-pointer, with Lieutenant-Commander Dill, who were leaning on the life-line and peering down at the water-line.

As Thor came up, the officer pointed down over the side. "Did you ever see one of these fellows this far south, Thor?" he asked, smiling.

Thor's eyes followed his pointed finger. Below them a sleek, dark-brown seal lay calmly on the armor-belt, half awash, blinking its tiny eyes innocently.

"No, sir, I never saw one this far south before," Thor declared.

"He's been swimming back and forth among the ships all day," the officer continued. "Seems to enjoy lying on the armor-belts. Wonder where the poor little rascal will go tomorrow when the ships get under way? And that reminds me—you two men are the pointers on the twelve-inch guns in the forward turret, aren't you?"

"Aye, aye, sir."

"I hope you make good tomorrow," the officer said simply. "We'll be shooting at real targets soon," he added significantly.

"It's goin' to be some nifty shootin' them babies has got to do tomorrow," he said gravely, nodding his head with a decisive little jerk toward the black muzzles of the forward-turret's twin twelve-inch guns. "And we're the birds that's got the main job of clinchin' that bet."

"What bet are yuh yawpin' about?" Spic demanded.

AS Thor told the coxswain of the aft-turret's three hundred and fifty dollars, and of his promise to Baldy that his division would cover their money, Spic's black eyes flashed with eagerness and determination.

"Yeh, they tell me the aft-turret is goin' tuh be a hard nut to crack this time, but I'll put all that's left of my last paycheck on our own fire-belchers," Spic declared. "They may beat us, but we ain't no crew of pikers, an' they got it to do before they get our jack. The third division is puttin' a lot of stock in Baldy. They think he's a rabbit's foot."

"He is something of a reg'lar human four-leaf clover, ain't he?"

"Yeh, that bird's been stickin' feathers in his flat-hat every time he's fired for years, and he's gettin' to think he ought to be the admiral of the Atlantic Fleet, but I'm thinkin' we'll do a little feather-stickin' on our own tomorrow."

"I'm hoping we can," Thor said, but somehow, to the coxswain, his tone was none too confident. "They seem to think they've got us cinched. They're all rated first-class gun-pointers, an' you're the only rated pointer the for'ard-turret's got. That's why they figure we haven't a chance."

"That's the bunk," Spic declared. "I've been a rated pointer for two years, but that's no proof that I won't miss the whole blamed target!"

"I'd hate to see our men lose their money, Spic," Thor said moodily.

"Don't get funny," the coxswain advised. "I gotta get my hammock up on the boat-deck before some flat-foot grabs my swingin' place in the for'ard bullring, so I gotta be goin'."

Thor stared thoughtfully after the departing coxswain until he disappeared in the shadows between the for'ard-turret and the main-deck superstructure. Then he walked slowly to the life-line and peered down at the murky water.

It was growing dark rapidly, but he could see that the armor-belt was deserted. The seal was gone. Apparently he had tired of being forever watched and had

put off in search of a more secluded resting place.

THE following day broke clear and warm, with the sea an endless crystal plane of greenish-blue water. It was an ideal day for firing on the range, and the spirits of both officers and men mounted higher with the rising of the sun.

As they stood out toward the range, Mr. Hiller, the senior officer of the first division, met both pointers and the trainer of his turret. A moment before they had been lounging under the turret's overhang, but they had jumped to their feet with the officer's approach.

"Figuring out a plan of battle, men?" the lieutenant smiled. "The for'ard-turret should make its mark on a day like this, and I have a feeling that it will. By the way, Spic, you've assigned the men in our division without gun-stations to the target-repair party?"

"Aye, aye, sir."

"That's good. The captain don't want any unassigned men running about the ship today."

"We only have three men in the first division without gun-stations, and I've assigned them to the repair party."

"And that Negro—what did you do with him?"

"He's assigned to the target-repair party, sir."

The officer nodded approvingly.

"That's very good," he said. Then he hurried aft to the quarterdeck.

"Negro, did he say?" Thor asked abruptly, the moment the officer had disappeared around the corner of the main-deck superstructure. "What black boy is that? Didn't know we had one in the first division."

"No, and neither did I 'til yesterday," Spic laughed. "He won't be in the division long, but we'll teach him how to use a holy-stone an' a few more tricks while he is with us."

"What's the big idee—puttin' the black boy on deck?"

"Well, this bird was assistant to the captain's steward. Seems like he was

stealin' the good eats or somethin', an' the skipper had to crack down on him."

"So he decided to put him on deck an' let him do some real man's work, eh?"

"Yeah, that's it," the coxswain declared. "Believe me, he'll be prayin' to his gallopin' dominoes to get back to peelin' spuds before today's work is over."

THOR and the trainer laughed heartily. Just then a powerful blast of the ship's siren announced that they were coming on the range, and the three men scurried up into the turret.

The gun crews were already at their stations; the flagship would fire first. Each turret was to fire separately, and word came over the sight-setter's telephones and voice-tubes that the aft-turret would fire the first run.

By this time the forward-turret was able to bear on the target, and although only the aft-turret would fire this run, the forward-turret's pointers and trainer enthusiastically checked up on the target.

"Train left," yelled Thor through the voice-tube. "Just a hair! Now right a bit—right a hair—a hair! Mark—mark—mark!"

And then—

"All right—that'll do. Left gun! Oh, Spic!—give me a mark!"

A moment later the firing-pointer's voice could be heard distinctly as Thor elevated and depressed the monster guns. "Mark!—mark!—mark!—mark!"

Exactly with the last "mark" the commencement-firing gong began clanging furiously, and with an upward thrust of the arm Thor brought the gigantic, electrically-controlled guns back to the loading position. A second later he was peering breathlessly through the telescope-sight port-hole toward the target off the port-beam at which the rival gun crew would soon be firing.

Two, short stand-by buzzers sounded nervously. Then, almost at once, followed the firing buzzer. With its first tingle there was a tremendous roar, and as the smoke cleared Thor's excited eyes followed the huge black shells as they trailed a long

arc through the air and then crashed through the upper edge of the canvas target.

The impatient Thor waited breathlessly. The aft-turret's second salvo was even more fortunate, tearing its way half a foot below the first direct hit, and nearer the bull's-eye.

Baldy was right, Thor mused. Those first two salvos proved that there were "reg'lar" pointers in the rival turret.

Another roar. But when the smoke cleared away Thor almost rejoiced to see that the third salvo was not so fortunate. The pointer's aim was perfection itself, but the trainer's hand had fluttered at the critical moment, the turret had swung slightly to the right with the result that the left gun's shell struck the target fairly mid-way between the top and base on the extreme right edge. The right gun's shell missed entirely.

WITH the clanging of the cease-firing gong, the forward-turret's men, laughing and chatting wildly, swarmed out upon the forecastle for a breath of fresh air until the *Columbia* should circle back upon the range again.

"Well, our rivals have done their worst," smiled Mr. Hiller, the division officer, as he faced Thor a minute later, "They made a fine attempt, and but for that last salvo we'd have a hard record to beat. They're real pointers! Heaven help the enemy when we meet!"

Thor laughed, but the laugh seemed a trifle forced.

"Well, I'm not a rated pointer," he declared, "but I hope our old turret can better what they've just done."

"I hope you can," the officer said thoughtfully. "You can never be sure until the last salvo is fired." He turned abruptly to Thor. "But what I want you to do most," he said, "is to qualify today as a first-class pointer."

"I'll do my best, sir."

As a second blast from the *Columbia's* siren announced that they were again coming on the range, the coxswain nudged Thor sharply and pointed toward the mo-



ONE WOMAN TO ANOTHER

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tor-launch that was rapidly kicking away from the target off the battleship's star-board bow.

"I'll bet that dark-skinned boy wishes he was back in Africa with his great-great-grandpapa about now," he laughed. "It ain't no kid's job out there with the target repair party, and besides I'll bet the rest of the birds out there are handin' it to the black baby kinda heavy."

* Thor shaded his eyes and looked interestedly after the boat.

"Yeah, but I can't make him out in the boat—can you see him?"

"Maybe he's restin' in the sternsheets," the coxswain laughed. "Come on, he'll keep—we'd better be gettin' to our battlestations."

The commence-firing gong found the crew of the forward-turret alert and impatient; the pointers and trainer industriously checking up on the target for the last time. Then, finally satisfied, Thor

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brought the great guns down to the loading position.

Almost instantly he heard the deafening sound of the heavy electric tray rumbling up from the handling-room with its staggering load of ammunition. There came the rattling sound of the powerful electric rammer racing out and then back into place—once, twice, three times. All this followed instantly by a sharp, almost inaudible click; then the ready-lights blazed before his eyes.

With the flash of the red signal, Thor thrust his arm downward rapidly and the huge guns came up quickly to bear on the base of the target. The stand-by buzzers found the telescope-sight's horizontal-hair quivering about the lower edge of the bull's-eye, and with the first tingle of the firing buzzer the pressure of Thor's hand upon the brass wheel increased perceptibly. The minute horizontal line mounted steadily and stood quivering on dead-center.

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As the smoke and flame cleared quickly, Thor's eyes followed the black projectiles as they described the usual arc and then plunged through the target just above the bull's-eye.

An almost unconscious upward thrust of his arm had brought the twin guns back to the loading position, and while the gun-crew worked feverishly at the second load, the big blonde seaman rejoiced.

"We're beatin' 'em!—we're beatin' 'em!" he told himself gleefully. "Our first salvo makes any one of their three look silly!"

The second salvo was even a trifle better directed than the first, tearing its way just below the bull's-eye. Thor was overjoyed.

With the glad assurance of a victor he swung the great guns upward for the last time. Then, suddenly, his eyes grew wide

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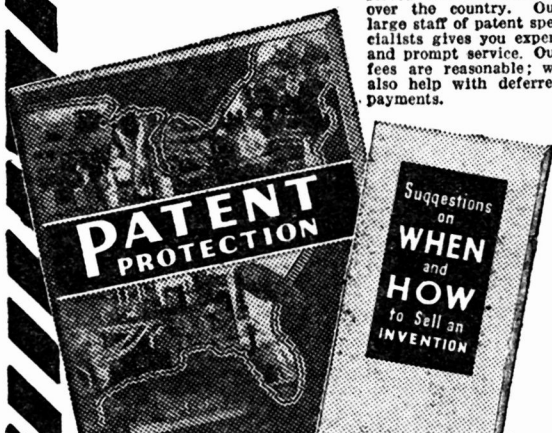
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with horror. Around the corner of the target-raft came a black head and shoulder, and the next instant a dusky elbow was thrown up out of the water and over the edge of the raft.

Slowly, but with a frightful certainty, the truth flashed before him. The Negro mess-attendant—somehow he had been left behind!

Again the stand-by buzzers sounded. To Thor they now held a certain terrible meaning.

There was no time to cry out. There was no time for questions which, unanswered, brought only greater perplexity and confusion.

"What the devil's wrong? Get on the target—quick!"

THE irritating words, plainly in anger, were yelled by Spic, the firing pointer. But with a grim determination Thor held the big guns at the unheard-of elevation.

A smothering feeling of despair came over Thor Storkerson—the sort of anguish that comes with defeat at the moment when victory has been almost within grasp.

That dusky head and glistening ebony shoulders were still before his eyes. With an effort he pulled himself together and peered again through the hood's port-hole, but the trainer had already begun training in and the target-raft was no longer visible.

As he stepped down from his station he found himself face to face with the turret officer, Lieutenant Hiller.

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"What was the trouble, Thor?" The officer's tone seemed almost an accusation. "The first two salvos could hardly have been beaten—why didn't you get on with that last firing buzzer?"

"There was a man clinging to the target-raft, sir! I didn't see him until after the first two salvos were fired, but I—I couldn't fire then—not at a—man."

"A man?"

"Yes, sir!—he swam around the front of the raft! It was so far away—I couldn't be sure. But his face and body were black. It must have been that colored boy with the repair party."

MR. HILLER was thoughtful for a time. Then he put his hand firmly upon the seaman's shoulder in a fatherly way.

"Don't tell that story to any one, Thor—never. Do you understand? Don't repeat it."

"Aye, aye, sir," he said dejectedly.

"It's not that I think you've made up some fantastic yarn to cover your reasons for not firing," the officer hastened to add. "I don't understand this exactly, but you are sincere in your belief—I can see that. But the repair party would hardly have left a man on the raft—that is almost beyond reason. Still I'll make inquiries—especially in regard to the Negro lad."

"Then what—"

"What did you see?" the officer interrupted. "I don't know. But the concussion from this heavy-gun firing is likely to be a strain on some eyes. It's possible—yes, it's possible that your eyes have been affected. This will have to be explained to the captain, and no doubt your eyes will be tested. I hope that it comes out all right, but I'm afraid the captain won't allow me to use you as a gun-pointer again. I'm sorry."

"Never fire again?"

"I don't know. Perhaps if the test finds your eyes still holding 'twenty-twenty,' but even then the captain may not allow me to use you in the pointer's hood. There would still be the danger, you know, of

your eyes going wrong at the critical moment. We can't take a chance on that now. You know, the next target we shoot at won't be made of wood and canvas—"

When the officer had gone Thor stayed for a time in the now deserted turret. So

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this was to be the end of his heavy-gun pointer ambitions, no chance to fire a shell at the enemy.

IN the quarterdeck he was bombarded with many questions. Why hadn't he fired? Had the juice—the power—gotten beyond control, and if so, how? Was he crazy—loco? Why didn't he say something?

"I ain't talkin' now. Maybe I'll tell you sometime."

And still later, the words of Spic McMein quieted the last of the doubters.

"Don't blame Thor, fellers," he admonished. "He's played square—yuh all know that. Mr. Hiller was talkin' to him right after the firin'. He's ordered Thor to keep mum, and that's why the Dane ain't talkin'. I reckon the power went on the blink—got out of control, mebbe—and Hiller's tryin' to keep it from gettin' out."

And although the firing was the only subject discussed by the crew, no man mentioned it directly to Thor Storkerson until three hours later. Then it was his coxswain friend, Spic, who, meeting him for'ard on the gun deck, told him the outcome of the betting.

"Well, Thor, there ain't been any bets paid yet—and there ain't goin' to be," Spic confided. "The aft-turret claims the honors, and so do we. The umpiring officers say it's a pretty even break. They had five direct hits to our four—but every one of our hits was nearer the bull's-eye than any one of their three. Consequently, the umpires can't agree. So they've decided to make it a tie."

PRECISELY at the same hour, Mr. Hiller, at the officer's mess, was diplomatically running out verbal "feelers" among his fellow officers.

"Mr. Colton," he asked absently, "how did that colored lad make out with the repair party today? Didn't fall overboard or anything?"

"How'd he make it?" the young officer laughed heartily. "Say, you will have to ask *him* to be exactly sure, but I take it

that he's ready to go back to washing pans and looking after the admiral's dog. Fall overboard! Not that baby!"

The officers laughed heartily.

"By the way," the young officer's face suddenly became more serious, "that reminds me of something else. You remember that seal that's been swimming back and forth between these four ships for the last day or so, lying on the armor-belts? Well, as soon as we got away from the target the first time—after the aft-turret had fired—I made him out swimming to the target-raft. And he stayed there—while the for'ard-turret was firing."

"By George," the lieutenant-commander was saying, "*that's* what I saw! I made it out with my binoculars from the foretop. Sighted it first right after the for'ard-turret's second salvo. Do you know—you may laugh, but it's true—from that distance I couldn't be sure just what it was, but the first thing I thought of was that Negro mess-attendant; thought maybe the colored boy had been left behind; somehow. I've been wondering about it ever since, but I didn't say anything for fear I was mistaken. Funny, I never thought of that blamed seal."

Mr. Hiller found Thor sprawled disconsolately under one of the star-board six-inch guns on the gun-deck.

"Come, come," the officer beamed, "it isn't as bad as all that even if you did fail to fire the third salvo."

But Thor was not to be consoled. "It may not seem so to you, sir," he said huskily, "but it means the end for me."

And then, taking pity on the blond giant, Mr. Hiller told him of the mistake.

"But," he ended, with a twinkle in his eyes that Thor failed to notice, "you'll never be allowed to make such a mistake again."

"I knew there was a catch in it, somewhere," Thor replied.

"The next time you handle a gun," interrupted the officer, severely, "it will be as first pointer—*first pointer*, understand, and when you fire a salvo let's hope it will be at a target supplied by the Kaiser."

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