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No kiddin', a pin dropping would have sounded like an exploding bombshell. Jim Smith looked at me, I stared at Ed Johnson. What was going on? Who was this newcomer? What kind of a bird would he be? Who was going to be “fired”? J. P. sure had us in a dither—and I mean dither!

And then, through the door staggered the office boy carrying a tray as big as a cart wheel. On top of it stood twelve big, gleaming bottles of Listerine Antiseptic.

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**OCTOBER
1940**

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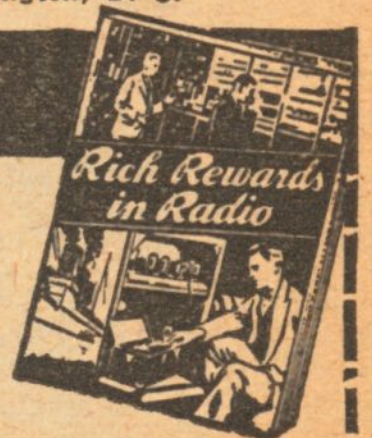
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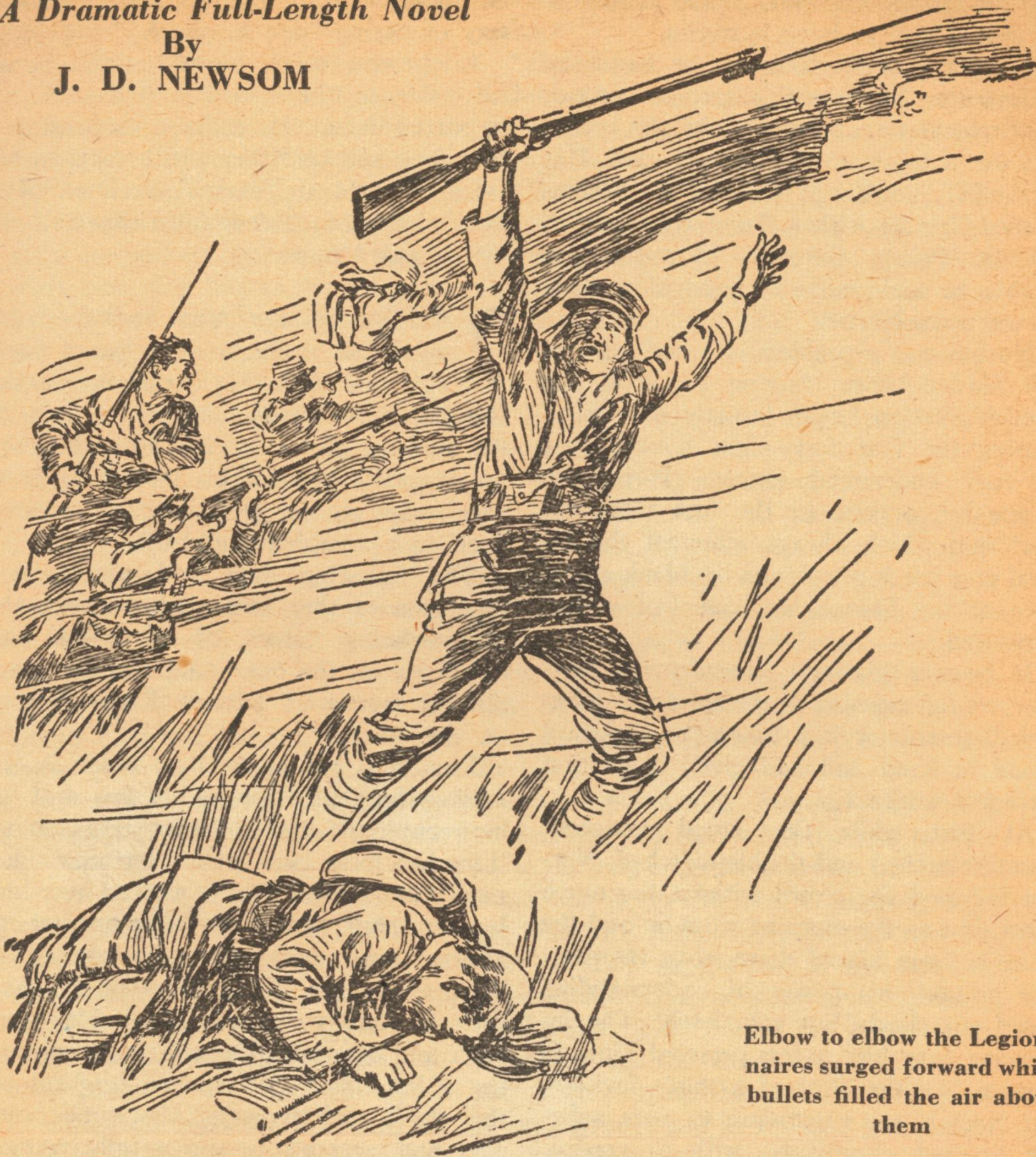
Soldiers of Misfortune

Legionnaire Kirby Norton had a hard time understanding the French language—but later it became increasingly harder to understand other values for which he and so many other Legionnaires were fighting



A Dramatic Full-Length Novel

By
J. D. NEWSOM



Elbow to elbow the Legionnaires surged forward while bullets filled the air about them

CHAPTER I

CRAZY AMERICAN

“**B**ALAI,” explained Sergeant Grunovski, holding out a dilapidated bass broom. “*T’es de corvee de quartier, entends-tu, espece de cretin. Balaye-moi la cour!*” #

Legionnaire Kirby Norton surveyed the broom and the sergeant with a grave and

#“Broom. You’re on fatigue duty, do you hear, you dumb-bell? Sweep the courtyard!”

thoughtful eye. “Right smart looking weapon,” he nodded, speaking in English. “You oughtn’t to shake it that way, Horse Face. It’s an antique. All of them beautiful bristles are going to fall out if you ain’t careful.”

He made no attempt whatsoever to take the broom out of the sergeant’s hands.

Grunovski was not a patient man, but he controlled his temper with a superhuman effort which was painful and startling to behold. His eyes bulged, a network of purple veins stood out on his forehead,

and his lips twitched and jerked as though he were about to have hysterics.

For the past five minutes he had been endeavoring to make this accursed recruit comprehend that he must take the broom and use it to sweep the barrack yard. Unfortunately, although he was an accomplished linguist with a fluent command of French, Polish, German, Ukranian and Arabic, he could make no impression whatsoever upon Norton.

Norton was a problem. He had been at the Sid-bel-Abbes training depot of the French Foreign Legion exactly nine days. During the first forty-eight hours either he had understood enough French to scrape by, or else in the first rush and confusion which always attended the arrival of a batch of recruits his blank ignorance of the French language had passed unnoticed.

It became glaringly conspicuous, however, on the morning of the third day when a drill instructor had taken the awkward squad in hand and had given it its first intensive workout.

At first while the squad marched, countermarched and double-marched, Norton followed the crowd without too much effort, but as the morning wore on and the white-hot sun blazed down upon the exercise ground, his power of understanding faded out slowly but completely. The instructor gave him a few personal hints in a voice like the blast of a ship's foghorn, but Norton was impervious to mere noise. He listened attentively, with a puzzled, cheerful look on his sharp-featured countenance; then he said, "Ah, oui. We-we-we-wee!" and did the wrong thing in a brisk and clumsy manner.

The more the instructor howled at him, the less he understood. Not a word could he grasp. A more thorough-going imbecile had never been wished upon that apoplectic instructor. Norton marked time when ordered to "about turn by numbers"; he came smartly to a halt, and threw the ranks into dreadful confusion verging upon collective insanity, when urged in impassioned accents to advance "*au pas de gym-*

nastique," which is the roundabout French way of saying "double march!"

In the end, to rid himself of this baneful influence, the instructor had to admit to partial defeat. He called a corporal and four men and told them, with tears in his voice, to lock the sacred specimen of a dirty, lousy, rat-faced American half-wit in the guard room.

NORTON did not seem to experience any sense of shame. The guard room was cool and dark. He curled up on the sleeping platform and spent the rest of the morning gently snoring while the awkward squad, freed of his disturbing presence, made up for lost time and sweated itself to a complete standstill.

The following days had witnessed a repetition of that first clash between the overwhelming forces of discipline and obedience on the one hand, and the magnificent inertia of Recruit Kirby Norton on the other.

English is not in common usage in the Legion, for Anglo-Saxons are few and far between in its ranks. Nevertheless something had to be done about Norton. Skilled non-commissioned officers worked over him by the hour, doing their damndest to arouse some spark of understanding in his gray matter. While he stood at ease, with his hands clasped behind his back, erect and determined as a bantam rooster, the ablest, most clear-spoken sergeant on the depot staff repeated the same order over and over again, and a fully trained Legionnaire carried out these orders with scrupulous precision. And they got nowhere.

Norton's mind was not only a blank, it was a sieve. Two consecutive orders were more than he could begin to memorize. With snappy determination he would run off in the wrong direction, or else he stood stock still, staring at his mentor with a questioning look in his eyes, shaking his head slowly from side to side as he sighed: "Gosh, I wish I could get the hang of this *parlez-vous!* All this cultured stuff goes right over my head. Boy, it breaks my heart to see you all lathered up on a

hot day like this." Then he would frown.

But he had a retentive ear for music. The notes of the mess call held no secrets for him. He mastered them almost at once, which aroused the suspicions of an observant corporal and caused Norton to be marched before an officer who sat in judgment in a small, whitewashed room decorated with fly-specked memoranda and a plaster cast bust of a buxom damsel symbolizing the French republic, on whose nose and cheek bones layers of dust had been accumulating for many years. Three clerks, scribbling furiously, bent over a long table against the wall.

The officer, a tall, angular gentleman with patent leather hair and a close cropped mustache, examined Norton with unfeigned curiosity.

"Norton," he remarked at last, speaking slow and labored English, "what is it that is then the matter with you?"

Norton's eyes flew wide open and an expression of glad surprise brightened his countenance.

"The matter with me, sir?" he echoed. "Not a thing! I'm certainly glad to meet somebody who can speak my own language!"

"Quite so," agreed the officer, placing the tips of his fingers together as if he were about to pray; "but are you making an effort to understand what is said to you? I am informed that you do not try to obey orders."

"Me!" exclaimed Norton. "Why, say, I just can't learn fast enough. If they talked slower, I could get the hang of what they're saying. You know what it is, you can't learn a foreign language in five days. I can't, anyway."

THE officer swallowed hard. Such friendliness on the part of a recruit was positively unseemly.

"Kindly recall that you are addressing your superior officer," he snapped. "Remember your distances, if you please!" Much to his exasperation he thought he detected a twinkle in the depths of Norton's eyes, and he added sharply, "If you

do not speak French, how did you do to enlist?"

"Nothing to it," grinned Norton. "The fellow in the recruiting office in Marseilles spoke fine English. He was a swell guy. He said—"

"Enough!" the officer broke in. "Be silent! Norton, you are now a Legionnaire. Others have had to learn. You must learn in the same fashion. We have no room for exceptions here. No! We cannot immobilize the entire staff for you to make the joke of!"

"No, sir!" protested Norton. "You're wrong there."

The officer did not believe him.

"You will learn," he summed up, "as you proceed. This ignorance you manifest is a pretense. Very well, my friend, you will understand or be punished. The orders are easily remembered—even by fools. And to begin with, you will do two days of extra drill to teach you the proper respect due to an officer. That is all. *Disposez!*"

Even this warning, however had failed to heighten Norton's receptiveness to new ideas. It required the patience of Job to make him grasp the most elementary suggestions, and Sergeant Grunovski was far from Joblike. At the end of five minutes of strenuous effort he was almost frothing at the mouth. The men on guard duty, sprawling on the bench of the postern gate, were having the time of their lives at his expense, and he realized that unless he could overcome Norton's amiable imbecility without delay his prestige would suffer irreparable damage.

"Observe," he shouted at Norton, "and observe me carefully, thou monstrous quintessence of congenital idiocy, and if you do not obey instantly, it is not to the guard room you will go! No—not this time! It is to a cell, and you will stay there, by God, until you have memorized the entire Larousse dictionary!"

So saying, he held a burnt match stick under Norton's nose, dropped it, and swept it, together with other bits of rubbish, into a neat, conical mound. The men on

guard duty rocked from side to side, hiccupping feebly as they watched the performance. Norton, alone, remained calm and dignified. Clad in an ill-fitting fatigue uniform of coarse white canvas so large that the shoulder seams hung down midway to his elbows, with a cap a size too small squarely planted on his close-cropped nut, he followed Grunovski's demonstration with an earnest, unsmiling expression frozen on his sharp-featured countenance.

Grunovski would have loved to murder him, but there were too many witnesses. He threatened Norton with a rigid forefinger.

"You," he said. "Broom," he said. "You sweep—like this." Viciously he scraped the earth, raising clouds of dust. "Now—is it yes or no?"

Before Norton could open his mouth, the sentry posted outside the gate shouted, "*Garde a vous!* Guard turn out!" and the next instant Colonel Auguste Baliverne strode smartly through the postern gate into the thick of the young dust storm raised by Grunovski's exertion. To add to the gayety of nations the colonel stepped into the sample rubbish heap, tripped, stumbled, and nearly, but not quite, fell flat on his face.

The guard, no longer laughing, leaped to attention, for Baliverne was in command of the training depot, and had the reputation of being the most rigid disciplinarian this side of Kingdom Come.

"What," he demanded, glaring at Grunovski, who stood chin up, chest out, heels together, holding the broom close to his side as though it were a rifle—"what happens here? Have you gone mad, sergeant? Is it that you desire me to break my neck on your damned dust heap? You, a sergeant, sweeping!"

He sputtered incoherently. "What next? Why don't you get down on all fours and scrub the doorstep while you're about it?"

HE LISTENED in stony silence to Grunovski's stammered defense, then slowly he brought his cold blue eyes, all streaked with bright red blood vessels, to

bear upon Norton. There was nothing easy-going about him. He had a long, flat chin, a beak of a nose, and a bushy gray mustache brushed straight out at right angles to his harsh and uncompromising mouth.

"So you don't speak French, hm?" he commented in almost flawless English. "Not a word, hm?"

Tucked way somewhere inside his ungainly uniform Norton squared his shoulders as he said apologetically:

"Very sorry, sir. I can't seem to get the hang of it. I try—"

"Not hard enough! You Americans, you think—" He left the sentence hanging in midair, and went off on another track. "Your sergeant is ordering you to sweep up the—ah—debris in this courtyard. Don't you understand that?"

"Is that what he wants me to do?" cried Norton. "What do you know about that? Why, of course I'll be glad to do it. I couldn't dope out—I mean, sir, I couldn't follow him."

The colonel's steely blue eyes bored straight through him.

"What did you think he meant?"

"Search me," Norton replied with childlike simplicity, and the colonel almost strangled inside his high, tight collar.

"Search you!" he ejaculated, his long jaw trembling. "Search *you?* You Americans, you are—" Again he broke off.

"Bear this in mind," he added; "you won't last long if your attitude does not improve. We do not tolerate undesirable characters here!"

"I can quite understand that," agreed Norton. "I don't seem to fit in, but—"

"But you will," Baliverne assured him grimly, "or you will end up in prison. Be silent!" he commanded, forestalling Norton, who appeared to be about to say something. "Not a word! I have heard enough. My mind is made up about you. You are like the other Americans we have had to contend with," the truth came out at last, "you are insupportable! No sense of discipline. None! You ought to be kept out of the Legion. But you are here. You

will have to conform to our standards, or, I warn you for the last time, you will be dealt with most severely!" He turned to Grunovski and rapped out, "Put this soldier to work. He knows now what is expected of him. If he refuses to obey place him under arrest instantly!"

He stalked away, pounding the earth with his heels, and as he receded, the squad slowly relaxed and became human again. Grunovski was too far gone to have any more words with Norton. He placed the broom firmly against his chest, and led him to the far end of the barrack yard.

"From here," he said, indicating the north end of the administrative building directly facing them, "to there." He pointed to the south end of the building. "Sweep!"

"Ah, we-we-wee!" agreed Norton. "Watch me!"

HE SET to work with such reckless energy that the bundle of venerable twigs fell off the broom handle, and Sergeant Grunovski would have torn his hair out by the roots, had he had any hair to tear.

"Pig that you are! It is not a shovel, nor yet a pick-ax you are handling. It is but a broom. *Doucement!*" He patted the air with a circular movement as though he were running his hand over a baby's head. "Gently, thou dismal baboon! Lightly! And if you take it into your foul brain to destroy government property, you will pay for it, I promise you!"

By that time Norton had succeeded in reassembling the working parts of the broom.

"Alas, poor Yorick!" he said gravely. "We'll have to nurse him along, I can see that. Now beat it, Horse Face, I seen enough of you for one morning."

So saying he applied himself to his job with great diligence and Grunovski, exhausted by the prolonged conflict, retreated toward the guardhouse.

He was not quite half way across the yard when Norton, enveloped in a swirl of dust, burst into song:

"Oh! I yam lost in the for . . . rest!
'Tis a dark and stor . . . ormy night, trala!
Oh, I would give a million bucks
To be out in the open again!"

The tune bore a faint resemblance to the celebrated "Prisoner's Song," but it was less a song than a plaintive, full-throated and dreadful howl. The sound persisted as Norton, drawing upon a lively imagination, produced stanza after mournful stanza.

The sergeant, clenching his fists, took one step in Norton's direction, then he changed his mind and hurried as fast as he could walk without loss of dignity toward the guardhouse.

"I can't go back," he told Corporal Schmorel. "I couldn't keep my hands off his neck. I know it. I'd murder him. Just wait till the Old Man hears him! He'll blow up, and how I hope and pray he does! I've been in the Legion going on eleven years, Schmorel, but never—*never*, do you hear me—have I had to deal with a thing like that."

The corporal tugged at his mustache, which was long and of a blood hue.

"He won't last long, sergeant, that is one consolation," he said gravely. "I think he's crazy, if you want my opinion."

CHAPTER II

A NEW FRIEND

DESPITE the heat, the dust, and the threat of reprisals hanging over his head like a sword of Damocles, Norton was still going strong when he was mildly startled to hear a voice say:

"Cheerio, old chap!"

He glanced over his shoulder and to right and left, but there was not a man within a hundred yards of the spot where he stood. It was seven-thirty. Most of the troops were out route marching, or drilling, or learning how to shoot. Here and there a Legionnaire on fatigue duty, straggled across the parade ground, keeping to the patches of translucent blue shadow thrown by the olive trees planted in long, straight

rows. Five stories high, yellow walled, ugly, the barracks stood empty and silent. On the far side of the yard, by the gate, Grunovski and the picket hugged the patch of shade beneath the projecting eaves.

Cupping one hand to his ear, Norton muttered:

"Voices! Celestial voices! By heck, I hope I'm not going the same way as Joan of Arc!"

Then he pushed back the vizor of his cap and looked up. A few feet above him, at a window on the ground floor of the administrative building, he beheld a soldier in khaki uniform who, when their eyes met, smiled quizzically, arching one eyebrow and pursing his lips as he repeated in a glib, parrotlike manner:

"Cheerio, old chap!"

Norton paused, resting both hands on the top of the ancient and dilapidated broom.

"*Banzai!*" he said politely. "May you live a thousand years, monsoor. Do my ears deceive me or did you address me in my own, my native tongue?"

The man tucked a pencil behind his ear and leaned forward, resting his elbows on the window sill. Youngish, in his early thirties, with a high, bald forehead, a thin, pointed nose, and a small mouth he looked pleasant and affable, and yet, in some indefinable fashion, slippery. Even when he smiled, a shrewd, coldly appraising wariness never left his eyes.

"Are you Norton?" he inquired.

"This is fame!" grinned Norton. "What you, a major general or something?"

"Nothing more than a private, on the clerical staff. You had better keep on sweeping. Sergeant Grunovski, I see, shows signs of impatience. But," he added, laughing gently, "do not sing. I advise you not to sing. The colonel is in his office."

"Don't you like me-ounting music?" Norton asked.

"It is beautiful, but inappropriate. I introduce myself: Edmond Cordelier." He cleared his throat. "I learned English at a jolly good school at Hastings. In England, you know."

"I know," sighed Norton, making a vague swipe at a crumpled cigarette-paper packet. "Dear old England! What the hell are you doing in this outfit?"

An expression of manly fortitude, tinged with poignant sorrow, swept across Cordelier's face.

"That is something I can't tell you now," he said firmly. "We must return to our tasks, but I'd like awf'ly much to have a talk with you, yes?"

"O. K. by me."

"Can you leave barracks tomorrow night?"

"I guess so, if I'm not in the cooler."

"The cooler? Of course, most amusing! You mean the guardhouse. Well, old chap, you must keep out of the cooler because," he leaned a little farther out of the window, "I have a surprise for you."

"Oh yeah?" A note of derision crept into Norton's voice. "Listen, I've had all the surprises I want for the rest of my natural."

"Wait! You have been in the Legion nine days? Tomorrow, old boy, you receive your enlistment bonus. Isn't that ripping?"

A puzzled frown appeared on Norton's otherwise unruffled brow.

"Bonus?" he repeated. "What bonus?"

"You receive one hundred and twenty-five francs for having enlisted. That is in addition to your pay, you understand. The voucher is here on my desk."

"I got you! Gravy. The sugar coating on the pill."

"The bitter pill," nodded Cordelier, twisting his extraordinarily flexible mouth sideways. "Yes, I know what you mean . . . and I agree. But we must make allowances, old fellow. So what do you say? Tomorrow night we have a little binge, just you and I, to celebrate?"

"Tickled to death," agreed Norton. "It's my party. Boy, it sure is good to speak a da lingo again after all the trouble I've been having. Believe me, it is!"

CORDELIER refilled Norton's glass. "An amusing place, is it not?" he observed. "I thought you would like it. It is different."

"Are you telling me," commented Norton, staring thoughtfully at his plate on which was heaped a glutinous mess of lukewarm dough optimistically referred to on the thumb-marked menu as Spaghetti a la Bolognese. A reddish substance compounded of spoiled tomatoes, garlic, and chopped goat's meat of doubtful origin had been sloshed over the *pasta*.

Cordelier shrugged one shoulder, laughed, and said:

"The food, of course, is very plain."

"Plain!" Norton broke in. "Don't kid yourself, Eddy. It's lousy. It's worse'n that; it stinks."

Cordelier laughed that one off too.

"My dear chap, you exaggerate! It's not so bad, you know. One mustn't expect too much. Don't forget that we are in Sidi-bel-Abbes, in midsummer. One can't expect the diversity one finds in France. And, really, if you only knew, this is far superior to most of the restaurants frequented by our fellow Legionnaires."

The tone of his voice and the look of smug condescension which accompanied his words implied clearly that his fellow Legionnaires, in his estimation, were mud.

Norton pushed away his plate and helped himself to a cigarette.

"Eddy," he remarked after a contemplated pause, "you're all wet. We came out to have a good time. Are we having a good time? Like hell we are. This dump is a morgue. It's dead and, I tell you, it stinks. Let's go somewhere else. Let's make whoopee, Eddy, in a big way. Ain't there a gin mill in this one-horse town where we can step out?"

He was bored, bored to tears. The party was not going so well. In fact, it threatened at any moment to turn into a dismal flop.

They had been compelled to postpone the celebration for a week, for Norton, owing to his amazing obtuseness, had spent his nights in the guardhouse and his days in the performance of menial and disgusting chores adapted, so the powers that be had decreed, to his low level of intelligence. The one drawback to this scheme had been that he could not even

be trusted to do a dirty job without creating an appalling mess which some one else, in the end, had to clean up.

He was not popular. Non-commissioned officers who valued their peace of mind gave him such a wide berth that the day had come at last when he had escaped punishment simply because no one had told him to do anything, and, in consequence, he had been free to go to town with Cordelier.

They had a couple of drinks at a tenth rate cafe near the market place, then Cordelier had led the way to this dingy, desolate restaurant run by a Greek who was alleged to specialize in Italian dishes.

On the way over Cordelier had assured Norton that there was not a better place in town. It was quiet, it was refined, it wasn't overrun by the common herd, it had atmosphere. There, he swore, they could talk to their hearts' content without being disturbed.

Undoubtedly, they were free to talk. The hash-house was almost empty. Two Spaniards, mechanics in greasy blue denim, sat near the door noisily shoveling unappetizing slops into their wide open mouths. In the far corner of the room a dyspeptic commercial traveler, very seedy and threadbare, sipped a glass of Vichy water. Behind the counter the Greek's wife dandled a skinny, sallow, squalling baby in one arm, while she made a pretense of rinsing glasses in a basin of gray and scummy water. The Greek, wallowing over the cash drawer, was fast asleep, his nose mashed down on an evening paper. Flies in glistening clots crawled upon the ceiling.

BUT Cordelier was oblivious to his surroundings. He wanted to talk and he did so. And he drank sour red wine as though it had been good, clean water. His chief topic of conversation ever since he had picked up Norton by the barrack gate had been himself; who he was, what he was, how he had come to join the Legion.

He belonged, he assured Norton, to an excellent family, a really wonderful family.

On his mother's side he was related to a senator, a cabinet minister who had held office for nineteen consecutive days.

"Is that so?" commented Norton, who had repeated those three words at least fifty times.

Nothing more was expected of him. Cordelier, warmed by the wine, had talked like a book. He had passed both baccalaureate examinations brilliantly. After that feat he had somehow acquired the rank of reserve lieutenant in the army and had embarked upon what was to have been his life work. He was what he never tired of calling himself; a technician.

"Is that so?" muttered Norton for the fifty-first time.

It was so. And then Cordelier had spoken of the disasters which had overtaken him. On that score he was less explicit but just as long-winded. His success had aroused the envy of false friends whom he had invited to sit on the board of directors of one of his companies (he had several). They had ousted him from the chairmanship; they had faked the books, and had accused him of selling technical trade secrets to a rival concern. But he was innocent!

"Is za so?" chorused Norton, guzzling drink for drink to steel himself for the ordeal.

Nevertheless, Cordelier confessed, he had been disgraced, dishonored, and hounded. His fiancée (very beautiful, very rich) had broken off their engagement. In desperation he had "flung himself" into the Legion to seek shelter until he could vindicate his good name.

But, and here his face brightened up, the officers had been quick to recognize his qualifications. He was too valuable an asset, with all his technical training, to be wasted on the parade ground, and he gave Norton to understand that he had been literally pestered to death by Colonel Baliverne until he had "accepted a position" on the clerical staff.

The arrival of the spaghetti and Norton's subsequent protests had put an end to his monologue.

"This can't be the only joint in town," Norton insisted. "Now look, Eddy, I'm not difficult. There must be some kind of a hash-house where we could grab off a square meal. It doesn't have to be fancy. Just ham and eggs, for instance."

Cordelier threw up his slender hands and waggled them about as though fending off the idea.

"Ham, my dear fellow! Do not think of it . . . unless you desire to contract trichinosis. No, you mustn't even think of ham out here."

"O. K. by me," agreed Norton, pushing his plate farther away than ever. "Let's starve. I don't mind. But can't we go someplace and do a little serious drinking?"

Cordelier grabbed the bottle and refilled their glasses brimful.

"You are right!" he cried with a sudden access of boisterous heartiness. "Let us drink! Drink and be merry! Drink—as they say in my country—is the maker of forgetfulness, is it not? This wine," he smacked his lips, "this wine is *good*."

"Good for what?" inquired Norton, making a wry face as he put down his glass. "Tanning leather?"

"Of course it is not a great wine," admitted Cordelier, "but it has a *cachet* of its own. There is not a better wine of its class in all Sidi-bel-Abbes. You can take my word for it, old fellow, and I pretend to know something about wines. This," he held up the empty bottle to the light, "is a Royal Kebir. It differs from the wines of Roussillon—"

Norton groaned aloud.

"No," he begged, "not that! I've never met a Frenchman yet who wasn't bug-house about wine! I've listened to more lectures about Bordeaux and Burgundies and what not! And honest to God, Eddy, I don't give a damn. All I know is this stuff's as sour as vinegar. Let's go some place and—"

"I have it!" exclaimed Cordelier, snap-snap-snapping his fingers at the Greek's frowsy wife. "Two cognacs," he ordered in quick, curt French. "The best you have."

"We only have one," the woman said apathetically. "It's fifteen *sous* a glass."

"Never mind that! Bring what you have at once. I want you," he went on, turning to Norton, "to taste this. It is one of the best brandies I have ever come across. You will love it, I know. But tell me," he added, smiling confidentially as he leaned across the table, "I was right then. You do—er—understand some French?"

Norton was beginning to feel the effects of the startling quantities of wine he had imbibed. His brain was muzzy, and the question came so unexpectedly that for a moment he was at a loss for words.

A sheepish grin straggled across his face as he inquired:

"How did you dope that out?"

CORDELIER tapped a fingertip against his high, bald forehead.

"I knew," he laughed. "I knew all along. What you said about listening to lectures about wine—that settled it. Of course, it is none of my business, but I must say I admire your courage. You are running great risks."

"Risks nothing! They can't make me learn French. No, sir, they cannot."

But he spoke without conviction, and Cordelier, threatening him with an up-raised forefinger, said in his best, pseudo-British, man-to-man manner:

"My dear chap . . . come! You don't expect me to believe any such bally nonsense as that! Be honest. I won't give you away . . ."

Suddenly Norton's native caution deserted him. For weeks he had been under a tremendous strain. Now, however, thanks to the wine, he was overcome by a treacherous sense of release. A warm and mellow glow suffused his whole body. He saw the world through rose-tinted spectacles which masked its asperities and its pitfalls, and filled him with boundless and idiotic optimism.

"Well," he drawled, "as a matter of fact, just between you and me and the gatepost, Eddy, I can *parlez-vous* enough to get by. Keep it under your hat—"

He was interrupted by the Greek woman who shuffled up to the table and set before them two brandy glasses scarcely larger than good sized thimbles.

"*Non, non!*" protested Norton, airing his French for Cordelier's benefit. "Too small, *madame*. What's a humming-bird in French, Eddy? Tell her we ain't humming-birds."

"But—" began Cordelier.

"Bring a bottle," ordered Norton. "A grand, big bottle, *madame, oui-oui!*"

"It's twenty-two *francs* fifty," she informed him, unsmiling and indifferent.

From his pocket he drew a wad of notes and sorted out the right amount.

"There you are," he proclaimed. "*Voilà!* Twenty-two fifty, and an extra five for the bambino to grow on. Eddy, tell her to buy the kid some milk or a box of candy. It's only five months to Christmas."

"But," sputtered Cordelier as the woman picked up the extra five *francs* and departed without a word of thanks, "but, really, old man, that is a lot of money to spend!"

"Don't you worry about that," chuckled Norton. "When we've spent the dog-gone bonus maybe I can dig up some more."

A thoughtful look crept into Cordelier's eyes. He had had a lot to drink, too, but he had been much more circumspect than Norton. He sipped where Norton guzzled, and every time he refilled the latter's empty glass he made a great show of adding a few drops to his own which, strangely enough, was never less than three-quarters full.

"Oh," he said, pursing his lips into a small, round knot. Then after a brief pause, he added with affected breeziness, "So you have a cash reserve, eh?"

"Plenty," Norton nodded. "A coupla thousand *francs* and some dollar bills. You dumb-bell, that's why I wanted to go places instead of staying here."

"And I have been trying to help you economize," exclaimed Cordelier. "How amusing!" He picked up his brandy glass and held it on a level with his eyes.

"Cheerio, old man, here's to you and your success in the Legion. You will . . ."

"YOU drink to that and I'll crown you. My success in the Legion!" He snorted indignantly. "How do you get that way? What do you think I'm acting so dumb for—on the off chance they'll make me a top-sergeant? Look, Eddy," his eyes were swiveling around so that he saw Cordelier through a shimmering and uncertain haze, "before I'm through, do you know what they're going to do? They're going to kick me out."

"No!" muttered Cordelier.

"I'm telling you." He swallowed the contents of his glass at one gulp. It was so raw and fiery that it gagged him. "Hot dog!" he wheezed. "That'll put hair on your chest. Bathtub gin has nothing on this. Ain't you drinking?"

"Like a fish," swore Cordelier, holding up his glass which he had emptied on the floor. "But tell me, if you don't like the Legion—and I don't blame you, old chap—why did you enlist?"

Norton looked glum. "Have you ever been to Marseilles? You have? Then you know what it's like. Wide open! Baby doll! The ship I was on, the old Benton Brook, put in there to unload hides. I was her radio operator. Not a bad berth at that, but I went haywire in Marseilles. I don't think I drew a sober breath for a week, and the next thing I knew I was in this damned outfit!"

"Most extraordinary!" commented Cordelier.

"And how! It just happened. Some cootie I met after the Benton Brook had sailed said I ought to enlist, and, by heck, I did! That's the kind of dumb cluck I am. Of course, I wasn't paralyzed. It was too early in the morning for that, but I'd just had an eye opener and, inside, I was as jittery as hell. All I wanted was a chance to get somewhere quiet and sober up . . . and I'll be doggoned if they didn't hook me for the next five years! Can you tie that?" he concluded helplessly.

Cordelier laughed till he cried.

"It is dreadful," he admitted. "Didn't anybody notice that you were not sober?"

"Naw," grumbled Norton, resting his cheek on his clenched fist. "How could they? I *looked* sober, and I *acted* sober, and all the time I was as boiled as an owl. Sure I was! Why, man alive, you couldn't pay me to be a soldier, least of all a French soldier! It don't make sense."

"But you enlisted."

"Maybe I did, but they're going to be so sick of the sight of me before I'm through they'll be glad to ease me out."

"Old chap," Cordelier said earnestly, "it won't work. I am your friend—I am sorry for you—and I warn you, if you keep this up you will end in just one place, and that is prison."

"Then I'll go to prison," agreed Norton. "But I won't form fours for the President of the French Republic in person. I'm a sea-going wireless operator, and if they think they can make a soldier out of me . . ."

Cordelier gnawed at his lower lip.

"There is only one thing to be done," he announced solemnly. "Norton, you must desert."

"I've thought of that, but how?"

"You must! I have heard the colonel talking about you in the office. He is having you watched. If you make one mistake, he will not forgive you. Old man, you are in a terrible fix."

"They can't make me understand French!"

Cordelier shuddered. "In prison they will make you understand very rapidly. You have no choice now. You must get out. Let me think . . ."

HE THOUGHT. He took a sip of cognac and thought some more. His thoughts made him scowl fiercely and jerk his head from side to side and drum with his knuckles on the table. At last he had it.

"I wouldn't do this for another man," he said in a low voice. "Not a single one! But I have always had a weakness for Americans, and—well, we have had a pleasant evening together, old man."

At the other end of town, he went on in the same hushed whisper, not far from the hospital, he knew of a Syrian coffee dealer who, for a price, helped Legionnaires desert. There were others, of course, engaged in the same clandestine business. But they were not to be trusted. The Syrian, alone, did things well. He left nothing to chance. The Syrian supplied false passports, clothes and passenger accommodations on board a foreign ship. When all was ready he summoned the Legionnaire and rushed him to Oran and onto the ship so swiftly that he was out of the country even before he was reported absent without leave.

"Swell!" crowed Norton. "Let's go!"

But Cordelier held up his hand. They would have to work, he went on, through intermediaries. The Syrian never came in personal contact with would-be deserters.

"It is very dangerous," explained Cordelier, "but I will get in touch with the right people for you. Leave everything to me. In a week or so all will be ready."

Norton's face fell a mile.

"Another week!"

"Or ten days. That is not long to wait, old chap. You must be patient. Luckily, I know what to do. An Austrian who worked in the office with me deserted about a month ago. He took me into his confidence. I—er—helped him in many ways."

"Go to it," agreed Norton. "If I can only get out of this mess."

"There's just one thing," said Cordelier, clearing his throat, "it's rather expensive, you know, old man, and at present I'm rather short of cash. I wonder whether you could spare . . ." he shot a sidelong glance at Norton, "say three hundred *francs*. I hate to ask you, but . . ."

From the breast pocket of his tunic Norton drew a dilapidated billfold and counted out three one-hundred-*franc* notes which he planked down in front of Cordelier.

"There y'are, old man, old boy, old chap, old scout," he hiccupped. "Three hundred! 'N' if you need more, I got it. How much do you suppose," he inquired

with an unexpected gleam of common sense, "it's going to cost—all told?"

"That," confessed Cordelier, "is more than I can tell you just now. I believe the Austrian I mentioned had to pay about a thousand *francs*."

Norton gave a drunken chuckle. He said:

"About seventy bucks! That's cheap, Eddy. That's a mere bag of shells."

Cordelier, however, was in deadly earnest.

"In a day or so I will let you know where we stand," he promised. "The minute I have something definite I will get in touch with you at once. Meanwhile . . ." He glanced at his wristwatch and exclaimed, "My dear fellow, it's almost nine o'clock. We must be going."

"Let's step on it," agreed Norton, gripping the edge of the table as he levered himself to his feet. "Onwards and upwards!"

"Back to barracks," Cordelier said primly. "We have no passes, you know, old chap, and we must be in before lights-out."

CHAPTER III

DISCIPLINE

IT WAS close on six o'clock. The day, which had been hot and windy, was ending in a blaze of light. The level rays of the sun bursting like an explosion through the dust haze turned the clouds to scarlet and gold. The sky itself was emerald green deepening to violet along the horizon.

The upper stories of the barracks and the tops of the taller trees in the park outside the old ramparts were bathed in this incandescent light, but down below, on the drill ground, it was almost dark—so dark that Norton could scarcely see the features of Corporal Kleefeld, a big, beefy man who stood six paces away, spraddle-legged, straight-backed, the thumbs of his enormous hands hooked inside his belt.

Not that Norton particularly wanted to

see Kleefeld's rugged countenance. He had been compelled to stare at that unprepossessing mug for so many hours that he knew it all too well. It had been burned into his brain so that, even at night when he slept, he was haunted by that unintelligent and ugly face with its undershot jaw and its bloodshot eyes set close together astride a short, reddish nose.

The Legion was through fooling with Norton. For weeks, patiently, it had watched him with a hundred eyes and a hundred ears; it had tried mild doses of solitary confinement in vermin-infested cells and prolonged seances in the vile-smelling guardhouse. But Norton had showed no signs of improvement.

On the other hand, though he was impervious to such correctives, he was unflinchingly polite and willing to do his best even if his best was very terrible indeed, and the powers that be had come to the conclusion that it would be inhuman to court-martial a recruit simply because he was too dumb to master the barest essentials of the French language.

For the Protean task of making Norton a real Legionnaire, Corporal Kleefeld had been selected. Discipline and Obedience were his twin gods; the *Code Militaire* was his Bible. He had a simple, straightforward mind, free from all complexities.

When told to teach Norton French and stick to his post until Norton responded like an automaton to every order listed in the Manual of Infantry Training, the Corporal set to work with the same plodding thoroughness he would have displayed had he been detailed to clean the colonel's bathtub until it glistened.

A native of Strassburg, what he didn't know about French grammar would have filled volumes. Nor did he have the slightest acquaintance with English, but that did not deter him.

His method was remarkable by its painstaking deliberation. Beginning with the first order in the Manual, he placed Norton in position, like a window-dresser adjusting a figure, and kept him in that position for minutes on end while he

brayed the corresponding order in his face. Then, if Norton failed to respond, or responded too slowly, they started the same movement all over again.

There was no mercy or kindness in Kleefeld's humorless soul. He worked Norton till he reeled, till his legs buckled beneath him; then he worked him some more, making him double-march, round and round in a narrow circle like a squirrel in a cage, making him cross the dusty, sun-baked exercise ground from end to end "by short rushes, in artillery formation," compelling Norton, with sixty pounds of kit on his back, to run ten steps, then flop flat on his stomach, arise, run, and drop again.

That day when Norton stood swaying drunkenly in the gathering darkness, had been the hardest of all. The blisters on his feet had cracked open, his boots were wet with blood. Open-mouthed, glassy-eyed, sagging beneath the weight of his pack, he peered at the corporal, waiting for the last order of the day which would send him, at last, limping down the road to the barracks. The bugle had sounded "retreat" almost fifteen minutes ago, but little things like that did not bother Kleefeld.

"Stand up!" he barked in a voice grown hoarse from too much shouting. "Like a man, thou ill begotten hunk of infection. Stiffen that damned back!"

A STUBBORN look crept into Norton's dull eyes. He did not move; not an inch. "Stiffen that damned back," was not as yet part of his official vocabulary.

Kleefeld, glaring at him, repeated the order: "*Tiens-toi droit, espece de vache!* I'll cure you of that elegant slouch!"

As he spoke he glanced sharply from side to side. The exercise ground had long since been abandoned by the other troops. They were alone. The sun was down on the horizon, the color was ebbing out of the sky. Night was close at hand.

Kleefeld stepped up close, and, clenching one of his great fists, drove it against Norton's ribs.

"We're going to reach an understand-

ing," he announced. "You've been trying to make a jackass of me for the last three weeks, haven't you? That's fine. Now I'll teach you a few tricks."

The force of the blow had driven all the air out of Norton's lungs. Blood welled up in his throat, choking him. He coughed, and because he was weary to the point of exhaustion, his rifle slipped through his fingers and fell into the dust.

"Pick that up!" rasped Kleefeld, accompanying the order by a backhand clout over the ear. "Don't make me say it again. Pick it up!"

Norton dropped to his knees. A kick in the small of the back sent him sprawling.

"I didn't tell you to lie down and go to sleep," jeered Kleefeld. "On your feet, you swine of an American, or I'll break every bone in your body. You've been asking for this—now you've got it."

Norton came up fighting. As he heaved himself to his feet he raised his rifle and tried to fling it butt-end foremost at the corporal's head. But Kleefeld was ready and waiting. With a contemptuous gesture he slapped the rifle aside and drove his fist into the pit of Norton's stomach. Then he caught him by the front of his tunic, half strangling him, and shook him till his teeth rattled.

"Discipline!" he said between shakes. "I'll put some discipline into your thick head, I will! I've had enough of this circus, I have! That's why I kept you out here tonight, just to settle this privately. Privately—you understand, you baboon? From now on you're going to *learn* something. I'll pound it into you! Tomorrow, and the next day, and the day after, we'll end every lesson just like this, my lad!"

"This" was a thoroughgoing thrashing, the time honored "*passage a tabac*," administered without heat or passion. In theory he had no right whatsoever to lay violent hands upon Norton; he could have been court-martialed for this offense. But there were not witnesses out there on the drill ground, and Norton, without witnesses, would find it impossible to bring

convincing charges against his aggressor.

Kleefeld, moreover, was careful to leave no traces of his handiwork on Norton's face. It wasn't the first time he had felt called upon to resort to extra-legal methods in his dealings with ill-natured recruits. He knew where to hit and how to hit to cause the maximum amount of pain without leaving any tell-tale marks. He did not have to overexert himself. Norton was too weak and groggy to offer any further resistance. Kleefeld's bludgeonlike paws thumping heavily against his ribs and stomach seemed to tear his heart loose from its moorings. Again he went down and Kleefeld, after a couple of tentative kicks, stood back and placidly lighted a cigarette.

"That'll be all for today," he grunted. "*Debout!* Up! Now you know what it's like. Tomorrow night, if you don't understand every single order I give you, you'll get another dose of the same medicine. You're not going to make a fool out of Corporal Kleefeld, I can tell you that right now and once and for all."

At a brisk pace, as soon as Norton was able to stand up, he marched him toward the barracks down the long, straight road splashed with the glimmering yellow light of street lamps shining down through the dense foliage of plantain trees.

"TOMORROW and the next day and the day after that . . ." Kleefeld's threat ran through Norton's mind as he lay on his cot in the barrack-room, staring angrily at the row of shelves above the beds on the opposite wall.

His own helplessness exasperated him, and as he lay there, nursing his bruised and aching stomach, he reached one definite, unshakable resolution. Not all the Kleefelds in creation were going to make a Legionnaire out of him.

He reached this decision with his eyes wide open. He had enlisted of his own free will (God and the examining medical officer alone knew that he had been half crazy with booze at the time); there was no loophole through which he could crawl.

But no matter what the cost might be he would not submit. That was final.

Everything connected with the Legion set his teeth on edge and aroused his latent antagonism. The rigid Eighteenth Century standards of discipline, saluting, forming fours, bugle calls, the everlasting superiority of clean, well-scrubbed young officers, the taste of the sloppy black coffee, the boorishness of the drill sergeants, the all-pervading smell of creosote, rifle oil and sweat . . .

They could send him to prison if they chose. It could be no worse than the regular routine life at the depot. He'd give them a damn good pretext for sending him up! Two pretexts if they preferred. One of them was Kleefeld.

"The next time he starts anything," decided Norton, "I'll fix his feet so they stay fixed."

The other concerned his dear old chum, his pal Cordelier. Cordelier had made a sucker out of him, bled him white, down to the last greasy five-*franc* note, the last dollar bill; strung him along with plausible lies, asking for more money and still more money; promising at each interview that it would be the last; that there would be no more delays. But the days had grown into weeks and Cordelier had suddenly become elusive as a wraith. In the office, of course, he was beyond reach. No trooper could wander in there and start an argument with one of the clerks without falling foul of a dozen officers, adjutants and other important personages, who would see to it that his exit was swift and painful.

Off duty, Cordelier was so slippery and devious that Norton could not catch up with him. He used back doors, avoided the parade ground, and spent all his spare time in town, where Norton had been forbidden to go until his period of private tuition under the guidance of Professor Kleefeld was over.

It was a hopeless situation. There was little or nothing he could do about it. Even had he gone to town he would not have known where to begin the hunt for Cordelier.

The sound of voices, coming from the canteen, drifted through the open window. A drunk was singing a long-winded sentimental *lied* accompanied by a groaning accordion.

By contrast the barrack-room was very still. With the exception of Derecske, the orderly for the day, all the men were out. Slumped down on a bench by the table in the middle of the aisle, Derecske sat with his chin propped up on his folded hands, sleepily watching the thread of smoke rising from the bowl of a long-stemmed cherrywood pipe which he held loosely between his pouting lips.

The light of the lamp hanging from the ceiling fell full upon his round, smooth-shaven skull and the nape of his stumpy, muscular neck. A quiet man, slow and very deliberate, Norton had never had occasion to speak to him, though they had lived in close contact for weeks on-end.

For no good reason Norton suddenly addressed Derecske's broad back, much as he might have addressed a lamp-post, without hope of an answer:

"Have you ever been rooked? I wonder whether anybody ever sold *you* a gold brick?"

Taking his pipe from his mouth, Derecske turned around until he faced Norton, who was startled to hear him say:

"Often. Why do you ask?"

Norton forgot the pain in his stomach. He sat bolt upright, grinning from ear to ear.

"You mean to tell me you speak English?" he exclaimed. "Suffering cats!"

Derecske took a little puff of his cherrywood pipe and said placidly:

"Why not?"

"But—"

Derecske cut him short. "There was no need. Each man must fight his own battle in his own way. I could not help you, and it is never wise to interfere. Just now, when you spoke, I was thinking of Pittsburgh. Plain as day I could see it . . ." He broke off, shook his head several times, then abruptly he went on, "Who's been rooking you?"

Norton swung his legs over the side of the cot and stood up. Barefooted he shuffled over to the table and sat down, facing Derecske.

"Now listen," he said painstakingly, "are you kidding me or what have you? Pittsburgh—no, I've never been there. I'm from New York City, N. Y., U. S. A. D'you know 8th Street and 6th Avenue? That's me . . . And you didn't give me the high-sign! Why, you son-of-a-gun, you . . ."

Derecske sighed deeply. "I have my own troubles," he explained, and that one statement seemed all-sufficient. "I have been also rooked."

"So we're both in the same boat. Listen, you been here longer than I have. You can go out. You don't happen to know anything about a cootie from the office by the name of Cordelier, do you?"

Derecske bit down on the stem of his pipe until it cracked.

"Cordelier?" he repeated, spitting out little splinters of wood. "I do know him—yes."

"Ain't that something!" approved Norton. "Any idea where I can find him?"

DERECSKE nodded his head slowly several times. He had the very best of ideas where Cordelier was to be found. There was a girl in town—a Spaniard from Jerez—and he, Derecske, had been crazy about her. He had had no illusions as to her worth; he had known from the very beginning what kind of woman she was, but in her company he had been able to forget his present surroundings and the tragedy which had pitchforked him into the Legion.

"You see," he said, choosing his words with great care, "I come from Hermannstadt in Transylvania. It was—it *is* Magyar, but today the Roumanians hold it. They call it Sibiu! Sibiu!" His eyes flamed and his placid countenance suddenly twitched with rage.

"They flogged my father to death," Derecske went on. "They beat him with whips made of steel wire because he would

not learn to speak their damned, corrupt language. He was one of many! I shot the swine who ordered the flogging. An officer, he called himself—a captain. He used scent and powder like a woman, and he stood by, watching my father die, smoking a gold-tipped cigarette. I shot him in the stomach, and with these"—he held out his enormous paws—"I strangled him. Then I escaped from that nightmare and came here . . ."

It was Cordelier who, flush with money, had caused the girl to turn him down.

"And I'll tell you where he got the dough," Norton broke in, "From me."

Derecske listened in silence, his head thrown back, blowing smoke rings at the ceiling.

"So that's the lay-out," Norton summed up. "I've got to get him first. After that I'll deal with Kleefeld."

"And go to prison?"

"And go to prison."

Derecske got up, knocked the ashes out of his pipe, put it carefully away in the haversack hanging at the head of his bed, and started to dress.

"What's up?" inquired Norton.

"Put on your uniform and come with me," said Derecske. "I am going to take you to Cordelier."

"But you're the room orderly—"

"And then I shall go to prison with you or desert," Derecske stated in a level voice. "It is better so."

"You're cockeyed!"

"You have taught me a lesson. All this," he waved his hand at the walls, "all this is part of the system which makes possible the things that happened at Hermannstadt. I cannot serve on the side of the oppressors."

CHAPTER IV

REVENGE

THEY left the barracks, not by way of the main gate, but over the back wall behind the stables. Minutes later they reached the ramshackle apart-

ment house where Senorita Vittoria Alvarez occupied a flat on the third floor.

Derecske knocked. After a brief interval the door opened an inch or so. A large, questioning eye appeared in the crack, and a throaty, not unpleasant voice said:

"*Sapristi!* You—again! Of all the pests you are the very worst, my poor Emanuelo! Haven't I told you a thousand time not to come here any more? You are not wanted. Go away and stay away and—" Suddenly the roving eye came to rest upon Norton. It grew dark with Iberian wrath and the voice, grown shrill, cried out, "So you have brought company, have you? This is too much! Why didn't you invite the entire garrison while you were about it? I won't have it. Get out!"

But Derecske's broad foot was across the threshold. He kept it there so that she could not close the door.

"Let us in," he ordered. "It is not you we want to see. It is Cordelier."

"He is not here," she retorted. "Go before I lose my temper! Go before I show your friend what I think of fools like you!"

"We are coming in," said Derecske, not budging an inch. "I know he is here."

The *senorita's* patience snapped. She flung the door wide open, leaped out onto the landing, and smacked Derecske's face—once, twice, and again, before he had time to draw a deep breath. As she delivered the third smack she hooked her pretty fingers and dug her nails into his cheek, gouging it from the corner of his eye to his chin.

"Now will you go, camel that you are!" she demanded, pointing dramatically toward the staircase. "Imbecile! Clod! Buffoon! I am a respectable girl, I would have you understand," she added for Norton's benefit. "I work for my living and do not intend to be annoyed by such miserable and stupid trash!"

Derecske stood his ground.

"Where," he insisted, "is Cordelier?"

Before the girl could select a suitable string of insults to hurl at him, Cordelier, aroused by the noise of those resounding

smacks and the girl's impassioned outcry, bustled out onto the landing. The hall light was weak and at first he did not notice Norton half-hidden behind Derecske's broad shoulders.

Spic and span as ever, very sure of himself, very superior, he said sharply:

"You fool, do you want me to call the police and have you arrested? You damned peasant, you behave like a love-sick cow, but—" Then he caught sight of Norton and his haughty self-assurance oozed out of him. "You!" he exclaimed, stepping back across the threshold.

"You bet," agreed Norton, following him up. "You got two thousand *francs* of mine and fifty-seven bucks to account for, Eddy. We'll have a showdown right now."

The situation was complicated however, by the unpredictable actions of the maiden from Jerez. Something told her that there was more at stake than the sunshine of her smile. She had no intention of being mixed up in a vulgar brawl which might lead to police intervention and have a disastrous effect upon her social position. During business hours she had a good job as second saleslady in the only high-class millinery-lingerie shop in Sidi-bel-Abbes. She did not want to lose that job. It brought her in contact with the best people in town and eventually might lead to bigger and better things. Matrimony, for instance. One never knew; one had to be prepared for such emergencies. Furthermore, she was beginning to lose interest in Cordelier. Socially he was more desirable than Derecske, but the money he had squandered on her during the past few weeks showed signs of running low, and she had her eye on a young and sentimental second-lieutenant who was said to be very wealthy.

UNDER the circumstances she could not afford to hesitate. Whirling around, she grabbed Cordelier by the arm, propelled him violently out onto the landing, and slammed and locked the door of the apartment in all their faces.

"Go away—all of you!" she called

through the keyhole. "If you don't, I shall scream out the window. I know none of you!"

But her words went unheeded. Backed up against the flowered wall paper, Cordelier was doing his slippery best to put up a bold front.

"I have no idea what you are talking about," he asserted. "Money? What money are you talking about?"

"Quit stalling," advised Norton. "It won't work, Eddy. I'm talking about the dough I gave you to give the Syrian so I could desert."

"You must be out of your mind, my dear fellow! As if I would help you to desert! Nonsense!"

"And you spent Norton's money on Vittoria," added Derecske, mopping blood off his cheek with a large cotton handkerchief.

All at once Cordelier flared up.

"What of it? You're a pair of stupid jackasses. If you can't take care of your women and your money, that's your hard luck. It serves you right. So you thought you were going to desert!" He jeered, turning to Norton. "You're wrong. If you have no decency or honor—"

"Honor!" laughed Norton. "Hot dog!"

Cordelier turned white.

"That's what I said. You took an oath—you'll have to live up to it. Your money? If I have it—prove it! And I'll tell you something else, Norton; one more word out of you, one threatening gesture, and I'll report you to your company commander. I'll let him know that you speak French. He won't miss you. You'll go to prison. It's your last chance. Clear out!"

"You've got me coming and going," commented Norton, rolling back the cuffs of his tunic. "Boy, you're certainly a swell double-crosser! He's a technician," he told Derecske, "and a French gentleman down to his itching finger-tips."

"So I have heard," nodded the Hungarian. "He—"

At that moment, Cordelier, fully aware that Norton did not give a curse whether he went to prison or not, sprang away

from the wall and made a dash for the staircase.

He didn't go far. Derecske, with unexpected speed, thrust out an arm and swept him back with so much force that he crashed against the door of the flat facing the apartment occupied by Vittoria.

Raucous shouts came from within, while shrill screams issued from Vittoria's flat. Filled with panic, Cordelier aimed a kick at Norton's groin and, since Derecske barred the way to the lower floors, tried to race upstairs.

That kick settled his hash. It was no more than a glancing blow, but it jarred Norton's bruised stomach and roused him to instant and violent action. Three at a time he shot up the steps, grabbed Cordelier by the knees, and dragged him down. Locked together, barging against the sagging, cracking balusters, they rolled about on the landing.

The whole house was in an uproar. Fifty infuriated tenants with hot Latin blood in their veins clamored for the instant restoration of peace and quiet. The bravest among them surged up to the third floor with the avowed intention of hurling the combatants out on their ears. But Derecske barred their way. With oxlike stolidity he stood at the top of the steps and brought down his great fists on every skull that came within reach.

MEANWHILE Cordelier had succeeded in breaking Norton's hold. They came off the floor fighting. Cordelier launched a perfect *chasse-croise* which almost broke Norton's shin bone. Norton evened the score more by good luck than good management with a couple of magnificent clouts. The first closed Cordelier's left eye. The other bent that long nose of his over onto his cheek, ruining its shapeliness forever.

He bled copiously down the front of his expensive, tailor-made tunic. But he was far from beaten. He fought with his teeth, his nails, his knees, and even with his fists. The technique of fouling held no mysteries for him. Closing in with a rush

he drove one knee in the general direction of Norton's lower stomach . . . and an uppercut rocked him back on his heels, almost tearing his head off his shoulders. That blow hurt. He tottered back against the wall, and the light shone full on his ghastly face. Shouts of dismay came from the crowd blocking the staircase.

"They are killing him!" some one cried out. "*Le pauvre!* This is murder!"

Cordelier heard those shouts. They renewed his strength and his courage. He battled desperately, doing his best to gouge out Norton's eyes, scarcely aware of the hail of blows which were creating such havoc with his handsome map.

Norton's tactics were not as showy, but they were far more effective. He didn't spout abuse, nor grunt, nor stamp his feet as Cordelier was doing for the benefit of the onlookers. He used his feet to stand on and slugged his opponent with everything he had. He missed often, but when he did manage to land a clean blow there was plenty of steam behind it.

Twice in quick succession he clipped Cordelier on the point of the jaw, and as the latter lurched unsteadily he walloped him with everything he had just below the ear. Cordelier's legs went from under him. He sat down, too badly dazed to remember the audience, and as he fell the shrill sound of police whistles filled the house. A loud voice could be heard braying:

"*De la place, voyons! Make way!*"

Rousing himself from his torpor, Cordelier struggled into an upright position, and his right hand groping vaguely through space chanced to close on Norton's left ear. He held on. The more he was hit the tighter he held on. His knees sagged, but he would not let go. He clung to Norton's ear as a drowning man is supposed to cling to a straw. In a half clinch they lurched across the landing, going faster and faster and faster until they came up with a mighty bump against the door of the *senorita's* apartment, tearing it off its hinges. It collapsed. They collapsed on top of it, and as the policeman clubbed

Derecske out of their path, Norton knocked Cordelier cold with a mighty clout on the chin and raised himself to his knees, nursing his mangled ear.

"Fiend," shrieked the *senorita*, making passes at him with a Japanese parasol. "Brute incarnate!"

"You took the words out of my mouth," panted Norton. "But I've had my money's worth, girlie! I guess that'll hold him for a while."

Then the cops beat a smart tattoo upon his head with their little truncheons, snapped handcuffs on his wrists, linked him to Derecske, and rushed them out of the house, pursued by the curses of the assembled tenants. Cordelier went with them. Two policemen toted him down the steps, for he was still unconscious.

BUT it has been wisely said that he who laughs last laughs best, and Cordelier was destined to laugh right heartily after a general court-martial had dealt with Legionnaires Norton and Derecske.

Derecske was found guilty of being absent without leave, of creating a disturbance, resisting arrest and inflicting injuries upon two policemen and five civilians. His was not a bad case. He was given a year with the disciplinary battalion to think things over.

Norton's case was much more serious. The list of charges against him ran on for pages. Thanks to Cordelier, who dragged in the owners of the Greek restaurant who had heard him speak French, he was left without a leg to stand on. He had almost succeeded in ridiculing the entire staff of the training battalion. No one believed him when he said Cordelier had gypped him out of two thousand *francs* and fifty-seven dollars.

The Procurator held up Cordelier as a model of all the military virtues; he was loyal, disinterested, truthful! Did anybody really think that such a splendid young soldier, whose past record was an open book, gentleman, would stoop to such base actions? A thousand times no!

When called to the witnesses' bar, before

the dais where seven judges sat all in a row beneath the gray light dripping through the dingy transom windows, Cordelier refuted the prisoner's slanderous accusations with dignity and perfect self control. The judges believed him, for he was very eloquent. He had cultivated the prisoner's friendship, he swore under oath, to draw him out and put an end to his passive resistance, which was a disgrace to the Service, with a capital S. He had done this because he loved his regiment and his country! Yes, he confessed, he was French. He had joined the Legion because of an error in judgment that most men would have dismissed with a smile and a shrug. But he, Cordelier, valued his honor and the honor of his family so highly that he preferred to make a fresh start in the Legion . . .

Such statements are permissible in French courts where the laws of evidence differ fundamentally from those in use in Anglo-Saxon countries. Cordelier's act of faith, spoken in a voice vibrant with emotion, brought tears to the eyes of the seven judges. They praised his zeal and his devotion to the cause he served so well. But they stared stonily at the prisoner. Norton damned himself beyond redemption. He was neither humble nor abashed. He expressed no regrets. He was mad clean through and didn't care who knew it. When one of the judges asked him point-blank whether or not he liked the Legion, he retorted impolitely:

"What the hell! I'm an American citizen. Think it over."

Which was no answer at all.

So the court put on its seven caps, buckled on its seven swords, and retired to deliberate, and Norton, in due course of time, was informed that he had been condemned to eighteen months at hard labor in a military prison camp."

"That's fine," he said blithely. "I'd sooner be a convict than a soldier in this outfit, believe it or not."

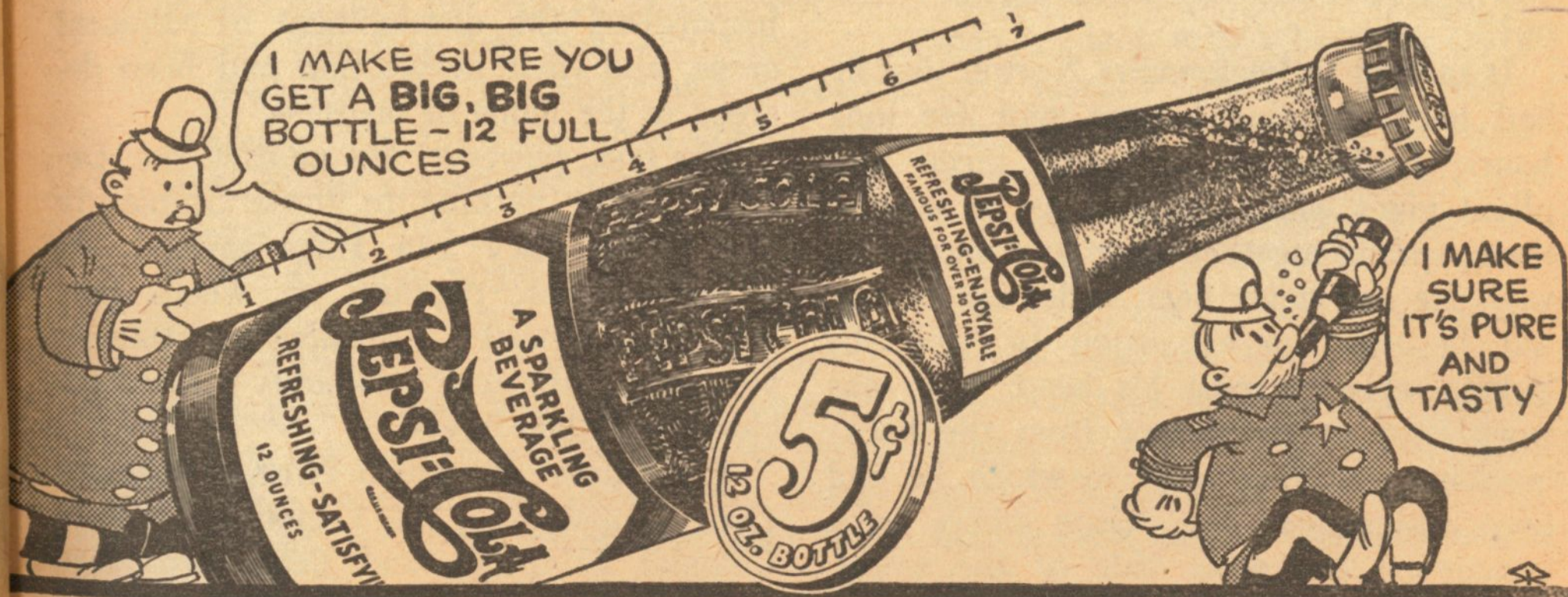
"Where you are going," promised the hard-faced adjutant who read out the sentence, "you'll soon change your mind—and if you live, when you come back to serve your full five years with the colors, my boy, you'll be a different man."

CHAPTER V

JUNGLE WARFARE

IT WAS early morning. The sodden earth steamed. Tree trunks and giant branches festooned with vines loomed out of the iridescent fog that closed in like a wall around the long line of men moving at a snail's pace through the dense undergrowth.

At each step the soldiers sank through the deceptive matting of leaves and weeds and dead twigs into black muck so soft and spongy that it was no more than earth in the making—primeval slime, fetid and warm and enormously prolific.



Slowly the men moved forward. Standing knee-deep in the muck, they hacked their way through the jungle with the aid of heavy, long-bladed machetes. It was hot and close and damp. Sweat poured down their mud-caked cheeks. Their flannel uniforms clung to them in sodden folds. Around each man's head hovered an aureole of insect pests; the napes of their necks were covered with bright-red leeches, the size of pin-heads, which fell from the leaves they brushed against.

Spasmodic gusts of rifle fire burst from the jungle in front of the line of toiling men. Bullets tore through the leaves and vines with a long-drawn rattling sound. From time to time a slug struck home. Somewhere along the line a man would crumple up and sink into the soft, warm ooze, and vanish beneath its surface, so that nothing remained to mark the spot where he had died, save perhaps a blood-spattered sun-helmet with a hole through its crown, or the outline of a knapsack with a dented coffee-pot strapped across the top, rising like a headstone out of the mud.

The survivors went on, so preoccupied by their fight against the undergrowth that they were scarcely aware of the gaps that appeared in their ranks. Even the wounded received scant attention.

"We'll be back," promised the non-coms. "You'll be picked up." And in the same breath they shouted at their squads, "Keep moving! Don't lose your direction. . . . Bear in to the left. . . . Close up!"

It seemed to Legionnaire Norton that he had been standing in one spot for long hours, hacking at the same green and pliant vines which, as soon as he severed them, sprang together again and barred his way. He had never been under fire before, but he was too exhausted to heed the bullets whistling past his head. This was work—not very different from the back-breaking, crushing work to which he had been assigned at the prison camp, back yonder on the other side of the world, in the arid hills of Morocco.

They had changed him up there. They had broken him, and remolded him, and cured him of all his crazy notions. He had been taught, and the lesson had been seared into his very soul in letters of fire, to respect his superiors and blindly to obey their orders. For his own good, for the good of the service, he had been kicked and beaten, half starved and overworked for eighteen months, until too much suffering and too much endless misery had blunted his senses and dulled his mind. He didn't think any more about whether or not he liked the Legion. He *was* a Legionnaire, and that one fact was all-sufficient.

Without a flicker of interest he had accepted his fate when, less than a month after his return to the depot, he had been sent East on a troopship, and rushed across country with a reinforcement draft to replace the heavy casualties suffered by the Lafourche column.

GENERAL LAFOURCHE was pacifying the 5th Military Zone, along the Laos border in the northeastern corner of the Tonkin, in French Indo-China. This mission of peace was necessary because the zone, which lay like a broad wedge between the fertile reaches of the Kong-Soo River valley and the equally desirable hill country to the northward, was infested by turbulent scoundrels who made a hobby of butchering every soldier, tax collector, or government agent who endeavored to penetrate their swamp lands. Their presence jeopardized the development of adjacent areas, and their destruction had been decreed in the name of progress.

The task, however, was no easy one. Decrees meant nothing to those people. In the jungle they ran rings around the French troops, popping up where they were least expected, vanishing into thin air whenever Lafourche's columns pressed too closely on their heels.

The column to which Norton belonged (two companies of the Legion and one of Colonial Infantry) had been dispatched at an hour's notice to destroy a fortified

village said to be the headquarters of a notorious gang of river pirates, whose depredations threatened to ruin the extremely profitable rice carrying trade on the Kong-Soo River.

On paper the expedition was a simple affair; a thirty kilometer march, a quick thrust driven home after intensive machine-gun preparation, and the job would be over. In practice it did not work out quite so well. There had been innumerable delays, one guide had had to be shot to stimulate the memory of two others; sickness had caused the ambulance service to break down almost at the very start; and as the column closed in at last upon the village, it met with unexpected resistance.

But Norton was only dimly conscious of his surroundings. He moved like an automaton, going steadily forward, driven on by the sound of the voice of his platoon sergeant. It alone conveyed a definite meaning to his brain.

"Keep on . . . Keep going . . . Keep up . . ."

And all at once, quite distinctly, above the thousand noises that filled the jungle a new sound reached his ears. A bullet whistled past his head, but instead of the whistle becoming thin and attenuated as it sped on its way, in full flight—it stopped. It stopped with terrible finality and was followed by a soft thudding blow. *Thump!*

Norton glanced over his shoulder. The sergeant had fallen back against the branches of a thorny bush which held him upright though his legs no longer bore his weight. His face had been torn away.

Slowly, as the branches bent beneath its weight, the thing that had been a sergeant of the Legion slid toward the earth. Thorns held up the arms until they were almost at right angles to the shoulders; the head hung forward as though bowed down with infinite sorrow. Then, abruptly, the body tore loose and sank into the mud.

A fit of rage shook Norton. He went crashing through the underbrush, slashing furiously at the vines that kept him from coming to grips with the snipers.

The ground beneath his feet grew firmer. The trees thinned out. Abruptly he found himself in knee-deep grass, in a clearing where the mist hung in thin, gray layers. A beam of pale sunlight fell upon the angle of a stockade made of stout bamboo poles lashed closely together.

Gusts of lead greeted the troopers as they emerged from the jungle. A machine gun away off on the left flank jarred into action, raking the flimsy wall, splintering it.

A bugle call rang out. A shout came out of the fog, repeated over and over again as it swept down the line:

"Close in on the left, the Eighth Company. . . . On the left. . . . Pass it along. . . . Close in. . . ."

That order had a steadying, sobering effect upon Norton, whose first blind impulse had been to rush headlong at the stockade. He responded to the summons as he had been conditioned to respond: automatically, without conscious effort. Swerving to the left, he ran in slow, heavy strides toward the place where the company was forming up.

"Get a move on! Hurry! Get into line! Hurry!" The company formed up on two ranks, and fixed bayonets. The men obeyed orders with crisp precision, but the sense of strain was acute, almost unbearable.

They waited. The mist shut down, hiding the stockade. The thunder of rifle and machine gun fire filled the clearing. Several men were hit and sank into the grass. The ranks closed up. Then a young officer Norton had never seen before, a lieutenant with a black mustache, who carried himself jauntily though his torn clothes dripped mud, trotted out in front of the company, shouted "*En avant!*" and lifted it forward with a sweeping gesture of his sword arm.

A great shout burst from the Legionnaire's lips. All their pent-up emotions found instant relief in that wordless yell. Elbow to elbow they surged across the open. War-horns brayed deafeningly. The bullets came faster. The air was alive with them.

Norton raced along, staring over the shoulder of his front-rank man, straining to catch a glimpse of the stockade. All at once the fog thinned out. The palisade was not a stone's throw away. Fire spurted from rifle muzzles thrust through chinks between the posts. Behind the rifles Norton saw dark shapes moving.

Then came disaster.

A dispatch instructing the machine-gun section to raise its angle of fire to cover the Eighth Company's advance had not been delivered, for the messenger lay dead with a slug in his brain. From the gun positions, because of the mist and the slope of the ground, the field of observation was extremely limited. And the Legionnaires blundered into the hail of bullets before the officer who was controlling the fire could check it.

IT ATE into the charging ranks, blew them to pieces. Caught in mid-stride, the men went down all in a row, like so many dominoes. The lieutenant, the sergeant-major, the entire left section were blotted out. In an incredibly short space of time there was no company left—only a handful of cursing, bewildered troopers who ran this way and that, and threw themselves flat on the ground as the hissing torrent rushed by.

Norton's platoon, on the extreme right, suffered least. The guns ceased fire as the men broke and fled. The brassy notes of a bugle cut shrilly above the clamor: "Retire! Retire!"

On hands and knees he crawled through the grass, away from the stockade, toward the trees.

"This way," some one was calling. "The Eighth, this way!"

A hand seemed to reach inside Norton's chest and close around his heart. He knew that voice. It echoed in his brain louder than the rolling thunder of the rifles, louder than the roar of the war-horns.

And as he crept toward the spot where the survivors were gathering, he came face to face with Cordelier—Cordelier with a sergeant's stripes on his cuffs, a pasty-

faced, white-lipped Cordelier, sweating with excitement, who shouted like a parrot:

"This way the Eighth! This way!"

Their eyes met. Cordelier frowned, drawing down the corners of his mouth, as he tried to recall where he had first seen that lean-jawed, hard-bitten countenance. Then, behind the week-old stubble and the dirt, he recognized Norton, and his hand closed convulsively on the trigger of his rifle.

"What the devil are you gaping at?" he cried angrily. "Don't you understand what I'm saying?"

"It's been a long time," said Norton. "We've come a long way . . ."

He had sworn to himself that if ever he caught up with Cordelier he would kill him. For eighteen months he had clung to his life and his sanity for no other reason. And now that his chance had come, now that the point of his bayonet was not six feet from Cordelier's throat, he found that he could not bring himself to commit murder. He had seen too many men die that morning. His eyes still held the vision of his platoon sergeant hung up on the thorny bush, back there in the swamp, with his face shot away.

"We have come a long way, have we?" retorted Cordelier, trying to conceal his apprehension behind a great show of authority. "What nonsense is this, may one ask? Don't you worry—I remember you quite well. You are Norton. The American who tried to desert. You haven't succeeded, I perceive. That is excellent. Excellent! And you might as well bear this in mind: I am a sergeant, from the Fifth Company, and you will be good enough to keep a civil tongue in your head when speaking to me. I have quite enough to do without calling you to order. I am in charge of your company for the present." He cleared his throat importantly even though his eyes, darting from side to side, were full of uneasiness.

"Commandant Grugusset gave me special orders to reorganize the right flank."

"That," agreed Norton, solemn as a

judge, "is a guarantee of success, of course."

"You—" began Cordelier, on whose cheeks two bright red splotches had appeared. "Confound your insolence!" Then he changed his mind and said, "That will do! Get back there and rejoin your section. I'll deal with you later, if you compel me to do so!"

Waving Norton away, he raised his voice, shouting at the men crawling through the grass:

"This way the Eighth! Over here! *Rassemblement!*"

CHAPTER VI

SHOT FROM BEHIND

CORDELIER did not want to be reminded of the far-off days when he had not hesitated to resort to dubious expedients to obtain money to satisfy his expensive tastes for wine and women and tailor-made uniforms.

Norton had been but one of his victims. There had been many others both before and since, and he might well have gone on practicing his astute little pranks at the expense of gullible Legionnaires had he not, in an inspired moment, bethought himself of his family.

In France, "*la famille*" means much more than it does among footloose, independent-minded Americans. It is the most significant factor in French social life. Given an influential *famille*, a black sheep need never despair. Something will always be done for him. And Cordelier, with his tongue in his cheek, had written to the king-pins of his clan to tell them how sorry he was his escapades had cast dishonor upon his wonderful *famille*. He swore he was a reformed character and intended to carve out a new career for himself in the army. It had worked like a charm. Occult forces had been brought to bear where they could do most good, and the authorities at the depot had been pleased to cast a benevolent eye upon the industrious and ambitious young clerk who

was reputed to be such a brilliant engineer.

The proper place for a gentleman equipped with such an array of academic honors was the officers' mess, but Cordelier had been given to understand that, first of all, he would have to win his spurs. And spurs were not to be won while sitting in a swivel chair. An uncle had chipped in with an allowance which had enabled him to reform without giving up any of his nasty little vices, and he had sallied forth from the office all the way to the banks of the Kong-Soo River on the edge of the Laos country.

It was his first experience of bush warfare, and he was not enjoying the sensation. All too clearly everything was going haywire. Commandant Grugusset, a fire-eating optimist, had underestimated the enemy strength, and launched his first assault without bothering to prepare a coherent battle plan. The result was a first class mess. The Eighth Company of the Legion had been cut to pieces. The Fifth, farther to the left, had not yet extricated itself from the quagmire. The Colonial Infantrymen were wandering around on the right flank, somewhere, on the far side of a low fold in the ground, which was said to be alive with snipers.

During the momentary panic which had followed the virtual annihilation of the Eighth, Grugusset had pounced upon Cordelier and had ordered him to round up the survivors and establish a liaison with the Colonial Infantry. It wasn't the kind of work Cordelier was accustomed to. Ever since he had been on active service he had managed to wriggle from one good staff billet to another, and had never displayed the slightest inclination to expose himself to the enemy's fire.

Grugusset, however, had not stopped to realize that in sending Cordelier into action he was depriving himself of the services of a zealous, amiable and efficient assistant-secretary. Far from it!

"Here's your chance," he had declared. "You have a good head on your shoulders, my boy. I can't spare another officer. Impossible! Out of the question! But you'll

do. Round up the Eighth. Get it out of the way—under cover. Give the men a breathing spell. We may need 'em later on."

THESE words were balm to Cordelier's jangled nerves. He did not relish the job, but he had to live up to his reputation—a reputation for heroic courage he had built up for himself, even while he was making out ration returns in triplicate and penning fair copies of the commandant's reports to headquarters.

Until Norton had appeared upon the scene he had been getting along quite nicely. "This is dreadful," thought Cordelier. "This is terrible! He is bound to gabble, this crapulous swine of a Yankee. He'll do his best to belittle me. Damn him and his miserable two thousand francs! If Grugusset hears of this—of course he wouldn't believe a word of it, but a doubt might subsist in his mind. And the men would lap it up. They'd love it!"

Beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead, ran down the sides of his long, slightly crooked nose.

"I must get rid of him," he decided. "He doesn't count; a jailbird. I'm not going to be held back by any such vermin. My life is more important than his."

Puffs of smoke eddied above the grassy slope on the right flank. The bullets were hunting out the Legionnaires of the Fifth Company as they stumbled out of the jungle. Cordelier pursed his lips and stared intently at the slope, until, abruptly, he reached a decision.

"Legionnaire Norton!" he called. "Come here at once. Norton," he went on as the latter crawled up beside him, "you see that ridge? Very well. The Colonial Infantrymen are on the other side—somewhere. I have already sent out one patrol to find them and order them to join forces with the Fifth. I want you to follow up the patrol and make sure the order has been delivered."

Norton's glance traveled slowly from Cordelier's tense face to the low ridge half

hidden by the mist and the smoke.

"You're in a hell of a hurry to get rid of me, ain't you?" he jeered. "What's the trouble? Afraid I'll put a bullet in your nut while you ain't looking?"

"Speak French!" snapped Cordelier. "I refuse to answer your stupid question. My feelings toward you are wholly impersonal, free from prejudice of any sort. Is that clear to you?"

"You bet!" agreed Norton. Those two words were all-sufficient. Had he spoken for half an hour he could not have expressed his contempt and derision more explicitly. But Cordelier chose to overlook the insult.

"I am sending you," he said, in a firm yet friendly manner, "because I happen to know you are American. You do not take kindly to discipline," he shrugged his shoulders and smiled one of those nasty-nice smiles which could be interpreted ten different ways, "but I have great faith in your personal initiative. I am giving you an opportunity to wipe the slate clean, Norton, and make a fresh start. As you see, I bear no malice . . ."

"For what? Taking my dough and sending me to prison? Cut out the tripe."

"You have your orders—obey them!" retorted Cordelier, abandoning all pretense. "If you refuse to obey, don't forget you are on active service and may be shot for cowardice in the presence of the enemy. Are you going? Yes or no?"

For a brief instant Norton wavered uncertainly, then, without comment, he stood up, tucked his rifle under his arm, and ran, crouching low, toward the ridge. His own impotence filled him with disgust. Even though he distrusted and despised Cordelier, Cordelier was a sergeant and he had to obey him. *Had to!* Either he carried out the sergeant's orders or they would tie him to a stake and put twelve bullets into his chest. . . .

So he ran toward the ridge, where the mist was thinning out, and Cordelier on his knees in the grass watched him go; watched him with the hard, unwinking stare of a bird of prey, following him

step by step to the foot of the ridge. And as Norton began to climb the slope his bent back became visible; a blurred khaki patch burrowing among the weeds.

With a quick movement Cordelier snatched up his rifle. He drew a deep shuddering breath as he brought the sights to bear on the figure on the slope. He leaned forward, pressing his sweaty, bearded cheek against the smooth gun stock. His trigger finger grew taut!

Crack! The air hissed through his teeth. Over yonder, the figure had vanished. For a second or so the weeds and the grass quivered spasmodically, then all was still again.

Cordelier jerked the spent cartridge shell from his rifle and crawled toward the Legionnaires.

"I bagged that one!" he exclaimed joyfully. "There's one sniper who will snipe no more! That's not bad shooting—at three hundred meters—a bull's eye!"

Only one man looked up, a gaunt, hollow-cheeked trooper whose eyes were bright with fever.

"That's fine as long as you didn't make a mistake," he pointed out. "How about the fellow Norton—he was going that way—"

"I've had my eye on this sniper for the past fifteen minutes," swore Cordelier. "Norton, you idiot? Norton crossed the ridge long before I fired."

"And the machine gunners thought the same thing about us."

"Nonsense," Cordelier said emphatically. "Utter nonsense. Accidents will happen, you know, but we mustn't allow ourselves to be demoralized. We must have courage!"

The man's only answer to that exhortation was an undignified and insubordinate grunt.

IT WAS high noon. Out of a silvery-white sky the sun beat mercilessly down upon the clearing. A pillar of smoke and flame towered high above the burning village. Showers of sparks and blazing thatch palm leaves whirled through the air, kindling

scores of new fires in the treetops.

The whole world, it seemed to Norton, smoldered and smoked in the quivering heat haze.

With fingers grown numb and clumsy he pushed his sun helmet back to cover the nape of his neck. The effort left him weak and shaken, racked with pain. A bullet had punched a hole in the back of his right thigh. It was still in the wound, lodged in the muscles just above the knee. The force of the impact had bowled him over. Before he had been able to open his first aid kit he had lost so much blood that he had lost consciousness.

Hours had gone by. He had come to in time to catch a glimpse of the Legionnaires and Colonial Infantrymen swarming through gaps in the stockade. The noise had swelled to a mighty crescendo, then had gradually died away as the fighting rolled through the village and spread along the banks of the stream.

Very gingerly Norton sat up. The wound reopened as he did so. He felt the blood flow and spread inside his mud-caked pants. The first aid bandage lay in the grass, a foot or so away. To reach it, and open it, to tear aside the leg of his trousers was a slow, agonizing struggle against leaden muscles and reeling brain. With infinite difficulty he twisted around sideways and poured the contents of the iodine vial into the open wound. The accompanying wave of burning pain made him yelp. Through clenched teeth, his lips drawn back off his gums, he shouted crazily:

"Why the hell don't they come out and get me? Are you going to let me leak to death, you buzzards? Killing people! Murdering 'em! I don't give a damn about your lousy war. I won't die out here like this!"

Then he laughed at his own blind terror, and the sound of his laughter sent a chill racing down his spine.

"I'm going nuts," he announced, nursing his throbbing leg between both hands. "What if I do croak? There's plenty more to keep me company and if—"

He left the sentence unfinished as he gaped stupidly at a face which had appeared all at once on a level with his boots. An oval, ivory-yellow face with almond eyes and delicate, finely-moulded features. A lock of glossy, blue-black hair hung down over the forehead.

The faintest suggestion of a smile hovered around the lips.

Norton's hand went instinctively to the rifle lying close beside him, but he had not strength enough to lift it off the ground.

"Well?" he croaked. "What's on your mind, Image?"

The image spoke in a thin, breathless voice:

"I heard you speak English. I am wounded also. My ankle is, if I may so express myself, shot to hell. I wonder whether you would mind letting me have a drop of water—if you have any water."

Norton closed his hot, dry eyelids, and held them shut for at least three seconds. When he looked again the face was still there, peering at him over the end of his muddy boots.

"Suffering pups!" he muttered. "What do you want? Water? Sure—there's some in my bottle. But you'll have to come and get it. I can't move. I've been bleeding like a stuck pig."

The man squirmed out of the grass, his breath hissing through his indrawn lips as he dragged his shattered ankle behind him. Norton's astonishment gave way to dumfounded amazement when he saw that the native was dressed in European clothes—a coat of white linen, tweed plus fours, golf stockings, and pigskin shoes. A shirt of blue silk and a polka-dot bow tie completed the startling ensemble.

"Where the flaming blazes did you come from?" ejaculated Norton, helping the man loosen the catches of the bottle.

The bottle was no more than half full. The native raised it to his lips and drank sparingly.

"Thank you," he said. "I am much obliged. You are American, are you not? I thought so. I studied law at Columbia University."

"Say that again!" ordered Norton. "Columbia University? Morningside Heights . . . the North River . . . traffic lights . . . remember the old Fifth Avenue busses? I can see 'em plain as day." Tears dribbled down his cheeks. "I'm a damn fool, but I can't help it," he complained. "New York! It's night over there. There's people going to theaters, and Broadway's crowded, and some lucky stiff is taking his girl to the movies, and—" he broke off sharply, glaring at the native, "we're here! Killing one another, burning villages that ain't on any map, crawling through stinking slime to pump bullets into each other's hides. Does that make sense? Does it? The hell you say."

HE SLUMPED down, holding his head between his fists, exhausted by his own outburst.

The native said quietly:

"You must tie the bandage around your wound or the flies will infect it. You speak of murder," he went on, "is it a crime for a man to defend his home—for a tribe or a nation to resist aggression? What brought *you* here?"

"You'd be surprised," grunted Norton. "But if you think I wanted to come, take it from me, you're wrong."

The man's features did not move, in his eyes alone appeared a glimmer of contempt.

"I cannot argue with you. I do not wish to arouse my captor's ire."

"I ain't keeping you," Norton assured him. "For all of me, you can beat it all the way back to Cherry Street—and good luck to you. I didn't start this war."

The native propped himself up on one elbow. For a long moment, lost in thought, he stared at the blazing stockade.

"No," he said at last, "you did not start it, but the French did, and you are fighting for the French."

"Now listen—" protested Norton.

"I know!" the man broke in. "To you this is a great adventure—as escape from routine and monotony. You spoke of New York a minute ago. Why didn't you stay

there, where your life was secure, where you were among your own kind? Why did you come here in a French uniform to fight and to conquer—”

“I’m no conqueror, doggone it!” muttered Norton. “Wait till I tell you.”

But the man didn’t wait.

“Conquest!” he went on bitterly. “That may not have been your motive, but that is the result of your actions. What *are* you fighting for out here? You don’t know and you don’t care.” His thin voice hissed like the lash of a whip. “You do what you are told to do.”

Norton, in his own unexpressed opinion, was feeling lousier and lousier from second to second. The pain in his leg was subsiding, but he was very dizzy and faint, and he found it increasingly difficult to make his eyes focus on the native’s face, which seemed to recede and to grow smaller and smaller until it was no bigger than a pin point. Oddly enough the man’s voice was very loud and distinct.

“You do what you are told to do,” he repeated.

“If I don’t,” said Norton, “I’ll be shot.”

He could not articulate properly, for his tongue was thick and dry.

“You *have* been shot,” the native pointed out.

“’Tain’t the same thing. You know what I mean. They’d line me up before a firing squad.”

The native’s voice filled his ears, echoed inside his reeling brain:

“We fight for our liberty, as your nation fought in ’76. You are fighting for tea planters and rice brokers, financiers and manufacturers. You are fighting for company promoters and ten per cent dividends.”

A quarter of a mile away the village blazed and the smoke cast a shadow across the white-hot sun. Men in small, scattered groups fled through the waist-high grass followed by other men, who shot them down.

“This,” said the native, “is nothing. This bog, as you call it. But beyond lies a richer soil, a better climate, and in the

hills there are huge deposits of tin and nickel and tungsten; there is a dense population which can be taxed and put to work and exploited. These are the things you are fighting for.”

“I wish you’d lay off me for a while,” pleaded Norton. “I keep telling you it ain’t my war. I ain’t interested. I’ve seen enough. I’ve seen too much! But what can I do?”

The native’s fingers closed around his wrist.

“Do you mean that?”

Norton laughed wearily, as men laugh when they have reached the end of their tether and can see no hope ahead, no relief from suffering and misery.

“Do I mean it? Man alive, I’ve been in this outfit almost three years; I’ve been in prison; and not a day has gone by that I haven’t hated it. If I’d wanted to be a soldier I’d have joined the Marines or the Navy. . . . I’d fight for my own country any day, but this—can’t you understand?—it’s none of my business. I’m a radio operator, and—”

He stopped, stared wide-eyed at the native, then all the color drained out of his cheeks, and he keeled over onto his back, and lay there limp and motionless, breathing so faintly that the native had to place his cheek close to Norton’s lips to find out whether he lived or not.

The man took another drink from Norton’s water bottle, replaced it on its hooks and crawled slowly toward the jungle, dragging his crippled leg behind him.

CHAPTER VII

CONDEMNED

AFTER the doctor had gone his rounds, Norton left the ward and limped out onto the veranda of the hospital. It was raining in sheets, a warm downpour which obscured the broad and muddy expanse of the Kong-Soo River flowing by at the foot of the terraced garden.

The veranda was crowded with con-

valescents. Here and there a man nodded as Norton went by, but no one attempted to make room for him on the benches. Most of the patients seemed to be very interested in their card games or the magazines they pretended to read. Silence walled him in. Conversation died abruptly as he advanced, and was not resumed until he had gone by.

The nursing sister on guard duty hurried toward him, an eager smile on her smooth, round face.

"There is a chair down at the far end," she told him. "I kept it 'specially for you. I'll make you comfortable in no time at all."

Norton, however, came to a halt by the screen door.

"If it's all the same to you," he said pleasantly, "I'll stand here and look at the view."

There was nothing to be seen except a strip of rain-sluiced lawn, but Sister Genevieve did not attempt to dissuade him.

His presence had a bad effect upon the wounded heroes intrusted to her care. They couldn't relax properly when he was about. There was something very wrong about this gaunt, hollow-cheeked Legionnaire with the hard eyes and the bitter mouth. He was "under observation" by order of the military authorities. This was supposed to be a secret, but the news had leaked out as such rumors will from the hospital office. No one knew whether Norton was a spy, an agitator, or merely a soured and untrustworthy soldier. One thing was certain: the Intelligence Service was ready to pounce upon him just as soon as it had completed its investigation. His fate was bound to be unpleasant, and none of the other patients, quite naturally, cared to be mixed up in any way with such a dubious and unsavory customer.

Sister Genevieve, who was kindness itself, stood beside him, uneasily fingering the beads of the rosary at her waist.

"I saw your chart this morning," she said with assumed brightness. "You are coming along wonderfully well. Practically no temperature and your leg will soon be

as good as new, won't it? You have much to be grateful for, my poor child! It is a miracle that the doctors were able to save you!"

She looked at him hopefully, and he rewarded her good intentions with a grim but not unpleasant smile.

Nothing definite had been said to him by the doctors or the officials with whom he had come in contact, but he was well aware of the fact that he had been listed as a suspicious character. He needed no sixth sense to warn him that he was in danger. He had been much too outspoken for his own good when the surgeon at the field dressing station had taken a French Lebel bullet from his leg, and when the fever had addled his brains he had raved and cursed so vigorously that he had been shifted from the general ward to a private room, where he could gabble to his heart's content without contaminating his fellow sufferers.

Since then he had been discreetly pumped by the resident psychologist and a swarm of lesser lights, ranging all the way from medical corps orderlies to convalescent troopers. They had done their best to draw him out, but he closed up like a clam, and his silence itself had heightened the suspicions of the investigators.

He dared not trust anyone, not even the nursing sister standing beside him.

"Yes," he admitted, "I am much better."

The beads clicked through her fingers.

"Soon you will be leaving us, going back to your regiment." There was a catch in her throat. "I am sure you will welcome the opportunity of doing your duty."

She was doing her best to help him, waiting for some favorable remark she could relay to the medical board.

"I shall obey orders," he assured her.

"Joyfully?"

That was going too far. He might be headed for prison, or a padded cell, or the firing squad, but not even to please Sister Genevieve would he pretend that he enjoyed being a Legionnaire. He had made a mistake; he was paying for it in full; he asked favors of no one.

HE LEFT her question unanswered, and after an awkward interval he said:

"Doesn't it ever stop raining in this part of the world? We haven't seen the sun all week."

She moved a step closer.

"Something is troubling you," she began.

"The rain," he declared. "I'm tired of being cooped up."

"But you love your regiment, don't you? You are proud of it. If you tried hard enough you would be promoted very rapidly. Isn't that worth striving for—to serve faithfully and loyally—"

He cut her short: "You're wasting your time, Sister. I have nothing to say. I am a 'bayonet unit,' as the textbook says. My thinking is done for me—which takes a great load off my mind."

Sister Genevieve edged away.

"I must go," she explained. "But you must cheer up and look on the bright side of things. I'm sure you need a tonic. That's just what you need: a good tonic. I shall speak to the doctor about it."

He stood where she left him, staring at the rain, until he heard footsteps moving toward him and a heavy hand closed on his shoulder.

He wheeled around, half expecting to find himself confronted by the provost-marshal come to arrest him. Instead he beheld Derecske, just as four-square and chunky and slow moving as he had been in the old days at Sidi-bel-Abbes.

Norton greeted him enthusiastically.

"You almost gave me heart-failure! What are you doing out here, you old son-of-a-gun? I'm damn glad to see you! How's everything?"

Derecske accepted this outburst with his usual ox-like calm.

"I heard you were here," he explained. "Me? I have been out here quite some time. I have been looking for you."

"Have a good time with the Disciplinary Battalion?"

The Hungarian's blue eyes twinkled.

"A very nice time—and you?"

Norton laughed, his first spontaneous laugh in many months.

"The happiest days of my life were spent at Camp 8, north of Taza! I'll never forget 'em. They were just too kind to me for words, up there. We had a dear old adjutant—the soul of honor. He loved to rap me over the head with his black-jack."

"And now?"

"Not so good," shrugged Norton. "I've been blacklisted."

Derecske nodded. "So I gathered. I've been coming here every day for the last two weeks. They weren't going to let me in today until an officer came along and said it was all right."

"Maybe it is," agreed Norton, "but I wouldn't linger long if I were you, or they'll get you, too. This business of being watched ain't so hot."

They were silent while an orderly who had been hovering in the background came

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Of Tired Kidneys—How To Get Happy Relief

If backache and leg pains are making you miserable, don't just complain and do nothing about them. Nature may be warning you that your kidneys need attention.

The kidneys are Nature's chief way of taking excess acids and poisonous waste out of the blood. They help most people pass about 3 pints a day.

If the 15 miles of kidney tubes and filters don't work well, poisonous waste matter stays in the blood. These poisons may start nagging

backaches, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, getting up nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder.

Don't wait! Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, used successfully by millions for over 40 years. They give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from the blood. Get Doan's Pills. ADV.

up with a bucket and a rag and mopped up a puddle of water by the door.

"The walls have ears," cautioned Norton, as the orderly slouched away. "That cootie speaks English well enough to misunderstand everything we say. He's a pest. How come you're in this neck of the woods?" he went on, lowering his voice. "I had a hunch you were going to make a break?"

DERECSKE'S square face grew hard. "That is coming—soon. Very soon now. There was no hurry. I volunteered for service in Tonkin because before I leave the army I want to meet Cordelier once more."

"That buzzard?"

"But that is not what brought me here today. We can't talk here. I have news for you—big news." Looking straight to the front, he spoke out of the corner of his mouth. "I met a friend of yours recently. He wants to see you as soon as possible."

"I have no friends. Who are you talking about—the keeper of the jail or the president of the next court-martial?"

"Ever heard of William Van-Prao?"

"Nope."

"I think you have. Van-Prao lost a leg some time ago. He tells me a bullet struck his ankle and the leg had to be amputated because—"

"Got you now!" exclaimed Norton. "For the love of Mike! That bird—I thought I must have dreamed about him—"

"He is very much alive. Can you leave the barracks this evening?"

"Not a chance!"

"Convalescents are allowed out. You must apply for a pass at once."

"Yeah! And they'll give me the horse laugh."

"Try. If that does not work, find some other way of getting out. You must, unless you are willing to spend the rest of your days in prison."

It was much easier than Norton had anticipated. He went to the office convinced that his request would be brutally refused. Nothing of the sort happened, however. The regimental sergeant-major to whom

he applied was almost affable. A pass? Of course he could have a pass! Why hadn't he asked for one sooner? A few hours in town would do him a world of good!

At five thirty, when he left the hospital, he found Derecske waiting for him outside the gates.

"It looks sort of fishy," confessed Norton. "They seemed glad to turn me loose. I don't like it worth a cent. If you want to call it off, there's still lots of time. There's no sense in getting you in Dutch, too."

"That is my business," retorted Derecske. "I know what I am doing and why. I came out here to find Cordelier—but Cordelier no longer matters. I hate all this more perhaps than you do."

He waved his hand at the buildings lining the square they were crossing.

"Look at 'em—banks and wholesale houses and government buildings! Soldiers conquered this country, soldiers like us; those God-fearing business men loot it."

"With due process of law," Norton chuckled. "Loot is part of the white man's burden."

"And bullets," added Derecske. "Bullets come first. What right have you or I to be here? It's all right for the French to colonize this part of the earth if they want to, but where do we fit in? It reminds me of my own city: Roumanian officers monopolizing the tables at the cafe while the gypsy orchestra plays to the people standing outside in the gutter."

"We're being followed," Norton broke in. "At least it looks that way to me. See that civilian? There! Passing under the street lamp. He picked us up as we left the hospital. I've learned to spot 'em."

"Can you walk a little faster?" queried Derecske. "Let me take your arm. Where we are going he will find it hard to follow."

He turned into a side street, and they passed abruptly from the well ordered quiet of the European settlement to the swarming squalor of the East, hurring through a succession of muddy, narrow, congested streets filled with stocky little brown men, some naked to the waist, some clad in knee-length garments.

"How far are we going?" inquired Norton, wiping the sweat off his face.

The Hungarian took a firmer grip on his elbow.

"We'll be there in a minute—but that's only a beginning. You have seen the last of your hospital. You're never going back."

"Rather sudden, ain't it?"

"Any regrets?"

"Just one," Norton replied. "I'm damn sorry I didn't fix Cordelier's feet. I had a good chance—but I couldn't do it. I bumped into him the day I was wounded."

"I heard about that also. I met some of the men of your company at the canteen. Some queer stories are being told about Cordelier. One of them concerns you. It may not be true, but one man swore he saw Cordelier shoot at you."

Norton stopped dead in his tracks.

"So that's how it happened. Why, the lousy swine!"

"Never mind that now," urged Derecske, dragging him along. "It is unimportant. Cordelier," he added dryly, "was mentioned in dispatches for courage and resourcefulness under fire. He had been transferred to General Lafourche's staff."

"And he's the guy who sent me out on patrol and put a bullet in my leg!" sputtered Norton. "Why didn't anybody report him?"

"A thing like that is hard to prove. If you can't prove it, the best thing a man can do is to shut up. Don't bother about Cordelier—you're all through with him."

He slowed down as they reached the corner of a dark and evil-smelling alleyway.

"This way," Derecske ordered sharply. "Quickly!"

Midway down the alley they came to a house, no different from a thousand other native dwellings. A thread of light showed beneath the door. Derecske put his knee to the door and thrust it open. In the middle of a small, low-ceilinged room a very fat Chinaman in a patched blue shirt squatted beside a mound of old rags which he was sorting out and bundling. The rags stank. An oil lantern standing on a low stool threw wavering streaks

of light and shadow across the Chinaman's moon face.

He did not appear surprised when the two soldiers came tumbling in.

"All clear?" Derecske inquired in French.

THE Chinaman nodded and spat a long jet of betel-nut juice at random among the rags. Without a word he heaved himself to his feet, picked up the lantern and led the way through a back room and across a yard, where a lean sow and her progeny wallowed in muck so foul that Norton almost gagged. They came to a shed into which they squeezed. The Chinaman extinguished the lantern and lowered a roll of matting which shut out every last scrap of light. Then he knocked on the wall, a door swung open, and Norton stepped into a white-washed cubicle as small and bare as a prison cell. A camp bed, two stools, a table, and a kerosene lamp comprised the furniture.

As the Legionnaires, half blinded by the light, stumbled across the threshold, a man limped toward them. He wore native dress; a knee-length tunic of black silk with a closely fitting collar, and a small turban of the same material, but Norton recognized him instantly. He would have known that face in any crowd. It had breeding and self-composure and the same indefinable expression of aloof indifference Norton had observed on statues in Buddhist Temples.

"Here he is," said Derecske. "I think we were followed part of the way, but we shook 'em off."

The man bowed.

"I have been looking forward to this minute a long, long time. You are more than welcome. You have not forgotten our last meeting?"

He gave the two stools to his visitors and lowered himself onto the camp bed. The peg-leg stuck out stiff and straight in front of him.

"I'm damn sorry you had to lose it," Norton began. "I suppose—"

"It does not matter," Van-Prao assured him. "We have no skilled surgeons to patch

us up. Our friend Derecske tells me you are just as dissatisfied as ever. Is that so?"

"Absolutely."

"Then will you listen carefully to what I have to say. I shall be as concise as possible. First, a question: I take it you are anxious to desert?"

"Right!"

"One more: Has Derecske told you anything about me or my plans?"

"Not a word."

Van-Prao nodded. He lit a cigarette before he spoke in a low, monotonous voice. He was not, he explained, a native of the flat lands where he had first met Norton. He came from a small principality to the northward, in the hills near the Chinese border. At the peace conference which had followed the Franco-Chinese war the fate of the principality had been left in doubt. No one had taken the trouble to consult its ruler, nor had it been mentioned by name in any treaty. Because access from the south was extremely difficult it had enjoyed over forty years of independence, while the French consolidated their position in Tonkin and China disintegrated in a welter of anarchy and blood.

"But we are not going to be left alone much longer," said Van-Prao. "The French are clearing the road to Bac-Ming as fast as they can. It is slow work—slow but steady. Bac-Ming is their logical goal. It is the door to the interior of China, and that means trade, profits, new zones of influence to be developed. They will drive a railroad through the swamps to tap our natural resources. The financiers and the industrialists won't object to that. The French are badly in need of oil; there is oil up our way in enormous quantities, according to the geological surveys. The refiners want to break the Anglo-American monopoly; the government wants a private source of supply of crude oil in case of war—so they make war against us to obtain control of our oil beds. Amusing? Very! That's why General Lafourche is pouring men like you into the swamps, and that, also, is why we are delaying and hampering his advance. We

shall fight," he said, biting off each word, "to the very end with every and any weapon. We are not going to surrender. Personally, I am ready to die, but I will not submit."

"But you can't win," said Norton.

"Of course not, but our effort will not be wasted. We can set a pattern for our sons and our son's sons to live up to. Will you help us?" he asked abruptly.

"In what way?"

"A thousand. You understand wireless. Propaganda is a mighty weapon. There's the oil. Perhaps we could organize a company of our own. You could be useful there. And you would be free."

Norton stood up and held out his hand. "I'm with you," he said. "All the way. This is something worth fighting for."

Derecske clouted him on the back.

"That's what I said! I was sure—"

Somewhere near at hand a shout rang out, a loud, inarticulate cry, followed instantly by the sound of a shot. Four more rang out in quick succession. A fragment of plaster, torn off the wall above Van-Prao's head, fell onto the bed. The shouting redoubled. Through the flimsy partition men could be heard floundering about in the hog-wallow, calling to one another.

For an eternity the three men in the narrow room stared at the jagged hole in the wall.

"They've got us!" Derecske burst out.

"Quiet!" ordered Van-Prao.

He hobbled across the room and blew out the lamp. The white beam of an electric torch split the darkness. It crept along the wall until it came to rest on a narrow door at the far end of the room.

"I don't think they have found this entrance," Van-Prao went on. "Not as yet."

He extinguished the torch. Very gingerly he slid back the bolt, and as he did so hell broke loose. A dozen men surged forward so eagerly that the leaders became wedged in the doorway. Cursing and struggling, they hung there for a split second, and Van-Prao, dragging an automatic from his pocket, let them have it at point-blank

range. Four men dropped. Van-Prao ducked and slid out of the room as the survivors recoiled, but neither Derecske nor Norton was able to follow him.

Before they could move, the door through which they had first entered the room gave way. Shafts of dazzling light beat upon them, front and back.

A voice yelled, "Put 'em up, you swine! Up!"

Derecske tore his bayonet from its scabbard and rushed like a bull straight at the speaker. A lick of flame spurted out of the shadows. Shot between the eyes, stone dead, Derecske fell flat on his chin with a thud that shook the whole house. Out of the smoke a man loomed up in front of Norton—a face lighted from underneath by a bright beam of light, a face with a long, thin nose and a mouth all twisted with hate.

Cordelier!

Norton lashed out savagely, but his fist never reached its mark. The butt end of a gun crashed against his skull, and he slid down into merciful darkness and oblivion, where for a little while he was freed from all pain and anguish.

CHAPTER VIII

ESCAPE

NORTON sat in his cell, resting his elbows on his thighs, staring vacantly at the floor. The night was so quiet that the steady pulsation of his heart rang in his ears.

He had come to the end of the road, the long road he had traveled since the day in Marseilles when he had gone haywire and joined the Foreign Legion.

The grim ritual of the trial lay behind him. The endless waiting, the red tape, the uncertainty, all these were over. Everything, life itself, was over. Military degradation, and hard labor for life had been the verdict of the court. As soon as the sentence had been approved by the advocate-general at Hanoi, he would make his last ignominious appearance in the Legion's

uniform. The buttons would be ripped off his tunic, the badge torn from his cap, then gendarmes, representing the civil authorities, would take him in tow, and he would be paraded past the assembled troops, while the drums thundered and volleyed as they sped him on his way to prison for life. After that he would be herded with murderers and thugs, and he would be indistinguishable from them. Eventually he would land in French Guiana, where another kind of hell awaited him until at last he died. He was twenty-five years of age.

There was nothing he could do about it. He was lost. Van-Prao had vanished. Derecske, the lucky devil, was dead and buried. He, Norton, had been made the goat. But he was past anger and sorrow. He experienced no twinge of bitterness when he recalled Cordelier's appearance before the court; a very smart, smug and conceited Sergeant Cordelier, who had literally simpered as he told the judges how, since his transfer to the Intelligence Department of the Legion on the staff of General Lafourche, he had been assigned the task of tracking down one Guillaume Van-Prao reputed to be one of the most dangerous agitators in the country.

Of course Van-Prao had escaped, but that wasn't Cordelier's fault. His subordinates had not followed his instructions. Nonetheless, thanks to his technical training which had sharpened his deductive powers, he had smoked out Van-Prao and kept him from exerting his pernicious influence upon the minds of the rank and file of the Legion. He had learned, he explained with becoming modesty, that Van-Prao had been sent to America at one time by a secret nationalist organization with headquarters at Canton. Acting upon this information he had shadowed Derecske, who was known to have lived in the United States, and Derecske had led him to Van-Prao's hiding place. But he had not been content with this master stroke. Norton, he was convinced, was also involved, and he had taken the necessary measures to make sure that Norton could leave the hospital without

let or hindrance. And as a result of his brilliant exploits, there stood Norton, a self-convicted traitor to the flag he had sworn to serve!

A slight sound caused Norton to look around. Rats, maybe, scuttling along the floor or some one moving in an adjoining cell. Again he heard the sound, a very faint scraping, which seemed to come from the door. It was too dark for him to see across the cell. He sat motionless, and after an interminable period the air suddenly felt cooler against his cheek.

A hinge creaked, it was no more than a pin point of sound, but Norton knew that some one had entered the cell. A match flared up suddenly, high and bright as the light of an explosion. The flat-featured, brown face of a native sergeant of the *Tirailleurs Tonkinois* swam toward him out of the darkness.

In two strides the sergeant crossed the cell and bent over Norton.

"*Viens!*" he whispered. "Come."

Then the match went out and Norton felt the sergeant's fingers close around his wrist. Dry-mouthed, his knees shaking, he allowed himself to be led out of the cell. The corridor was empty. A lantern glowed above the heavy door barring the way to the guard room. Tugging at Norton's arm, the sergeant headed in the opposite direction until they reached an empty cell at the far end of the passage.

Striking another match, he pointed upward at the window. Two of the bars had been wrenched from their sockets. The aperture was wide enough for Norton to squeeze through. Rooted to the ground, he gaped at the sergeant, but the latter was in no mood to be gaped at or to answer any questions. He was in a desperate, feverish and quite unoriental hurry.

"Up!" he ordered.

"And you?" inquired Norton, wondering whether he might not be about to be shot in the back, according to the classical formula, "while trying to escape."

The sergeant handed him a thick, heavy automatic, and again pointed to the window.

"You first. I follow."

They scrambled out the window, making, it seemed to Norton, more than enough noise to wake the dead. An eight-foot drop landed him in a narrow, stone-paved courtyard. His feet were bare. He lost his balance and rolled over, wrenching the muscles of his leg weakened by the bullet wound in his thigh.

The sergeant landed upright with the stealth and grace of a cat. Side by side they crossed the yard and headed toward the outer wall of the barracks. Somewhere above the clouds there was a full moon. Occasionally a stray beam of light shed an uncertain glimmer upon the near-by buildings. The voices of the sentries mounting guard on the ramparts echoed in the stillness.

KEEPING close to the wall, the sergeant led the way to an open shed which housed the farrier's shop. A ladder had been concealed behind a tool chest. He propped it against the wall.

A wave of hope, headier, more intoxicating than champagne, tingled in Norton's veins.

"Liberty," he said to himself, "here I come!"

It seemed to him that all danger was past. He was out, he was free, he was going places.

And as he reached the ramparts the moon broke through the clouds, and a sentry fifty yards away bellowed:

"Halt! Who goes there? Halt, for the second time—Halt!"

"Jump!" hissed the *Tirailleur* sergeant, prodding Norton in the small of the back. "Go!"

The sentry was galloping along the narrow walk. Norton lowered himself over the edge and let go. *Crack!* A bullet missed him by inches.

He dropped in knee-deep mud and again his leg gave away. The sergeant dragged him to his feet. Bullets hailed about them as they splashed out of the moat and fled down a narrow path. The night was alive with noise; dogs barked and whistles

blew; rifles banged and some one yelled: "I see them! They are going toward the river!"

The tumbledown shanties of camp followers lined the wayside. Norton caught glimpses of half-clad people clustered in doorways as he raced along. And abruptly, sprung from nowhere, a gendarme lumbered into the sergeant and tried to throttle him. They hung there for a full second, their tendons cracking as they strained against each other. Other men were pounding up the path. Norton heard them comfast. His hand closed on the butt of the heavy gun in his pocket. He drove the muzzle against the gendarme's side and jerked the trigger.

Then they were running again and the sergeant was all doubled over as he coughed and spat. They passed the last houses; around a bend Norton saw the surface of the river glistening in the moonlight. Their pursuers were not a stone's throw away. He stopped and emptied the automatic at them without visible effort. The sergeant dragged at his arm, cursing him in a shrill, squealing voice.

They reached the river bank. Norton heard an engine purring, saw a long, black shape at the water's edge. The engine's voice swelled to a sputtering roar as he slid down the muddy bank.

Some one grabbed him by the scruff of the neck; the sergeant boosted him from behind. Almost before he landed in the cockpit the launch shot away from the bank.

When his breath returned Norton sat up. The launch was in midstream, traveling fast, though the engine had been throttled down.

"Well," said a voice. "Feeling better?"

Van-Prao, a cigarette between his fingers, sat on the bench close beside him.

"I feel like a million bucks," croaked Norton. "I had a hunch I'd be seeing you as soon as that sergeant showed up. I can't begin to tell you—"

"Don't," said Van-Prao. "That sergeant is one of my best men. He was useful where he was, but he served his purpose;

he got you out of prison. There is much work for us to do."

THE French were coming. They were over yonder, somewhere, behind that range of hills standing out sharp and clear against the pale-blue, rain-washed sky. A sluggish, slow-moving crowd filled the roadway and rolled in an endless stream down the steep hillside toward the red roof-tops of Bac-Ming.

Defeat, apathy, indifference, were stamped on the brown faces that flowed past Norton as he drove his pony at a slow walk toward the old temple on the brow of the ridge.

The French were coming. For two years these people had fought stubbornly, holding onto every inch of their land. But the pressure had become too great. The slow, unwieldy columns had come crawling out of the steamy lowlands, closing in upon Bac-Ming from three sides at once like steel claws. No decisive battle had been fought, but from one day to the next the defensive forces had crumbled and all semblance of resistance had ceased.

With difficulty, Norton breasted the crowd and urged his pony into the courtyard of the temple. Other horses were gathered there, guarded by collies in sheepskin coats huddled around a wood fire. A sentry with a breech-clout hanging down below a soiled and threadbare khaki tunic squatted on the mossy steps leading up to the temple. He did not raise his head as Norton, having dismounted, hurried past him.

Indoors two youngish men stood by a charcoal brazier, warming their hands. They wore peaked caps and cheap, badly made khaki uniforms. Heavy revolvers stuck out of the holsters fastened to their belts. On the floor, close to the brazier, thrown down in disorder lay a heap of automatic rifles, cartridge belts, and crates of ammunition. Beyond, against the rear wall, an enormous stone statue of Buddha towered up into the shadowy darkness which the shafts of sunlight slanting through holes in the roof could not dis-

pel. The place smelled of opium smoke and rotting wood and manure.

Van-Prao, who had been standing by one of the high windows talking to a group of elderly natives wearing their ceremonial robes of office, limped forward as Norton came in. He looked very tired, and his thin face was stamped with the same apathy which hung like a cloud over all the faces Norton had seen that morning.

"My message reached you," said Van-Prao as they shook hands. It was less a question than a statement of fact. "I expected you sooner."

"Couldn't make it sooner," snapped Norton. "We got tangled up with their advance guard in the Sai-Kieng Pass. We gave 'em hell until we ran out of ammunition. Why the blazes didn't you send me some of that stuff?" he demanded, jerking his thumb at the crates on the floor. "Haven't I been yelling for cartridges all week? It's a sweet mess!"

Two years of that life had left their mark upon him. He had grown lean and hard and direct. He had learned to trust no one, to expect no help, to doubt the motives of all those with whom he had to deal. And as all hope of ultimate success disappeared he had watched the slow disintegration of his companions' courage and endurance. Jealousy, treachery and greed had spread among them like a disease.

Van-Prao lit a cigarette and blew out the match with great care before breaking it in two and dropping it to the floor.

"I sent for you," he explained, clearing his throat, "because there is to be a meeting this morning. A meeting," he repeated, stressing his words, "with the French . . . to come to an arrangement with them."

"So it's all over . . ."

"I don't know." Van-Prao was as calm as ever, but a vein on his neck, just below his ear, throbbed jerkily. "It—it is hard to say."

"I thought you swore there was to be no surrender. Changed your mind, have you?"

"We have no choice," said Van-Prao.

ONE by one their plans had been shot to pieces. At first they had been successful—spectacularly successful. French outposts had been driven back, lines of communication raided, supply convoys destroyed.

On several occasions the outside world had actually heard rumors of the existence of Bac-Ming. News stories—Norton's handiwork—had appeared in the press about the vast oil deposits awaiting development in that remote territory. Imperceptibly, however, the tide had turned. Wireless equipment and other merchandise ordered from Canton was lost or destroyed before it arrived. Nothing more was heard about Bac-Ming, and Bac-Ming was promptly forgotten.

Diplomats on the other side of the earth put their sleek heads together and talked sagely about prestige and balance of power and the danger of fanaticism in the Far East. From foreign office to embassy they haggled and bartered with exquisite refinements of speech and manners, and the low cunning of horse thieves.

And the storm clouds gathered over Bac-Ming. Outlawed, without outside support, Van-Prao and his followers had been slowly ground down, muffled and gagged, choked into silence. Their faith in one another, in the cause they fought for, had turned to distrust and suspicion. Many clamored for peace—peace at any price—that the business of sowing and reaping and trading might pick up again.

Norton stared through the arched entrance at the ragged army of disaster streaming past the gates. Beyond them, across the valley where the city of Bac-Ming lay huddled inside its girdle of old brown walls, there was a broad gap in the hills—and beyond that gap, blue in the distance, lay China.

"So, what?" insisted Norton. "What are you waiting for? What are you going to arrange with the French?"

Van-Prao shifted his weight from the wooden stump to his left leg. He flicked the ash off his cigarette several times before he spoke.

"You mean—escape? That is not possible. I cannot run away."

"Who wants you to? How about the city? Are you going to let it go without a fight?"

Van-Prao nodded in the direction of the group of men he had been talking to. Norton knew most of them. They were the leaders of the community; pearl-button mandarins, money lenders, merchants, councilors who had governed the province and administered justice before Van-Prao had stepped into power with his new-fangled ideas and unorthodox ways.

"They will not stand for it," he explained uneasily. "They insist that we come to terms."

"That's nothing new. They've been making the same song and dance ever since I've been here. What's all this hooey about a 'meeting having been arranged'? It's the first I've heard of it."

Van-Prao's embarrassment only increased as he defended his actions. He had been approached, he said, by French envoys. They were ready to recognize his authority and to come to terms with him. Had he refused to entertain their proposals he would have been overthrown and some one else—some one willing to make peace—would have stepped into his shoes.

AND, he went on before Norton could speak, the terms he had been offered were very liberal and honorable. Instead of outright annexation the French were disposed to make of Bac-Ming a buffer state with the status of a protectorate. In that case he, Van-Prao, whose family had ruled Bac-Ming for many generations, would retain his rank and his privileges.

"How much are they offering you?" inquired Norton. "Remember what you once said about never submitting? How about it?"

A pinkish tinge crept into Van-Prao's cheeks. He was silent for a long while, then he said even more gently than was his custom:

"You are hurt because I did not take you into my confidence. I did not have

time to do so. It was a matter I had to decide alone, without consulting you or any one else. The French think we are in a position to go on fighting. If they find out our situation is hopeless I shall be swept aside."

"I see," agreed Norton. "And I don't blame you. When all is said and done, this is your funeral, not mine. I'm not trying to tell you what to do. If you can get good terms—fine and dandy! More power to you. When is this meeting of yours taking place?"

"Any time now."

"Then," concluded Norton, "I'm going to make tracks. You don't need me any more. You're all set. I'll be on my way—"

"On your way where?"

Norton pointed northwards.

"China. Catch a train to Canton and—"

"No," said Van-Prao. "Not yet. I cannot let you go. I want you to stay. I—er—want the French to know that I am proud to have had your help."

Not a word he said rang true, but even so Norton refused to distrust this little yellow man who had been his comrade and his friend for two years.

"That's swell," he declared, "but the less the Frogs see of me the better. I'm still a deserter. If they find me here, they're sure to raise hell."

"In all probability they will have forgotten all about you," shrugged Van-Prao. "If they haven't, I shall insist that they allow you to leave without being molested; I won't have it said you were forced to escape like a criminal."

Norton shook his head.

"You're all wrong. What's the use of complicating matters? What they don't know won't hurt 'em. I'm going while the going's good."

"You must stay," repeated Van-Prao, and it dawned upon Norton that a chasm lay between him and all these people. They did not think as he did, they did not act as he did. None of them—not even Van-Prao.

Out of the tail end of his eye he saw that while they had been talking the two

armed men had left the brazier, and now lounged in the doorway. Their right hands rested on their revolver holsters. They were watching him.

"All right," he agreed, with an assurance he was far from feeling, "if that's the way you feel about it, I'll stay a while longer."

"I knew you would!" exclaimed Van-Prao. "I shall never forget your unselfishness, nor your—"

"What's this: an obituary notice?" retorted Norton.

CHAPTER IX

BETRAYED

SHATTERING the silence a hammering, vibrant sound all at once filled the temple. It came again, louder, more emphatic. Drums. One long roll and another, and a third.

The road outside the gate was empty. The last stragglers had gone by.

Bram! Bram! Bram! The air quivered. The noise was as threatening, and as real, as a clenched fist.

Van-Prao winced. He seemed to shrink in upon himself, to grow very old and stooped. A thousand tiny lines, like cobwebs, furrowed his cheeks. For a brief instant he looked at Norton, and his eyes were those of a man in torment. Then the look vanished. His face became a mask.

"Stay here," he ordered curtly. "Don't come out till I call you."

As he turned away the drums rolled again, hammering out their warning. He took a step in the direction of the group of notables shuffling slowly toward the door, then he swung around and laid a hand on Norton's arm.

"You brought a gun with you?" he inquired.

"I did."

"Loaded?"

"Of course."

For the third time the drums rolled. Van-Prao inhaled deeply through distended nostrils, like a man about to plunge into icy water.

"If I cannot save you," he said in his mild voice, "you will know what to do."

Norton jeered at him, "Want me to commit suicide?"

"It is an honorable way out," admitted Van-Prao. "Enough lives have been thrown away. We must avoid reprisals. When our time comes we must know how to meet our fate—"

He did not wait to hear Norton's retort. He backed away awkwardly on his wooden stump, keeping his hand in his pocket, covering Norton with his gun. He spoke to the two men in the doorway, then turned and led the procession down the steps, out across the courtyard to meet the French.

And as they assembled by the gate, bugles filled the morning air with their joyous, brassy clamor. The tune they sang echoed inside Norton's chest. He knew it and knew it well. It was the marching song of the Third Battalion of the Legion.

With his feet planted wide apart, his fists on his hips, he stood erect and motionless in the middle of the empty temple, staring straight before him.

Then while the bugles blared, a soldier, one lone man, swinging a rifle at the end of his arm, stooping slightly beneath the weight of his huge knapsack, trudged past the gate. He went straight on. For a moment the road was empty, then a squad of perhaps a dozen men appeared, and the sight of them brought back to Norton, the very smell and feel of the Legion; creosote in the barrack rooms, sockless feet in greasy boots, the tug of packstraps on aching shoulders. It was closing in upon him again, getting ready to smother him for the last time.

The squad went by. Next came the clique—two drums and six bugles, then a mounted officer.

The tune stopped.

"Company . . . Halt!" brayed a voice.

"On the right form line: Right . . . dress!"

Norton's muscles twitched involuntarily. Even after two years of freedom that shouted order almost forced him to obey.

"Thank God I'm out of it!" he thought. "Yes, sir, I'd sooner be dead."

HE GLANCED over his shoulder. The colossal figure of Gautama Buddha, sitting on a bed of lotus leaves, smiled down at him out of the shadows. All the so-called wisdom of the East was in that smile, and to Norton it was meaningless. It looked gentle and tolerant and unbelievably cruel and indifferent.

"Yep," nodded Norton, "you don't give a damn. Save your own hide and let the other guy go to hell and gone. I get you."

The sound of voices came from the courtyard. A French officer seated on a glossy-coated sorrel was leaning forward, one hand resting on his thigh, speaking to Van-Prao.

"You are acquainted with General Lafourche's terms," the officer was saying. "They are final. They cannot be discussed. They must be complied with in full before any further negotiations can take place."

Norton's heart skipped a beat. A band of iron seemed to have been clamped around his head.

The lieutenant was Cordelier. Cordelier with a medal on his chest. Cordelier up from the ranks, promoted for his zeal and his efficiency, looking very haughty and unyielding as he parleyed with the enemy.

Norton stepped back into the shadows, past the glowing charcoal brazier. The two guards in the doorway had forgotten him. They were staring wide-eyed at the French troops standing in the roadway.

"We demand the surrender of all your war stores," Cordelier went on, after Van-Prao had spoke in a voice inaudible to Norton. "All ammunition, rifles and other weapons . . ."

The Chinese border was not five miles away. It lay just beyond the gap in the hills . . .

Cordelier's words ran in the silence:

"Are you prepared to hand over the deserter, Norton, whose nefarious influence helped prolong your resistance and caused needless bloodshed? General Lafourche ardently desires to bring the blessings of peace to Bac-Ming. He is prepared to grant you and all those of your race complete amnesty, but this amnesty will not, under

any condition, be extended to renegades and deserters such as Norton."

He sat bolt upright while he made this speech. It came rolling off his tongue in well-rounded periods, and as he spoke he peered over the heads of the delegates gathered around Van-Prao as if expecting to find Norton trussed hand and foot, ready to be delivered like a bundle of dirty washing.

"Is His Excellency the General prepared to admit my legal right to rule—" began Van-Prao.

Lieutenant Cordelier raised a gloved hand and made an impatient gesture, cutting the question short.

"That will have to wait. General Lafourche has no intention of interfering in any way with your established customs . . . but hostilities will be resumed at once unless you comply with our terms of surrender. Are you ready, yes or no, to hand the deserter over to us?"

Van-Prao bowed.

"Very well, I am at your orders, lieutenant. One moment, if you please." He turned and called out: "Norton! Norton! Come here!"

There was a brief pause. Cordelier's horse played with its snaffle bar. Van-Prao's eyelids fluttered as if he were waiting for a gun to go off.

"Coming!" Norton cried.

FROM inside the temple a shot . . . two . . . a dozen rang out. The guards rolled down the steps. Norton, an automatic rifle in the crook of his arm, appeared suddenly in the doorway.

Cordelier stood up in his stirrups. His mouth flew wide open. But he was all through talking. Bullets swept the courtyard. They caught him waist-high, broke him in two, spilled him out of the saddle. Van-Prao went down, his spine shattered at the base of the skull. White-lipped, his eyes blazing, Norton marched down the steps, firing as he advanced, pouring a stream of lead into the panic-stricken mob milling crazily about the gateway.

The drum of cartridges lasted till he was

within a few feet of his pony. He threw the gun aside, drove his fist into a coolie's face, vaulted into the saddle, drove his heels into the pony's flanks . . .

The wall surrounding the temple grounds was old and crumbling. There were wide breaches in it, choked with mounds of rubble and weeds. Straight toward one of these gaps he headed the pony. Twice it stumbled as it hunted for a footing on the uneven blocks of masonry, then at last it reached firm ground and streaked down hill at breakneck speed.

A volley filled the valley with echoes. Slugs splattered in the mud close to the flying hoofs. Norton swung the pony around in a wide arc until a group of peasants' huts lay between him and the marksmen lining the temple wall.

The ground leveled out. Snipers tried to bring him down as he raced across open fields. Their shots fell far short.

He passed a quarter of a mile from the walled city, forded a stream, and galloped on through a wide valley.

Ahead, clear and bright in the sunlight, lay China.

* * *

It was a dirty day. The Statue of Liberty loomed green and glistening out of the rain. Wall Street's skyscrapers were hidden behind fast-moving clouds.

Bareheaded, up in the bows of the *S. S. Knickerbocker*, Norton stood sniffing the wind. The cold made his teeth chatter.

"Lady," he said, "am I glad to see you!"

A man in a heavy ulster, a first-class passenger who had ventured forward to clear his head after too many farewell drinks, examined Norton with amused curiosity.

"Friend of yours?" he inquired.

"I'll say she is," laughed Norton. "It's been almost five years since we said good-by. That's a long time . . ."

"Um," said the man in the ulster. "You have been to Europe?"

Norton nodded vaguely. He was watching a little tug steaming down the wind-whipped river.

"There and elsewhere," he admitted. "Especially elsewhere."

The man sighed. He had spent a happy month in Paris buying dress models for his firm.

"Paris is a great place, isn't it?" he said reminiscently.

"You can have it."

The man laughed. "You don't mean to say you don't like it! Why, it's the brightest and gayest city in the world. Compared to the French we don't know the meaning of the word freedom . . ."

"Is that right?" drawled Norton, a wicked gleam in his eyes. "Now let me tell you something. Maybe we don't know anything about freedom and liberty over here. Maybe not! But we have enough to suit me. We mind our own business. When we need raw materials we buy 'em—we don't grab off half the earth and colonize it, and gut it, and civilize it with bullets. Maybe we're dumb—but we're half way honest."

"Quite," agreed the man, backing hastily away. "You're quite right. Yes, indeed."

Norton forgot him. Leaning far out over the railing he yelled at a deckhand on the tug:

"Hi, buddy! What d'you say?"

The man, a broad grin on his face, waved back. His voice reached Norton above the whistling of the wind:

"Hi, there, buddy! Welcome home!"

With those words an immense weight seemed to be lifted from Norton's shoulders. He had no money, no job, no prospect of a job. But such things were of no earthly importance just then. He was home again, among his own kind, one hundred and thirty million of them, and that one fact, for the present at least, was all that mattered now.



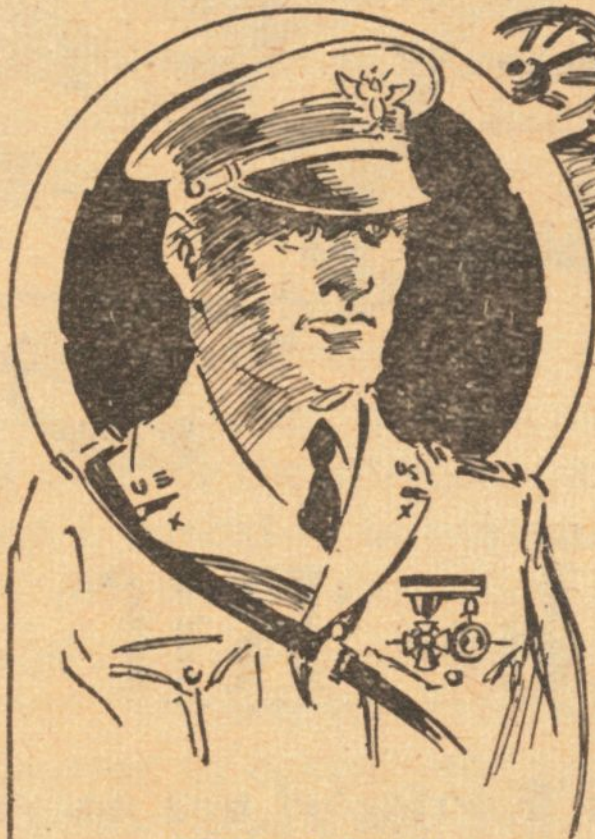
The Fighting Man's Lexicon

By W. A. WINDAS



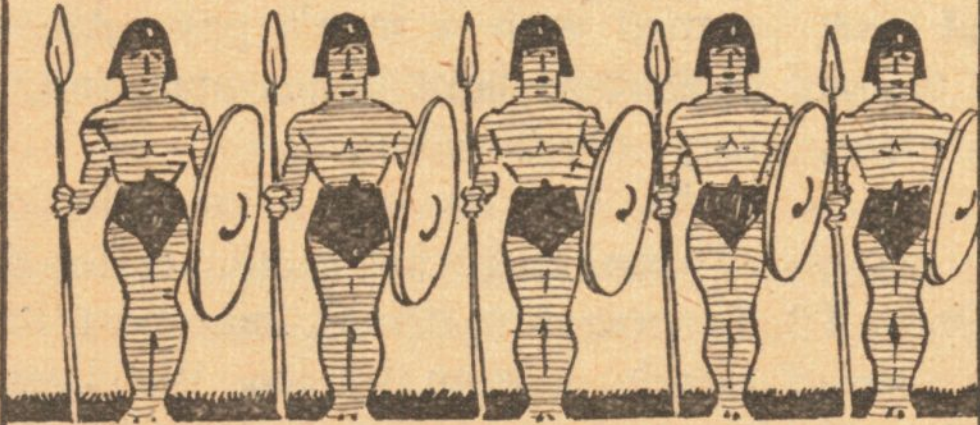
• TANKS •

When armoured caterpillar cars were first built there was no intention of giving them the official name of "Tank." Construction was carried on under profound secrecy in England, and to delude German spies, hints were dropped that the new machines were special self-propelled tanks to carry water. They were packed in crates labeled "Tanks for Petrograd."



• MEDALS on the LEFT BREAST •

Medals are nearly always carried on the left breast because knights wore tokens of favor from their ladies over their hearts.

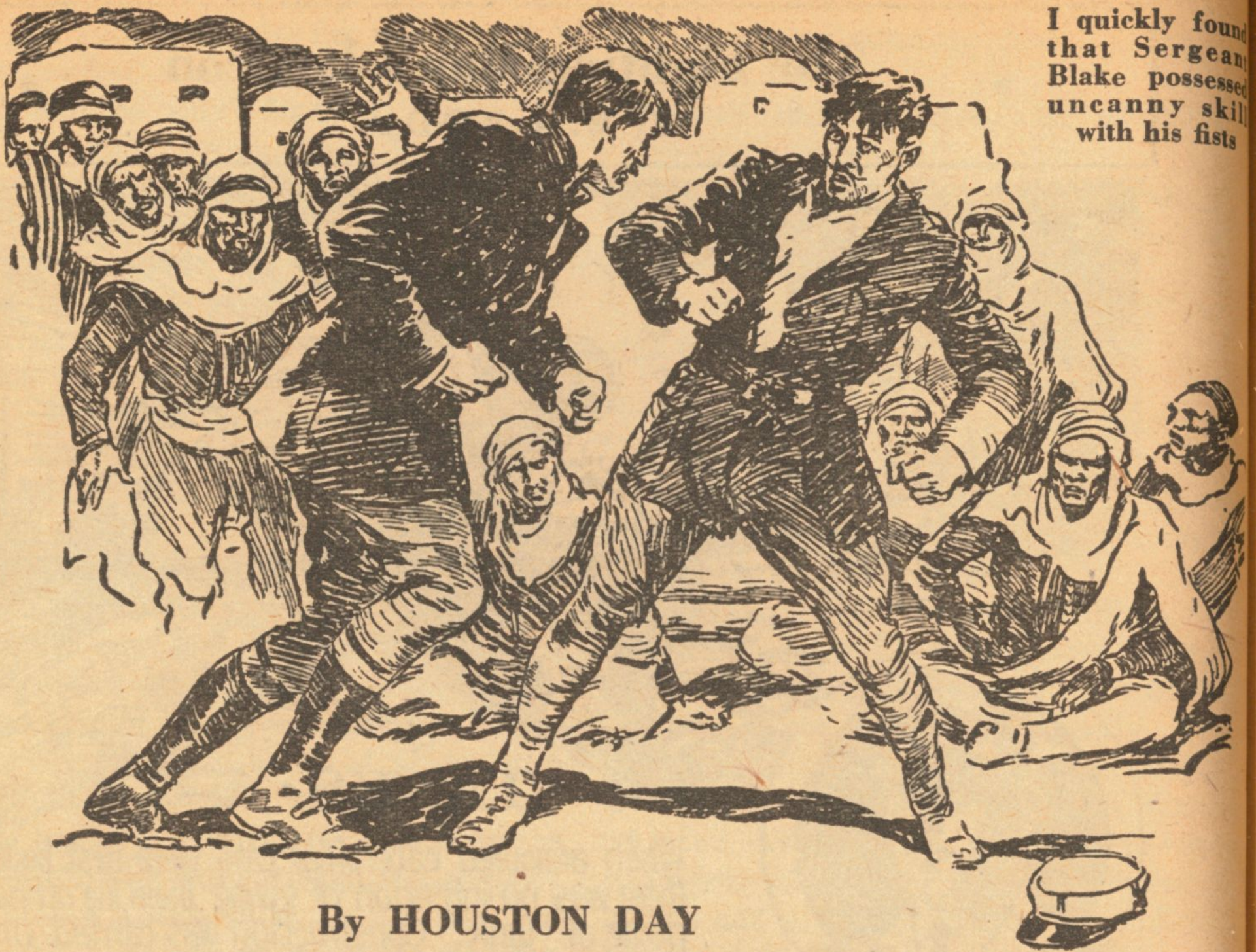


The FIRST STANDING ARMY.

The first army on record to be maintained in both Peace and War was the Guard of King Saul in 1093 B.C.



A name for certain regiments of brilliantly uniformed cavalry. It is derived from two Hungarian words "Husz" and "Ar", meaning "Twenty" and "Pay", from an Imperial order that "every twentieth man of the military population shall take to the field and shall be paid for his services."



I quickly found
that Sergeant
Blake possessed
uncanny skill
with his fists

By HOUSTON DAY

Murder in the Rif

A knowledge of superstition among the Beni Warriaghel was not enough to uncover murder but a dose of applied science brought success to a Legionnaire's experiment

AN ANISETTE? *Oui, monsieur*, you are good to an old Legionnaire. It was a lucky day for me that brought you to Tonquin. Your presence alone makes life bearable, for without your gracious generosity I would have to be content with the cheapest of native wines, instead of this excellent anisette.

My luck has not often been so good. In fact, it has been mostly bad. Once, I remember, it brought me a summary sentence of death by the firing squad, and if my wits had deserted me on the same occasion I would surely have been lying face down in a murderer's grave in Morocco today.

It was all on account of that English sergeant. John Blake, he called himself. It was common knowledge that this was not his name, but the Legion is not concerned with a man's past. All it desires is that he fight like a man and, if necessary, die like one.

Ah, but he was a cold-blooded driver of men, and what a stickler for discipline. He was not brutal, nor even harsh, but merely a man of ice. We Legionnaires, more generously endowed with the human frailties, looked upon such perfection with great disgust, and so we hated his very soul.

The district about our *poste* was com

paratively quiet at the time, and outside of daily marches over the *bled* to extort taxes from the tribesmen there was little for us to do. We had returned from one of these wearisome treks, and I had thrown myself panting in the shade of the wall, when Sergeant Blake appeared and ordered me to get up and forage for fuel.

I protested vigorously. "But, sergeant, I completed my ten hours' extra duty yesterday, and it is not my turn to go."

Blake stared at me coldly. He was a tall, slender man, with slate gray eyes and sun-bleached blond hair. He realized as soon as I spoke that he was wrong. Both Jerry Burke, the wild American, and Roskowski, the Pole, had extra hours yet to perform, and he had forgotten I had served my punishment. But there was no sign of yielding in his impassive face.

"You heard the order," he said. "*Allez-vous en*. Get started."

My blood boiled at the injustice. I was tired, weary, and in a few minutes it would be time for the afternoon ration of *pinard*, and I wanted to be present, so I foolishly let my tongue wag when I should have kept still. Rising grumbling to my feet, I said: "The sergeant takes advantage of his chevrons to commit an injustice."

Blake glared at me with icy eyes. It was his pride that he was always fair, and my accusation rankled because he knew my grievance was just. But to him discipline came first, and obedience to orders was more important than their fairness.

"Supposing I should remove my chevrons. Just what would you do, *mon vieux*?" he asked.

I grinned to myself, *monsieur*, for I knew what was coming. On several occasions Blake had felt the behavior of the men demanded action not specifically covered by the regulations. Each time he had invited them to stroll outside the walls of the fort. And each time the men who accompanied him returned much chastened, but with puffed and bruised faces.

It delighted me now that I was to have my opportunity to prove I was a better man than he. I have always had a high

opinion of my own ability as a fighter, even though experience has proved to me repeatedly that there are other men with greater strength and skill.

But I was young then, and rash, so I jumped at the sergeant's invitation.

"It would give me great pleasure, *mon sergent*," I said, assuming a pose of dignified formality, "to knock your block off."

Blake grinned dryly. "You shall have the opportunity to try, my little cabbage. Does the present time suit you?"

"Perfectly," I replied

Ah, but I was soon to regret my bravado. Ten minutes after we had left the *poste* I was wishing I had consented to gather fuel, for I found that Sergeant Blake possessed uncanny skill with his fists, and grinning maliciously as he struck, he aimed all his blows at my nose. Such an indignity. . . . It is bad enough to suffer the pain, but to be hit repeatedly upon that sensitive organ without being able to score effectively in return is humiliating.

BLAKE had led me to a spot about three hundred meters from the fort. There a mountain stream had carved its path deep in the ground. By its side stood the homes of some of the Beni Warriaghel. They came from their houses and watched curiously as we fought.

What a fighter that man Blake was! He stood poised on his right foot, his left foot pushed forward. His left hand, clenched to the hardness of an iron ball, worked back and forth with the smooth regularity of the hoof of a trotting horse. His right, drawn back in reserve, landed with the force of a howitzer shell whenever he chose to unleash it. And every time he struck he aimed for my nose.

Ah, *monsieur*, the man's accuracy was disgusting.

What was I doing in the meantime? Nothing. My blows encountered only air. When I rushed, hoping to bring my knee up to his groin, or wrestle him to the ground, I was sent staggering back on my heels under the force of his blows.

We had been fighting about five minutes,

and I had not once got near enough even to gouge my thumb into his eye, when Blake laughed shortly and dropped his hands. "Come, Le Brix," he said. "Wash your face and come back to camp. You have had enough sport for one day."

Sport he called it. Bah! My temper was aroused. For a reply I snarled a curse. "Yield to a pusillanimous Limey? Never! Gaston Le Brix surrenders to no one." And again I rushed, and again my head went dizzy with pain as his iron-like fist collided most viciously with my nose.

I spat out a mouthful of blood and immediately wished I had not been so emphatic in spurning his offer of a truce. Over his shoulder I could see the Beni Warriaghel watching us with rising curiosity. The antics of the white men are always beyond their comprehension. Even now I knew they were wondering why we were battering each other with our fists, or rather why Blake was battering me, when he possessed a rifle which would inflict greater injury with a lesser expenditure of energy. But the sight of my gory face must have given them great pleasure, for they have no love for Legionnaires.

I had received perhaps fifty or a hundred more blows, all in the same spot, when Blake dropped his hands again. "Come," he said, "foolish one. Let us quit this. I grow weary of striking you. I'll have some one else gather the firewood."

I laughed between my swollen lips. "I am glad you are tiring," I told him. "My turn is coming soon."

And once more I rushed, and once more I winced as his fist rebounded off my nose.

But even though I hardly believed it at the time, my turn was actually near. The *savate* proved his undoing. I had been so enraged, so desirous of sinking my fingers in his throat, I had forgotten completely about man's most efficient weapon—his feet. Bah, what a dolt I had been. I could have ended the fight minutes sooner and spared my nose much abuse, for at the first attempt my heavy booted foot caught the Englishman completely off guard. It crashed against the side of his

jaw directly under his right ear, and he fell face downward as if he had been struck between the eyes by a gun butt.

It was with an effort that I kept from collapsing over his body. Only my joy kept me on my feet. I had humbled the proud sergeant in fair combat, and I rejoiced. I knew of course, that Englishmen and Americans have some absurd prejudice against fighting with the feet, but that did not detract from my elation. After all, he had fought his way, and I had fought in mine.

I STRAIGHTENED my aching body with an effort, saluted my unconscious foeman, then staggered back to the *poste*. I would have enjoyed it hugely if I had been able to carry him on my shoulders so the men could witness his humiliation, and spared myself much misery later, but I was too far gone. I had to leave him where he fell.

Reaching the gate the first man I met was Captain Le Fevre. He was a scholarly man, more interested in his books than in soldiering, and he stared at my swollen nose curiously. With high glee I told him how I had beaten the Limey. The men came running, listened, then curved their lips in disbelief. I could excuse their skepticism, *monsieur*, for I was a sorry sight.

"Come," I said. "I will prove I have not lied. You can see with your own eyes, and then you can help bring the sergeant in."

So back we marched to the stream, headed by the curious captain, and there we found Sergeant Blake. He was lying just as I had said, sprawled grotesquely on his back, but he was dead, his head mashed in with a boulder.

I turned moist all over. My knees threatened to bend under me. I rubbed my eyes, for I could not believe that I saw aright.

The captain spat upon the ground with disgust. "Ho!" he exclaimed. "Is this the way you vanquished the sergeant? It will be the firing squad for you now, carrion."

My head swam as I sought an explanation of this mystery. My eyes roved again to the village. The Beni Warriaghel who

had been watching us had vanished into their houses. Our methods of collecting taxes had made them wary of groups of Legionnaires. We had left them nothing but their *djellabas* and grass sandals.

It was while I was looking vainly among the houses for a sign of life, hoping to be able to produce a witness to the encounter, that the solution came to me. "The natives killed him!" I exclaimed. "Blake was alive when I left."

The captain glanced at the village and laughed shortly. "No," he said. "You cannot ask me to believe that, Le Brix. These tribesmen are loyal sons of France, haven't their *caids* signed the treaty?"

So I was marched back to the *poste* and thrown into the guardhouse to await execution.

All that afternoon and night I lay in the cell bemoaning my luck. Morning came and I learned it was Sunday. I had twenty-four hours more to live. Perhaps I could extricate myself by my wits. But even though I thought and thought, and beat my clenched fists against my head, my brain refused to suggest a way by which I might escape the bullets of the firing squad.

Noon came and I became desperate when I realized that Jerry Burke, my comrade, was avoiding my cell. Even he believed me guilty. I shrugged and resigned myself to death. After all, a man can die but once, and what difference does it make when the time comes? He loses nothing but perhaps a few moments of illicit pleasure, and escapes much misery.

I was standing by the grated door waiting for the opportunity to wheedle a cigarette from the first passing Legionnaire when Captain Le Fevre came out of his quarters. He was shoeless, and I could see his feet were red and swollen. They had never become toughened to the daily marches.

HE SAT down on a camp stool while his orderly filled a pail with hot water, then poured into it a quantity of powdered alum. The captain immersed his feet in

this strong astringent with a sigh of satisfaction, and settled back in his chair to read. I could see the title of his book. It read: "Superstition: Its Relation to the Savage Intelligence."

When I saw those words an idea flashed through my brain. Superstition. . . . It is a common savage trait. Perhaps the Beni Warriaghel could be compelled to talk.

"Captain Le Fevre," I called. "May I speak with you?"

He looked up from his page with a frown. "Well, what is it?"

"Let me out of here but for one hour," I replied, "and if I do not prove those tribesmen killed Blake, you can shoot me down with your own pistol."

The captain yawned. "Bah," he said. "I have no desire to shoot you. I would much prefer to have a firing squad exterminate such a species of vermin."

"But, captain," I protested. "I have a plan whereby I can force the natives to convict themselves."

Le Fevre's eyes went back to his book. "Some trick by which you hope to escape your just deserts, I suppose. Save it, and try it on the devil. You will need all your ingenuity where you are going."

I was desperate, and I was not to be silenced. "These natives are superstitious," I insisted. "It would be simple for me to play upon their fears of magic and make one or all of them confess."

Le Fevre closed his book, marking his place with a forefinger, and smiled derisively. "The more you say, Le Brix," he said, "the more clearly you show your ignorance. At this very moment I am reading De Strasse's treatise on the tribes of the Rif. He confirms unequivocally the opinion of Gross, Heinkle and Rombeau that the Riffians are unusually free from superstition."

"But, captain," I interrupted.

"Let me finish," he said. He was warming up to his subject, and I realized with a glow of delight that I had captured his interest. "The Riffians," he continued, "have a number of old beliefs that heretofore have been carelessly catalogued as

examples of primitive superstition. For instance, one tribe has an unusual way of testing a youth's courage. A light strand of fibre is tied snugly about his neck, and he is confronted with a wild boar. If the strand breaks he is considered inferior in courage. That sounds like rank superstition, of course, but science knows now that intense emotional excitement causes a swelling of the thyroid.

"Still another tribe, when it seeks a warrior of great physical courage, judges his valor by the prominence of the half moons under his finger nails. Superstition, the first authorities declared, but again they were mistaken, for during the World War medical men learned that a man's courage very often was in direct ratio to the distinctness of these same half moons. . . ."

He paused, well satisfied with his argument. "That is all very well," I put in, "but in fairness the captain at least should listen to my plan."

"Go ahead," he said grudgingly, apparently regretting that he had entered into conversation with me.

AS BRIEFLY as I could I told him what I had in mind. I would have the natives brought before him, and he was to tell them he had a magic powder. Each man would be compelled to let him place some of it on his tongue. If he was innocent, he would not be affected. If it had been his hand that had struck the blow, he would instantly die a horrible death.

Captain Le Fevre laughed coldly when I had finished. "What nonsense is this?" he demanded. "Magic—Bah! Haven't I just finished explaining that these Beni Warriaghel are not superstitious? They will laugh at such hocus pocus. When, even their religion teaches them they have but to kill a Christian to enter paradise. Ho, Le Brix, you are being absurd. They would swallow your powder, lick their lips, and jeer in your face."

"Theories, *monsieur* captain," I exclaimed, affecting great scorn. "Only theories. I am gambling that there will be one weakling in the group. If you stir his fears

with your words his mouth will become parched with fright, and when he attempts to swallow the powder will send him into a fit of violent coughing."

The captain looked back at his page without replying. He was considering my well directed argument, but at the moment I feared he had turned away in disgust.

"At least, captain," I said, appealing to his interest in anthropology, "if my experiment fails, it will offer further confirmation of what the writers say."

The captain closed his book and put it aside. "Yes," he said. "It would be a clinching bit of proof. I will give it a trial, but I warn you, Le Brix, against false hopes. Your plan is doomed to fail."

He called Sergeant Coignard and ordered me released. At the same time he assigned two men to guard me, but told them to give me full liberty in my preparations.

Ah, but it was good to get out of that stifling cell, but perspiration rolled off me in streams as I nervously went about setting the stage, for the test. The captain's words had been convincing, and perhaps the experts he had quoted were right. If the Beni Warriaghel jeered at my magic it would mean the end of Gaston Le Brix.

First, I placed a table in the courtyard. On it I arranged all the vials, tins and bottles the *poste* afforded. Even the contents of the medicine chest were turned over to me, after the captain had cannily extracted any powder that might be poisonous.

Meanwhile, a squad had returned with the tribesmen. Only six able-bodied men had been found in the village. The bullets of the Legionnaires had accounted for the rest during Abd el Krim's uprising.

At Le Fevre's order the entire complement of the *poste* formed ranks in the courtyard. They were interested spectators, as they wondered what the captain and I were up to.

But I had no thought of them. My eyes were on the tribesmen as they were lined up in front of my table. My heart began to climb in my throat. In spite of their ragged *djellabas*, they were a proud and

hardy group. There was not a sign of fear in their cool, gray eyes, and they looked neither superstitious nor cowardly.

Nevertheless, my hopes were raised when I heard the captain begin to harangue them. He painted an impressive picture of the power of the white man's magic. Turning to wave his hand at the collection on the table, he ascribed great and fearful powers to each of the powders and liquids. If there was but a spark of superstition in the breasts of the tribesmen, I knew his oratory could not help but fan it into a flame of abysmal fear. But I thought of the experts Le Fevre had quoted and despair gripped my heart.

I stared in vain at their phlegmatic faces of evidence of fright. The natives listened stolidly, and I was amazed and disappointed at their unconcern, for I admit that I was swayed by the captain's awesome words. I could not understand it, until, like a thunderclap from a cloudless sky, came the explanation of their apathy. The tribesmen did not understand French. . . .

MY SHOULDERS slumped. I caught the edge of the table for support. Le Fevre might as well have been talking in Sanskrit. Only one of the men, Mohammed el Houad, had caught even a glimmer of his meaning, and Mohammed's French, I knew, had been picked up in Fez, and consisted mostly of profanity.

"Captain!" I interrupted.

He was in the midst of a flowery description of the joy in store for those who submit wholeheartedly to their kindly French mother, and the disaster that awaits those who oppose her, when I spoke. He turned with a gesture of irritation. "Well," he demanded. "What do you want?"

"Nothing, captain," I replied. "I just wanted to suggest that you stop and let some one translate."

"You mean to say they don't understand French?"

"That's it," I replied. "Mohammed can understand a little, but not much."

"Well, I'll be damned," said Le Fevre.

"If you start back at the beginning," I said. "And speak slowly, in simple words, perhaps Mohammed would be able to convey your words to the others."

The captain laughed wryly. "It seems that you have succeeded in making a jack-ass of me," he said. "So laugh, Gaston Le Brix, laugh heartily, for it will be your last laugh on earth. Sunday or no Sunday, your execution takes place this afternoon."

I felt myself pale at his words. "Won't you even finish this test?"

"Bah!" he exclaimed. "This foolishness has gone far enough."

"It is not foolishness to me," I said. "Nor is it funny. My life is at stake, and so is your word."

He hesitated a moment, and then said sourly: "All right, give me the powders, I'll go through with it."

I had carefully prepared six separate packages of flour in folded papers, and I handed them to him. In his haste to be out of what he considered an absurd situation he dropped one of the packages. I picked it up and waited, my eyes fixed on the first of the natives who was to receive the test.

He was a tall, aquiline faced tribesman with ruddy, sun-burned skin, and he viewed the captain's approach with something akin to scorn. My heart quaked. No, this savage did not look superstitious. Obediently he opened his mouth when Le Fevre had got him to understand what was wanted, and the captain unfolded the paper, tilted it, and poured its contents on his extended tongue. The native's only visible sensation was one of mild pleasure at the taste of the soft, smooth flour.

Ah, what a dark moment that was for me as Le Fevre went quickly from man to man, emptying the packets of flour. He reached the last one and found he had not enough to go round. Turning to me, he said. "Have you had enough, Le Brix? Are you satisfied that these tribesmen are too intelligent to be superstitious? Surely, they must at least have obtained a hint of what I was driving at. They couldn't be that dense."

I smiled grimly, but with despairing heart. "Satisfied? Not yet, *monsieur* captain. There is one more to face the test. Give me but a moment to prepare the powder."

I made a great show of concentration as I fumbled among the bottles, for I had another idea. If superstition failed, perhaps science might succeed, and my veins began to pulse with new hope as I folded a powder in a bit of paper and handed it to Le Fevre.

MOHAMMED stood proud and defiant as the captain approached him. He alone had understood the full meaning of Le Fevre's words. At first he had been uneasy. In Fez he had seen strange examples of the white man's magic. Lamps that burned without oil. Machines that talked. Wagons that moved without horses. But he had been reassured as the others had successfully passed the ordeal. Hadn't Achmed el Bouad, Moab el Boui, Abd el Muman, as well as the brothers Absalom swallowed the powders without harm?

I watched closely for signs of trepidation but I saw none. Only curiosity and amusement showed on his weather-beaten face. He opened wide his ugly mouth and the captain stood before him without waiting to be asked. I held my breath as Le Fevre unfolded the paper, raised it, and let the contents slide down his capacious throat.

For an instant as long as eternity I stood there as if frozen. My blood began to pound in my temples, but I heeded it not. My body swayed, and I gripped tight the edge of the table and forgot to breathe. I had gambled everything on this last powder, and as I waited I saw failure.

The captain, impatient to have done with such mummary, did not wait even to see the outcome. Instead, he whirled on his heel and started for his quarters.

But as I finally expelled the air from my throbbing lungs and breathed deeply of the bitterness of defeat, it happened. A look of startled amazement appeared on Mohammed's face. His eyes rolled, and his mouth, now tightly closed, worked spas-

modically. He attempted to moisten his lips, then grimaced as he sought to draw in a mouthful of air.

I recognized the signs for which I had been waiting.

"Ho!" I shouted. "The murderer!"

Mohammed's sallow skin turned a saffron yellow. He turned and attempted to run, only to stumble and fall coughing and choking to the ground. Quickly I sprang upon him. "Tell the truth, O Mohammed," I shouted. "Tell the truth or the hyenas will gnaw at your bones."

The captain had come running. He stood staring with amazed eyes at Mohammed's strange behavior.

Half paralyzed with uncomprehending fright, Mohammed tried to swallow, and achieved only a convulsive spasm that racked his throat. Grabbing him by the ears I pounded his head against the ground, exhorting him to speak.

I saw his lips part, so I desisted. "It is true," he mumbled. "We beat the white man to death, but it was Achmed who smashed his head. Not I."

I had succeeded! The knowledge filtered swiftly through my brain and my whole body pulsed with new vigor and life.

Captain Le Fevre turned on me with beaming face. "A thousand thanks, Le Brix!" he exclaimed, and pulling me to my feet, he grasped my hand and shook it vigorously, then in his excitement, he embraced me and planted a kiss on both my cheeks.

I wiped the perspiration from my forehead and grinned modestly. "It is nothing, *monsieur* captain," I said. "I am sure I was as eager to detect the murderer as you."

"Murderer?" he exclaimed, his eyes gleaming. "Bah! What is the life of a Legionnaire, or a few natives, as compared to a scientific discovery such as this. De Strasse is an impudent bungler, and we have proved it. This will make my reputation as an amateur anthropologist. These tribesmen *are* superstitious.

"It was credulous, unreasoning fear of the powder that parched Mohammed's

throat and caused him to strangle on a teaspoonful of harmless flour, and nothing else."

I tucked my tongue in my cheek, *monsieur*, but said nothing. The captain was happy, very happy, and so was I. Why

should I be so selfish as to spoil his pleasure by telling him that superstition had nothing to do with the dryness of Mohammed's mouth? In that last packet I had substituted enough puckering alum to parch the throats of a score of men.

THEODORE ROSCOE

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AN AMERICAN OFFICER OF THE LEGION

A Pictorial Feature

By **STOOKIE ALLEN**

Descendant of a long line of warriors, including Admiral Guerrard, who served so gallantly with Lafayette during the American Revolution. Soldier, Linguist, Aviator, only American to hold a commission in the Foreign Legion in recent years.



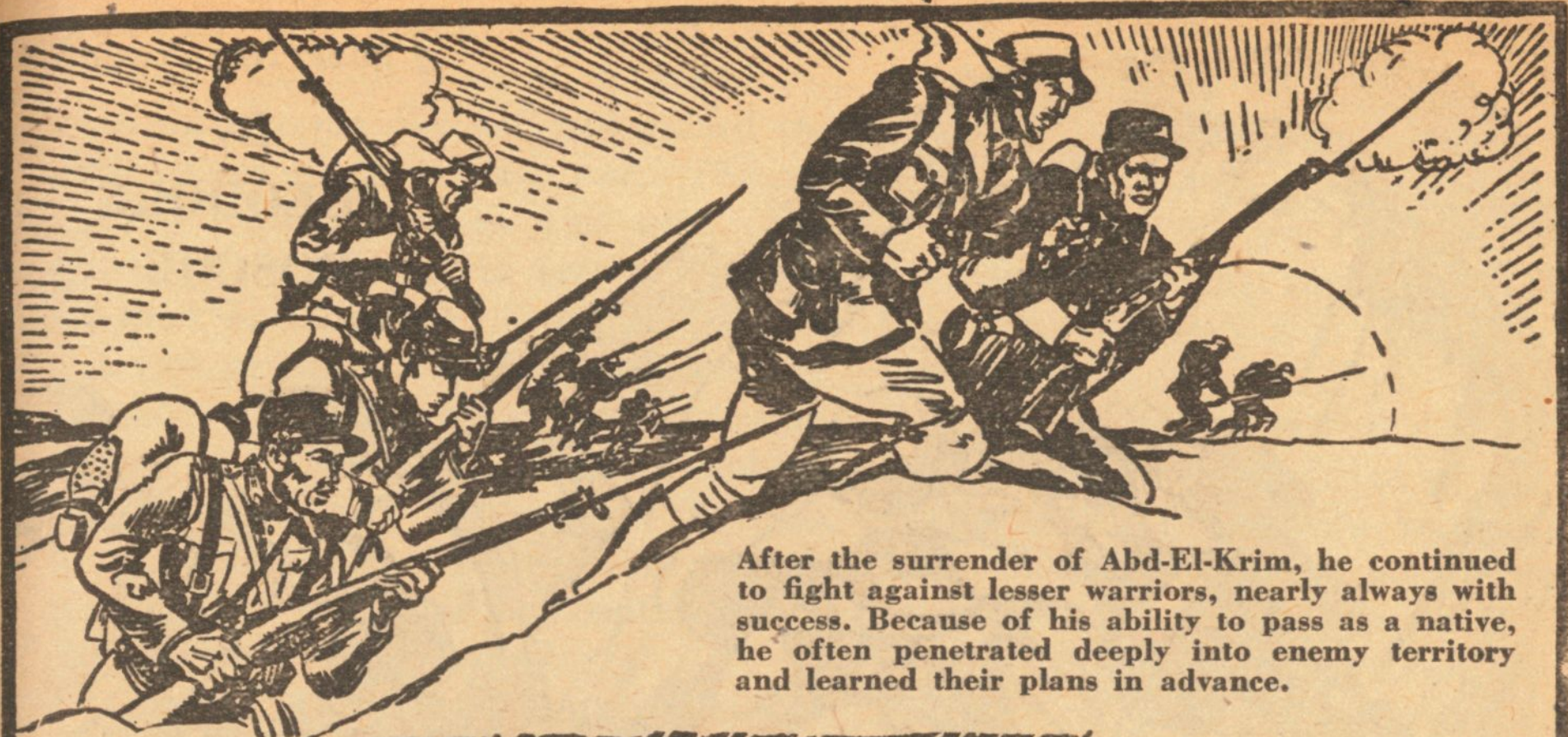
Born in Waterbury, Conn., 1890, he graduated from Carnegie Institute of Technology. In 1916, he enlisted in the U. S. Ambulance Service and distinguished himself by driving ambulances for long periods without rest and under heavy shellfire.



To satisfy his fighting urge, he enlisted in the Foreign Legion in 1917, but was transferred to the Air Service, where his technical ability was soon recognized and he was designated Chief Technical Advisor at Tours. There he flight-tested and made reports on every type of plane then known.

Re-enlisting in the Legion in 1920 for service in North Africa against Abd-El-Krim, he soon regained his commission and fought that doughty Riff almost continuously for two years, receiving many decorations. At the same time he learned every native dialect.





After the surrender of Abd-El-Krim, he continued to fight against lesser warriors, nearly always with success. Because of his ability to pass as a native, he often penetrated deeply into enemy territory and learned their plans in advance.



He was wounded in 1926 and again in 1932, then during a hot engagement with the Berbers while dragging in two of his wounded men he was shot through the jaw and neck. For saving his men he was given the Badge of the Legion of Honor, a Captaincy and a citation for the Medaille Militaire (a most unusual honor, as this decoration is given only to enlisted men and generals).

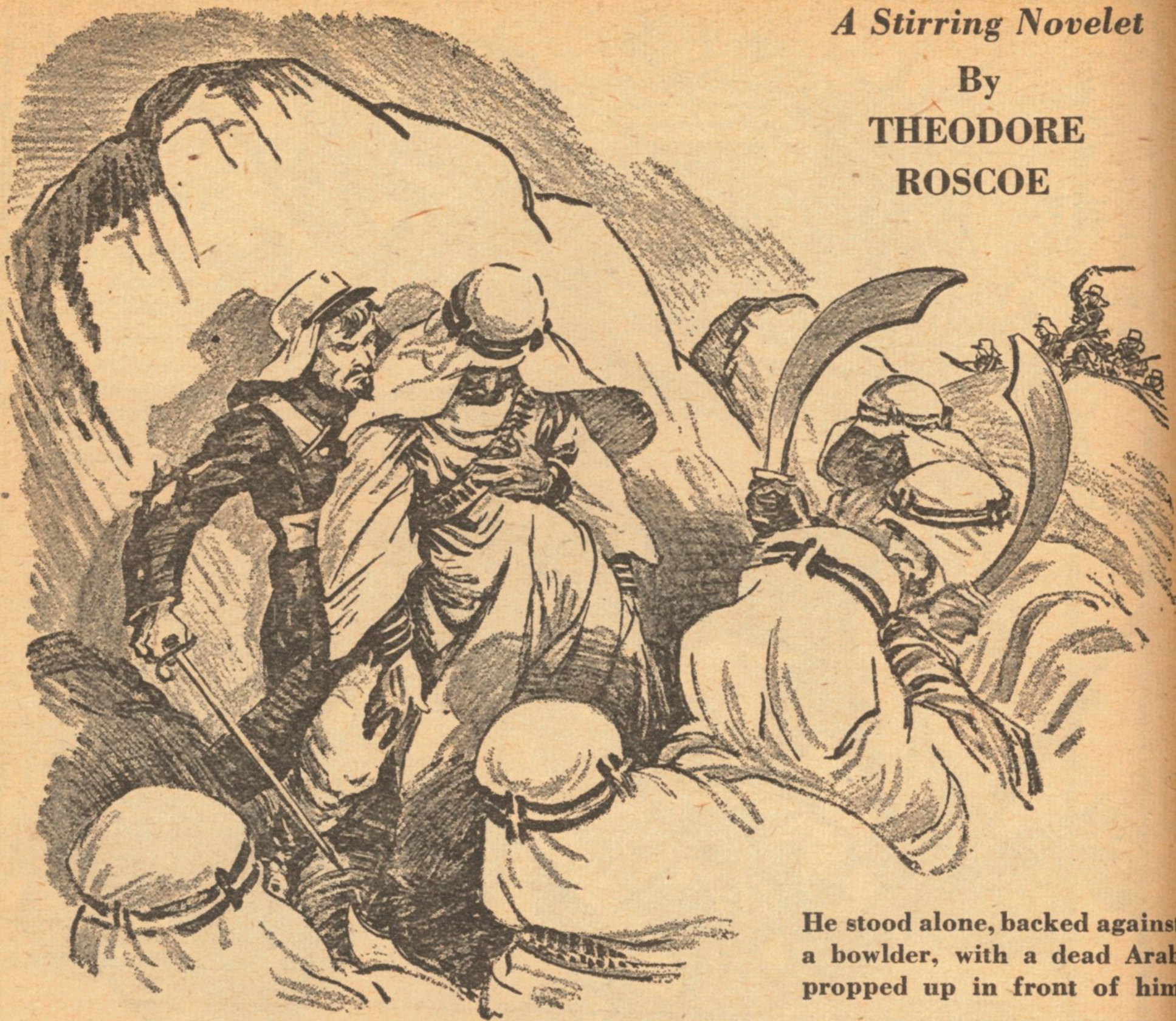


After 15 years of active war service, except for short furloughs and time out for hospitalization, Captain Hamilton is still modest and studious, but this is belied by his rows of ribbons for valor—and he gets only \$30 a month!

A Stirring Novelet

By

**THEODORE
ROSCOE**



He stood alone, backed against a boulder, with a dead Arab propped up in front of him

The Death Watch

Jack the Goat was a strange little man whom the Legion learned eventually to like—but that last great moment of his life was something only a master showman could have conceived

PROLOGUE

SOMETHING was doing down on the square before the mosque, Djemma el Djeddid. Boulevard Sadi Carnot lay whitewashed in bright moonlight, and the bay below its ramps was spangled with tinsel silver. By day Algiers might be pseudo-French; but nightfall made it mysterious, Arab-haunted, African.

Tonight the square before the mosque

might have been lifted from the "Arabian Nights." From our tables under the Brasserie Terminus awning, old Thibaut Cor-day, the veteran Legionnaire, and MacDowell, of the British consulate, and I could see the serried ranks of shrouded Arabs, the bobbing turbans, the waving hands. MacDowell had looked up from his wine glass to remark:

"Those beggars seem more excited than the usual evening mob. Let's take a stroll

down an' see what's interesting 'em."

Arm in arm, the three of us walked toward the mosque. We had just gained the outer fringe of the crowd when Thibaut Corday snatched me by the wrist. The gnarly fingers of the old veteran bit into my flesh, and I jumped in surprise.

A look at his face made me jump again. Torchlights smoked atop poles raised in the center of the square, and the lambent glow shedding over the heads of the mob found the veteran's face a strange mouse-gray. Sudden sweat glittered on his leathery forehead. He looked ill.

"Corday!" I exclaimed. "Are you sick?"

"Sapristi!" The words steamed out of his cinnamon beard. "Sick! I guess I am. Name of Julian the Apostate! Do you see what this crowd is staring at. Uncle of Satan! Yes, I am sick."

MacDowell muttered in astonishment. "But I say, Corday, it's nothing but a beastly marionette show. A pair of blooming Arab showmen working a Punch and Judy, that's all. Haven't you seen a puppet show before? I'd call it damned amusing—"

"Amusing!" Old Thibaut Corday panted, pointing a trembling finger at the little stage under the flares.

Now, it was nothing to go ill about. There were the tawdry wooden puppets yanking, dancing and fighting on their strings. There was the showman hidden behind the stand, working the dummy figures and clacking out their dialogue in shrill Arabic. Just such a Punch and Judy performance as delights street crowds the world over.

But Thibaut Corday was not delighted. His face was waxen.

"Mon Dieu!" he groaned. "I can watch it no longer. Let us get away. Back to my room in the hotel. I have there a bottle of cointreau. I want a drink, for by the bones of St. Pierro of Pisa, this sight has made me sick!"

Back in the veteran's little room, MacDowell and I drank in silence, mystified. Certainly the old Frenchman had become vastly distraught. He drank his liqueur at

one gulp. And Frenchmen usually do not drink in a hurry.

FINISHING his cointreau, old Corday bustled to a cupboard in one corner of his room. I knew that cupboard of Thibaut Corday's. Pandora's Box was never more interesting.

There was history in that cupboard, for it was crammed with relics of the old man's warrior days. Legionnaire kepis and capotes. Weird knives and guns. Canteens, cartridge boxes, brodequins, bayonets. A cupboard that echoed with the clack of gunnery; sheltered gear that was stamped with the insignia of twenty armies. For Corday's brodequins had marched him from Asuncion to Shiloh, Loango to Hanoi. And the cupboard told the tale.

Now he took from that cupboard a little book. Dust smoked from the arid bindings as he turned the volume over in his hands. Here was a bizarre relic from the wars. I could not suppress an oath of surprise as he dropped into a chair facing us, the volume clutched between his palms.

"That book," I questioned, "what has that to do with—"

"It tells the story," he muttered. "You can read it between these leaves. Look, then."

A shaft of moonlight slanted through the open window. Keeping a thumb over the title, the old man held the book to face the moonbeams. MacDowell and I could see a tiny hole through the pages, from cover to cover.

"A bullet hole," the veteran Legionnaire confessed. "And this little book tells the story. It is a story of the French Foreign Legion. That racket in the square below recalled it to my mind, for it is also the story of a puppet show, played by Legionnaires, you comprehend. And in the cast was the queerest and the bravest man who ever signed the roster of that Army of the Damned.

"But before you stay to hear the story, I will warn you. My story sings of bravery and courage to a high note seldom attained. It sings of self-denial, valor, heroism that

must have warmed the heart of le bon Dieu. But there is no sugar-coated fiction-pill to sweeten its end, save the memory of that glorious hero. And if you do not want to dream tonight, you had better go."

We stayed.

"Bien. This book tells the story. But I will start it for you."

And, later, we dreamed.

CHAPTER I

THE LITTLE YANKEE

QUEER characters there were in the Foreign Legion, but he was the queerest of them all. He had little deft hands and dainty feet. His hands were the hands of an artist. His feet were those of a dancing master. He might well have been either. He was not. He was the strangest character one could hope to meet.

Can you picture his face? It was small and pointed under a flourish of hair blacker than the wing of a raven. Slim, like he was. The chin was sharpened by a stiff goatee. His lips were thin, and smiled to show perfect china teeth. His eyes were the eyes of a bird.

With those robin eyes and that pointed face, and those slim, agile hands the hue of wax, he resembled nothing more than a window model one could see in the store of a Paris merchant. You comprehend?

He looked like a wax doll.

Now, there are few recruits in the Foreign Legion who look like wax dolls. *Jamais de la vie!* Not on your life! The most of them resemble ruffians hacked out of canned beef, with hands tough as horn and feet that know nothing of polkas but can kick like the hoof of an army mule.

This recruit, then, made a novel figure in the barracks at Sidi bel Abbes. Perhaps the strangest thing about him was his nationality. You would never have guessed it. He was, of course, an American.

He gave his name as John Smith. But every Yankee who joined the Legion called himself, you see, John Smith. To distinguish him—though Heaven knows he could

easily have been distinguished—the company nick-named him Jacques le Bouc. Jack the Goat. Because of the tuft on his chin.

The men did not like Jack the Goat. He did not get along well in Company Thirteen. He kept to himself, learned fast, worked like a Trojan to become a soldier. He was different, because his lips were sealed. Soldiers of the Legion are supposed never to tell their past histories. But they invariably get drunk and tell. They boast, for the most of them have pasts worth boasting about. Jack never told a word about who he had been or what he had done or why he had joined that Hell Battalion. All Company Thirteen could learn was that he was a Yankee. That was enough for me. I had met these Yankees before, and I knew they were men.

Those Poles and Greeks and Germans and Gascons in the outfit disliked Jack because he was reserved and silent; and the under-officers set out to make life miserable for him. He was bullied, browbeaten, teased, abused, tripped up on all manner of evil detail.

In the barracks the men tortured him with brutish tricks. On the drill field the sergeants worked him like a quarry slave. He looked like a gentleman, and Legion drill sergeants do not like soldiers who are nicer than they. The drill they gave him must have disjointed his spine. The bullying he won in the barracks must have shredded his soul.

Sometimes he fought back. But he was a foot smaller than his kindly companions, and his little, thin hands were sore as boils from the unaccustomed work. Jack the Goat took a good many beatings, and he never had a moment of peace. You know the American expression of "being the goat." But yes. That little, frail Yankee was the "goat" of his company in every sense of the word.

From the first I liked the odd little Yankee; though I could not help him to conquer his unkindly comrades, save by giving advice. In the Legion a man must fight his own battles. And in the Legion, where the weapons of inner conflict are

big fists and big boots, a small, quiet man such as Jack the Goat found life a misery.

Things went badly for Jack the Goat until the day when the regiment marched down into the Ouled Nail mountains to attack an Arab stronghold there. Sacre! Something happened during that battle! Something that won the American the respect of the men and made them leave him alone. It was all very strange. One of the strangest things I have ever witnessed.

THE Arabs were gathered atop the crest of a hill, and the Legionnaires debouched from a ravine below, to attack.

Save for the queer, mad incident at its end, it was the usual mountain engagement. Company Thirteen moved up the hill with needle-bayonets fixed and flashing sunshine, guns spouting flame, kepis dodging a hail of return fire. Dust rose in clouds under our pounding heels. Smoke from the steady gunnery rolled up into the clear sky.

Every crag and cliff tossed the echo of rattling rifles punctuated by the screams of smitten men, the squalls of officers, the chilling wail of Arab tribesmen waiting the shock of our arrival.

"Yah! Yah! Yah Allah!"

The Legion moved up in a long, plunging, blue line. The Arabs were gray phantoms flitting from boulder to boulder, sharpshooting with friendless accuracy. A Legionnaire would drop out of parade with a bullet in his hide, and the blue line would close in.

It took us twenty minutes of marching in the face of a scalding fire to climb that slope, and when we had covered half the distance most of my squad had fallen and I found myself elbow to elbow with the Yankee.

On the other side of John Smith the Goat marched three tall Poles. As they stalked onward, pumping their Lebel's, they found time to hurl taunts at the little Yankee. But Jack the Goat, I found, was deserving of no taunt. I watched him from the corner of my eye in certain admiration.

This must have been his baptism of fire; yet he closed in like a veteran, unafraid.

His eyes flashed gayly, his thin lips smiled no smile of fear, his jaw stuck out with courage, and his goatee fairly bristled. He could shoot like an automaton, too, and before we knew it he was all but leading our column.

"Good for you, my Jack!" I shouted to him. "You do well for a recruit. Shoot low, and mind your footing on the loose rocks ahead." It was the first time he had marched in mountain country where the trails were treacherous as a witch's kiss. "And watch out for their attack."

He flashed me a friendly grin and yelled:

"I like it!"

But the Arabs liked it, too. All this time they had been concentrating a force among a mount of rocks to the left of our advance. Suddenly, in typical, fanatic Moslem recklessness, the whole body of wild men charged down from the rocks!

I can see those Ouled Nail devils coming at us, to this day. I can see their spitting rifles, their bobbing hoods, their dodging beards.

But we knew what their wild charge meant. They were running low on ammunition. This was their shock-blow to shatter our line. True enough. After two volleys, they were dropping their long-barreled guns, and knives as grim as Turkish scimitars were spouting in their hands.

Now, it was one thing to walk into gun fire where the bullets were invisible; it was quite another sensation to face a horde of scimitars that flashed like crescents of silver fire in the sunlight. That taxed the nerve of the Legionnaires if anything did. But not a man of our blue line faltered.

"Yah! Yah Allah!" screeched the oncoming horde.

"En avant!" shrilled our bugler.

Dust rose in a choking cyclone. The ground shook underfoot. The screams of the combatants and the clang of steel on steel must have deafened the ears of le bon Dieu.

Then abruptly it was over. The smoke and the dust had thinned, the blue of the Legion had drowned most of the gray.

Uncle of Satan! I swear we had smashed those sons of the Ouled Nail flatter than the Seven Cats of Assasta. With expert Legion care we had, it seemed, finished the Moslems to a man.

If an Arab scimitar was a moon of death, those needle-bayonets of ours were swords of doom. A good many of our stout veterans lay slumbering on the stones with never a guard detail to torture them again; but the Arabs cluttered the ground like piles of soiled laundry.

I STOOD wiping my bayonet on an Arab's burnoose, meanwhile watching the blood drip from a gash on my hand and saying to myself: "Now we have killed them to the last man."

Then I heard the Legionnaires around me yelling like maniacs, pointing, and cursing with surprise.

We had not killed the Arabs to a man. There were five of them left; and the whole five were racing like mad back up the hill. They were not retreating, however. Those Ouled Nails were warriors who did not retreat. They were charging.

And when I saw whom they charged, I let out a cry, I can tell you that. They were charging with knives upraised at the strange little Yankee with the wax hands and the stiff goatee. Jack the Goat. You comprehend?

He was two hundred yards away.

Angels only knew how he got up there alone and alive, but there he was. Arabs marked the path of his advance like chickens would mark the trail of a speeding Renault car down a country lane.

He stood alone, I say, backed against a boulder. An Arab lay dead at his feet. His bayonet gleamed with crimson in his hand. He watched the five attacking demons with a grin that matched the glint of their waving scimitars. His kepi was on the back of his head, his raven hair fell in a sheaf down his forehead, and with a smile he watched death bound at him.

"To his aid!" I shrieked, finding my wits. "Help him. That is the Yankee. Jack the Goat—"

We went to his rescue, a crowd of us. But the Arabs were closing in, running faster than rabbits. Guns spitting, we fired as we ran; but in our excitement we sent wild bullets. Those five Arabs would be at him in a second. They would cut him to monkey meat. I ran with fear in my heart, and six comrades came hard on my heels. Then, *sacre nom de Dieu*, if I did not stumble and bring the whole six down on top of me like a football game!

We got to our feet, screaming curses, expecting to see the Yankee cut to pieces. We saw no such thing. While we had sprawled on our faces, that little Jack the Goat had done something. He reached down and picked up the dead Arab that had spraddled before him. Now the dead one he held propped at his side.

It was not an unknown method for a soldier to protect himself with the body of a dead one. But Uncle of Satan! Those five Arabs were not attacking. They were not dancing in to slash out with those fearful knives. No. What do you think? Just as I regained my feet I saw it all, or I never would have believed.

Those five Arabs threw down their knives as if they had been snakes of Gehenna. Then, by the bones of St. Mitropane of Voronesh, they went down on their knees, bowed their backs and flung out their arms as they bobbed their foreheads against the ground. You understand? They salaamed!

I do not know how we Legionnaires recovered from astonishment enough to capture those prayerful five. But we got up there, rammed our bayonets into their ribs, and stood them up against the boulder. Whereat the amazing Yankee let drop the body of the dead tribesman and saluted us with a grin.

"Thank you very much," he said, dusting off his knees. "It was a close call for a little old man, eh? All right, friends. Let us drive the captives into camp. They won't make trouble."

Nor did they. Do you know what they said? *Parbleu!* They marched off meek as lambs, but before they went they pointed

at the body of the Arab our Jack the Goat had held beside him. They pointed politely, saying the dead Arab was their chief.

Furthermore, they said, just as they had been about to cut down our Jack the Goat, this dead chief had spoken. They were frightened about it, for dead chiefs seldom spoke to living Arabs. But this chief had talked out loud, telling them to throw down their knives and let the white soldier live, for such was the will of Allah.

Queer? I should say it was queer. Jack the Goat, himself, offered no explanation; leisurely he strolled off to pick up his lost kepi. I? I examined that dead Arab. The body was cold with three bullets in the skull.

Somehow, the little Yankee got along well in the company after that. The Legionnaires were mighty civil to Jack the Goat; left him to his own devices. Behind his back, though, there were strange whisperings, furtive glances. I did a lot of wondering, too, you may well believe. Jack the Goat kept to himself, learned his soldiering well, and because he had, somehow or other, caused the capture of five live Arabs, he was made a soldier of the first class.

I was his only friend. Even so, he would seldom talk to me about himself. Looking back, it seems portentous and queer that the only time he spoke to me of himself was that first night our transport ship nosed down the Mediterranean. We stood aboard that rotting ship, the Fleur de France, which was steaming to aid a Legion outpost beleaguered in French Somaliland. It was on that ship of Satan that this strangest story of the Foreign Legion played to its mad end.

CHAPTER II

THE FLOWER OF FRANCE

THE Fleur de France, please know, was not a boat. She was the ghost of a boat. All rusty, clanking bones and wheezes and uncanny groans and smoke.

They sent her down from Marseilles to

load her with army supplies and ammunition at Bizerta. Then they crammed her lousy main deck with black Tirailleurs, sharpshooters. Then they sent to Sidi bel Abbes for a squad of Legionnaires to look after the Tirailleurs.

I was among the eight Legionnaires who boarded the Fleur de France to look after the Tirailleurs. I have every good reason to remember my companions. There was the German, Schneider; De Nogales the Venezuelan; Fuertes the Spaniard; a French apache named Le Canif because his face was like a knife. There was Kalnikoff, a former Russian general of Cossacks. There was Lieutenant Gentilet, who had once been a major at St. Cyr and was now to command our detachment. Lastly, there was the little Yankee, Jack the Goat.

When we knew our job, the eight of us went pretty sick. There we were aboard a transport older than Noah's Ark, stuffed with a company of African colonials to keep an eye on, bound for Somaliland to relieve an outpost and kick the devil out of a Somali rebellion.

You know French Somaliland? It is a mean little strip of Africa lying on the coast where the Red Sea spills into the Gulf of Aden through the Strait of Bab el Mandeb. It is bounded on the west by Abyssinia, on the north by Eritrea, on the south by a British protectorate.

It was going to be a long voyage down there on a rotten hulk like the Fleur de France. We Legionnaires did not like the idea. We did not like the company of black Tirailleurs crowded on the main deck below us. They looked like a lot of black gorillas. They were commanded by a giant negro named Ahmed.

Pacing the deck below, they would turn their white eyes on the bridge where our cabin was. They carried light carbines across their massive shoulders and monstrous coupe-coupe knives in the sashes of their white uniforms. They were a bad lot to be fighting under the flag of France.

"They are villains every one," Lieutenant Gentilet assured us with a grim smile.

It was our first night at sea. The *Fleur de France* was staggering down the Mediterranean toward the Suez Canal. We Legionnaires were standing on the high forward bridge where we were quartered, looking down on the *Tirailleurs* decked below.

"They glare at us who stand up here," the officer went on, "with evil in the eye. Already I have had a quarrel with that Ahmed who is their captain. He is angry about the food and thinks we Legionnaires are favored with better quarters. Pah!"

Such a thing could not be fancied. You should have seen the boat. She had that high forward bridge where we Legionnaires were jammed in a cabin. Aft she was a canal barge. A skinny funnel stuck up amidships. Every wave that hit her boarded the forecastle under the bow where her luckless sailors lived. And every inch of her hulk was a vermin-nest.

"A lousy craft," our lieutenant snarled again. "Look at her. Her engines just about move her. Two lifeboats." He indicated the dory slung over the stern. "There is that dory, and there is that rowboat over the bow. I hope to high heaven a storm does not hit us on this trip."

"And so do I," agreed Jack the Goat, after the officer and the others had gone to their cabins.

The little American and I were alone on the bridge. Wind was rising and stars were scattering down the sky. The squeak of the boat's hull, and the low throb of her struggling engines, the tramping boots of the *Tirailleurs* on the deck below made an undertone to the chant of the sweeping sea.

THE little Yankee laid a hand on my sleeve. "Lieutenant Gentilet expects trouble, eh? Trouble from the boat and from those *Tirailleurs*. It is a long, long way down to Somaliland."

"Too damned long," I suggested. "I do not love the idea, my friend. Here we are, eight Legionnaires on a boat filled with blacks. The *Tirailleurs* can be hand-led on

land. But at sea it may be something else, And I think we'll have a stiff fight with the Somalis when we do get there."

He turned his face to me. I could see his eyes shining in the darkness, and I knew he was smiling. He put a small hand over mine.

"Look here," he explained. "You've been a friend to me, Thibaut Corday. The others do not like me. In the barracks at Sidi they made hell for me. After that battle with the Ouled Nail they left me alone, but they are not friends. Just now they went to the cabin for a go at cards and didn't ask me to join them. They think I am something strange. But you have stuck by me. I reckon you've wondered about me, eh?"

I was surprised at this speech. "But yes," I admitted. "You are not exactly like the common Legionnaire. You have not confided in them, you see, and then that fight in the mountains—"

He laughed. "But I am like the others. Look here, Corday. Why did you join the Legion, anyway? Will you tell?"

"A woman," I growled confession. "And that is why most of them have joined. A woman has driven them to hell."

"I am like the rest," he said softly. "A woman. I will confide in you, Corday. You have been a friend. Yes, a woman drove me into the Legion. She was my wife—in America. She was younger than I. We worked together for years. I loved her better than anything on earth. I love her still, even though she ran away. We were in New York City. I was just at the pinnacle of success. She left a note. She was going to another man. She had met him in Europe, I believe. She said she no longer loved me, and was going to this man. It sort of finished me, Corday."

He did not cry, but his voice cried. Some men can love like that. I felt like the very devil for him, and patted his shoulder.

"I could not stand the old life," he went on, "so I joined this army. I have enjoyed the work, and care little whether I die in Africa or in hell. At all events I'm away

from America—the old haunts, the echoes, the memories. Listen, Corday. Listen, carefully. I carry in the pocket—this breast pocket of my tunic—a little package. Wrapped in brown paper. If—if anything ever happens to me, somehow, I'd like you to have it. Will you remember? Will you remember the little packet? It will tell a story."

"I will remember," I promised him. "You want me—"

"To keep it as a souvenir. Something to remember me by. I'd like to be remembered by somebody, Corday. And somehow, I've a queer feeling that something may happen on this voyage. It's in the air. This rotten boat. This trip into the tropics. Down that weird Suez Canal. Through the ancient Red Sea. Like a dream. And those black colonials below. There may be trouble."

We were silent then. The boat sneaked under the stars. Black water, slipping by abeam, glistened like ebony in the gloom. I thought of the strangeness of the world, of the little man beside me, of the wife who had snapped brutal fingers at his stout heart. I thought of that queer incident in the Ouled Nail Mountains. I thought of the little Yankee's premonition. Trouble. Somehow I became a little ill.

That very same night Lieutenant Gentilet was stabbed in the back. We found him lying on the bridge next morning, quite, quite dead. Pardieu!

PERHAPS you believe there was the very devil to pay, then. There was, indeed. One grand uproar shook the steamer from stem to stern. The lieutenant of the Legion had been murdered. The head of the detachment lay dead with a knife-thrust in his spine. Trouble aplenty.

The Fleur de France put into shore at Monastir and staged a royal investigation. Who had killed Lieutenant Gentilet? The Legionnaires accused the Tirailleurs. The Tirailleurs accused the Legionnaires and the sailors. The ship's crew accused everybody else.

Finally the suspects were boiled down to Ahmed, the Tirailleur captain, to three sailors who had been on watch, to the French Legionnaire known as Le Canif because his face was like a knife, and to Jack the Goat and me.

The little Yankee and I had been on deck later than the others. Ahmed was under suspicion because he had quarreled with the lieutenant. The three sailors had been somewhere at hand. And Le Canif had been a criminal and looked capable of stabbing his dying mother.

All very sad. Nothing could be proved in so short a time, and the rumpus did not restore life to Lieutenant Gentilet.

Then telegrams were dispatched. The new wires along the North African coast trembled with commands. Brigade headquarters at Sidi raged in its spade beard. There were messages. A wild cry for help had come from the Somaliland. Jibuti Port, Obok and the town of Tajura had been attacked, and the Somali coast was in flames. There were women and children in those helpless towns. The Legion outposts there were out of supplies and wanted reserves badly. A handful of guns and men might save the day.

Brigade headquarters sent a raging message to the Fleur de France. We were to go on full speed ahead. At Port Said we would stop and pick up Captain Dieudonne Daudet, who would take the detachment down. If any one could handle the job it was Dieudonne Daudet. Off we steamed with smoke boiling from our funnel and the engines straining in our middle; fast for Port Said and to the rescue.

You can imagine things were not too pleasant aboard that rotten transport ship. You bet they were not. Everybody had called everybody else a murderer. The ship and the rations were bad. The Tirailleurs, standing in a solid black mass behind their giant Congo-god of a captain, were complaining. We soldiers of the Legion staged a bitter quarrel with the captain of the good ship Flower of France.

Just off the coast of Egypt a storm

lashed out of the East, kicked the boat in the stomach, bent her spine, tore the lifeboat from her stern, and gave her engines the rheumatism. Now the Fleur de France could stagger along about six miles an hour.

I, myself, assumed command of the Legion squad, being older in rank than the rest. If things were bad among the black colonials on the main deck, it was no Sabbath school up there in our cabin on the bridge, where the German, the Russian, the Venezuelan and the Spaniard—ruffians all—were seasick.

Le Canif, the French apache, sneaked around with hate in his crooked eyes and a sneer on his lips, pretending his feelings had been wounded because of the unjust accusation that he had killed our officer.

I fail to know what I could have done without the little Yankee at my side. Jack the Goat was a prince. He smiled all the time. He never complained. He was a strange one to see in his Legion uniform, so small and gentlemanly and bird-like. But his heart was of solid gold, that is so. And more, as you shall see.

So I was mighty grateful when we dropped anchor in the harbor at Port Said to pick up Captain Dieudonne Daudet. We lay in close to shore, and I was going off in a small boat to meet the officer.

"I am glad my command is finished," I told the little Yankee. "This boat is dynamite waiting to be exploded. If any one can put out the fuse it is Captain Daudet. He has been here in Port Said on some manner of special government duty. He is the giant of the Legion. The sternest officer in the army."

That was so. Captain Dieudonne Daudet was one terror of a man, feared in the service of French armies from East to West. I had been under his command before, and I knew him.

A big Corsican he was, with a fierce red beard, fierce blue eyes, terrific hands and shoulders. His chest was a keg of muscles and glittered with forty medals. He had been in the Legion for years and his

middle name was Discipline. One whispered when one saw him coming, and instinctively snapped to attention. I was glad he was going to take us down to Somaliland.

But when I found him waiting on the pier with his wife, and learned he was going to take her with him aboard the ship, my heart sank. A woman aboard that lousy old lugger of a transport. And such a beautiful woman. Uncle of Satan! Here was a match to touch off any dynamite.

A MORETTE was her name. I had heard of this wife of Captain Daudet before. She had been with him in Algiers on a recent date. Gossip spoke of her as the most beautiful woman in the colonies.

I picked up the captain's duffel, and I stared. Dieu! She was a wonder. Any woman who could look beautiful on a pier in Port Said would be wonderful.

I remember her yet as I saw her then. I remember her small and stately figure, her burst of gorgeous mahogany-colored hair trapped by a little white sun-hat, her face that was like finest Carrara marble. Her sea-blue eyes could have made a saint break his promises. Her smiling scarlet mouth would have caused an artist to sell his soul.

"For the sake of Heaven, Captain Daudet," I whispered to the officer, "but you are not going to take your wife aboard ship? That boat is a weasel-coop loaded with spawn of the devil."

He withered me with a glance and an oath to remind me of my rank.

"Attend to your business," he snarled. "I am commander now. My wife goes with me to Somaliland. I am to be governor there. And I understand there has been trouble on the transport. The Tirailleurs have raised the devil, eh? Your Lieutenant Gentilet was murdered. So! By the bones of Anthony Carpetsi, things will be different from now on. Pick up my duffel, you salopard! Make for my wife a comfortable place in the small boat. What are you standing idle for?"

That was the good Captain Dieudonne

Daudet. Nothing for it, but I must make way to the small boat. The beautiful Amorette seated herself in the bow, Captain Daudet and I stood in the stern, and the sailors from the Fleur de France pulled seaward.

While we rocked toward our transport, which squatted among the clutter of boats near the canal mouth like some ugly amphibian, Captain Daudet questioned me about the murder and flung oaths and orders.

"Your Brigade headquarters must be insane," Captain Daudet thundered, "to send only one squad of Legionnaires with a whole company of those damned colonials. But I presume they could spare no more of the Legion because of the fighting in Morocco, eh? The Paris War Department has gone mad, anyway. There are those poor devils trapped in Somaliland—"

He bit off his words in his scarlet whiskers, evidently realizing he was talking to an inferior. Folding his arms across his medal-hung chest, he watched us bear down on the Fleur de France with a bitter sneer on his lips.

His girlish wife in the bow was smiling like a lady going for a brief row in the lakes of the Bois de Boulogne. Moreover, she was casting smiles at me; something I sincerely wished she would not do, for her husband was famed for quick temper and shooting before he asked.

It made me pessimistic to think of that lovely creature being on the Fleur de France with its cargo of scoundrels. Every

one of those black Tirailleurs was lined up at the main deck rail when our small boat came alongside.

On the bridge above, I could see the heads of the Legionnaires. Sailors coiling hawsers on the forecastle head stopped work to stare. All eyes were turned on the lady. It made me sweat. I caught a steely glint in the eye of Captain Daudet, which made me sweat the more.

A gangway came down from the deck; the captain, his wife and I swung aboard ship. Pompous as a rooster, the skipper marched forward to meet the famous Legion officer. Captain Daudet ignored his flamboyant gestures of greeting.

"Move this boat!" he roared. "I am Captain Dieudonne Daudet, now in command of this expedition. Do not stand gaping, fool. I have here papers from the War Department giving me full command. Start the engines in this damned barge. Have you your clearing papers? Good! Get us on our way and through the canal. Perhaps you know we are going to fight a war? Splendid! Be on!"

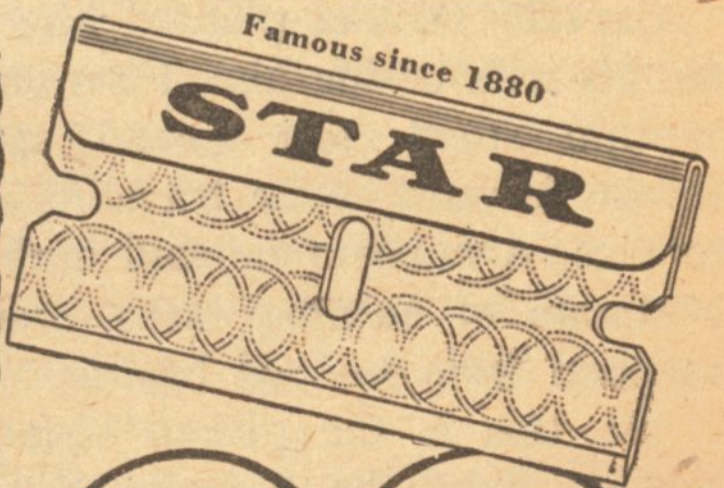
"But the lady, mon capitaine? Does she go with us?"

"In the very best cabin you can provide on this stinking craft. She goes with us, yes. You comprehend? She is my wife."

I THINK the skipper of the Fleur de France wanted to talk back. It was irregular for ship captains to take commands from expeditionary officers. However, the captain of the Fleur de France



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did not talk back. There was a something in the fierce blue eyes of the giant Legion officer which stifled the opposition. The captain of the *Fleur de France* swallowed thrice, managed an almost humble bow, and danced off.

A moment later we could hear bells tinkling in the belly of the boat, sailors shouting, winches squealing. Water churned under the steamer's blunt stern and the anchor rattled up into her prow, showering mud.

Then what do you suppose? Captain Daudet took his wife by the arm and marched her straight across the main deck through that mob of black Tirailleurs. Straight across the deck he marched her, and the African colonials did not stand in his way, you may well believe. Ahmed, their commander, sighted the red beard and the chevrons of the newcomer, and Ahmed snapped to attention with speed.

"Clear your black devils off this deck!" Captain Daudet screamed into the Tirailleur officer's face. "I will stand them on parade tomorrow afternoon. You know who I am? Splendid! I am given to understand that you and your detachment of men have been making a rumpus. This is the end of it. You will report to me later."

Then onward marched Captain Daudet with his wife. On to the skinny ladder leading up to the high bridge; on up the ladder. The Legionnaires on the bridge had sense enough to fall into line and stand at attention. I sprang into line, myself; and the seven of us waited in a stiff row.

Captain Daudet planted himself before us, his wife beside him. Fists on hips, the captain stood, feet spread apart, head thrust forward, eyes traveling from face to face. A moment he said nothing. Then a stream of burning oaths, crackled and snapped from his red beard.

"So this is the picked squad of men sent to fight the Somalis, eh? A likely bunch of ragamuffins. Of all the Legionnaires I have ever seen, you seven are the worst. Now, my merry salopards, I will tell you who I am. I am Dieudonne

Daudet, the toughest commissioned officer in the service. That means something. It means that things are going to click on this transport from now on. It means that those Tirailleurs are going to shut their black mouths. It means that we are making record time to Somaliland. That is what it means. And the first man among you to start anything with me will find himself in scalding water, that is so.

"Now, then, scum," Captain Daudet snarled, "this is my wife." He bowed to the lady. "She is going with us. A beautiful person for such foul company. Make no mistake, you dogs. She is to be treated with every respect. The least disrespect will mean a death among you."

Stepping forward suddenly, Captain Daudet shot out a heavy fist. Now we had been standing in line thus: Schneider the German; De Nogales, the Venezuelan; Le Canif from Paris; Fuertes the Spaniard; Kalkinoff of Russia; the little Yankee, and myself. Lined up against the rail, you understand. So the fist of Captain Daudet smashed like a flung hammer into the jaw of the fat German named Schneider.

Legionnaire Schneider dropped to his face.

"That for you, you dog!" Captain Daudet shouted at the crumpled figure. "Instead of listening to me, you were staring at my wife. Learn not to do so!"

His fist swept out again. Smack! Squarely on the chin of the tall Venezuelan. De Nogales fell like a sack of old clothing.

"You," bellowed Captain Daudet, "stared, too. Learn the lesson!"

Le Canif, the apache, was next.

"I do not like your face," Captain Daudet smiled, hitting him suddenly with his left fist. "You, too, stared at my wife. Beware from now on!"

And down went that lousy Parisian. Yes. And down went Fuertes from Spain; and down went Kalkinoff of Russia. Down they went. It was like a game of nine-pins. It was Captain Dieudonne Daudet's gentle way of establishing discipline in La Legion.

IT WAS a merry little scene. Captain Daudet striking out that bludgeon fist of his. The stricken Legionnaires dropping like emptied sacks. The wife of Captain Daudet standing there with a scared smile. (Perhaps this was a lesson for her, too.) And all around us the harbor of Port Said hooting and tooting in the blazing sunshine of Africa. It was a merry scene, saddened only by the fact that I was in line for a punch on the jaw, having stared like the others.

But our Yankee had not stared at the woman. From the corner of my eye I had watched my little friend. Throughout the whole performance he had not moved a muscle. Eyes front, he waited at attention stiff as a ramrod. The thought suddenly came over me; why should the little Yankee stare at any woman?

"Do not hit him," I said impulsively, stepping forward a pace. "Do not hit the American, Captain Daudet. He has been the only soldier of the lot who has—"

"I will hit him!" the officer roared. "Not because he stared at my wife. Non! He did not look at her. But I shall hit him because my wife made eyes at him. It will be a lesson—"

And crack! He sent the frail Yankee spinning. I must have raised a hand against him, for he hit me twice. Once in the stomach. Again on the jaw. Then I was flat on my back with the others. Dieu!

When I came to consciousness it was to stare through a headache at a sky sprinkled with early stars. The horizon was blue as the tunic of a Spahi. I could hear the throbbing of ship engines, smell a desert breeze, feel the tremble of the ship beneath me.

The little Yankee squatted beside me, calmly smoking a cigarette. On his lips there waited a sardonic smile.

"I was commanded to let you sleep," he said quietly. "Now I am to tell you to report for a guard detail."

I groaned a curse and got up on sore elbows.

The Yankee gingerly touched a finger to his jaw.

"That Captain Daudet is a good soldier, at least. His wife is—one of the loveliest women I have ever seen. But in spite of her husband, I think she will make much trouble."

His voice trailed off, and his cigarette became a crimson eye in the gloom. Then he said: "We are sailing southward down the Suez Canal, Corday. We are sailing straight into hell."

CHAPTER III

—INTO HELL!—

IN THOSE days the ordinary passenger boat went down the canal in eighteen hours. Since she was only rushing to the rescue of women and children and Legionnaires in Somaliland, the Fleur de France took twenty-four hours.

She plodded through the Bitter Lake region with marsh birds wheeling over her taffrail, hooting like lost souls. She halted at Suez for coal, and received another urgent wail for help from the outposts of Somaliland. Then she staggered with a fouled rudder-post into the Gulf of Suez, and it was blazing noon when she sighted Mount Sinai off her port beam.

All morning the good Captain Daudet drilled the Tirailleurs on the main deck. All afternoon he drilled his seven Legionnaires. He made us overhaul our gear, wash down our cabin, police the bridge deck, and unlimber a Chaut-chaut automatic rifle. All evening he raged, stamped and tramped around the cabin of the ship captain, howling for more speed.

His presence aboard ship had made the Tirailleurs quiet as mice. You could see them mumbling to themselves, rolling their big white eyes up at the bridge where Daudet commanded. Sometimes it seemed to me those big black African colonials were too quiet.

But all things considered, the Fleur de France was plowing down the Red Sea in orderly fashion. Captain Daudet had established an iron discipline over the craft and even urged a few knots extra speed

out of its worn out, antiquated engines.

Five days down the Red Sea we sighted the coast of Eritrea off our starboard bow. A junky Arab boat came scooting out from the shore, bringing the news that a platoon of Legionnaires, stationed at Taklai, was going to start a forced march down the coast and would reach our port in Somaliland a few days after we did. We lined the bridge rail, and could almost see the platoon of Legion devils footing it down the mountainous shore.

"Dios!" snarled Fuertes, the Spaniard. "It gives me a feeling of companionship to know there are Legionnaires on that coast. It has been lonely on this rat-nest lost in the Red Sea."

"Himmel!" grunted the fat German. "I am glad this cursed voyage draws to a close. Every night I have expected those Tirailleurs to mutiny and cut us by the throat. Ja! Captain Daudet has held them down, but I think they hate us. And with that woman quartered up here with us—"

"I am glad," muttered the tall Russian, "that our trip ends soon, myself. We sail tonight without mishap to our engine, and tomorrow late we should be near the Strait of Bab el Mandeb."

De Nogales, the Venezuelan, was in his cabin furbishing gear, so he could offer no comment. Le Canif, the Paris apache, simply spat in the dark water. The little Yankee, Jack the Goat, only shrugged.

EVENING with ragged clouds in a green sky, a low moon shedding silvery streamers across the calm water, and the coast of Eritrea lying a line of red mountain peaks off our starboard beam.

I was standing on the bow of the ship with Jack the Goat. Three crazy native dhows had scuttled under the shadow of our prow and now were lost in the direction of Arabia. In that same easterly direction the smoke of three passenger boats from the Orient hung feathers on the horizon.

The moon climbed higher in the sky and sneaked into a nest of gray clouds.

The Fleur de France waddled along creaking, smoking and shivery. The only sound was the occasional bell-tinkle in the pilot house on our bridge, the burble of the cutwater boiling past our bows, the clatter of the sabots worn by the sailor who stood lookout near us.

The little Yankee leaned on the rail and pointed south. "By the chart in the cabin we should soon be passing the Dahlak Archipelago. Right now we are not far from that African coast. Corday, I never expected we would get this far in this bilious old ship."

"Nor I," was my confession. "There has been an undercurrent of disaster ever since we left Port Said. You have felt it, too, I know. A handful of white men on a boat jammed with unreliable blacks. I—"

Jack the Goat caught the sleeve of my tunic. I felt it at the same time. So did the sailor on lookout. He swung around with an oath and peered at the pilot house.

"Parbleu!" he called. "Did you two soldiers of the damned feel that jar? Our engines have completely stopped."

"Did either of you," snarled the Yankee, "think you heard a scream? There, by Heaven—there it is again!"

I should say we did hear a scream. It coiled up into the tropic dusk and lost itself in echoes against the metal sky. A shrill soprano scream.

The next instant all hell broke loose on the bridge. Voices barked and bawled. Gunfire crashed out. Boot heels pounded up ladders and across deck beams. From the forecastle head, where we stood paralyzed, the Yankee and I caught the flash of spitting automatics, brief glimpses of men running through shadows. A sailor came tumbling down from the wheelhouse, wailing in terror.

"The Tirailleurs!" he screamed. "They mutiny. They have smashed into the engine room. That wife of the Legion captain has started it. She walked down the bridge, a Tirailleur smiled at her, and that captain shot the black man dead. Now they will murder us all! Holy St. Adrian!"

"Aux armes!" It was the voice of Captain Daudet somewhere amidships. "Legionnaires! Help!"

"Quick!" screeched Jack the Goat, bounding past me. "To the bridge, Corday. We must hold the bridge and the pilot house."

I was after him in a trice, and we went shin-banging up to our cabin like a pair of maniacs. All was confusion on the bridge. Powder smoke hung thick in the air with another odor—blood. Somehow or other the oil lamps had been smashed out, and it was darker than sin in the alleyways.

Amidships the vessel was a howling Gehenna. Gunfire flashed like the flame of lightning down there on the main deck. I could hear bullets thumping into wood and tearing through canvas. I could hear Captain Daudet shrieking oaths. I could hear those black Tirailleurs squalling like a den of raging tigers. I could hear a woman sobbing.

We came across her huddled at the door of her cabin.

"They are dead!" she was sobbing, her voice high with hysteria. "They are dead. And I am lost!"

We did not stop to find out what she meant. Jack the Goat yanked her to her feet.

"Get into your cabin!" he shouted. "Quick! Give me the key. I will lock you in. They can not get up here on the bridge."

She started to say something, but he clapped a hand over her mouth and flung her into the cabin, slamming and locking the door after her.

We darted on, down the infernal alley; dashed into our own cabin. A lamp was glimmering there, and I wish it had not been. For the little Yankee stumbled over one body, and I sprawled over another. You understand? Schneider and Fuertes lay there on the floor. Dead! With their own bayonets rammed into their necks.

"The devil!" Jack the Goat panted. "Someone stabbed them while they sat there at table. Look. Playing cards scat-

tered around. Their backs were to the door. Someone yanked the bayonets from their sheaths and murdered them."

"Look!" I shouted, pointing at a bunk. "There lies the Russian. Murdered, too. Sacre nom de Dieu! Foul play!"

But we had no time to gossip. We snatched our Lebel's from our own bunks and fled into the alley again. You realize how the after deck of the bridge looked down on the main deck amidships? You know about the skinny ladder leading up to the bridge deck from that main deck below? That was where we found the foul play.

Uncle of Satan! I will not forget the picture I found there, as long as I live. No. Nor after I die.

SLIDING from behind a cloud, the moon cruised open sky and shed a spectral ray that made the face of Captain Daudet a devil-mask. His eyes were wild, his cheeks the color of banana meat. His kepi was gone, and his red hair tossed in the salty wind. A bullet-scraps across his forehead poured crimson streams down either side of his jaw. Curse after curse was crackling from his beard.

A wild sight he made, crouching there at the top of the ladder, swinging the Chaut-chaut rifle to spray a blaze of steel at the deck below.

Can you see that raging jam of Africans on the main deck? Can you see that plunging knot of white uniforms, headless in the dark save where sudden gun-flame picked out an ebony face for a second-tick? Can you see the spiteful jets of fire squirting from their carbines, and the baleful ragged flash of those long coupe-coupe knives waving aloft?

Those fiendish knives gleamed like flashes of water. Those charging white uniforms made a boiling surf on the dark deck. And their savage, demoniac outcry rose like a smash of breaking seas. In a body they would rush the ladder. Rrrrrrrrrrrt! would roar Captain Daudet's gun. In a body they would retreat. Like waves.

Jack the Goat and I sprang out of the alleyway, and for a second could do nothing but stare as if smitten. Behind the gun that wove a brocade of white fire down those steps Captain Daudet was magnificent. Magnificent! Do you know what he made me think of? He made me think of that gallant Dutch boy with his thumb on the dike, stemming the torrential flood.

Just as I was thinking that (with no honest time for thinking anything) I saw something else. Jack the Goat saw it, too, and caught my arm.

The ladder defended by Captain Daudet fell from the starboard end of the bridge. At the port end of the bridge—right out on the wing—two men were fighting. Silently, almost secretly, they struggled in and out of shadow, bodies locked, arms trapped by arms, faces rammed together.

I could have yelled when I saw them there. De Nogales, the Venezuelan, and Le Canif, the Paris apache, Legionnaire against Legionnaire. Fighting like the very devil!

Busy at the ladder, Captain Daudet failed to see them. But the little Yankee and I saw them, that is so. We saw the evil, hate-twisted face of Le Canif, the stricken, knotted countenance of De Nogales. We saw ruby drops scattered from De Nogales's cheek. We saw a short, wet dirk lashing in the fist of the foul Frenchman.

Before the Yankee or I could move a foot, the Venezuelan sighted us.

"Aqui!" he screamed. "Shoot him! He murdered the others. He started the mutiny. Kill him! Por Dios, I am—"

Too late! Le Canif wrenched like a tiger. Out came that short, wet knife. Into shadow and out of shadow. De Nogales pirouetted like a dancer, and crashed to his face. It was all so quick.

Jack the Goat fired and I fired. But the apache made a flying leap. Like a catamount he went past us. Like a catamount he landed on the back of Captain Daudet, who was bent, unsuspecting, over his shouting Chaut-chaut gun. In and out

went that devil's knife. Captain Daudet spraddled flat beside the gun.

The Yankee and I flung ourselves at that traitorous Legionnaire. Our clawing hands snatched shadows. Le Canif had thrown himself down the ladder to join the Tirailleurs at its base.

DIEU! but the little Yankee moved fast. Springing on the Chaut-chaut gun, he had it hammering in no time. Tirailleur bullets were hissing up to the bridge in a deadly rain. They did not touch Jack the Goat. He was swinging the gun, weaving a net-work of bullets across the main deck.

His first burst of fire caught that Paris apache, Le Canif, smack in the chest, and all but knocked him to pieces. That was good. We saw Le Canif drop into a pile of white uniforms cluttering the ladder base. Then the Tirailleur charge was scattering back and away.

I had swung my Lebel into action, and was raking the shadows clinging to the engine-room house amidships where the funnel jutted skyward. The deck between that house amidships and the bridge where we hung was now clear, save for white lumps scattered here and there, and that piece of garbage in Legion uniform sprawled at the foot of our ladder.

The Yankee with his automatic gun and I with my Lebel drew a line of fire from rail to rail across that deck. Bullets whistled out of the shadows aft, winging over our bridge deck. But Jack the Goat was sheltered by the body of Captain Daudet, and I was behind the canvas fence of the bridge-rail. Thus protected, they could not spot us readily.

"Quick, then," the Yankee howled at me. "Get the sailors, Corday! Where in the name of Heaven have they been hiding? Run forward and find them. Bring guns and another drum of ammunition for the Chaut-chaut. I can hold them back. I can keep them from the ladder. They dare not cross that open deck, and they cannot go under this bridge to get forward. Tell the sailors to come up here. If

once those blacks should gain the pilot house—”

The sailors! I had forgotten them. I saw the Yankee could hold those African mutineers for the moment, so I raced back into the alleyway.

As I passed the cabin door behind which Captain Daudet's wife was locked I heard her sobbing in hysteria. The sound lent wings to my feet.

Bawling for aid, I rushed to the captain's cabin. That captain was not there. I banged into the little chart room. Empty! I scrambled into the pilot house. Not a soul to be seen; and the wheel turning idly as if maneuvered by ghostly hands.

Suspicion came suddenly. Sick with fear, I rushed down to the fore deck. Not a sailor to be seen. Now I was sweating and terrified, in all honest truth. Like a maniac I went galloping to the fore-castle and screamed into the fore-castle companion. No answer save a scurry of rats.

By the bones of King Michael, it got me like a hand on the stomach. I flung around from the hatch, and saw! Empty boat-davits. Yes! With a shriek I sprang to the bow rail.

Overside the water was lost in shade. The moon above had gone, leaving the Red Sea a sweep of muttering gloom. Far away I could hear the sound of squeaking oar-locks and muted voices. Saprستي! That thrice-damned crew of sailors, that craven mariner captain had robbed the Fleur de France of her only accessible life-boat, and fled.

CURSE? If I ever cursed anyone in my life, I cursed those sailors of the Fleur de France. But I had little time to do them justice. I hailed twice and got no answer save the slop of waves against our prow. Then I screamed my names for them. Names that should have made vinegar of the milk in their veins. And then the sound of the Chaut-chaut gun chattering on the bridge flung me into my senses, and I raced back to that upper deck once more.

I was sweating blood as I pounded aft through the gloomy alley of the bridge. What a gay situation was this. In my mind I could see it all. That black hulk of a steamboat lolling idly down a lost ocean. Those raging black troopers charging again and again from the after deck. Charging to rip apart two measly white men, lone defenders of the honor of France. Charging to capture the transport. Charging to gain a cabin where a woman hid weeping—a white girl whose slim beauty they had watched and marked with their bulbous, baleful eyes.

I gained the Yankee's side just in time to fend off another charge. The Tirailleurs were learning respect for the fast-shooting Chaut-chaut gun, and they did not press the attack too far. Carbines spitting, they came forward with a wariness, like so many gorillas clad in white.

They moved down the port and starboard sides of the well-deck, intent on getting under the bridge. Not a devil of them got across the deck. The Yankee and I drew the line with withering steel slugs.

In the old days the sailors of British merchantmen would keep idle passengers off the fore deck where they worked by drawing a chalk line from rail to rail. They called this “chalking their toes.” So the little American and I chalked the toes of those howling demon Tirailleurs with a line of bullets that must have sawed a strip out of that deck.

Jack the Goat ripped back and across with his rapid-firer. I sharpshot into the shadows. They retreated aft the engine-room house once more. Our gunfire, not needed further, faded to an echo.

The Yankee whirled on me. “Those sailors?”

“Gone!” I panted. “But fast. Here is another drum of bullets for the Chaut-chaut. There are two more drums in our cabin. Then—”

“You mean,” he panted in a strained voice, “that the sailors have deserted? They took the boat on the bow?”

Suddenly he was grabbing at me.

"Corday! We're alone with that girl in the cabin. Those blacks will attack again and again and again. How can we run this boat? No doubt they have slaughtered the men of the engine-room."

He seemed stunned. *C'est ca!* So did I. Our silence was one of horror. We were both thinking the same thought—the girl in the cabin.

Overhead the stars smiled. The boat rolled gently on a swell, and the stars walked in a brilliant arc across the sky. Amidships all was still, but aft we could hear the murmuring of angry men. Once or twice a tongue of fire spat from the shadows there and bullets whistled over our heads. Jack the Goat was panting.

Then suddenly he seized my hand in a crushing clasp. "Corday! There's a way out of this! We've got to save that girl. We've got to save this ship, too. Think, man. Down in Somaliland they're waiting. Waiting for this cargo. Food and ammunition."

"Parbleu!" I moaned. "The boat is crippled. To hell with it. But you and I and the girl. Like three mice waiting for the tigers."

I believe I started to cry. The Yankee and I could have gotten along, you comprehend. But there was the wife of poor Daudet.

DO YOU know what the little Yankee did? He kicked me in the shin.

"Corday!" he gasped. "Listen to me. Listen, I say! Off there is the coast of Africa—Eritrea. You remember the Legion platoon starting from Taklai? They are somewhere along that coast. You must find them!"

I swore a bitter oath. Those mountain peaks were miles away. A haze under the stars.

Jack the Goat twisted my wrist. "You've got to swim for it. Look! Get a plank, a cabin bench, anything. Drop overside. Swim. You can make it. Then find those Legionnaires. Find a boat, a dhow, any craft at all. And bring them back. Our

boat will not move from this position. First you must run to the pilot house and lash the wheel. You hear? You understand?" His words came in a vibrant rush.

"*Sacre nom de Dieu!*" I swore. "Do you think I would leave you alone in this trap? Do you think I would desert you on this sink of hell to face alone those black wolves? Do you think I would leave you and that white girl—"

The little Yankee's clasp tore into my flesh. "Corday! Do as I say. It's our one chance. I can hold them from the bridge. Listen! I want to save that girl more than anything else on earth."

Sweat was wiggling down his face. His eyes sparkled like burnished points of metal.

"I want to save her, I tell you," the Yankee insisted. "If we could make shore with you it would be good. But she could never swim it. I cannot swim a stroke. You must go—"

"I cannot!"

"You will! First lash the wheel. Then jump and swim like all hell. I will hold the bridge till you return."

"You will never hold it," I snarled. "When daylight comes and those savages see only one man up here—"

But his eyes commanded. If you could have seen his face you would have understood. A stern cord stood down his jaw, and his teeth grinned.

"Get on, Corday. I'll hold out. I'll hold out for days. Just bring me some grub and leave it to me—"

The spang of carbines snapped short his words. He trained the sights of his Chaut-chaut ready to answer the fire that had burned up from amidships. The Chaut-chaut rattled. The Africans stopped their shooting. Jack the Goat flung around at me again.

"Will you go?"

I could do nothing but nod. He clasped my hand. "You will save us all, Corday, and prove the hero I know you are. And listen, my friend. If—if anything has happened to me when you return, will you take that little packet from my breast

pocket? It will explain. You will take it?"

I promised. He thumped me bravely on the chest, and I fled to the pilot house. There I lashed the wheel. After that I foraged for rations and a canteen or two of water, which I placed within easy reach of Horatius-at-the-bridge. Then I dashed to my cabin. The sight of the dead German, the dead Russian, the dead Spaniard in there all but broke my resolution. But I caught up a bench, raced up the alley, dropped to the fore deck.

Down there the Fleur de France (a gorgeous flower, was she not?) was silent as a tomb. The high bridge lifted like a ghostly square castle against the stars. I thought of the girl locked in the cabin. I thought of the little man on the after deck of the bridge, crouching behind the Chaut-chaut gun.

I thought of the black swarm waiting to charge from behind the engine-room house. I wondered about the packet in his pocket.

Those thoughts raced through my numbed mind. Then I said a little prayer for the Yankee and that girl—the first prayer I had asked in years; and I said a little prayer for me. And I dropped the wooden bench overboard, stripped off from my uniform, and plunged after.

CHAPTER IV

TO THE RESCUE!

THERE were times when I thought I was going to die. My arms were pulling from their sockets. My legs were knotting with cramp. My skull and spine were frozen and the stomach in me burned with the sea water.

Then I would think of a little Yankee guarding a bridge of a skulking hell-ship. I would visualize the white woman locked in the cabin, the gorillas rushing across slippery decks. And I would swim.

There were times when I wanted to die. Those times were the worst. And then le bon Dieu would lend me power from unknown sources of the little dynamo that

drives all men through a hard, harsh world.

And the force which had parted the waters of that very same sea to allow an ancient people to march through, turned the wind and the waves to my aid; sent the currents toward the shore.

A blazing copper sun rolled up behind me and made of the water a blistering, metal element that strove to fight me under. I could no longer see the Fleur de France. I could barely watch the mountains of Eritrea; and they grew no larger in size, despite my efforts to near them.

Sacre! Of that terrible, terrible swim I can remember nothing more. I only know that eternities and eternities of time crawled by, that the heart shriveled inside me, that my bones expired, that the sun finally got into my eyes, and that two coal-black, ugly fishermen who looked like angels dragged me out of the water and raced me shoreward in a crazy fishing smack.

I spent a night in a hut that smelled like a sewer and looked like one, battling for sanity, battling against fever, shrieking and fighting and all but killing the homely devils who had saved me from the sea.

They tied me in a net and rushed away, to return hours later with a tall, thin white man wearing a thin, white beard. The thin old fellow gave me something to drink. I woke with sunshine on my face, and met the thin and bearded old man.

He told me I was sane, living, and a miracle under the sky to be doing so. He told me he was Doctor Augustin Jacques Edouard d'Etiennes, a medical missionary.

Was this Eritrea? Yes, it was. Had he heard of a Legionnaire platoon in the vicinity? But yes, a platoon had been on its way to the Somali coast; they had marched through the town only four hours ago.

Was that his horse waiting in the lane before the hut? It was.

Two hours later, half naked and a third mad, I galloped like a wild man into a knot of marching Legionnaires. They were dusty, footsore, weary and ragged as the ears of a hound. But their kepis were set

at a jaunty angle and the barrels of their Lebel rifles glimmered in the noonday sun.

Mubarek, I think the town was called. It was nothing of a town, at that. But in those days Eritrea was a sort of unclaimed territory. The Eritreans were too black and lazy and genial to care. Certainly in Mubarek nobody cared.

There was a certain regiment of sick Italian troopers in the town waiting to march over and try a few shots at the fuzzy-wuzzies of Abyssinia, and the only thing they cared about was finding drinking water.

That afternoon when our platoon of Legionnaires darted into Mubarek the Italians were away looking for drinking water. The point is, they had a bumboat waiting in an inlet near their camp. A dried-up Venetian lieutenant with furious black mustaches, and two faded soldiers from Verona, by the looks of them, guarded the big bumboat and reeled spaghetti into their unshaved faces.

The lieutenant of our Legion platoon hit the Italian officer with the black mustaches and knocked him into a pot of spaghetti. The two faded soldiers from Verona promptly bolted. Others of our Legion men scoured Mubarek and came back with three terrified ebony fishermen who could navigate the Red Sea.

SOLDIERS of the French Foreign Legion are not seaman. But no sailors on earth ever manned the oars of a bumboat with stronger arms and stouter wills to win. The oar-blades flashed silver in the blatant tropic sunlight. Spume and salted spray sputtered from the bumboat's bow. A Mubarek native stood up there on the lookout, warned to strain his eyes.

The young lieutenant of the Legionnaires and I stood behind the native. An automatic waited in the lieutenant's fist. I clutched a hair-triggered Lebel. In the stern of the boat we carried a little Maxim rapid-fire gun.

Sixty and more hours had gone since I had left the Fleur de France. And I hoped with every inch of my being for

the native on the lookout to sight her. Yet I feared in the pit of my soul to sight her at all.

The scarlet sun clambered down behind the bumboat's stern, enameling the water in our wake. The Legionnaires hauled madly at the oars. Eastward. Eastward where the Fleur de France might lie.

A few rakish dhows and fishermen bobbed past. They had not sighted the transport. The Red Sea was immense. Arab and Eritrean sailors stared in wonderment as our bumboat scuttled away. Eastward. Where the night was toiling in sweepy, greenish shadows down the skies.

"Parbleu!" sobbed the Legionnaire lieutenant.

He was a boy from St. Cyr, with blond hair and a grim, mannish jaw. A Croix de Guerre was on his breast and a scarlet fourragere on his shoulder. He must have been a hard one, to win those citations and a Legion commission in his youth. Never before, though, had he embarked on such an expedition. You could see it had him by the nerves.

"Parbleu! I hope we get there on time. Tell me, my old one, did you hoist a distress signal?"

Miserably I shook my head. What would a soldier know of marine signals? The lieutenant cursed, fingering his automatic. The men drove their shoulders to the oars. The native in our bow scanned the horizon. Directly ahead we were raising an island. One of the Dahlak Islands. Few ships cruised this portion of the Red Sea. If our transport lay out there we should sight it soon. We did not.

Night came swiftly. On high the tropic stars flashed like lanterns set in a vast dome of indigo. The island drifted near. The boats of the fishermen and the Arab dhows dropped into the sunset. A Japanese moon, the color of a hamadryad's eye, struggled up through the clouds crouching on the island.

The elliptical moon shed a pallid light of silver across the restless water, and raised a fog. What a fog! At first there were ragged wisps that smelled of salt.

The wisps merged into long tatters of gray haze that rolled like battle-smoke.

Finally our bumboat was plowing through a tumbling vapor, wet, sticky, and white. A vapor that swirled and coiled about us, touched ghostly fingers to our hot cheeks, deadened the sound of thrashing oars and scattered water. Now we were engulfed.

Fog and night on the Red Sea, and a skinny Eritrean native to guide our rudder on this impossible, awful hunt. Fog and night. Never would we find the Flower of France. Never would we sight her sinister hull. But the young lieutenant cursed in gallant French. The Legionnaires pulled away. The fog whispered around us and wrapped us in an evil cerement.

At intervals the bumboat cruised fast through a "fog dog." You know the term? A hole in the vapor, it is. A rent in the pouring mist. A pocket of cleared water where the black waves glittered, stabbed moonbeams shafting from the patch of sky above.

It was mighty weird to bob into one of those open spaces, rock across a moonlit patch of ink-like water and lunge into sceneless mist again. It was hopeless to be blinded so. Terrible.

It was weirder still when the little African cramped in our bow suddenly shot a black hand heavenward and shouted: "Bwana! Listen!"

Did we listen? Sacre! Our ear drums exploded, bursting with the effort. How we listened. The men stopped their oars. The boat chopped through a gentle swell.

When we heard it we raised a yell. You bet we did. There! There it was again. The short, smart sound of rifle-fire.

"Quick!" screamed our lieutenant.

The men drove their oars into water. Spray flew. We scudded from the fog into an open area of glimmering sea a mile broad. There, hemmed in by the weaving shroud of mists, lolled the Fleur de France!

SHE sneaked along, her gaunt funnel poked up against that oval-shaped moon, water burbling gently under her high bows and flat stern. She sneaked across the water slowly; inching through the wan moonshine that filled the fogless area and made the black water to glint. She sneaked like a thief; her prow pointed toward that spot where the island hung in the fog.

Rags of white vapor clung, coiling, about her high bridge, her deck amidships, her taffrail. Her black hull glistened as if perspiring. On her fore deck a load-boom swung and softly groaned. In her bowels loose chain was clanking.

"Aunt of the Devil!" whispered the lieutenant. (One whispers when one sees a specter.) "There is your transport, my old one. But nom de Dieu! Is there a lifeboat aboard her?"

A volley of rifle shots answered his words. We were bearing down on the ship's starboard quarter, you understand. Rat-tat-tat-tat! came the sound. Like hammer-taps. Like a brief flurry of hail pounding a tin roof.

The mists that wreathed the Fleur de

USE SPEEDWAY DE LUXE BLADES
FOR FAST, SMOOTH, ECONOMICAL SHAVES



France amidships were split by slim, sporadic tongues of red flame. Those were the carbines of the Tirailleurs. Spang! Spang! came the reply. Bursts of fire flickered out of the vapor that hung the bridge. Shots from a Lebel rifle!

I could have screeched with joy. That was the little Yankee!

For two days and two nights and a third evening he had held the bridge alone. That little Yankee who looked like a wax doll. That little Yankee called Jack the Goat. Mon Dieu!

"Do you hear?" I panted at the lieutenant. "See? Lebel-fire on that bridge up there. It is the American!"

Tears were crawling down the young officer's face.

Jerking his head, he snapped an order to his Legionnaires. The carbines were snapping on the main deck of the Fleur de France again. The Legionnaires hauled like madmen on their oars. Our bumboat sped, rocketing forward.

"Softly," growled the lieutenant. "We must not be seen. We will board her after deck. A squad of us. We will trap those mutineers."

He turned to me. "They must be gathered before that engine-room house, eh? They will not see us under their stern? Look! Could we plant our machine gun up there by the funnel? Good! We will mow them down like flies."

Our steersman, one of the Eritreans from Mubarek, did well. We scudded closer and closer to the ship. Now we could see her after deck was deserted. Those black mutineers were busy amidships.

Dieu! How had that lone Yankee held out so long? It suddenly occurred to me that the mutineers were making this furious attack because the transport had drifted close on the island.

Then our boat was under her taffrail. The men shipped their oars. The little black lookout on our bow—though terrified to death, I wager—had valiantly grabbed a hawser dragging from the deck above. The taffrail was not six inches above our heads.

I went up first. The after deck behind that engine-room house was deserted. I motioned the others to come. The lieutenant swung up from the bumboat. Five others came, Lebel's hung on their backs. The fifth man dragged up the Maxim gun.

The lieutenant gave low-voiced orders. The men remaining in the boat were to pull away, bear down on the port beam and board her there. Shoot from the water, if needs must. Bien! The bumboat slid away.

I was leader now. Silently, rifles unlimbered, the men followed me. In frantic haste we climbed a ladder to the roof of the engine-room house. From this vantage point, we could shoot down on the main deck.

We spread in a stooping line, scuttled up the low roof past the cold black funnel. The mist-hung bridge up forward we could scarcely see. We could see the flame of a Lebel up there, but that was all.

But the Tirailleurs we could see, all right. We looked right down on their heads. Their tarbooshes were bobbing. Their carbines gleamed and spouted flame.

The giant, Ahmed, moved among them bawling hoarsely, knife in hand. He was urging them to charge, but they did not charge. Why? Certainly they had not sighted us on the roof behind them. Certainly they were not afraid of one lone soldier on the bridge up there.

Our young officer growled. We planted our Maxim gun. We aimed the Maxim at the row of shoulders below; aimed our rifles. The lieutenant raised his hand to give the order to fire. His hand never fell. As if by signal a sudden breeze whipped across the Fleur de France and swept away the fog. Like that. And we saw!

CHAPTER V

THE DEATH WATCH!

IF I live through thirteen incarnations, being reborn after thirteen deaths, I will never forget that sight. Perhaps at the thirteenth death I will forget it. If

so, thirteen is a lucky number. Sapristi!

You comprehend how a breeze had abruptly dissolved the fog; lifted the curtain? Lifted the curtain, yes. Like a curtain lifting to show a stage. But yes. A stage!

There were the five Legionnaires, the young lieutenant, me—on the roof of the engine-room house. Gallery seats.

Directly below us on the main deck crowded the black Tirailleurs. They were wanting like anything to rush the bridge, those Tirailleurs. They wanted to capture the wheel house up there. They wanted to get at a white woman in a cabin up there. They wanted to do it before the ship moved alongside an island they knew was not far away. But they never dared charge the bridge. For that bridge was the stage! Uncle of Satan, how can I tell it? Who would believe? There were men on the bridge up there. Men, I say. They stood in a row at the rail, looking down at the deck below. But they never were men. Non! No men had eyes like those. No man ever held a rifle slung under the arm, with the stock caught under the armpit—and fired the gun without finger on trigger!

The devil! They stood in a row, you understand? On the after deck of that high bridge. Side by side. Their chests leaning against the rail. Their rifles poked over the rail. Their kepis hung over their ears, jauntily. Their chins on their chests, not so jauntily. But there they were in the line. Schneider, the German, Kalkinoff, the Russian. Fuertes, the Spaniard. De Nogales the Venezuelan. And all dead! Every one!

Yet, they were alive. The German fired his gun. The Russian fired his gun. The Spaniard fired his gun. De Nogales fired his gun. One, two, three, four—like that. The bullets went awry, but those Tirailleurs all screamed as if they had been hit.

“Name of fourteen saints!” groaned the lieutenant at my side. “Look at that! Look at that! Those Legionnaires on the bridge—”

How I looked! Their arms moved. Their heads nodded clumsily. Their guns fired again.

The Tirailleurs sent up a moan. We on the engine-room house sent up a moan. We did not want to believe those four on the bridge were dead. But I knew they were. My companions knew it. The black Tirailleurs knew it. They wore the color of death, those four.

And while we stared the play went on. Two men strolled out of the alleyway up there. Arm and arm they came. Step by step. They stalked out on that deck and they moved to the top of the ladder. Captain Dieudonne Daudet and the little Yankee.

The American looked like a wax doll. The captain looked like the devil. He carried his sword under his arm and held his head high. The Yankee held an automatic and was smiling.

At the ladder top they halted. And then—by the name of Boniface!—Captain Daudet let out a yell! He yelled, I say, and the Legionnaire last in the row at the rail yelled back.

Back and forth they yelled, and in half a split minute-tick those Tirailleurs below were yelling, too. Down on their faces they went. They bobbed their heads, flattened their bodies and clawed at the slippery deck. And right then—as if unable to restrain its nerve longer—the Maxim gun beside me let go; and flung reality to the scene. Our machine gun roared and roared.

It seemed to snap a thread. Captain Daudet and the little Yankee came tumbling down the ladder.

Ah, that Flower of France! The little Yankee was dead, but he told the secret. Or part of it. For his left leg had been lashed to the right leg of his Captain. The four on the bridge had been tied standing against the rail. Ropes from their gun-triggers led to the alleyway where the living had hidden. Ropes from their arms. Ropes from their collars. What a show!

And the gallant Yankee who had planned it all? The gallant little Ameri-

can who had told me he would hold out somehow? Because he had finally been shot, he could not explain.

But I remembered the packet in his breast pocket, and sought it out with quavering fingers. The little package told the story. I read it to myself. I read it to the young lieutenant. I read it to the white girl safe in her cabin. We wept. Think of the bravery of it all! Think of the jest!

And so before the curtain came down for the last time, the young lieutenant stooped and pinned his Croix de Guerre on the Yankee's breast and hung the scarlet cord across the Yankee's shoulder.

And the Fleur de France, drifting into the fog, wrapped him in a kindly, cool mist.

EPILOGUE

OLD Thibaut Corday, veteran of the Legionnaires, poured himself a drink with shaking hands; and gulped it down the way no Frenchman should. MacDowell and I drank, too. The mat of moonlight had moved across the floor. Now the pale light played on the old man's face, and the eyes in his leathery head were burnished blue stones.

"Nom de Dieu!" he breathed. "But there was a puppet show for you. Think of that little Jack the Goat holding off those tigers by lining up those soldiers who had died. The Tirailleurs could perhaps brave a corpse that shot a gun. But they could not face a corpse that yelled. No more than could those tribesmen of the Ouled Nail. And thus did the little American hold the Fleur de France, on her way to the Somaliland. Thus did he save the transport and the wife of Captain Daudet."

"But," muttered MacDowell, "how about those dead Legionnaires—"

"Yelling?" Old Thibaut Corday smiled. "Look, then."

He held out the thin little book that had come from his cupboard of memories; the little book with the hole drilled through its leaves from cover to cover.

"This," said the veteran with a wry smile, "was the packet in the Yankee's

breast. You see that bullet hole? Sardonic, is it not? Our Legion had lost its head and killed one of the bravest men who ever honored the ranks. That bullet hole, my friends, was made by our Maxim gun. A wild, terror-driven shot. See, too, the title of the book."

We read the title, MacDowell and I. The Britisher made a noise in his throat. I spoke it out to make sure.

MY FORTY YEARS AS A SHOWMAN

By Professor John Smith
Famous Maker of Marionettes, and
America's Greatest Ventriloquist

MacDowell got to his feet. "An astonishing story, Corday," he acknowledged. "And you were right—a story to make one dream. But I don't like your yarn, old top. I don't like to have the Yankee shot down at the end."

"The only way for it to have been," murmured the old Frenchman, getting to his feet with a sigh. "Look here."

He opened the book to the title page. Moonbeams slanted across the yellowed paper. MacDowell and I saw a photograph printed on the leaf. A picture of a doll-like little man wearing a stiff goatee and a high hat and a cutaway. Posed beside him, in the rigid manner of those "family-album" times, was a girl.

Despite the fading of the print, despite the outlandish costume of the day, we could see the girl was of marked beauty. And here was a strange thing:

The bullet which had sped through the book had clipped through that picture on its fly leaf, making a hole through the lady's heart. Below the photograph ran the legend: "Professor John Smith and His Wife."

Old Thibaut Corday spoke softly. "You remember he told me of that wife? She had left him on the very night of his triumph in New York. That was why he had joined La Legion. So. But listen, my friends: That printed picture cannot affect you the way it affected me when first I saw it that dreadful night aboard the Fleur de France. For then I knew.

The little Yankee had purposely thrown himself down that ladder to stop our Maxim bullets. Le bon Dieu knows how to exact justice. Think of the punishment it would give that false wife to learn of that heroism, that sacrifice. And she did learn of it, most certainly. C'est ca! For that Amorette—that beautiful woman of Captain Daudet's—that lovely lady who had waited in the cabin while a lone, brave Yankee Legionnaire defended the

bridge with the greatest courage I have ever known—but yes! She was the girl of this photograph! She was his wife."

Old Thibaut Corday's voice went silent in his beard. Outside, the moonlit city of Algiers was a city of the "Arabian Nights." Down on the square before the mosque the crowd of Arabs was dispersing, murmurous in the perfumed dark. We could catch a note of laughter. The puppet show was done.

White Eagle

mightiest of Comanche braves, rides a savage trail to battle for his tribe's honor, and to find his white man's heritage

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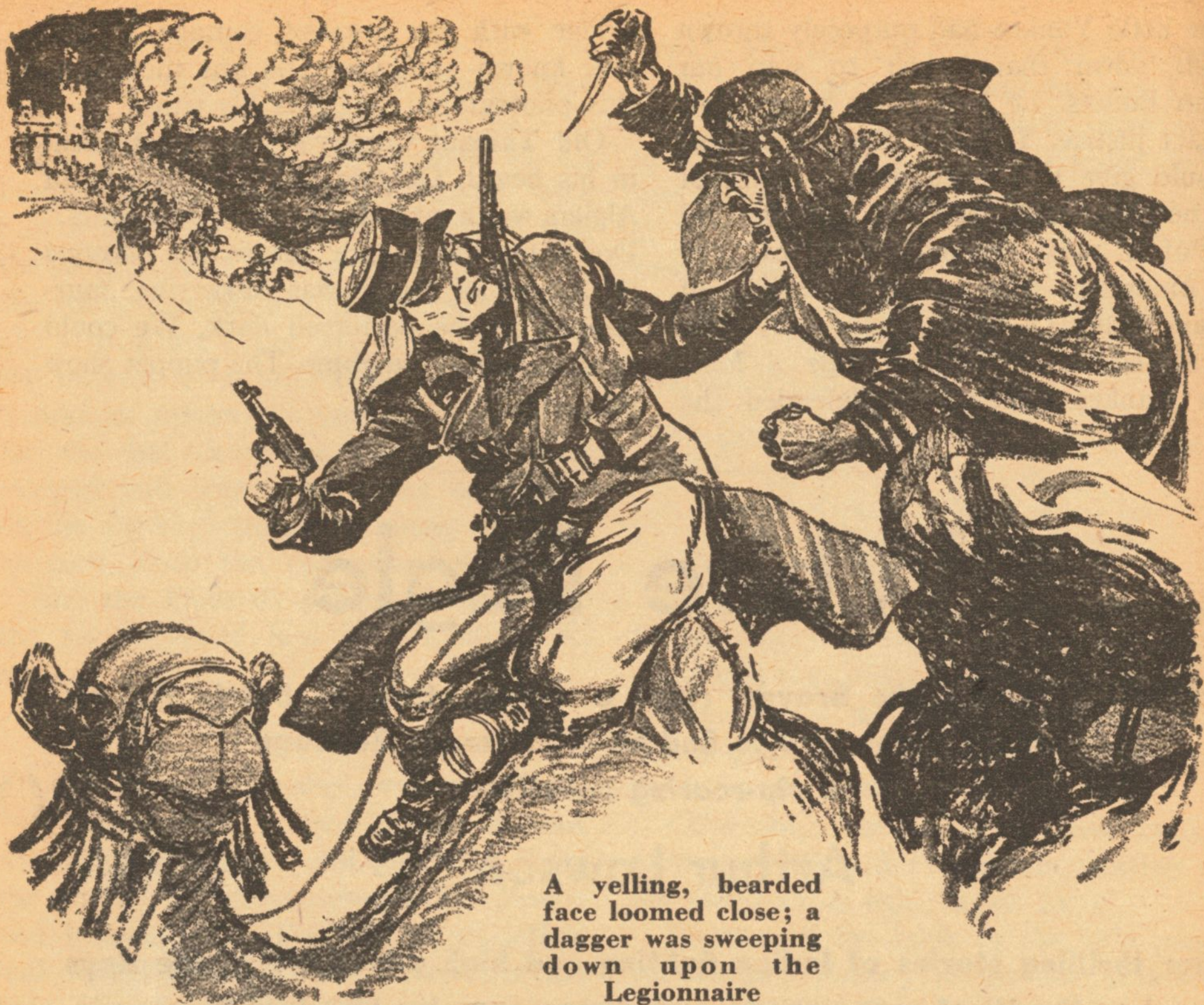
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A yelling, bearded face loomed close; a dagger was sweeping down upon the Legionnaire

The Renegade Caid

*A Sensational
Novelet*

By
F. VAN WYCK MASON

The white Caid Rouazi Dial Allah had ambitious plans for conquest and it remained only for him to overcome Legionnaire Lemuel Frost, late of the U. S. A.—but Lemuel, in this case, became a harder foe than the French Republic

CHAPTER I

RAIDING TRIBESMEN

THE sergeant's long legs swayed gently to the stride of his camel as he rode slightly in advance of three hard-featured, unshaved men in the blue and white uniform of La Legion Etrangere—last of the world's mercenary regiments.

He seemed to be drowsing, for the sun, glaring on his sweat-sodden white neck-cloth, no longer beat down with the pitiless, furnace heat of midday.

But Sergeant Lemuel Z. Frost was very far from drowsing. His brown eyes, so deep in hue as to seem black, and narrowed by the glare to mere slits, flickered endlessly back and forth like those of a Comanche, Sioux or some other plains Indian, noting

every tiny depression and shadow in the vast, red-hued desert stretching away toward the heat-distorted horizon.

"This heat makes little old Death Valley seem like a perfoomed garden! Hope everythin's O. K. at Samah."

With the thought his eyes flickered over the red ridges to the left. Somewhere out yonder lay the tiny white walled posts of Samah, one of many such barriers to the spoil-hungry raiders of the Arabian Desert.

Suddenly he stiffened; far away in the direction of Samah rose a tiny plume of whitish smoke, rising almost vertically in the windless atmosphere. Sergeant Frost turned toward the rear, his face lean and hard-bitten, remarkably like an Indian's. It was marred on the right side by a long, whitish scar running from the corner of a straight, thin-lipped mouth to just below the high cheek bone.

"Hey, Harold! Mosey up alongside!" he called.

The smallest of the three Legionnaires grunted, spat, and kicked his mount into an awkward trot to ride up, sparrow-like, red features alert. From the deep shade of his kepi's leather brim, two small and very bright blue eyes fixed themselves upon the American's intent brown face.

"Wot's bitin' yer, Lem?" he demanded, as his buff-colored *mehari*—riding camel—slowed to a fast shuffling stride that stirred lazy puffs of reddish dust.

"See that there smoke?" The sergeant's wide, brown hand, decorated with an eagle bluely tattooed on its back, indicated the smoke column. "Don't look too healthy, do it? It's a damn sight too near the *post* to suit this ornery *soldado*."

"Carn't see it," replied the other, after searching the desolate stretch ahead. "But I do see somethin' else. Look down by that *wadi* yonder!"

The American's narrowed eyes flickered to a deep gully that lay, a blue-shadowed slash in the desert's face, some two miles to their right. Lemuel's flat, blue-clad back stiffened in alarm; into that gully was galloping a long line of camel riders.

"Well, I'll be damned!"

Lemuel's horny hand shot to a battered pair of field glasses swaying on his chest, but before he could get them out, the last of that quick-riding column had vanished as though swallowed by the hot clay and sand of the desert.

"Now strike me peculiar pink!" grunted Corporal Harold Hackbutt of the Sixieme Compagnie, as he further shaded his eyes with a stubby hand bearing a generous crop of reddish bristles on its back. "It's a raidin' *'orka*,* all right, but that's the first time I ever seen Arabs sportin' dark robes."

"Same here," grunted Lemuel, jerking his bridle rein. "Sake a leg, son; I reckon we'd better slip down into this arroyo and make ourselves harder to see."

"Wot do you think them beggars is, Lem?"

"Hard to say. 'Taint none o' the Druses, 'cause they always wear white or striped—leastwise, their desert tribes do. The mountaineers is different—they wears blacks and browns, as you'll recollect, eh, son?"

The sweat-bright faces of both Legionnaires creased in reminiscent grins, the vicious fighting of the recent Jebel Druse campaign still fresh in their minds. No Legionnaire who had fought that ghastly campaign would quickly forget the fierce charges of the shaggy Hauran mountaineers, whose habitat now lay not far behind, a black basalt mass rising sheer from the red plains.

"They seemed to be ridin' in formation o' some kind, Harry. Might be British. We ain't so far from the Trans-Jordan border, you know."

"Them blighters British?" The cockney shook his head until the white *kepi* fluttered. "'Ell, no! If they 'ad been wearin' khaki we couldn't 'ave seen them 'arf so good."

Amid an avalanche of hot pebbles the sergeant guided his *mahari* down a steep slope of crumbling rock; while a sharp uneasiness rose within him. There was something queer about these strange, hard-riding raiders. To what tribe did they belong? What was their objective?

**Harka*—raiding expedition of no special size.

SUDDENLY the sergeant's blue-clad arm shot skyward in an unmistakable gesture of alarm; whereupon Harold and the two other Legionnaires, big, brown-faced men with brutal, clean-shaved faces, set their weight back, jerking their camels in an abrupt halt. It was significant of the deadly peril in which they existed that the rifles were unslung and cocked without command.

"Down!" snapped Lemuel, black eyes a-glitter. Placing his dusty hobnailed shoe on the base of his snuffling camel's neck, he pressed vigorously; whereupon the ungainly brute uttered a low, bubbling groan and with jerky motions like those of an awkwardly folded camp chair, sank to earth and snapped half-heartedly at his rider's knee.

"These damned A-rab canaries will be the death o' us yet," snarled Lemuel, as he stopped to adjust the knee halter. "Why in hell can't they be quiet? I ain't aimin' to get impaled on no young palm stump just yet. Shut up, you cross-grained devil!"

"Your orders, *mon sergent*?" inquired Legionnaire Maillot, a villainous ex-Apache from Marseilles. His teeth shone yellow in the strong sunlight as he advanced, his long Lebel held ready—even when mounted the splendid marksmen of the Legion spurn the shorter Gras carbine. He was jerking open the flap of his black leather cartridge clip containers, his deep-set black eyes lighting with the joy of coming battle.

"Sounds like camel riders a comin' up this arroyo," was the sergeant's reply. "We're out o'sight, so if we stay quiet and them damned camels will stop their blasted yelpin', mebbe we can avoid a set-to."

Realizing that a "set-to" would probably end unpleasantly—the Druses are not fond of men in French blue—the reconnaissance party took up the best positions that could be found behind convenient boulders at the head of the gully, as far as possible from that mysterious column of camel men. Who were they? More of those dark robed raiders?

The rocks were still scorching hot from the midday heat they had absorbed.

Though the sun was reddening and plunging toward the western horizon with satisfactory speed, the four Legionnaires bitterly resented their enforced proximity to the hot earth, which exuded scorching air currents that sent rivulets of perspiration trickling beneath the heavy dark blue overcoats they wore.

"Now, if it comes to fighting," whispered Lemuel his hard black eyes embracing all three of the tensed riflemen, "wait for my order. *Feux de salves!* Volley fire and yell like hell!"

Bulgakan, a blond Russian Legionnaire whose huge bulk lay sprawled on the far end of the line, nodded several times, a blue-black shadow mimicking his motion on the dry, lifeless clay. Next to him Legionnaire Maillot licked thick lips that were brown and cracked from the heat. Corporal Hackbutt with characteristic *sang-froid* disposed bright brass cartridge clips in a neat, convenient row before him and scowled.

"Just our bloody luck, Lem," Harold growled, blowing a sweat drop from the end of his pointed nose. "'Ere I'd thought we'd finished this 'ere reconnaissance wiv nerves 'ale and 'earty, and now look wot's 'appenin'."

"What'll happen next is you'll get a thick ear if you don't shut that noisy trap o' yours," promised Lemuel; then he flattened like a frightened quail, big, bronzed hands tightly gripping his Lebel.

Even his war-tried heart began to pound when, with the complete silence of a drifting shadow, there trotted into the gully below a strange vision. He was a dark-faced Druse in white robes which at that distance seemed oddly marked. Three, four, five, six others rode into sight; then after an interval three or four more appeared, swaying oddly in their brass-mounted saddles.

Gradually Lemuel's jet eyes widened and into his Indian-like visage crept a look of puzzled surprise. He glanced sidewise. The other three riflemen, too, were gaping in astonishment; for the snowy *djellab* of the leading Druse was spotted with blood flow-

ing from a hideous face wound. The white *mehari* he bestrode shuffled wearily along, head swaying dispiritedly at the end of its ungainly long neck.

To the American's intense surprise, the other riders also bore the marks of conflict. Of the ten that appeared, only three or four were without wounds of some kind.

Nearer and nearer rode the fugitives, obviously survivors of a disastrous skirmish. The details of their equipment now showed more clearly. Scarlet and green saddle cloths; archaic, gold-hilted tribal daggers, hooked like the bill of a bird of prey; goat-skin water bags, modern pistols and rifles.

When the Druses were yet some fifty yards away, the man with the face wound swayed weakly, lost his grip on the saddle horn and suddenly plunged from his camel's back, to lie a tumbled heap of blood-splashed robes among the small round stones in the bottom of the gully. His camel halted and lowered its sweat-darkened head to sniff at its late rider.

CLEARLY the muttered words of the next Druse carried up to the curious watchers crouching behind their stones. "*Bismillah*. God wills it. May the soul of Ibn Cheil pass to the Seventh Circle of Paradise!"

But the speaker, a big hawk-faced tribesman with a black forked beard, made no gesture to halt, nor did any of his followers. Reluctantly the fallen man's *mehari* abandoned the corpse, and halter rope dragging, fell in with the last of the beaten force now passing directly below the bewildered Legionnaires.

It was very tempting to see those dark-featured, unmissable targets now twenty yards distant, riding by utterly unaware of their peril. They were enemies, too—fierce Druse nomads of the sort who made life a continual nerve-racking hell for the small Legion garrisons scattered among the heat-blasted foothills of the Hauran mountain range.

Bulgakan scowled, rolled pale blue eyes imploringly to Lemuel, and licked his lips for all the world like a hungry dog. Mail-

lot's calloused forefinger had crept around the trigger of his Lebel and he cuddled the stock to this swart, unshaved cheek. Over the rifle's sight he had already picked out a minor chieftain for the first bullet—a rich young Tchek with two gold-hilted daggers tucked in his girdle.

It was not that Lemuel had any moral scruples against shooting from ambush. He would have been very glad to wipe out that sorely stricken party: had he not seen handsome young Lieutenant Dinard, neatly disembowelled and minus ears, nose and eyelids, sent into camp lashed to a foundered baggage camel? A gift from these same Druses.

But, crafty veteran that he was, he restrained himself. Who knew what might be out of sight down the gully? It must be a terribly efficient force that could inflict such a crushing defeat upon the hardy warlike Druses. Had it anything to do with that long column of dark-robed riders?

Now the retreating Druses had all limped up: the badly wounded clinging desperately, doggedly, to the high peaks of their camel saddles; the unwounded ones somber-eyed as they dejectedly goaded their long-legged mounts to an even swifter walk.

It was only when the low gurgle and whining of the camels had faded in the distance and the last rider had been lost to sight around a bend in the gully that Lemuel made any motions. Even then, though tortured by heat, he delayed a full ten minutes lest some straggler, mounted on a wounded camel, might come up and give the alarm.

"*Allons, mes enfants,*" he said at last, and wiped great drops of sweat from his straight black brows. "Reckon we can amble down and throw a eye over that late-lamented cutthroat."

In silence the four men in blue and white scrambled down to bend presently over the gray-faced Druse.

"'Ello! The bloody devil's still breathing'," observed Harold. "Watch 'is blinking chest . . ."

He dropped to one knee and roughly

jerked the *djellab's* hood away from a dark, predatory face that lacked one cheek, an ear and part of the skull. Eyes, dim but yet retaining intelligence, opened, and on beholding the dreaded uniform of the Legion the tribesman made a feeble effort to spit; but as his left cheek had been entirely torn away leaving the teeth and bone exposed, this amiable effort was quite without success.

“*Sacre mecque!*” Legionnaire Maillot’s snaggle teeth shone in a wolfish grin as he set down his rifle. “No use wasting a good shot on such. Here!” Stooping he caught up a great round, reddish stone, heaved it to his shoulder, and grinning wickedly came striding toward the wounded Druse who watched him from venomous black eyes.

“Ah!” grinned Legionnaire Bulgakan in simple pleasure. “How nice! Our friend is thinking of his partner who was skinned alive last month.”

Nearer stalked the brutal-featured Apache, the stone ready balanced, the Druse watching him from dim malignant eyes.

“Lay off!” suddenly rasped Lemuel. “This hombre’s goin’ to peg out pronto, anyhow.”

Maillot halted, scowling. “But, mon sergeant, ’tis too easy a death for this black dog.”

Lemuel’s jaw shot out. “You heard me! Drop that dornick.” After the stone had thudded to earth the American thrust the kepi to the back of his head and speculatively eyed the stricken native, just then writhing with a spasm of pain.

“Harold,” he announced. “There’s a few things I’d like to know about these here goin’s on. To pull through with a whole hide, we gotta do some fast thinkin’. Just you hike up to them left-handed gyraffes o’ ourn and fetch little Lemuel a water bottle.”

“A wot?” The cockney seemed intensely surprised, almost pained; for this war between the Foreign Legion and the Druses was without romance, without glamour or mercy; it was a dreadful, savage struggle in which the weak and helpless perished as

slowly and uncomfortably as possible.

“A water bottle-canteen—get it pronto!” snapped the American. “And now you two, haul this nigger into the shade.”

Muttering resentfully, Bulgakan and Maillot picked up the dying Druse and with no special tenderness deposited him in the shade of a great red rock.

“*Maiah! Maiah! Water!*” choked the Druse convulsively, lifting a small dark hand to his blood-streaked throat.

“Now you, Maillot, forget your buddie and listen to orders.” Lemuel was very brisk and businesslike. “You speak the A-rab lingo, so as soon as we’ve watered this here faded rose a bit I want you to ask him some questions.”

“*Cre nom de Dieu!*” The Frenchman spat in disgust; but knowing the hard fists of Sergeant Lemuel Frost, he obediently squatted on his heels and prepared to translate, after Corporal Harold had tilted a tin cup full of water into what remained of the Druse’s mouth. Lemuel nodded in satisfaction when bewilderment and gratitude indescribable lit the stricken native’s features.

“Ask him what happened.”

In swift, guttural Arabic, Legionnaire Maillot obeyed. Then in a feeble, blood-choked voice the Druse commenced to speak.

MAILLOT’S red, battered features were lifted to Lemuel. “This *vaurien* says his raiding party fell in and fought with warriors from a strange tribe—probably gun-runners from Tiflis. This sacred grandson of murderers also says the strangers are fierce warriors, terrible white men, leading Arabs from a far country. What next, *mon sergeant?*”

“Find out where the skirmish was. See if you can’t get a better idee o’ the nationality o’ these hostiles.”

Bending low, for the Druse’s voice was growing constantly weaker, Legionnaire Maillot listened, then uttered a low cry of astonishment; “He says the *razzia*, the foray, was made by the followers of a white man called Caid Rouazi Dial Allah.” Mail-

lot scratched his dirty blue black head. "Rouazi Dial Allah—that means Fist Blows of God. Our dear little cutthroat also would have us believe that this white man has become of the True Faith—that this Caid fights as do the Roumis. The Druse *harka* was massacred—almost wiped out. *Dieu de Dieu!*"

At this, Lemuel's craggy features fell into a tense, thoughtful expression; and while Bulgakan and Harold maintained a vigilant lookout up and down the gully he put question after question.

"What's this gay Caid's objective?"

The dying tribesman groaned a little before replying, and the bright arterial blood pumping from that ghastly wound seemed to flow slower, as though the supply were nearly exhausted. How red it shone on the white robes and on the hard, sun-dried earth!

"This renegade Caid has sworn to make a kingdom for himself. He plots to inflame the desert tribes against the French in Syria, and the English in Palestine and Transjordan." "

"Going to lick France and England, eh?" commented the American with grim humor. "'Pears like this bad hombre ain't afraid of a fight."

It appeared on further inquiry that the Caid Rouazi had three main objects in mind. One was to capture a Legion supply depot at El Kufr lying at the end of a narrow defile on the far side of the Hauran mountains; the second was to intercept and capture certain supply trains due at Nasib on the Damascus-Bagdad railway. The gentle Caid had heard that machine guns, which he could use very handily in his business, were being shipped in quantity to the none-too-well equipped desert garrisons.

The third and not the least of El Rouazi's ambitions was to indulge in a wholesale slaughter of Christian natives then assembled for a fair at Melal-es-Sarrar, not far to the southward. A thoroughgoing massacre, the Caid firmly hoped, would cause the fanatic tribesmen of the Jebel Druse, El Jah, and Jebel Zumleh to rise

and join him in casting out the hated Europeans, once and for all.

"Nice little program," commented Harold. "I don't fink!"

"Ask the nigger how many men this Caid's got," directed Lemuel, eyes narrowed with concentration.

But when the Legionnaire Maillot put the next question the wounded man's eyes nearly closed and the blood flow had ceased.

"Come on, *sacre cochon noir!*" Maillot rasped, shaking the gore-splashed Druse; but the only result was to evoke a sudden last rush of blood. Then the glazing eyes, strangely white in that dark face, gradually fell open and the robes lay still over the tribesman's narrow chest.

Lemuel, wasted no time in regrets. A *razzia* of major importance was afoot; and the more he thought of that pillar of smoke in the direction of the *poste* the less he liked it.

"Wish to hell we knew how many there is in this funny *harka*. Well, snap out of it, you *soldados*. We got a heap of a way to go yet, and I ain't figgerin' to tangle with these strangers outside the *poste*. Anybody that can lick them ornery Druses to such a frazzle is tough meat!"

With more than their usual swiftness the Legionnaires cast off knee halters and with whistling cuts of camel whips urged the foul-smelling *meharis* to their feet. Then with Lemuel riding in the lead, his long legs in dirtied white canvas crossed and locked before the pommel, the reconnaissance party cautiously made their way down into the gully and passed the dead Druse who lay staring up into the afternoon sky with a fixed and grave interest.

Swaying and jolting in the saddle, they trotted down the gully toward the vast undulating expanse of desert. Suddenly they rounded a corner to behold the whole, wide-flung horizon.

"*Yei Bogu!*"

"Gorblime!"

"*Bigre!*"

Each in his own way express dismay; for in the direction of the *poste* at Samah there rose an ominous pale gray cloud

that hung in grim significance over a tiny white speck barely visible through Lemuel's glasses.

"Now may I be a long, tall son of a buzzard," swore Lemuel. "They've tackled the *poste*, and the boys is in trouble there."

Instinctively his mind flew to the one man in the garrison who mattered: Reb Carver, that rangy, blackhaired Louisianan who for ten years had shared his travels, dangers and pleasures. The sergeant's jaw shut with a click.

"Guess Reb'll take care of himself. He always has," he muttered. "But it sure looks bad! Come on, you unplucked gal-lows birds."

And with faces that betrayed alarm in varying degrees, those stalwart men in blue and white lashed their long-legged *meharis* to a swift but lumbering gallop.

CHAPTER II

FIRE AND TORTURE

DUSK was creeping into twilight when the reconnaissance party galloped around the last barren hog-back hiding Samah from view.

"It's bad, orful bad," grunted Harold excitedly. "Look, Bulky! See the red glow on that 'illside!"

A moment more and the panting, lathered *meharis* were ridden into full sight of the flame-spouting *poste* at Samah. Long banderoles of fire were licking up the flag-staff, were billowing from the watchtower to dye the whitewashed mud walls crimson.

"Steady, now!" cautioned Lemuel, slowing his camel. "There's like to be some o' them raiders still 'round."

The gaunt American sergeant's voice was strangely low and thick; and all three of his followers knew that he was thinking of the gay and fearless Reb Carver.

An icy hand clutched Lemuel's heart when he thought of Reb. Did the big Southerner lie among those blackly sprawled figures scattered on the slope just outside the crumbling white walls?

Or had he escaped? Lemuel's mouth set itself in a straight colorless line—common sense told him there could be no escape from Samah, standing as it did on the crest of a little hill with hard clay sloping bleakly away on all sides. Still, Reb was wise as an old he-coon.

Silent as drifting shadows, and with Lebel's tightly gripped, the four Legionnaires dismounted, knee-haltered their panting camels and deployed to reconnoiter. The nearer they came to the burning *poste*, the longer grew Lemuel's leathery features and the narrower his keen black eyes.

A billow of spark-laden smoke swept down from the *poste*, bringing a dreadful smell like that of a steak scorched by a careless cook. Burning flesh! Nauseous and speaking eloquently of the dreadful fate of those Legionnaires who had perished within, the wind and smoke drew tears from the eyes of the anxious reconnaissance party.

"Reb!" called Lemuel. "Reb! My Gawd, boy, where are you?"

To the American sergeant's experienced eye, the trampled ground gave much information. Here was a heap of empty cartridge cases. There were boot marks, mingled with the footprints and slipper marks of native feet.

That Druse had not lied! It was a force of combined Arabs and Europeans which was invading southeastern Syria.

They must have been disciplined, too. A long line of footprints showed where the raiders had fallen into ranks; a little farther on, part of a machine gun belt bespoke the completeness of Caid Rouazi's equipment, and on the white walls up above one could see the bursts blackly marked. Though not a single dead enemy remained before the *poste*, dark pools scattered over the hillside revealed that the defense of the garrison had not been entirely in vain.

Steadily Lemuel's fears grew as he commenced the final climb. Just ahead of him lay a body, dark and strangely flat, the first of the massacred garrison. When the flames shot suddenly higher, Lemuel

bent to recognize Carrora, the Italian senior sergeant. He had died terribly, and in the dead man's eyes was an expression of surpassing agony.

"Bad as the Druses, these here renegades!" muttered Lemuel. Had they done that to Reb? He felt sick, despairing. No, he told himself savagely, Reb was resourceful; had escaped.

Up and up he climbed, circling about or stepping over one ghastly corpse after another. How eloquently they told of the merciless onslaught which had made another large gap in the ever-melting ranks of the Legion! Yes, the recruiting offices in Marseilles and Sidi Bel Abbes would be busy for weeks to come.

Glancing sidewise, Lemuel could see Harold advancing, sharp little features twitching with disgust when a plume of black, oily smoke swung down the hillside to envelop him. Up to the smoldering, shattered gate, though it and into the courtyard, Lemuel's long legs carried him. Just then a strong puff of the desert night wind fanned the ruins of the barracks into a great sheet of flame; and Bulgakan uttered a hoarse cry.

AT THE sound of his voice Lemuel whirled, finger on trigger, fully expecting to see a dark swarm of enemies come galloping up the hill. But the flat-featured Russian was staring fixedly at a section of wall to the right. Suspended against the flame-lit white surface was an object that glimmered palely. The structure of that distant outline was somehow familiar. Lemuel was suddenly reminded of a church. Then his breath went out with a long, shuddering hiss.

"Blime!" choked Harold. "It's a man, and—and—"

There was no need for him to explain further. They all saw what had happened. Lemuel, tallest of the four, now stood in a frozen gesture, lean head outthrust, staring in fixed, uncomprehending horror. Coarse and brutal though they were, Maillot and Bulgakan also gazed in shaken awe, while Harold cursed endlessly.

Then something like a low groan sounded from the fire-lit section of wall. Lemuel galvanized into action, and with the help of the others wrenched out the four long bayonets by which Reb Carver's hands and feet had been spiked to the wall.

"Reb! Reb, old pard—you ain't dead! Pull yourself together Reb—I—oh, God!"

Terrible was Lemuel's anguish. For perhaps the first time in thirty years, tears coursed down his scarred and powder-stained cheeks, as he saw how near death was his comrade.

"Quick—you, Maillot! Get a canteen off'n our camels. Harold, put your coat beneath his head."

In silent grief the cockney obeyed, while Lemuel stripped off his heavy blue overcoat to tuck it over that gaunt, pain-racked figure. How very white, damp, and sunken the features looked! Only the false color of the flames gave them light. It was strange how those rough men, even then in danger of their lives, took time to think of every possible means for easing the tortured Legionnaire's last moments.

When the water trickled past his dry, contorted lips Carver showed the first signs of life.

"Reb—Reb! Don't leave me!" implored Lemuel, fiercely. "I just can't soldier without you!"

But the other's black-haired head moved ever so faintly on Harold's coat. "Cain't Lem. That Roossian devil's fixed me—fer keeps."

"Tell me who he is!" pleaded the gaunt sergeant with terrible intensity. "Tell me! I'll kill that swine by inches!"

"A Russky man in garrison recognized him. He's famous—name's Michailov."

From Lemuel's elbow came a loud grunt of surprise from Bulgakan.

"Michailov!" he snarled. "No wonder! In all the Little Father's army never was a better soldier nor a crueller—"

"Keep that for later!" snapped Lemuel, tilting more water into the bloodied lips. "You all beat it—git! Go look around, make yourselves useful."

Only Harold realized how great was

the agony in the American's soul. He laid a sympathetic hand on Lemuel's arm, and said quietly: "All right. We understand, matey—and we're terrible sorry."

Heads bent, the three moved off; black, martial silhouettes clearly seen against the leaping, crackling flames which soared ever higher into the night air.

For a while the friends talked; spoke of joyous adventures together of loves, of perils; and it was only when the Dark Angel hovered very low that Lemuel forced himself to think of duty once more.

"Tell me, Reb," he whispered trying to forget how horribly cold that torn and mangled hand had become, "tell me. Where's this son of a buzzard headin' for next?"

"An escaped prisoner o' his'n came in," the dying Southerner answered in a voice now almost inaudible, "and 'lowed as how Michailov—natives call him Caid Rouazi Dial Allah—aims to take our *poste* at El Juweilil."

"So that's his game! Um Wulad after that, I s'pose."

"He'll take it, too. He's smart soldier with a real army. Three or fo' thousand camel men, auto rifles and m. g.'s—all uni-fo'ed—green cloaks, white pants and blouses and red fezzes—recognize 'em easy. You-all gotta stop his gettin' them guns off'n them trains, and his massacre o' the people at the fair at Melal-es-Sarrar. God help you-all if he pulls that off; whole damned Druse country will be a rarin' again—hell to pay . . . Lem?"

"Yes," choked the sergeant. "Anythin' I can do?"

Reb Carver's lips twisted into a tired smile. "Chuck another overcoat over me, I—I'm gettin' kinda cold; then talk to me about home."

Silently Lemuel obeyed, tenderly tucking in Bulgakan's overcoat on top of his own; then, taking the Southerner's chill hand in his, he commenced to speak of the great emerald-green forests and bayous of Louisiana, of hounds belling hot on the trail of a lordly buck, of the bright-winged ducks that skim the cool green waters.

AT THE far end of the courtyard the three Legionnaires stood silently watching, listening to the steady rise and fall of Lemuel's voice. Suddenly it fell silent, and the black outline of the speaker's head sank forward between shadowy hands. So he remained a long five minutes, shoulders a-quiver. Then he got up.

"I allow we'd better be getting along," Lemuel muttered. "We got a lot to do."

"Wot are we goin' to do?" demanded Harold, his eyes determinedly fixed on the throbbing embers at the far end of that ghastly courtyard.

Lemuel's wide shoulders lifted in a deep sigh. "I'm a goin' to kill that Roossian swine with me own hands."

Suddenly the bronze-featured sergeant remembered, and whirled on Bulgakan: "Say, you act like you knows somethin' about this Michailov guy. Do you?"

Without a word the Russian slipped off his dirty suspenders and slid up his shirt to reveal long, rough scars in a purplish criss-cross design that climbed up his back. The flesh was strangely twisted and puckered—altogether ghastly by the fire-light.

"Has Leon Bulgakan known Prince Michailov?" The Russian's deep laugh sounded like the growl of an animal. "He ordered that done!"

"So you want him, too," remarked Lemuel, with forced calm. "Appears to me there's going to be a row as to who gits first crack at this Roossian devil. But who is he, aside from all this personal stuff?"

"He was colonel in the Little Father's cavalry," replied the Russian Legionnaire. "Good officer, too. During the great war he was on staff of Grand Duke Nicholas in the Armenian campaign. Prince Michailov was clever, very clever; he beat Turks right and left. Yes, his highness was a brilliant strategist."

"And then what happened?" the American cut in. "Snap out o' it! We ain't got all night."

"When *sacre* Bolsheviki come, he sell his whole brigade out; then when Wrangel

fight, he sell out the Red forces. Oh, yes; Prince Michailov's coat is turned very easily. But Bolsheviki chase him out of Ukraine."

"Wot's all them 'orrid scars on yer back?" inquired Harold.

"A knout," was Bulgakan's grim reply. "A favorite amusement of Alexander Michailov. He order that done when we are fighting the Hungarians up in the Carpathian Mountains."

"Why?"

"I didn't see him in time to salute," was the Russian's reply.

"*Nom de Dieu!* And for that he made cat's meat of your back?" growled Maillot uneasily. "So this is the monster we are fighting?"

Lemuel, who had not spoken for several minutes, stood gazing fixedly at the spot where rested his friend. He looked up suddenly:

"Come on! We'd better get back to them camels and mount up."

"Going after Michailov?" demanded Harold.

"No, that'll have to wait. Our first job's to try and reach Um Wulad before his raiders do. The *poste* at El Juweilil may hold him up a bit. Then mebbe we could spring through that pass with the funny name. What's it called?"

"'Saladin's Throat' is wot the blooming natives calls it."

"Well, it's the only pass through the Hauran mountain range for a good two hundred miles each way. Now, if the Um Wulad garrison and the supply depot garrison at the other side of the pass could concentrate and take up positions in the pass, they might hold up old Michailov's advance long enough for armored cars and cavalry from Suweideh and Mejmar to reach El Kufr."

"Then yer idea is to ride 'ell fer leather to warn Um Wulad?" Harold frowned, while shouldering his Lebel. "Say, Lem; I just 'appened to think—unless they 'ave changed the C. O. there, we're going to 've a 'ell of a time. Lieutenant Von Maxenzee—'e's the bleeding Austrian wiv manners

none and 'abits narsty, whose platoon bolted at Tibneh. Remember?"

"He'd better listen," growled Lemuel, starting off toward the ruined gate. "God help the poor nigger people on the far side o' the mountains, if this here Michailov buzzard gets loose!"

The four had just quitted the *poste* when from behind a not distant rise came the sound of a guttural song. Bulgakan's flat red face quivered, and he started as though a scorpion had stung him.

"*Vite!*" he rasped, throwing off his rifle's safety catch and breaking into a trot. "Quick! To the camels! 'Tis one of Michailov's patrols—that is the Cossack crow song!"

Like jackals skulking from a ruin the four Legionnaires silently left the scene of tragedy, and shielded by the noxious smoke, made their way hurriedly downhill to where their camels were twisting long, snake-like necks in angry impatience to be at water troughs.

All went well for a time. The deep, hoarse voices roared out verse after verse of the song. The Legionnaires could see the men now a dozen or so still astride their camels, watching the play of the flames. Faces, uniforms and camels all were dyed red. Behind them was the velvet blackness of the night.

Then Lemuel's camel emitted a long, gurgling growl of disappointment while it was being cinched. The dark-browed sergeant's heart nearly stopped. Abruptly, the distant song ceased; and from the pitchy darkness—the moon was yet but a golden promise on the horizon—came the subtle clanking of stirrup irons and the cautious click of rifle bolts being drawn back.

As if by magic the Russians faded from sight into the gloom; and now the Legionnaires needed no word to speed them. In frantic haste they cast off the knee halters and lashed their sullenly whining brutes to their feet as there broke forth a deep, ringing war cry which was quite unlike the familiar "*Ul-Ul-Ullah Akbar!*" of the fierce Moslem desert dwellers. This war

challenge rang far more eerily through the darkness:

"Hourra! Hourra! Hourra-a-h!"

Hoarse, bloodthirsty and savage, it sent an icy rivulet trickling down Lemuel's spine. Battle yells and charging shouts he had heard and used a-plenty during the long years of his campaigning, but this was the first time the veteran had ever listened to that wholly barbaric Cossack yell which, since the Middle Ages, had terrorized eastern Europe:

"Hourra! Hourra! Hourra-a-h!"

The raiders seemed to be on all sides.

CHAPTER III

—THE DOOMED POST—

OF THE wild headlong ride that ensued, Sergeant Lemuel Zebulon Frost retained only disjointed impressions. One thought, one realization crushed out all others; Reb Carver was dead. Somehow he could not bring himself to believe it. Gay, hot-tempered Reb lying back there in the *poste*? Impossible!

Even when the pursuing patrol became visible in the first rays of the honey-colored moonlight Lemuel remained incapable of thought, so stunned, so overwhelmed with grief was he. Only when the foremost riders, too darkly-seen camelmens in somber flying robes and Mussulman fezzes, outdistanced their companions and, with lances leveled, bore swiftly down on the fleeing Legionnaires, did the American arouse himself and the battle fire commence to burn in his narrowed eyes.

It was characteristic of Harold that he was the one who reined in to re-enforce Lemuel, whose camel, wearied by the greater weight he bore, was lagging a little.

"One apiece, old egg," he grunted.

"Thanks, son," muttered the sergeant; "but I'm going slow a-purpose. I aims to intervoo that foremost Roosian with the fancy pig sticker."

Glancing backward, Frost discovered that the main body was a good hundred and fifty or two hundred yards behind

their overanxious leaders, both of whom brandished long, slender lances while flogging their splendid racing camels to even greater speed. On beholding the big Legionnaire's *mehari* slacking its pace, they stood in their stirrups and settled their lances significantly.

"Hourra! Hourra! Hourra-a-h!" they bawled and, swaying to the weird gallop of their mounts, came charging up.

"Bloody fools! Clean balmy to get dotted one," chuckled Harold, when Lemuel jerked out his automatic. "Silly idiots, they orter know better!"

This was hardly fair, as neither Cossack could be expected to know that the hawk-faced Legionnaire now riding but a few yards before their twinkling lance points was an ex-Texas Ranger, whose bullets seldom went astray.

"'E'll pot 'em in a minute." But just in case of accident, Harold unslung his Lebel and rode prepared to repair any possible error.

"Hi-yah!"

The American cavalry yell rang out as Lemuel suddenly whirled in the saddle, raised his N. C. O.'s automatic, and swiftly sent a bullet into the leading raider at precisely that point where two cartridge belts crossed on the Cossack's white uniformed breast.

Spasmodically, the rider stiffened, swayed; then the lance glimmered like a wand of silver crazily brandished, as the rider's hands shot skyward. Without a sound the dead man slipped from the saddle and rolled over and over on the ground like a child at play.

Lips writhed back in a smile of savage satisfaction, Lemuel, shifted his aim to the other, who, nothing daunted, bent lower in the saddle and dashed forward. He pressed the trigger, but to his utter dismay no report ensued. The Russian's broad-headed lance flashed in the moonlight. His body gave a powerful surge to drive the point through the Legionnaire's torso; but by a texterous twist the American avoided the Cossack's murderous thrust by a scant fraction of an inch.

R-r-rip! His overcoat was shorn apart. A yelling, bearded face loomed close; instantly the veteran shot out his long arm and swept the green-cloaked camelman from the saddle to the back of his own *mehari*. Fists beat in Lemuel's face, tore at his eyes; but the sergeant's long fingers, strong as steel springs, closed upon the prisoner's hairy throat.

Fearfully Harold poised his rifle, watching the deadly, frantic struggle taking place on the back of Lemuel's blindly galloping camel. He saw the Russian wrench a Cossack dagger from his belt, saw its blade glitter evilly in the moonlight; but failed to note that, as the razor-sharp dagger descended, Lemuel's head had flickered sidewise to catch the descending wrist between strong white teeth: so Harold with remarkable accuracy drilled Lemuel's prisoner through the chest. In pained surprise he heard the gaunt American curse when the captive Russian sagged and went limp.

"No use to me now, damn the luck!" was Lemuel's bitter reflection as he let the sweaty, foul-smelling body flop to earth. Then in fury he turned on the grinning cockney.

"Blast your interferin' hide!" he snarled. "What for d'you think I take a prisoner? To have you drill him for your own amusement? You damn little cockney rat!"

Then, on seeing the pained amazement in the Englishman's face, Lemuel hastened an apology: "Sorry, son; I orter be thankin' you. I—I guess Reb's got me kind o' upset. But I wanted to get some acc'rate dope on this renegade Roossian's plans. Well, we ain't far from Um Wulad, judgin' by that ridge yonder."

Setting straight the kepi which dangled about his neck by its chin strap, Lemuel next cleared his jammed automatic, returned it to its holster, and then intently scanned a long moonlit hill ahead. Reminded him of a Texas hog-back, it did: but he knew that on the other side of that ridge lay the oasis and Legion *poste* of Um Wulad.

IN THAT *poste* there should be quartered some forty or fifty hard bitten Legionnaires of the Seventh Company. But as his camel slowed to climb the slope, Frost found himself wondering if he would be in time. Had Michailov headed straight for this *poste* after obliterating the one at Samah, or had he paused to blot out El Juweilil in passing? Lemuel and the others would know within a few minutes.

He glanced back to see the last of the pursuing patrol, numbering perhaps eight or nine, halted by the bodies of their slain companions, evidently quitting the chase.

"Bloody butchers—I wonder if we will shake 'em off? Oh, Reb—Reb, old pal—I'll kill that devil or die tryin'!"

On through the cold night air of the desert galloped the four survivors of the massacred Samah garrison. Lucky they'd been out on reconnaissance, reflected Lemuel, or he, Harold, Bulgakan and Maillot would be nothing more than mangled lumps of flesh—jackal food.

As the crest of the hill drew near, his heart commenced to thud more quickly. Would they find flame and desolation ahead? The plain dark with enemy raiders? He listened, but to his ears came nothing but the soft hiss of sand and clay under the broad pads of the *meharis'* feet.

"Close in!" he called in an undertone. When the shadowy riders drew abreast he added: "If Um Wulad's been took, we'll circle to the right and try for the pass. Every man for himself; somebody's got to get through with the news."

Up, up they rode. The crest was just a few yards ahead; eight eyes were wide with expectancy. Three strides more—up and over. A great warm tide of gratefulness swept into Lemuel's being. Dominating the scattered native dwellings and towering over the idly stirring date palms lay the *poste*, neatly white and apparently lifeless; but the faint twinkle of moonlight along a rifle barrel told the breathless sergeant that here and there a sentry walked the walls.

Five minutes later he was riding toward

the gates bawling, "*Aux armes!*" at the top of his lungs. "To arms!" They must hurry! At any minute the onslaught of Caid Rouazi's swift cohorts might invest the *poste*.

When they galloped closer a figure stirred above the main gate, and a silhouetted head stood back against the stars.

"*Qui vive?*" challenged the sentry, an evil-faced Greek.

"*Ouvrez vite!* Open up, you idiot!" roared Lemuel. "We're of the Sixth Company, at Samah." That slow fool—couldn't he realize that every second meant life or death?

Harold growled an anxious aside to Maillot: "The man's blarsted slow. I see the Seventh ain't forgot 'ow we showed 'em up at Tibneh. I'll bet yer a month's pay, Frenchy, that damn' Austrian lieutenant won't believe Lem. He 'ates the sight o' Lem because Lem's platoon saved 'is blink-in' little shirt tail, that day."

A few moments later in the *poste's* orderly room Lieutenant Karl von Maxenzee stared with insulting disbelief on the hollow-eyed, panting sergeant.

"*Quelle sottise!*" he snarled. "What foolishness! Do you mean to tell me, stupid, that there are Cossacks roaming the Red Desert?"

Lemuel, standing at rigid attention, felt his heart sink. It had never occurred to him that even the stupid and arrogant von Maxenzee would refuse to be warned.

"Before God, *mon lieutenant!*" he cried hoarsely. "It is the truth! Quick, sir! Your only chance is to order the garrison into the pass—'Saladin's Throat'—where you could hold the Caid back while we ride ahead and raise the garrison at El Kufr."

The pale blue eyes of the Austrian lieutenant were hard as bayonet points beneath their puppy, red-rimmed lids.

"*Garde a vous!* Care! Since when does a slovenly dog of a sergeant presume to give advice to an officer?" he snarled. "Bah! For your childish fears and imaginings I care not that!" He snapped strong brown fingers and turned away, a stiff, erect figure in dark blue.

Sickened, desperate because of the time that was being lost, the American stepped forward, his hands outstretched.

"But the lieutenant's got to believe! Your garrison will be wiped out within twenty minutes, and they'll die a death a nigger's yellow dog doesn't deserve. No—no! Listen to me! I tell you this Russian butcher's got two or three thousand men, with machine guns."

"Silence, insubordinate swine!" broke in Lieutenant von Maxenzee with a chill, menacing voice. "I think that you must be drunk, sergeant, or else gone crazy with the heat. Understand, fool: I'll not believe a word of this nonsense and I'll not order a man out of this *poste!*"

His thin, red features, lit by an oil lamp, showed that like most weak characters, von Maxenzee mistook obstinacy for determination.

PRECIOUS, relentless seconds were flying, Lemuel knew. Seconds which meant success or failure for Caid Rouazi Dial Allah's bold raid into the rich plains of Syria. His blood ran cold at the thought.

"You always were a pack of timid braggarts in the Sixth Company," continued the worthy lieutenant provocatively. "Now, we of the Seventh—"

As von Maxenzee had hoped, this was too much. Lemuel's anger flared.

"So you think so? You damned yellow Dutchman! Who ran like hell when the Druses charged at Tibneth? The Seventh! Who cost us a whole platoon to win back what your cowards lost?"

Livid with wrath and evil satisfaction, Lieutenant von Maxenzee sprang to his feet, pale eyes aflame.

"*Du lieber Gott!* Here's insolence!" he barked, while his hand flew to draw his pistol. "Cowards, eh?" he wrenched open the holster, then checked himself. "No, we'll keep you for court-martial—Sergeant Louvadis! Put this insolent trickster under arrest!"

The door of the orderly room swung open to admit a lowering, thickset Greek sergeant.

"Arrest him!"

Lemuel was a soldier to the core, with a soldier's mighty respect for military law and the dire penalties it can inflict. He realized that if he did not do something very rash, he and the three other men of the Sixth Company would be immediately imprisoned. Later they would be slaughtered and tortured with the rest, when Michailov's trained troopers assaulted this *poste* as they had annihilated those at Samah, and by this time, El Juweilil.

"Arrest that man!" Shaking with passion the Austrian stood, accusing finger leveled, his face scarlet to the roots of his stiff, blond hair.

Casting discretion to the winds Lemuel got into action; and by so doing established claim to a firing squad. With a movement so swift that the weapon seemed to flow into his hands, he wrenched his automatic from its holster; and before either the officer or the startled Greek could move a finger they were both covered by that deadly black tube.

"So!" snarled von Maxenzee, backing away. "You want to rot in the penal battalion!"

"No—and I ain't going to, either! Put 'em up, or I'll drill your worthless hides!"

Harsh, like the clash of a bayonet dropped on a stone pavement, was the American's voice as, with weight balanced on the balls of both feet, he surveyed the sullen pair whose hands had crept to the level of their shoulders.

"If you're so damn' blind and dumb that you won't believe me, I ain't going to stay and die with you! No—keep 'em up and don't move! If you say another word, Mister Dutch Lieutenant, I'll enjoy killing you. I've earned a death sentence already, so I wouldn't stick at bumping you off. No—stand still, sergeant; less you want a bullet through your greasy crawl! Now, both of you, about-turn!"

Reading death in those blazing black eyes, officer and noncom obeyed. Then Lemuel darted forward, plucked the pistols from their holsters.

"*Verdammt Amerikaner Schwein!* You'll die for this!" rasped von Maxenzee.

It was quite clear to Lemuel that the Austrian would never rest until a firing squad of the Zephyrs—the terrible Bataillon d'Afrique, penal division of the French army—had disposed of the audacious American.

In a moment Lemuel had gained the door, had leaped through, slammed and locked the door from the outside, and shoving aside a frightened corporal, bounded below, bawling for Harold and the other two men at the top of his lungs.

He found them in the courtyard, wet of head, face and chest, revelling in the coolness of water drawn from a well, freshly blasted through the hard basalt underlying the desert. Striding forward, Lemuel realized that the well was not more than half completed, for various tools lay neatly stacked to one side and several square blue boxes under guard of a special sentry bespoke the presence of dynamite. At Lemuel's word, the three donned their kepis and fell in beside the camels.

"Wot's up, Lem?" muttered Harold, when he saw the grim expression on the sergeant's bronzed sweaty features. "Had a run-in wiv the dear little Austrian?"

"Yep, he's out for my scalp. You can hear him yelping from here. Shake a leg, you worm-casts!"

Scowling at the metal number sixes stitched to the visitors' collars, various members of the garrison stood undecided, then looked uneasily about as from the depths of the *poste* roared a furious voice, its words undistinguishable with passion.

"You!" snapped the American sergeant to the Legionnaire on guard at the gate. "Open up, pronto; we're goin' on!"

WHEN the man hesitated, Bulgakan, who was not as slow as he looked, lashed his camel forward, shoved the startled sentry to one side, and flipped up the stout top bar, while Lemuel expertly leaned low in his saddle and shot back the other bar, and pushed open the

gate. Like four pale shadows, the reconnaissance party quitted the doomed *poste* at Um Wulad, galloping off amid volleys of curses from the garrison and a chorus of wild barking from all the ribby curs in the oasis.

"Damn' blind fool—wouldn't listen!" raved Lemuel when the single-storied, whitewashed houses of the native village lay a few yards behind. "That's torn it it for fair! There's no one to hold the pass now."

A sense of angry desperation settled upon the sergeant when he reflected upon the gravity of the charges to which he had laid himself open: insolence, insubordination, and threatening an officer! It was just another burden to the load of worry and anxiety already riding his weary shoulders. First Reb, then Michailov, and now . . . Surely the odds were too great.

"Guess there's nothing to do," he muttered audibly, "but to 'go on pump'—desert as soon as the dust settles. I've sure got myself in a three-ply, man-size mess."

Before he could speak further came the vicious crack of a rifle from the top of the hog-back they had crossed in coming from Samah, telling the four that Michailov was already upon the doomed *poste*! Lemuel's heart stopped while the report echoed and reëchoed menacingly among the low foothills surrounding the oasis of Um Wulad, for near at hand had sounded a queer little grunt. Many times before had the veteran heard such a grunt.

He whirled in the saddle just in time to see Legionnaire Maillot's dirty hands fly spasmodically to an invisible wound in his side. Then with an expression of intense surprise on his hard, moonlit features, the Apache toppled sidewise and, turning a half somersault, fell to lie very still on the thick dust of the reddish caravan track.

Bullets hissed and moaned all about the three as the first shots sounded from the *poste*. A bugle shrilled brazenly, despairingly, several notes of the *alerte* sadly flat.

"Gawd help us!" Harold muttered a

low cry of alarm. "Will yer look at 'em come! There's thousands of 'em!"

While the *meharis*, refreshed by the rest, bounded past the last silver-trunked palms, Lemuel looked back to see the dunes black with ranks of camelmén who rushed down over the bare, clay foothills like an engulfing, sable wave. Maillot was undoubtedly dead; so the three lashed their camels to top speed, chilled by the dreadful, barbaric shout that arose once more to fill the beautiful night with terror.

"Hourra! Hourra! Hourra-a-h!"

From the *post* came an answering shout, feeble in comparison, but dauntless in its lack of fear.

The night wind was now rushing evenly past Lemuel's set features. Could they reach El Kufr in time? He was beginning to doubt it. Who would have thought that the renegade Caid could travel so fast! His forces must be wonderfully organized and mounted.

Frost cast a brief glance at his companions, hunched like jockeys on their camels' backs, busily plying their whips, Bulgakan's flat savage face was turned to the rear, watching in manifest fear the terrific onslaught on the little white *poste*.

Jewel-like flecks of fire flickered even then from the crest of those long, low walls. Somewhere a machine gun got into action, its staccato bark splitting the night's stillness. Then another spoke, and another, lashing the *poste* with a deadly, leaden blast that crippled the defense ere the struggle was well begun.

Most terrible of all were the agonized shrieks and howls arising from the native village. These grew even louder, more poignant and frightful; from which the fugitives guessed that a company of camelmén was sweeping through the hamlet's two or three streets, hacking, hewing down the terrified natives as the Huns of old rode roughshod over the rich provinces of Rome.

In less than three minutes the white-walled *poste* was closely invested with a ring of fire. Dearly was von Maxenzee paying for his arrogant incredulity!

"It all depends," Lemuel was panting to Harold, "how long the garrison can hold 'em up. Course they'll fight to the last man; but they ain't got a chance. Damn, I hope they's some machine guns at El Kufr! Chuck away your ammunition, boys, all except two or three clips; then shed anythin' you can spare—ride light's the word; we're in for the race o' our misspent lives . . . Hell! We've been seen!"

Galloping at headlong rate down a moonlit hillside was a dark column of camel riders. Their unmistakable intention was to cut off the retreat of the three Legionnaires before they could gain the wide plain, sweeping to the not very distant Hauran mountains.

CHAPTER IV

ONE JUMP AHEAD

"IT AIN'T no use. They'll ketch us!" Lemuel's breath was whistling into laboring, aching lungs; tough though he was, the half hour's hard galloping was telling on him. He made a strange unsoldierly sight—black hair whipping in the wind, without overcoat without cap, without blanket roll or rifle, retaining only four pistol ammunition clips tucked in his wide blue waistband. He turned to watch the dark outline of pursuers grow ever more distinct.

"We'd be all right if only our mounts was fresh," was the cockney's panted observation. "That blarsted pass ain't but 'arf a kilometer away. Blime, look at Bulky leg it! One taste o' dear Michailov is enough for 'im, I guess."

Too spent to reply, the American sergeant's bloodshot eyes searched the surrounding moon-frosted hillsides, seeking some rugged area which might afford opportunity of casting off those relentless pursuers whose lance points twinkled less than half a kilometer behind.

"We gotta get to El Kufr," he kept repeating. "We gotta!"

While his lean body pitched and swayed to the *mehari's* gallop, Lemuel's war-wise

brain tackled the problem with the experience of twenty turbulent years. But he found no answer.

His black eyes ranged ahead, studied the rugged, somber outline of the Haurans reaching up like sharp, sable fingers to grasp the blazing stars. Somewhere ahead lay that narrow slash through the mountains, called Saladin's Throat. How far away was it?

To the harassed sergeant's further alarm, his camel and the others began to show distinct signs of tiring; their spongy feet landed with stiff, unexpected jolts that made them lumber off on tangents.

Dashing the bitter sweat from his eyes, Frost examined the hills to the right, and stiffened convulsively. What was that glimmer of white up there?

While the wind rushed past, he watched, hoping against hope that he had been mistaken. But no, the white blur materialized into a long line of camelmens advancing at top speed, eliminating any chance for the three Legionnaires to win a passage into Saladin's Throat.

It must be, Lem decided, a raiding party of the fierce Jebel Lejehis; there was no mistaking their distinctive black turbans.

"Cooked and cooked for fair!" Like a delirious man, Lemuel blasphemed in his despair. "Cain't keep on, and 'tain't no use to turn back!"

Harold and Bulgakan had not yet seen the new menace. He called to them, and quite without knowing why, shouted:

"Keep right on ahead!"

At the command, they looked up and automatically reined in, but started on again. Oddly enough the desire burned in Lemuel's brain to die as near as possible to the goal. Yes, it seemed better to perish beneath the razor-edged *flissas* of the Jebel Lejehis than the lances of Caid Rouazi's hard-riding barbarians.

On and on galloped the *meharis* carrying their riders toward the death waiting ahead. It struck Lemuel as a cruel irony that they should be actually urging their beasts toward certain death.

"Think fast, boy!" he told himself.

"Think fast, or you'll be cold monkey meat inside o' two minutes!"

A dense swarm of black-turbaned, white-robed riders had gained the same track along which Lemuel and the other fugitives were racing; and after a momentary hesitation, the tribesmen closed in, obviously surprised that the trio neither halted nor turned aside.

The fatal seconds ticked relentlessly by. Nearer and nearer! Lemuel could clearly see the jolting trot of the enemy camels, now sharply silhouetted against the golden glory in the sky, for the moon was rising squarely behind the tribesmen, tinting their thin lances.

A fugitive hope entered the American's brain. Why had the Lejehis not yet opened fire? He would have given much to know; he guessed it was because of the absence of the distinctive dark overcoat, which made each Legionnaire appear to be white-clad, for in the desert garrisons the trousers and undershirts are white.

"They won't wait any longer." He could see the carbines coming to shoulder and felt his throat suddenly become dry and burning. Too bad; he very much wanted to live in order to avenge Reb.

"Think boy—think! There must be a way," he told himself savagely. "But it ain't by fightin' a way through—they's nigh thirty or forty o' 'em ahead." He glanced back. Out of sight for the moment were the followers of Caid Rouazi.

"So long, Lem! Don't let 'em take yer alive." Harold reined over, his small pinched face ghastly in the moonlight. "It's all very queer, though; why are these bloomin' natives raidin' in the dark?"

In a flash the answer occurred: "Reckon they're on their way to join up with old man Michailov!"

Only a hundred yards separated the white-robed men from the three sweat-bathed fugitives. The crisis was inescapably at hand!

In the American's brain seethed a mad maelstrom of confused thoughts of desperate plans and cunning subterfuges. Nearer and nearer! A preposterous idea

presented itself—a typical Yankee bluff.

"Bulgakan!" he yelled. "And you, Harold! We're scouts belongin' to Michailov's gang. See? We're bein' chased by Druses. Get me? Mebbe they got a Roosian with 'em, so you hail 'em, Bulky—bluff 'em—it's our only chance!"

"Cunnin' old fox," thought Harold, and prayed that no Lejehi would fire.

NOT far ahead the moonlight glistened ominously on many a rifle barrel and drawn scimitar when the tribesmen, deeply puzzled, pulled their camels to a halt, to watch in mingled suspicion and amazement the headlong approach of three weirdly dressed Europeans. No Legionnaires these, they thought—the gallopers wore no kepis, no overcoats, and made no effort to unsling their rifles; Lemuel had insisted on this.

The Tchek in command grinned thinly to himself. "If they prove French, they seem good strong men who should last well under the torture."

"*Allahu Akbar*," piously added the worthy Tchek, then he drew his Luger automatic. "We shall bring gifts to the Caid Rouazi."

Just then Bulgakan racing along a few strides in advance, raised his right hand above his close-cropped blond head in the universal signal of peace, and with stentorian tones inquired in Russian, if there were a follower of the great Caid Rouazi among the ranks of the Jebel Lejehi.

Then did the Lejehi leaders eye one another. French they were familiar with, but not this hoarse, guttural tongue.

The three Legionnaires were almost among the suspicious, dark-featured Lejehis when for the first time the tribesmen detected the sound of pursuit. As an excited, high-pitched babble of Arabic broke out, Lemuel sensed the psychological moment, turned in his saddle, and pointing to the rear gasped: "*Jebel Druse! Jebel Druse!*" at the top of his lungs.

Even as the world left his lips, the veteran's bloodshot eyes flickered searchingly from one to the other of those fierce,

predatory features crowding aggressively toward him.

Would they believe? Everything swung trembling in the balance. Lances and swords swung up, poised for action.

But not for nothing had the Druse and the Lejehi tribes been sworn enemies for uncounted centuries.

"*El Druse! El Druse!*" The words leaped like wildfire down the white-robed column.

The hawk-faced Tchek eyed Bulgakan narrowly; and then the conclusion Lemuel had hoped he would make leaped into his mind: Ah! So the pariah-sired Druses had cut off a detachment belonging to Caid Rouazi?

Panting and trembling in every limb, Lemuel watched a fierce joy light the Tchek's features as, standing in his stirrups, he brandished a carbine, faced to the rear and shouted the command to charge:

"*Elkoddam! Ul-Ul-Ullah-Akbar!*"

In an instant the Lejehi raiding *harka* had deployed into a long double rank. Gun breeches clicked and scimitars were drawn with sibilant *zweeps* that played sweet music in the ears of the Legionnaires.

Nervous moments followed for the bare-headed, wild-eyed sergeant and his two surviving followers. Lost in the depths of the Lejehi array, they unobtrusively urged their camels toward the rear ranks, past tribesmen intent only, on slaying the hated Druses. For safety's sake they repeatedly shouted "*Caid Rouazi!*" and found that the name worked like a charm.

Once deployed, the white-robed band took up a trot, raising the fierce cry of "*Ul-Ullah-Akbar!*" until it swelled like the tones of a mighty organ.

"And now, gents," muttered Harold joyously, "there's goin' to be the best little Donnybrook yer ever 'eard tell of!"

With breathless, terrific speed the battle was joined. Those hard-riding followers of the Russian renegade swept around a low hillock to find themselves suddenly confronted by a long line of howling murderously inclined tribesmen with not a second's time for parleying.

Lemuel, riding anxiously in the rearmost

rank, watched with professional interest and not little alarm, the expert way in which the dark-robed Cossacks closed up, lowered their lances, and uttering a terrific "*Hourra! Hourrah!*", hurled themselves in resistless momentum upon the eager Lejehis.

"Shall we flee?" panted Legionnaire Bulgakan, eyes wide and sweat-soaked chest heaving.

"Not yet, son, not yet," was Lemuel's muttered reply. "We'll wait till these hombres lock horns good and proper and forget all about us."

And lock horns those combatants did. Lances snapped, pistols cracked viciously, camels went sprawling to the ground to be trampled upon their fellows until they howled in agony. Steel rang on steel, bodies met with dull, sickening impacts and shouts, yells, screams arose from the wild melee.

Once the battle was fairly joined Lemuel had no trouble in foreseeing its outcome. One last look he cast at that mad tangle of fighters, to see the long lances dipping and thrusting, to see gleaming blades circle and whistle down.

On and on the three must go. On to El Kufr, to bring the news of disaster. Lashing their *meharis* to fresh efforts, the trio sped off. All went well until a straggling Lejehi mounted on a lame camel, unaware of the trio's identity, spied the fugitives. Prompted by some imp of misfortune, the tribesman whipped up his Mauser rifle to take a long range shot at the three bobbing targets.

NEITHER Harold, riding as he had never ridden before, nor Lemuel, his mind frantically seeking for inspiration, noted how Legionnaire Bulgakan hunched up, coughed two or three times, then wound both his great hands around the saddle horn, spitting out a dark trickle which commenced to ooze from the corners of his mouth.

"We've got to get to El Kufr; if we don't warn 'em no one else will!" Lemuel kept telling himself, and found comfort

that the din of battle was fading. He glanced backward. "What fighters them Roosians are!"

Though the Caid's men were outnumbered, he saw that the Cossacks had overwhelmed the larger Lejehi force and were now engaged in mercilessly hunting down fugitives.

The American's face grew ever longer. Evidently the Caid's men would take a lot of licking; no undisciplined mob were his three or four thousand camel troopers. What a superb soldier this Michailov must be! He who had murdered poor Reb.

Lemuel's gloomy train of thought was interrupted by the sight of a narrow black ribbon that seemed to split apart a mountain peak not far ahead. He knew it must be the pass called Saladin's Throat, beyond which lay the important supply depot of El Kufr.

Grinning in fierce delight and anxiety Harold drew alongside, ignorant that Bulgakan was now swaying like a drunken man in his saddle.

"There's the pass! Blime, Lem, if they ain't no more Lejehis we'll win through yet!"

But Lemuel, thinking of that deadly force behind, was weighing their chances and found them pitifully small. How could he save both the supply trains and the pilgrims?

He had found no answer to the question when the blackness of the defile swallowed them up.

How utterly lightless it was in the gorge. How narrow! The three camels, stumbling continually could barely ride abreast. High overhead shone a few stars, toward which the mountain sloped sharply on either side. In many places Lemuel noted that the rock formed sheer walls.

As no shot greeted them and no ambushed force surprised the Legionnaires, Lemuel's heart commenced to beat a little slower. Not a quarter of a mile ahead lay El Kufr, the supply depot, with a garrison of a hundred well-armed men. Yes, he had won the first step; though perhaps it was nothing more than a temporary stay.

In another twenty minutes a force equipped with automatic rifles and machine guns would advance in an attempt to block the pass until strong columns from the Suweideh and Mejmar garrisons could arrive to defeat Michailov's barbarians in pitched battle.

Then came an agonizing thought: If the renegade Caid were kept on the east side of the mountains, he could yet massacre the pilgrims at Melal-es-Sarrar and deal a death blow to French prestige. On the other hand, if he won through Saladin's Throat he would seize and loot the supply trains of their invaluable material. What should Lem do?

He was still pondering when the gloom thinned and through a narrow gap the rich, rolling plains of Syria came into view. And there was the depot, its embraured walls pristinely white in the moonlight.

Out of the pass lumbered the American sergeant's camel at a heavy faltering gallop that jolted every bone in his body; just behind rode Harold; but there was no trace of Bulgakan. What had happened to him? "I suppose he's fallen!" Lemuel muttered. "We ought to go back, but . . ."

CHAPTER V

DOOMED MEN

WHILE Frost was still debating his course the Russian Legionnaire rode into the moonlight, arms locked weakly about the saddle horn and his shirt front dark with splashes of blood. Poor devil! Shot through the lungs.

At a glance Lemuel realized that he had lost another sturdy Legionnaire. The veteran sergeant had seen too many men thus wounded to be mistaken. Well, Bulgakan would probably be able to reach the depot, now only four hundred yards distant.

By tacit consent he and Harold, with that royalty of the Anglo-Saxon, turned back and one on either side tenderly supported the weakly swaying figure. Thus

they rode straight toward the square little fort, which dominated by a high watchtower and lying at the foot of a great black mountain, looked remarkably like a toy building.

"*Aux armes!*" yelled Lemuel. "Turn out the garrison!"

"'Urry! Open the blinkin' gate—*aux armes! Aux armes!*" To make his thin voice more carrying Harold dropped the bridle and cupped his hands.

Ten minutes later Lemuel, haggard, wild-eyed and trembling from his exertions, was addressing a thoroughly dismayed sergeant.

"*Dios de Dios!* We are lost!" cried the fellow wildly. "There are only four men left in the depot—"

"What!" A roar like that of Niagara sounded in Lemuel's ears. Four men! He felt sick and shaken. Four men! "Where are the rest?" he snapped.

"Left at sundown for Nasib to escort supplies due on that *sacre* supply train tonight. But this invasion?" The speaker, a big blue-jowled Spaniard, glared at Lemuel from frightened black eyes.

On the American's face he read only a part of the hopelessness, of the agony tearing that big man's soul. This was the last blow, the ultimate stacked card. Only four men! His wild ride had been then in vain.

"Invasion? Oh, yes; thousands of 'em. Listen here, sergeant—what's your name?"

"Martinez."

"You got wires from here to Suweideh and Mejmar?"

The other, yet damp and bleary with sleep, nodded his disheveled head vigorously.

"O. K.—show 'em to me!" Lemuel rasped. "Hurry, you damned garlic destroyer!"

Three steps at a time Lemuel's dirty white form bounded up the stairs leading to the Commandant's office; while Harold tongue-lashed into frantic haste the other three men of the depot's garrison, and dashed below to secure metal strips of Hotchkiss ammunition for a brace of can-

vas-shrouded machine guns standing along the walls.

Hopelessness such as he had never known before gripped Lemuel's soul. Hell! He'd fought, planned and schemed; but everything had gone wrong! Samah lay in ruins, Reb Carver was dead, von Maxenzee had refused to listen; and now to find the supply depot guarded by only four men! Sickened, he realized that nothing in the world could prevent the success of Michailov's raid, and its even more terrible consequences. There was absolutely no way to stop him in the pass. What could seven men, one of them badly wounded, accomplish?

A stride behind the thoroughly frightened Spaniard, he burst into an office lit only by a shaft of moonlight. All his eyes saw was a telephone standing on a rough wood table. Shaken with futile rebellion at Fate he snatched up the instrument and gave the crank a vicious twirl.

"Hello?" he panted. "Hello!" Silence. He could feel the Spaniard's dark eyes fixed upon him, questioning, fearful. Still silence. He spun the crank again. Were they all asleep at Suweideh? Beside himself at the delay, his eyes roved about the shadowy office and fell upon the Spaniard.

"Well!" he snarled. "D'ye think this is the time for a rest cure? Get to hell downstairs and lug up some ammunition, or you'll be playin' a banjo before the pearly gates in half an hour!"

But the big sergeant shook his head in a gesture of despair.

"Yesterday we issued all but a very little ammunition to Um Wulad. In all the depot there are only two machine guns fit to fire. New ones are coming on the supply trains."

"Yeah, and won't dear old Michailov love to have 'em! . . . Hello!" Lemuel savagely spun the crank until the whole instrument quivered and the buzzer hummed like a rattlesnake.

"'Allo!" At last a voice sounded sleepily over the wire.

"Supply depot speakin'!" snapped Lemuel, seeking to use the shortest means

of expressing the situation. "They's a big raid on. Enemy *harka* drilled by Europeans—three thousand o' 'em at least."

"What—what?" sputtered the voice at the other end of the wire.

"Listen, you idiot! Get every word I say, the first time. Them raiders is due here at El Kufr any minute now, aimin' to seize the supply trains at Nasib."

"'Allo! 'Allo! Who is this speaking?" A new voice had cut in.

Lemuel groaned, exasperated beyond words. Evidently some one in authority had interrupted, so he must waste vital seconds in repeating his message.

"Send every man you can!" snapped Lemuel, his gaze fixed on the dark gap marking the pass, which was visible through the orderly room window. "Yes, urgent is right! . . . What? How long will it take them mounted Legionnaires to get here? Two hours? It'll be too late. . . . The armored cars, they have to detour? Can't they do better than an hour and a half? This Michailov will have made his raid and got out by then. Every second counts. To play safe I suggest you call Mejmar in five minutes, coöperate with 'em. I'm calling now, but the wire may be cut any second."

CLICK! He slammed down the receiver; then his trembling, sweaty fingers flipped over a nicked lever, tipped with a red rubber handle, and spun the battery crank again. After a struggle of five minutes the frantic American succeeded in arousing a drowsy orderly. Having learned by experience by this time, he demanded to speak to the commanding officer direct. He spoke with eyes riveted on the pass—how near was the Caid Rouazi now?

It appeared that at Mejmar only three armored cars and a half squadron of Chasseurs d'Afrique were available. Yes! They would start immediately. Sergeant Frost was to hold the depot as long as possible.

Meanwhile, in an undercurrent of thought, Lemuel pondered. With wholly inadequate forces at his command, how

could the pass be held? After deserting the telephone he dashed below and passed through a long supply room where a number of solidly built, blue painted boxes lay stacked almost to the ceiling.

"What's that?" he demanded.

"Dynamite, for use on the new well at Um Wulad."

"Dynamite!" Hope soared into Lemuel's weary brain, and in fierce excitement he spun upon the Spaniard.

"That's the ticket! Quick!" he demanded. "Where d'ye keep the fuses and detonators?"

In that inimitable shrug of the Latin, Martinez's naked shoulders shot up. "*No hay!* None left—all shipped to Um Wulad!" he cried dramatically. "There is a fresh supply coming on the train."

On that train! "Oh, yes; every damned thing we need's on that train!"

Train! Train! The word hammered crazily in Lemuel's harassed brain. Why did everything depend on that train? He stared blankly at the neatly stacked cases. Dynamite! Case after case of it. Dynamite! Useless as chalk. There was no means of exploding it.

True, they might, if there were time, clamber up above the pass and hurl some sticks below, but they would be performing a fruitless self-sacrifice. They would never live to hurl a second stick; and though the first explosion might blow a few dozen men to atoms, it would in no wise effect a halt of Michailov's determined advance.

Arriving once more in the moonlit courtyard, Lemuel found Harold and the three other Legionnaires smeared with oil and cosmoline squatting grimly behind a pair of rakish, thin-barreled Hotchkiss machine guns, both of which, in their present position, were incapable of completely enfilading the pass. Almost hungrily the slender black snouts peered over the white battlements.

Lemuel would have found some measure of comfort in them had there been more than a few dozen metal ammunition strips, each of which holds but thirty rounds. For

the impending action it was a pitiful, perilously inadequate supply.

"Dynamite!"

The word throbbed and darted about his brain. Somehow it could be used! Granted enough time, its mighty power might be utilized. Bitterly, the gaunt sergeant cursed the absence of fuses and detonating apparatus.

In his mind's eyes he could see hordes of shaggy Cossacks scaling the depot's walls, killing the defenders, capturing the post, then galloping on to surround the trains and finally riding back, herding baggage camels that groaned beneath burdens of spoil.

Seven men to check the advance of at least three thousand? It could not be done. Dynamite! Dynamite! Then suddenly, like a star shell bursting on a cloudy night, came an idea, and Lemuel's rat-trap mouth twisted with grim humor.

"That's the ticket!"

While the wide-eyed Legionnaires listened he hurriedly explained his plan, and saw the drawn, hopeless faces about him gradually relax, to become at last wreathed in murderous smiles.

Under Harold's leadership Poullot and Andrada, two of the depot's tiny garrison, darted off along the firing platform to the supply room where those deadly blue cases were stacked.

"Shake a leg, you devils!" shouted Lemuel as he, with Martinez and the fourth man of the depot's garrison, sprinted to the sleeping quarters to gather up every spare sun helmet or kepi they could find. A few instants later Lemuel staggered out, long arms filled with assorted headpieces. Following him was Martinez, a man of extraordinary strength, bearing a huge bundle of spare rifles; lastly appeared the third Legionnaire, similarly laden.

Slumped on a firing step, Legionnaire Bulgakan stared for the last time upon the peaceful lustrous moon, then with eyes that had grown enormous, watched his fellows and continually wiped away the dark froth which welled to his quivering lips.

It was a weird, almost grotesque procession which presently stepped off toward the pass. Each of the six sound men was bent under a heavy burden and behind the little column rode the slowly dying Bulgakan, who clung doggedly to the saddle of a *mehari* on his way to meet the certain death for which he had volunteered. The blackness of the pass swallowed them up.

"Oh, God, just hold them butchers up twenty minutes more!" was Lemuel's silent prayer; but deep within him he doubted that the plea would be granted, since both hard and fast rode the followers of the renegade Caid.

CHAPTER VI

THE TRAP IN THE PASS

LEGIONNAIRE BULGAKAN'S white face looked strained and almost ghostly in the moonlight when Lemuel hastily tucked an overcoat behind the Russian's back to keep him in a sitting position. Deliberately he laid a cocked and loaded rifle across the dying Legionnaire's gruesomely spotted white trousers; then he held out his hand to clutch the doomed man's cold fingers an instant.

"So long, Bulky; you're a game devil to do this. I'd do it myself if you weren't peggin' out. Remember, now: all you gotta do is to wait till the pass is full o' the Caid's men, then fire into the thick of 'em as long as you can." He peered anxiously into Bulgakan's flat, sweat-dewed features.

"Sure you can stick it out all right?"

"Leon Bulgakan would live till hell is ice-coated," the Russian murmured savagely, "if he thought he could kill the butcher, Michailov." So saying, the Russian Legionnaire wiped the froth from his lips once more and raised his hand in salute. "*Au revoir, mon sergent*; I'm glad to die like this. The dynamite will be quick."

Lemuel again gripped his hand, and turned away suddenly. First, Maillot, then Bulgakan—who would disappear next from the roster of the living?

"'Urry up there, Lem!" The cockney's anxious voice floated up from the blackness to that narrow, rocky shelf on which rested the wounded Russian. "I fink I 'ears 'em comin'."

Before commencing the downward climb, Lemuel cast one brief glance about the dark walls and slopes hemming in the pass. Here and there a rifle barrel pointed down into the chasm, and realistically fixed beside the stock of each weapon was either a *kepi* or a sun helmet.

Yes, they were as cunningly hidden as the brief time had permitted. Not plainly visible were the pseudo-rifle-men, but they could be distinguished from below if cause were given sharp eyes to study the slopes above. Well, Bulgakan's shooting would certainly draw that attention.

The six able men had worked like mad, and as a result of their frantic endeavors, quite a number of clefts and pinnacles for a quarter of a mile each held a rifle pointing into the pass, and a helmet beneath which was arranged three or four long yellow cylinders.

As Lemuel scrambled downward, there came to his ears the distinct clank and clatter of accouterment from the Um Wulad end of the pass; whereat a savage grin drew his thin lips back from white and even teeth. Michailov, otherwise the Caid Rouazi Dial Allah, was advancing in force!

Immediately the six took up the *pas gymnastique*—that swift trot of the hurrying Legionnaire—and dashed back toward the depot.

Back to El Kufr they raced, while the American sergeant plotted to make his victory overwhelming and complete. Yes, there might be time to drag forward and mount one of the Hotchkisses at the mouth of the gorge, where it would be in position to mow down any raiders who chanced to escape the general annihilation.

Leaving Harold and two other Legionnaires confidently crouched by the Hotchkiss remaining above the depot's main gate, Lemuel, still coatless and kepi-less, hurried forward with Martinez and Poullot a stride or two behind, sweating and grunting be-

neath the weight of the Hotchkiss and its ammunition.

"Lucky this damn' thing's air-cooled," panted the American. "A water can would be the last straw."

When the three regained the black entrance to the pass, they selected a position in the shadow of the cliffs among a clump of boulders, and there mounted their lean-muzzled weapon.

The sounds of the approaching camelmen grew louder. Gurglings, clankings, voices, all confused by the straight black walls, came winging forward. The point and advance guard could not be far away, thought Lemuel as he carefully set the tripod's jamming handles.

With Martinez lying alongside ready to feed the stiff strips of ammunition into the mechanism, and with Poullot crouched, tools in hand, prepared to clear minor jams, the American sergeant sighed in satisfaction on hunching himself over the breech.

"Point-blank range—to hell with sights! Now, Reb Carver, watch little Lem and Company learn these Roossians a lesson in machine gunnin'."

He squinted along the barrel. Yes; the alignment, squarely on that black opening, was correct; set just where the cone of fire would be most crippling.

Still gasping and sweat-sodden from their exertions, the three Legionnaires lay flat behind their sheltering clump of boulders, staring into the velvet blackness of Saladin's Throat, conscious that a host of subtle sounds was growing distinctly louder.

"*Bueno!*" muttered Martinez nervously, and laid his automatic on a stone beside him to be readily snatched up should need arise. "Now they come! *Sangre de Dios!* I hope your dying Russian won't fire too soon."

"He won't," Lemuel grimly assured his mahogany-featured companion. "He's a wise boy, is Br'er Bulgakan, and he aims to polish off as many as he can."

THE three stiffened and crouched lower, for somewhere in the gorge a pebble had clicked against another and a camel

snuffled noisily. Eyes wide, the machine gun's crew stared into that pitchy blackness before them. Nothing visible yet. Then came the sound of low voices.

Lemuel's pulses throbbed. Ah! A shadow blacker than the rest loomed indistinctly amid the gloom. Another, and another. The roots of Lemuel's hair tingled under the suspense.

Yes, the column must be squarely in the pass; now was the time for Bulgakan to fire! Involuntarily his lean body contracted, his head bent lower, prepared to endure the deafening roar which would ensue. Eternal seconds dragged by. Still silence.

Steadily the number of those darker shadows increased, assumed definite shapes. A whole rank of them. Hell! Bulgakan was misjudging, but he'd fire now. Many of the raiders must now be clear of the dynamite-planted area. Oh, well, the Hotchkisses would settle their hash in a hurry.

Out into the moonlight rode the first raider, his lance swaying gently and his shaggy head, surmounted by a fez, turning ceaselessly this way and that. Then another. What was the matter with Bulgakan?

Whispering fearful imprecations, Sergeant Martinez crouched lower behind his stone, an ammunition clip held ready. Reluctantly Lemuel's gnarled forefinger came in contact with the oily coolness of the Hotchkiss's trigger.

What was the matter with Bulgakan? The fool had been given all his instructions! Three full ranks were now out in the moonlight, and Lemuel knew he could not allow those camelmén to advance much farther.

Conscious that his heart hammered like a riveting machine, he bent forward, found the center of that darkrobed column, and settled his shoulder firmly into the Y-shaped rest. He'd wait until the first rank reached that big flat boulder over there.

"*Diablo!*" Martinez was breathing as though he had run a half-mile race. "That Russian idiot has ruined everything!"

Lemuel's somber eyes fixed themselves on that flat stone, glimmering palely in

the moonlight. A shadow wavered black across its surface; venting a despairing curse, he squeezed the trigger.

Rat-tat-tat-tat-tat-tat-tat!

Towering cliffs magnified the machine gun's roar, as with curious crazy motions the foremost raiders and their *meharis* collapsed into an inextricable, kicking heap. Shrieks and yells arose. The advance guard halted, milling undecidedly. Behind them the main body jammed up, yelling to know what was wrong.

"Bulgakan!" choked Lemuel. "Why doesn't Bulgakan shoot?"

The bitterness of a general who sees his carefully planned victory thrown away by the stupidity of an underling invaded Lemuel's soul. True, the advance had been halted; but only momentarily. He was soldier enough not to deceive himself.

Rat-tat-tat-tat! Just to finish off the stragglers.

A dark mass of camelmén had formed and was trotting determinedly forward. He let them reach that white stone again, then the Hotchkiss again sent its hail of whistling lead into the mass of closely packed riders.

Many of them fell, choking out their lives; but others galloping out on either flank, almost won clear; and the sergeant was hard put to reverse his weapon in time to cut them down. Some time soon they would break away, and then—taps for Lemuel Zebulon Frost and Company.

"Bulgakan!" What was wrong with him? Then suddenly the American realized what had happened, and bitterly cursed his folly in placing the dying man above the defile. Bulgakan had lost consciousness, probably had died shortly after the American sergeant's departure. Of course Lemuel reminded himself, he hadn't wanted to condemn a sound man to sure death; and Bulgakan, though dying had looked strong.

So the game of life and death was lost, after all. All would be over soon; only three strips of ammunition remained beside the Spanish sergeant.

"*Ah, Dieu!* We are lost!" Poullot commenced to whimper in fright and beat

grimy fists together in pathetic despair.

Rat-tat-tat-tat!

Now the machine gun's fire seemed to have no effect whatsoever in checking that steady onrush of Caid Rouazi's raiders. Dozens fell, but dozens more escaped on the flanks, and now yelling their fiendish "*Hourra! Hour-r-a-a-h!*" came riding squarely down upon the machine gun crew, lances leveled.

Bellowing like a bull from his native land, Martinez stood up and gamely emptied his automatic into the onrushing horde, then, conserving the last shot and knowing too much about the fate of Michailov's prisoners, pressed the pistol to his own temple and fired.

Sick with disappointment, Lemuel steadied the Hotchkiss until a dry click told him its last shot had been sped. Only then he gripped his automatic and looked up. Almost above him was a yelling, bearded Cossack, lance point leveled and mouth wide open. Like a fearsome hairy gargoyle he bore down on the doomed American, who had just time to whip up his pistol and fire.

Lemuel's shot, sped in too great haste, pierced the camel's head, killing it instantaneously so that the ungainly animal stumbled, slid forward and of its own momentum crashed heavily upon the machine gun and gunner, burying them both beneath its quivering, hairy and malodorous form.

As he sought to leap clear, something struck Lemuel's head a vicious blow, and knocked flat by the falling animal, he collapsed, to be bathed with its blood.

CHAPTER VII

ONE MAN'S WORK

WHEN the black shades of complete unconsciousness lifted from Lemuel's brain, his first thought was that his right leg ached abominably; his second was that a powerful, sour reek was stinging his nostrils; and the third was that somewhere many rifles and a machine gun were

firing intermittently. Subconsciously he knew enough to lie still. About him moved shadowy figures. He couldn't seem to see well; gorge, moonlight, rocks and corpses all whirled giddily about.

By a supreme effort he rallied his wandering wits and forced them to fall into position, like an expert drill master. Answers to the first three thoughts he discovered almost immediately; the pain in his right leg was caused by the fact that a dead camel lay across it, forcing his limb among stones which were both hard and sharp; the sour stench was also due to the camel; but the third thought?

He warily opened his eyes a narrow crack to see the jewel-like flash of rifle fire raking the darkness around the depot. From above that structure's main gate spat the fire and chatter of a single machine gun fighting overwhelming odds.

"Harold, good old Harold!" he mused, while fighting for strength. "You can always trust the limeys to stick in a pinch."

At first marveling to find himself alive, he decided that his present safety lay in the fact he was literally smeared with the dead camel's blood. Also being clad in white he had escaped the attention of all save the first rank of Caid Rouazi's forces.

As the scene whirled less madly about, the agony in Lemuel's heart grew sharper. He had failed! For all his efforts and scheming the renegade Caid had broken through; and now Harold and the others in the depot must die.

Some little distance away he could see a straight-backed, motionless figure surrounded by many officers and sitting on a splendid thoroughbred white *mehari*: it must be Michailov. The rider wore beneath a long dark cloak a white uniform that glittered with decorations and set on his thin head at a rakish angle was a Mohammendan fez. On the Caid's chest hung a pair of powerful field glasses and a snap case, while at his belt an automatic kept company with a Cossack dagger.

Quite calmly, the silver-bearded veteran directed the investment of the depot, dispatching now a messenger here, now a

galloper there. This time there would be no burning; the worthy Prince Michailov could very handily employ the immense quantities of wheat, blankets, cartridge belts and other supplies the depot contained.

Lemuel, as he lay motionless and half-buried beneath the camel, could watch with dreadful clearness the taking of the depot.

Far out to either flank of the white moonlit structure the renegade Caid sent strong detachments of dismounted riflemen who took cover with drilled precision and who kept wary eyes upon the death-spitting machine gun above the main gate. Then, like the closing jaws of a pincer, the flanking detachments changed direction, and uttering a heart-shaking, "*Hourra! Hour-r-a-a-h!*" some two hundred men simultaneously charged the walls.

"*Hourra! Hourra! Hour-r-aa-h!*" How terribly the cry reëchoed in the gorge behind the helpless sergeant! Sick at heart, he beheld Harold and the other machine gunners pick up their weapon in a desperate attempt to train it upon the attackers charging from the left, even though a dark swarm of raiders was also swooping in from the right. No use. The Hotchkiss had time to emit only a few staccato reports; then its gunners were engulfed in a swarm of attackers who leaped cat-like to the walls. Swords gleamed, rifles flashed for a little while; then a silence fell, pregnant with tragedy.

"Poor Harold!" murmured Lemuel, bitterly. "Another man gone. He was a damned good soldier, too."

Prince Alexander Michailov was not one to ignore the value of time, and he was already three-quarters of an hour behind his schedule, so hardly had the last rifle cracked than a bugle shrilled some unfamiliar call which sent all but a single platoon scrambling up into the saddle. While the sergeant looked on, the Russian's perfectly disciplined little army swiftly formed into ranks and, moving off in column, trotted out over the broad plains of Syria like a dark stream.

Now safer from detection, and obeying

the instinct of self-preservation, Lemuel tentatively placed his free foot on the dead *mehari* and shoved. Ha! The imprisoned leg had moved an inch or so. Suddenly he relaxed; not far away a badly wounded Cossack was lifting his head.

"Dunno what for I want to live," Lemuel reflected dully. "Reb's dead; Harold, Bulgakan and all the rest are dead; and Michailov's loose."

He tugged again, while sharp stabs of pain traveled through the imprisoned right leg. Momentarily exhausted, he lay still to view, in grim satisfaction, the havoc his Hotchkiss had wrought during its brief career. By tens and twenties lay the dark-robed raiders, mingled indiscriminately with dead and dying camels. Not a bad five minutes' work.

BY THE time Lemuel got his leg free, Michailov's column was far on its way to Nasib, moving like a long dark snake over the moon-silvered plain.

"I allow they'll get them trains inside of half an hour, and clear out before—"

But suddenly there came to the battered American's ears a tiny sound which stirred his flagging pulses. It was the ever-so-faint cough of a locomotive getting under way!

In overwhelming relief he lay back, while the blood quickened and leaped through his veins. Of course; he'd forgotten that the commanders at Suweideh and Mejmar could and would communicate with the railroad authorities at Nasib. Even now the precious trains were being hauled away, roaring off through the night beyond reach of Caid Rouazi Dial Allah.

The sergeant's feeling of triumph was instantly dampened by two realizations; first, Prince Michailov was still quite at liberty to loot the depot of its military stores; and second, after returning through the pass he would be free to carry out his massacre of the pilgrims at Melal-es-Sarrah!

An idea sprang to Lemuel's mind. He sought frantically to free himself. At last, his leg slid from under the camel's still warm hairy body. Though badly bruised

and cut in several places, the leg was not seriously injured.

He listened, and heard again the puffing of busy locomotives. Watching the distant black streak marking Michailov's advance, he could not tell whether the column was yet in motion or not.

Then, from far to the north, a delicate arc of fire soared into the purple heavens, and an instant later three tiny pin points of green flame flared with brief intensity, then went out. Automatically Lemuel's sunken eyes flickered southward, watching tensely, breathlessly. Then, in answer to the first, another jeweled parabola soared up to spew forth two red balls of fire. "Thar she blows!" grinned Lemuel. "Them rockets is the gladdest sight I see since the Armistice."

Wheezing in an effort to suppress groans, the sergeant painfully hauled himself into a sitting position, his gaze yet fixed on Michailov's distant column. What was the raider going to do?

He was not long in finding out. Almost at once the distant black streak widened, then contracted into a huge, sable dot. Little shivers, cold as glacier water, flickered down the American's back. So Michailov had decided to retreat!

Skulking on hands and knees lest the guard remaining in possession of the depot catch sight of him, he commenced to crawl off into the blackness. Lemuel's progress was painfully slow.

Once, to prevent a warning outcry, he was forced to strangle an Arab wearing Michailov's uniform. For some moments the fellow, suffering from a ghastly abdominal wound, had silently observed the sergeant's approach until the two found themselves face to face over a dead camel.

It was a terrible sight the American sergeant presented; white shirt and trousers splashed with the gore of the *mehari* he had shot, hair falling over his forehead. His gleaming dark eyes shone as, pistol yet in hand, he crept forward over the sprawled body of the camel.

When the Arab hailed him in what Lemuel thought must be Russian, he made

no answer; and reading sharp suspicion in the fellow's eyes, he hurled himself forward and gripped the native's windpipe barely in time to suppress a betraying cry.

A last look cast back to the plains showed Lemuel that the situation was becoming clearly defined. In the center, the renegade Caid's column was in full retreat; to the right, and still very distant, armored cars from Suweideh were rushing forward with their headlights glimmering faintly. Presently, when the cars came closer those lights would go out. To the southward, but farther away, had appeared a long irregular column, which to the veteran's trained eye meant just one thing; it was the half squadron of Chasseurs d' Afrique hastening toward El Kufr at an extended gallop.

Unless something were done promptly, Caid Michailov would be back at the depot again, and picking up his spoil, could gallop on through the pass and out into the endless wastes of the red desert, where he and his camelmén could, with impunity, mock the efforts of armored cars and cavalry.

Fifteen minutes later Lemuel was panting at the foot of that cliff upon which he had left Bulgakan. With his wounded leg causing him untold suffering, he commenced to hoist upward, the automatic's trigger guard gripped between his teeth. Endless pain-dimmed aeons seemed to pass before he caught sight of Legionnaire Bulgakan seated just as he had been left, but with his great blond head tilted back and his mouth sagging open so that the moonlight just touched the points of his teeth.

It was astounding how quickly the renegade Caid's men had retreated. Already from far down the pass came the grunt and whine of camels. Lemuel's heart commenced to thud more wildly. Would the Russian's men, less cautious than before and hurrying from pursuit, see all of the nearly hidden sun helmets and *kepis*?

"I reckon mebbe I could see some more myself if I was to shinny a little higher."

Then he had an idea. He picked up the stiffening corpse of his late comrade and arranged it in a crouching position in plain

sight and with its rifle apparently poised for action. One of the riflemen, at least, would be convincing!

Subconsciously he slapped the cold shoulder and shivered, then resumed his climb until he reached a point from which he could see more than a dozen of the hidden pseudo-riflemen.

Like a stalking Apache he flattened out and merged with the summit of a particularly solid shoulder of rock that lay well above the line of dynamite charges. Behind him he found a shallow crevice in which he might find a measure of protection from the blasts to come.

WOULD his scheme work out as planned? Everything depended on whether the Russians would fire singly or in a volley. A volley would blast away a good part of the mountain and bury Michailov's cohorts beneath tons of basalt; but a single shot, while doing some damage would only serve to give the snare away.

While waiting, Lemuel shifted his weight and felt something dig into his thigh. Reaching down, he tested the offending outline, then a grin spread over his unshaved features—it was his sergeant's whistle.

"A break at last!"

Setting the metal tube between his lips, he crouched low and peered downward. From the darkness below had come the indistinct murmur of voices. Dark-robed camelmén were commencing to ride into the pass just as a throbbing glare of fire redly lit the black crags above. So Michailov had fired the depot! Well, it would give the avenging Chasseurs, Legionnaires and armored cars light to shoot by.

Now the retreat was in full sway. Rank after rank of camelmén trotted silently by, their lances, slim and straight, pointing to the stars above. Where was Michailov riding?

"When them scouts gets abreast o' that last helmet, it'll be time to sound off," he told himself, and gripped his automatic tighter.

Never, during the thirty-odd years of

Lemuel Frost's soldiering, had his nerves been keyed quite so tight as when he watched the Russian vanguard advance foot by foot toward that fatal last white blur.

Now? No, a moment more . . .

"Take a look at this, Reb!"

After drawing a deep breath that sent air hissing into his lungs, Lemuel set the whistle to his lips and blew. Hardly had its shrill blast faded when he shouted in hoarse parade-ground accent.

"*Préparez les feux de salve!* Volley fire. Ready—aim—"

Purposely he delayed before roaring the last command to his imaginary force. The raiders were now unslinging their carbines, with hasty but precise motions. Their N. C. O's were bellowing incomprehensible commands.

"*Fire!*" roared Lemuel, and emptied his automatic pistol into the thick of those cool, collected camelmén. The echoes helped—they magnified and multiplied his shots into a crashing volley.

Exultation gripped Lemuel when a deep guttural command rang out. He hurled himself back into the crevice pressed hands to ears and waited.

Fire flashed from a hundred carbines scattered along a distance of perhaps a quarter of a mile; then it seemed that a fierce, white-hot volcano had erupted in that dark defile known as Saladin's Throat, and all went black before Lemuel's eyes.

The relief columns, rapidly converging upon El Kufr, halted in bewildered alarm on beholding vast sheets of green and orange flame soar high into the night, apparently from the depths of the mountains,

Comparative darkness descended, while a thunderous report roared out. On its heels came successive detonations as those few dynamite charges not exploded by the Russians' volley went off at their own accord.

"*En avant!* Slay these renegade dogs! Slay, *mes enfants*, and spare not!" roared Commandant Le Nollet. His Chasseurs grinned like winter wolves and spurred their weary mounts to the charge. On the

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right of the cavalry, four swift, gray, armored cars, each mounting two machine guns, shot past with cut-outs open, to skim forward over the level plain like uncouth monsters.

From the north came more armored cars and two troops of mounted Legionnaires, all fresh and eager for the fray.

Back out of the earthly inferno of the pass streamed hundreds of black, fleeing figures; who, escaping death behind, now found themselves completely hemmed in by less numerous but fresh and eager French troops.

With courage worthy of a better cause, the green-robed soldiers of Prince Michailov rallied, formed some sort of line, then advanced upon the Legionnaires.

WEIRDLY, the crimson glare of the burning depot lit the scene of battle, revealed mounted Chasseurs and Russian lancers thrusting, hacking and hewing to the end; revealed blue-clad, brutal-featured Legionnaires, their dripping bayonets redder than the fire, thrusting, shooting, then thrusting again.

Of all this Lemuel was unconscious, for he lay completely insensible in that crevice into which he had hurled himself.

At last, a cool wind blowing up the pass carried off before it clouds of rock dust and the fumes of burned dynamite, and fanned Lemuel's throbbing forehead until he regained a measure of consciousness.

He became aware of rifles and machine guns going off somewhere in the distance. Quite without knowing why, he blindly struggled to his hands and knees.

Weak, dizzy and almost delirious, Lemuel climbed down, then staggered on toward the mouth of the pass. It was slow, terribly slow going, for jagged heaps of rock must be climbed over, rock that completely covered the floor of the defile.

Much like a wounded animal, Lemuel crawled from block to block of cold dusty stone, slowly but surely winning his way back toward the fire-gutted depot.

At last the plains were visible again, and Lemuel could see that a remnant of Caid Rouazi's forces crouched behind

boulders, reorganized now and firing with telling effect into the ranks of the Legionnaires, who were finding a vast difference between this well-controlled and accurate fire and the ragged, poorly-spaced volleys of half-civilized natives.

Fight as they would, the end of Michailov's command was nevertheless in sight. Hemmed in on three sides by the mountains, with their retreat cut off by the choked pass, the raiders fought with the dogged energy of the doomed.

Suddenly, to their right, the dynamite remaining in the depot exploded with a terrific detonation that made the earth tremble like jelly beneath Lemuel's feet.

Crash! Darkness — terrible, stunned darkness. Debris commenced to rain down, and this time the Caid's forces broke up for the last time. Like frightened rabbits they darted hither and thither—some were struck down by the falling stones and timber, others vainly attempted to scale the mountain-sides. The hardest souls hurled themselves forward to perish on the bayonets of those mahogany-faced Legionnaires, who on recovering from the concussion were now charging, yelling like fiends and burning to avenge their butchered comrades.

Lemuel caught sight of a gaunt, tragic figure standing alone in the center of the field, and therewith felt a strange new strength rise within him.

No mistaking that thin, arrogant face; there stood Prince Alexander Michailov gazing with bitter, uncomprehending eyes upon the battle which had put a period to all his ambitions.

Perhaps it was as well he could not know that the ragged, broad-shouldered soldier who came tottering and swaying out of the pass was the one man to whom he owed his downfall.

As Lemuel strode up, his Indian face set in a rigid mask, the Russian made a stiff little bow which caused the decorations on his breast to glitter in the smoke-paled moonlight.

Like a man in a dream he turned to face the disheveled, blood-splashed Legionnaire.

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"I surrender!" he cried disdainfully, throwing his automatic at Lemuel's feet.

But the sergeant evidently did not hear, for he did not even check his advance, but rolled up his sleeves as he came—a subconscious American gesture persisting even in this crowded hour of life and decidedly unmilitary as well.

"I have surrendered!" called Michailov, stepping back in alarm. "Did you hear me, Legionnaire?"

"Yeah," grunted Lemuel, and drew his weary frame together. "I heard you—but so did Reb Carver! Stand up, you butchering swine, and fight for your life!"

* * *

Some half an hour later a lean, gray-haired officer who wore on his cuffs the three *galons* of a captain in the Legion checked his horse at the entrance to the pass.

"Here's another *sacre* Russian. Nom de Dieu! I am wrong; this man is a Legionnaire! See, sir, he still chokes a bearded Russian who has been dead a long time.

"*Dieu de Dieu!*" Captain Fontaine leaned low in his saddle. "Why it is *le sergent*, Frost."

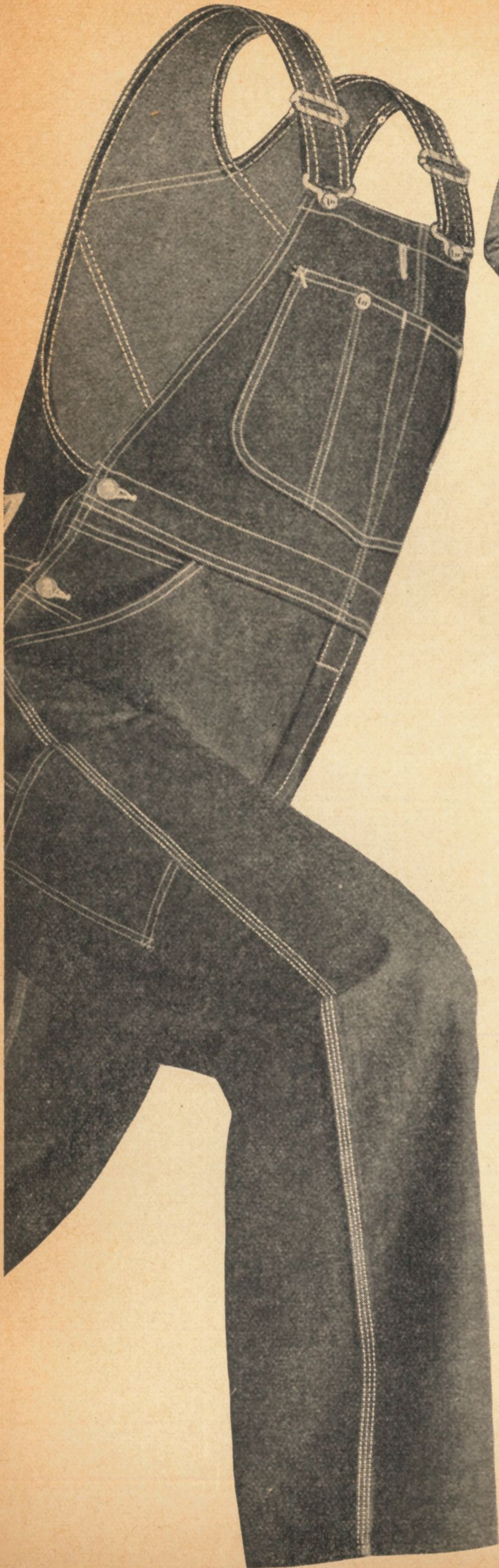
The Legionnaire, who was bending over Lemuel's unconscious frame, straightened.

"Yes, sir; 'tis the Sergeant Frost who rode from Um Wulad to send the warning. Close by the depot we found a little Englishman who was badly wounded, shamming dead. He swears 'twas the sergeant who planned the whole thing."

Now, Captain Fontaine was a Gaul and a man of strong impulses, so he thought nothing of leaping off his horse, of falling on his knees beside the gaunt American to feel for his heart-beats.

"Ah!" he sighed and smiled in sudden relief. "*Bon!* His heart beats like a Dahomey drum. Quick, Lefevre—call the litter bearers! Here's a man to whom *Madame La Republique* owes more than she can ever give in honors and fame."





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