

# ATTACK ON AMERICA!

Starting Expose of U. S. Lack of Defense

By GENERAL ARED WHITE

### WHO'S WHO AND WHAT'S HAPPENED

Unprepared America is under attack by Mexican forces directed by Military Leader Van Haseek.

COLONEL FLAGWILL, chief of U. S. military intelligence.

CAPTAIN BENNING, intelligence officer on the trail of Van Haseek's spies, is trapped in a safe by Colonel Bravot, Benning's former chief of section in Mexico City when Benning was known as Lieutenant Ironmiltz. Benning is rescued by his aides.

The president is killed when Washington is bombed. Mobilization is incomplete and the country is panic-stricken.

### CHAPTER XXI

His ears strained for sound, but there was only silence. He tried kicking at the foot-thick steel doors, but there was no response. It came to him that in the heart of a great city, with its teeming millions, he was as completely sealed away as a dead man in a tomb.

Out in the offices of the Andes Gold Mining and Milling company a blunt new crew had taken over, headed by Lieutenant Colonel Wallace, corps area intelligence officer. Three of Wallace's officers were checking through the company records, three others were standing guard over four glum prisoners.

This sharp transfer of authority had been accompanied by a brief, tragic violence. In a corner of the office, covered by a rug, lay the body of Backrop. A bullet from Wallace's pistol had been needed to end Backrop's resistance.

"All right, Oldfer," Wallace threatened the cowering fat man who sat in front of him. "I'll give you one more chance to remember the combination to that safe. If you do remember, I'll make it an internment camp, if you don't I'll have you hanged inside a week!"

"The safe-makers will be here any minute, then we'll not need your help," Wallace warned. He lifted his wrist to his eyes and glanced at the time. "I'll give you exactly thirty seconds more to decide whether you live or hang."

Ten seconds had passed when the office door opened. Safe experts reported in to tackle the job of opening the vault. Oldfer was jolted into decision by knowledge that if the man in the vault emerged alive, the jig was up with him.

"I'll open it!" he cried, leaping to his feet. "Ja, I'll open the safe, if you promise me I don't hang for it!"

Oldfer fairly raced to the steel doors and nervously fumbled the combination. In his excitement three trials were necessary to complete the combination. Colonel Wallace seized the door and pulled it open. Benning was lying on the floor, his right hand clutching a small pocket notebook.

Wallace lifted the unconscious man to a sofa in the Salvatore room. A medical officer, who had been hurried in from Governor's Island, took pulse and temperature and applied stimulants. In a minute Benning opened his eyes and, on orienting his mind to the whirling gap world about him, attempted to sit up.

"The captain will be all right shortly," the doctor predicted. "It's just as well, however, you got him out of there without much more delay."

Half an hour later Benning insisted on getting to his feet. His legs were wobbly under him, but the slow, steady throbs of his pulse reverberated in aching temples. But he waved the medical aside and went into the office where Wallace and his men were working.

"Here, Benning, you'd better take it easy," the corps area G-2 chief admonished.

"I'm feeling better," Benning answered. "What's the score now, Colonel?"

Colonel Wallace was effervescent. "The Andes Gold Mining and Milling company," he exclaimed, "is the most valuable mine in the world right now. No question about it, we're headed for the biggest spy roundup in history."

"Where's Bravot?" Benning wanted to know. "Bravot, alias Salvatore."

The glow of Wallace's face vanished into gloom. "Pretty bad luck, Benning," he said heavily. "He managed to slip out his private door as we entered. I had lieutenant Crane guarding the hall. Salvatore fled him with a small automatic and was lucky enough to catch a cage down before we could get out there. By the way, Benning, when you feel up to it, Colonel Flagwill wishes you to call him at the war department."

Benning checked through the haul of records. There was no need of cryptographers on the job. In a false bottom of Bravot's desk, Wallace had unearthed a code book which unlocked the symbols.

The first estimates showed seven thousand cards of stockholders. Many of these were innocent purchasers. Wallace thought from the first results of his check, but there was evidence of thousands of enemy agents, scattered in important posts and positions throughout the United States.

An hour later Benning went to the McAlpin. His legs still lacked strength and he took a cab for the short ride. Operators in his room he called Flagwill, who was on the line promptly.

"Glad you're all right, Benning, you had us worried!" Flagwill exclaimed. "A great piece of work, simply great! Report back as soon as you feel like traveling. Benning, Flagwill's voice trailed into gravity. "There are looking pretty black right now—and we've got to find out what's ahead of us."

"Very good, sir," Benning accepted. "I'll report in Washington on the next available plane."

Colonel Flagwill was asleep at his desk when Benning reported at the war department in mid-afternoon. The G-2 chief woke with a start and vigorously shook himself into full wakefulness.

"You've certainly justified your existence again!" Flagwill exclaimed, smiling at his assistant. "We've already ordered the prompt arrest of all Andes stockholders—innocent and guilty alike. That means the biggest spy roundup in history. We can separate sheep from goats after we've arrested the whole lot. Now is no time for half measures."

Benning said, "I'm sorry Bravot got away, sir."

"He'll be a magician," Flagwill vowed. "If he gets through the nets we've laid for him."

As Flagwill turned back to his littered desk, his eye fell upon a penciled memorandum. He looked up sharply at Benning.

"I've just found another little chore for you—to sit in on a very secret party row over successor to the presidency." Flagwill lowered his voice and spoke rapidly. "A partisan intrigue to force Senator Tannard, secretary of state, out of the line of succession. It all hinges on the fact that Tannard received an interim appointment from the president last fall, when Secretary Hingee died. Tannard has not yet been confirmed by the senate."

"Now, if congress rejects Tannard's appointment, the presidency falls by law to Judge Baucum, secretary of the treasury. Since Baucum is party leader and wheel horse, it is likely that a swift party coup will bring this about, as Tannard may not want to make a fight for his confirmation under all the circumstances. Baucum himself has called the conference, which sounds significant. Baucum is our friend and will let you sit in as General Hague's representative. The meeting will be held in the conference rooms of Senator Vren, Baucum's enthusiastic. Let me have your report for General Hague as soon as possible."

On reaching Capitol hill a few minutes before four o'clock, Benning passed the house chamber, sent downstairs, and took the tunnel-trolley access to the senate office building.

The selected senators, leaders of the party in power, were just arriving when Benning reached the Baucum conference room and was admitted by a Baucum secretary. Secretary Baucum rose promptly when the door closed on the last of those he had summoned. Baucum was a large man, square-faced, straight-tipped, with friendly, level gray eyes.

"Friends, I must announce that there will be a slight delay," Baucum said abruptly. His eyes ran slowly from face to face as if to test the mettle of those present against what he had to say. "I have just sent for Secretary Tannard."

Benning saw an interchange of astonished glances among those present and felt his own brows knit at Baucum's astounding announcement. Tannard long had been known as the particular political foe of Secretary Baucum.

"While we are waiting, gentlemen," Baucum went on, "I've a proposal to make. I think we should arrange at once a suitable memorial to that fine young officer, Captain Holl. We have built a shrine to the Unknown Soldier, now I think we should build one to honor our Known Soldier."

"Pardon me, sir," a nettled voice interrupted.

Senator Vren, veteran senate leader, was on his feet. In his taut face was reflected the prevalent astonishment at Baucum's invitation to Tannard.

"Necessity brings us here this afternoon," he said, "the necessity of agreeing upon a man to lead our nation. I see no occasion for admitting Senator Tannard to our confidence, and therefore I must object to his presence."

Baucum faced Vren with cold, level eyes.

"My reason for asking Tannard here," he said in a low, determined voice, "is I consider him the man best qualified among all of us to lead the country through our present crisis."

Vren stood with mouth agape. The room was stricken by tense silence. Vren shortly found his voice and spoke with slow, incisive deliberation as he shaped his words.

"Please be informed, sir, that I consulted the majority opinion before we came here. Therefore, I speak their opinion as well as my own when I inform you, sir, that it is your distinguished self we intend to name president of the United States, and this by the simple method of disqualifying Secretary Tannard."

Baucum's face softened to a serene smile, but he slowly shook his massive gray head.

"I appreciate the honor you pay me, Vren," he interrupted. "But we face an emergency, gentlemen, in which men are going to surrender their lives to their sense of duty—just as Captain Holl did. That makes it very easy for me to surrender so small a thing as my personal ambition. From now on we must resolve to smash party considerations. Our national crisis is serious enough without divisions among ourselves. I must set a personal example and confess to you frankly that I am too old and lack the vigor and, frankly, the abilities that are needed at this time."

He paused a moment, his eyes fixed defiantly on Vren, then he went on in a milder voice.

"If your minds, gentlemen, are free of purely partisan prejudices, you will not challenge my proposal of Tannard for president. Tannard has comparative youth and vigor. As secretary of state, while he is new in that position, he is the lawful successor, unless we disqualify him on mere technicality. He is the man we need to lead us in this emergency, and I intend to do everything within my power looking to his confirmation."

Baucum broke off and his eyes searched each face again as if seeking challenge to the words he had spoken. Only a stunned silence met him. His eyes lifted and a friendly smile wreathed his face as the door of the conference room opened. A tall, erect man stood at the door, gravely hesitant.

"Come right on in, Tannard," Baucum invited. He stepped forward to extend a congratulatory hand and his smile widened as he added, without formality: "I hope your heart is in good shape to stand a hard shove, senator. But the gentlemen present wish you to serve as president of the United States. Your confirmation will be voted without serious opposition."

Tannard's alert eyes searched the room. He was a man of fifty, physically fit, appearing much younger than his age. His face was angular, strong featured. Tannard looked the born leader of men, man of action governed by an active, orderly mind.

In his steel-blue eyes there shined no gleam of personal triumph at Baucum's announcement. His emotional response was a tightening of the muscles of his jaw, a drawing erect of his wide shoulders.

Tannard gave his answer in a measured voice.

"Very good, gentlemen, if that is your decision, I accept. Forgive me if I have no platitudes of gratitude to offer, nor promises of performance. I will say only that I deeply deplore the unhappy circumstances that bring about my succession to the presidency. If your position be confirmed by the senate I will do my best, and I will expect the fullest support from you and every American. If there is nothing further, gentlemen, I'll excuse myself."

(To be continued)

### Not a Leg to Stand On

GUTHRIE, Okla.—Said the sarcastic highway patrolman to Speeder Frank Buck: "Says, do you have your pilot's license with you?"

Buck, a licensed aviator, pulled out his certificate.

"Well, that's one on me," said the patrolman—"on your way, only take it easy, please."

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