

ATTACK ON AMERICA!

Starting Exposé 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 under Military Leader Van Haseck. Washington is bombed and the president is killed.

COLONEL FLAGWELL, chief of U. S. military intelligence in Washington.

MAJOR BENNING, U. S. intelligence officer trailing Van Haseck's spies—the Austrian Fincke, Italian Boggio and Colonel Bravot—finds himself on a dynamite ship piloted by the Mexicans to destroy the Panama canal and strip the Atlantic seaboard of the protection of the U. S. fleet. Benning's plans have miscarried. Previously in Mexico City, Van Haseck's agents have known Benning as Lieutenant Bromley, American renegade, whom he impersonated there.

SCHMOLZ, skipper of the ship. American deck hand, Grimes.

CHAPTER XXV

During the next few days, while the dynamite ship ate up the long miles to Panama, Benning carefully watched the vessel and watched his chances. Land had vanished, escape by boat had diminished finally as one of the questions as for killing Schmolz. Benning considered that this would arouse suspicion and accomplish little else, since, no doubt, there were ready to step into Schmolz's shoes.

Benning's interest centered on the radio room as his best chance. The radio station lay in a cabin hole under the bridge. Several times he visited the room, pretending interest in its mechanism. But the radio operator, one Smith, was suddenly uncommunicative and resentful of visitors.

You been around here enough, mister? Smith complained at Benning's third appearance. "I got work to do, so you please keep away."

After that incident, Benning gained an uncomfortable suspicion that he was being watched. Twice he tested his trail by an abrupt about-face on deck. Both times a hatch-faced steward stonewalled him with exaggerated preoccupation.

Only one chance remained if he failed at the radio. That was to reach the American officers who would come aboard to check cargo before the ship was permitted in the locks. But Benning decided that he must not wait on that last desperate extremity.

Grimes sat in with their dinner, his right eye swollen shut, a purple welt on his pink cheek. "I done what you told me," he said to Fincke. "I asked the cap'n when do we get to listen to the radio. All he did was swing on me and crack me across the deck against the rail." Grimes shook his head and his brows knitted over his discolored eyes. "Ah right, I could chuck him overboard with one arm and not half try. But I wasn't taking no chances of getting put off his boat at Panama. But wait till we hit San Francisco!"

Benning kept up a careful estimate of the speed and progress of the ship. His calculations told him when the ship must be approaching Limon bay. Schmolz plan, he guessed, was to detonate the ship as it passed through that bay.

Benning's plan of direct action crystallized on what he judged to be the last afternoon at sea. In his cabin he blocked out, on a sheet from his notebook, a blunt warning message.

Commanding General, Panama-Hait American freighter, now approaching Limon bay from New York, with cargo of high explosives. General plot in effect to wreck Panama canal at instant action imperative.—Benning, Major 412.

Until he saw Schmolz go to the bridge, Benning loitered about the boat deck, then went direct to the radio room.

"Mister, didn't I tell you to keep out of here!" Smith exploded as Benning stepped into the little room.

Benning said quietly: "I want to use your radio, Smith. You'll be good enough to do just what I tell you to do."

Smith scowled at Benning's leveled pistol and yielded with a sullied nod of his head. Benning strayed behind the fellow's hands behind his back and forced him to stretch out face downward on the floor. Sit him down calmly, Benning started putting his message into Panama. He had bargained out the words, "C-

g Panama-Hait" when a voice challenged from the door.

"So, my ship has a new radio man?"

Schmolz was framed in the door by his voice a raucous snore. Murder burned in his round green eyes as he covered Benning with a long-barreled finger pistol. Behind Schmolz were his mate, steward, and a member of the crew. With an oath he unstrapped Smith's hands and kicked the operator to his feet. Smith took Benning's pistol and message and passed them to Schmolz.

"El himno!" Schmolz, gasped as he read the message. "A spy aboard!"

In a surge of strange fury Schmolz seized Benning by the collar and jerked him out on deck. With a sudden swing of his ham of a fist, he dropped his prisoner and crashed down upon him with his two interred pounds of beef and bacon.

"Got here—just in time—didn't I?" Schmolz belted. "Not for nothing did I have you watched!" Schmolz's heavy fists pummeled Benning's face and head. Benning launched a counter-attack, planted a blow that brought a red trickle from Schmolz's cheek. The Schmolz henchmen dove into the fight and Schmolz, planting several parting blows, dragged Benning to his foot.

"Chuck him overboard to the sharks!" he roared.

Benning was driven to the rail. He gripped the rail with his hands and lunged tensely against the fatal plunge into the Atlantic. One of his assailants clutched his leg, another ground with heavy heels at his fingers. Below Benning could see the water foaming down the hull of the ship.

His feet were clear of the deck his left hand lacerated into helplessness. A knife flashed in the air over his right hand to slash it free of the rail.

Schmolz belted an order before the knife could reach the flesh and bone of Benning's finger. "Stan! H! Hold everything—keep him aboard! Ja, I got a new idea!"

The others turned to Schmolz with questioning glances. The knife hung in the air over Benning's hand. "Ja, in the water it is over too quick!" Schmolz leered. "So I think we give him a nice staircase—here he can think until heom!"

Schmolz sprang forward, seized Benning's collar and hustled him down a narrow flight of steps from the boat deck. He searched Benning's pockets and shouted an order. A shriek came, a hatch crept open over the hold. At command, one man seized Benning's legs, the other two helped Schmolz cram their prisoner head foremost through the opening.

Benning plummeted through black space, struck on head and shoulders and lay stunned, consciousness holding by a thin thread. Slowly his mind cleared. He stretched his pathracked body out on the hard cargo and tested shoulder blades by moving them. There was no fracture. Lying flat on his back, he strained his eyes upward through the blackness. The hatch had been closed.

He muttered to himself: "This time, Benning, you've tangled yourself in a line snarl. Looks like curtains, doesn't it?"

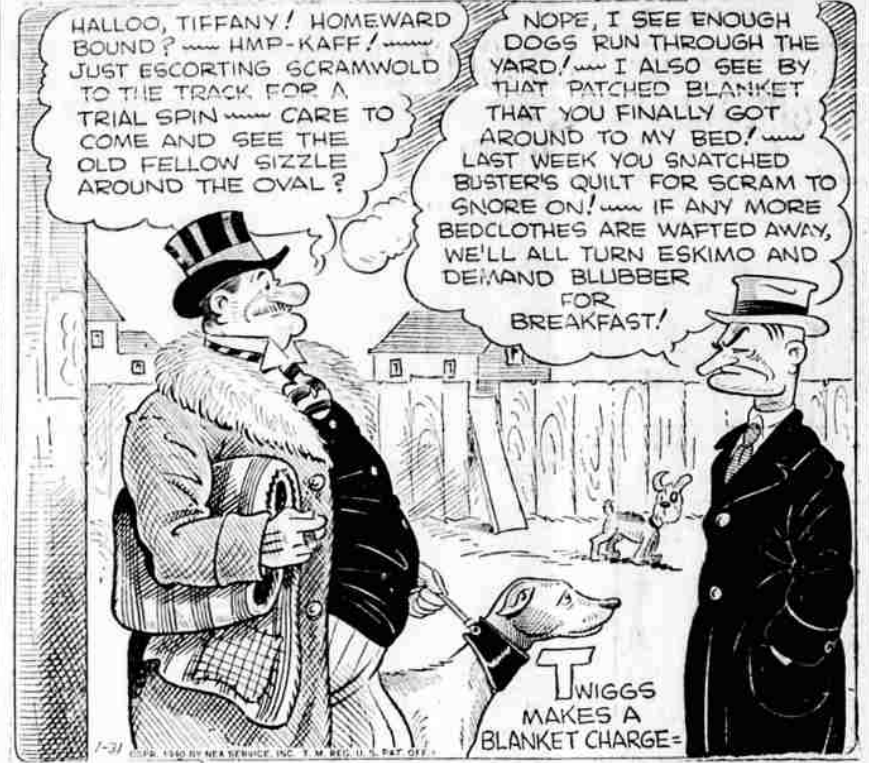
The sound of his voice brought a bitter laugh from his throat. He expressed the wills on his face and lay still, closing his mind to a sudden rattle of feet. Clearly he rationalized his lot. He had played a desperate game in the end of duty and lost. A surge of bitterness swept him. In time there would come that volcanic upheaval that would smelt his life as simply as a pale snuff's a falcon's saddle. Death would smite in the traction of a second. He would be crushed to eternity before there could come a sense of pain.

Benning felt drowsiness creeping over him, a drowsiness that had the power to a strong opiate. He woke with a start to find the engines shut down now. The ship was not moving. He concluded that the ship must have stopped at Cristobal. Here a quarantine

OUR BOARDING HOUSE

with

Major Hoople



officer would come aboard. Schmolz would advise him of the nature of his cargo, but this merely for the computation of weights and water displacement required for passage through the locks. Unless suspicious were aroused, the ship would steam on into the canal.

In a short time the engines churned. Benning took this as verification. The ship was leaving Cristobal.

After a time the engines slowed down, stopped. Benning's pulse hammered in his ears. He guessed that the dynamite ship had come to the locks and was being made fast to the electric cables that would tow her.

By now Schmolz and his henchmen must have abandoned the ship, after setting detonators in motion for the explosion, he concluded. Instant hands were seeing the vessel through a hundred screens whose lives would cost nothing with his own.

Into the black hole there came the soft yellow glow of a ball of light. Benning shook his head dazedly against what must be a phantom of his tortured imagination. The ball swung crazily toward him, gaining in brightness, and a husky voice came to his ears from overhead.

"Say, mister, ain't you pretty hungry about now?" Benning's voice leaped from his throat as his mind oriented itself to this intervention.

"Quick, Grimes! Get a rope down here and pull me out of this hole!"

The ball of light ceased its rotation, grew stationary on a thin cord in front of Benning's eyes. Grimes pulled through useless seconds, and countered, "But the cap'n might get sore when he comes back, and kick me off the ship."

"Schmolz isn't coming back!" Benning shouted. "Quick get a rope for me or it's only a matter of minutes until we'll be blown to pieces!"

Grimes did not answer, but jerked the lantern back up out of the hole. Benning's fingers bit into the palms of his hands through an eternity of waiting until the lantern reappeared, hitched this time to the end of a touch inch-rope.

Benning detached the lantern when it reached him, passed the end of the rope under his armpits and tied a hurried knot. He put the

force of his lungs into an order to leave.

With legs braced across the open hatch, Grimes put the strength of his powerful arms into the job and brought Benning to the deck. Benning staggered to his feet and started for the rail.

"Come on, Grimes," he ordered. "We got to get off this ship!" (To be continued.)

Bing Crosby Eyed for Possible Appendicitis

HOLLYWOOD, Jan. 31.—(AP)—Cocomer Bing Crosby is in a hospital while his doctor decides if the pain in his side is appendicitis. The physician said an operation might not be necessary. Crosby is scheduled to start work in a new film within a few days.

Blizzards in Japan Take Known Death Toll of 78

TOKYO, Jan. 31.—(AP)—The number of deaths from blizzards in north central Japan totaled 78 today, with 29 persons reported missing.

Most of the victims were killed when the flimsy roofs of their homes collapsed under the weight of the snow. The storms, which have lasted almost a week, destroyed 247 homes.

Ickes Holds Up Pay On Pipe Contract

WASHINGTON, Jan. 30.—(AP)—Secretary Ickes stopped payment today of about \$728,312 by the reclamation bureau to the Western Pipe and Steel company of San Francisco until investigation had been made of steel pipe being embedded in Grand Coulee dam for power penstocks.

He also announced that the company's \$729,000 bond would protect the United States against any possible loss.

Ickes noted, he said, on a report by Frank A. Banks, supervising engineer of the gigantic project, that two x-ray photographs reputedly of separate sections of a field weld joint in the pipe, were identical.

Ickes said that as a part of the protection of the dam it had been lined with a specially designed x-ray machine to make sure it was perfect. It further was required, he said, that any defects detected by the x-ray photographs be removed by the contractor and made good.

The big steel pipes are designed to carry water through the dam under high pressures to the turbines which will turn the largest electric generators in the world.

Driver Backs Car Against House, Saves 3 From Fire

PHILADELPHIA, Jan. 31.—(AP)—Perceiving three persons trapped on the second floor of their blazing home, a motorist backed his automobile against the house and helped them step from a window to the roof of the car and safety. Then the motorist drove away without giving his name.

100 Proof

PETERSBURG, Ind.—Farmer Herman Faltner boasted that through his adult life he never touched water.

To quench his thirst, he drank sour wine.

Yesterday, he died of pneumonia. He was 109.

Briton Tries to Soothe Neutrals

LONDON, Jan. 31.—(AP)—Prime Minister Chamberlain assured the United States and Japan today that Britain was anxious to avoid friction or disturbance in her trade and other relations with these and with other neutrals in the war against Germany.

Addressing a national defense committee, the prime minister expressed regret that the concentration of dollar resources in America for munitions and other war supplies had forced curtailment of purchases of other products there.

One of Britain's foremost aims of the war, he said, is to return to normal trade among nations.

Of the British-Japanese dispute over the seizure by a British warship of 21 Germans from the Japanese steamer Asama Maru on Jan. 20, Chamberlain said:

"Nothing could more distress us than that the Japanese government or the people should feel that we have exercised our belligerent rights with any want of courtesy or respect for them."

Japan had formally protested to Britain over the incident and the subject now is under diplomatic discussion in Tokyo.

Chamberlain announced that a German submarine attempting to attack a convoy yesterday had been sunk by combined British air and naval forces.

The British war effort, he said, already had achieved "prodigious results," among them the stepping up of aircraft construction to a point seven times what it was in 1935-36, and the manufacturing of shells at a rate faster than in 1911.

Poultry Hatchery to Open at Sutherlin

SUTHERLIN, Jan. 31.—Mr. and Mrs. H. J. Brown, who have successfully operated a chick hatchery plant seven miles south of Roseburg for the past five years, have purchased the building formerly occupied by the Cobb brothers cheese plant with the view of installing a modern hatchery plant there. A crew of men is now busy re-roofing the building and making extensive alterations. The Browns are installing the latest type Newton still air incubator and expect to start with about 15,000 eggs capacity. Operations will begin within 30 days.

One Lawyer Loses Libel Suit Against Another

SALEM, Jan. 29.—(AP)—The state supreme court held today that F. S. McKinney, a Lake county attorney, was entitled to no damages in his \$25,000 libel suit against Forest E. Cooper, another attorney.

McKinney, administrator of an

OREGON EVENTS FLASHED FROM WIRE SERVICE

CORVALLIS, Jan. 31.—(AP)—Washington-Oregon State basketball nights are good professionally for Slats Gil but bad for his family, it seems.

Last year on the night Gil's Oregon Staters walloped the Huskies his two-year-old son came down with pneumonia. Last night the same child fell from a tricycle and fractured his left leg.

McMINNVILLE, Jan. 30.—(AP)—A missing cell lock and a loose brick in the jail wall were speedily investigated by Sheriff George Manning yesterday and an escape plot was thwarted.

Manning said a butcher knife, smuggled into the jail, had been used. The six prisoners denied knowledge of the attempt.

SALEM, Jan. 31.—(AP)—Governor Sprague denied executive clemency yesterday to Gerald Staino, Portland publisher convicted on two criminal libel charges.

On one charge Staino faces a month's term in the Clackamas county jail. His sentence on the other charge was probated for two years.

PORTLAND, Jan. 31.—(AP)—An automobile driven by W. S. Stauders of Beaverton struck and fatally injured Mrs. Vivian Kletter, 40, Portland, last night.

Lt. Earl Stanley of the sheriff's office reported the victim walked into the path of the car after alighting from a bus.

PORTLAND, Jan. 31.—(AP)—George E. Jackson has a nice, cozy little nook for the burglar who took \$1000 worth of jewelry from his apartment.

Jackson is the county jailer.

HILLSBORO, Jan. 31.—(AP)—Charles Peterson, who got his commission as postmaster at Buxton, Ore., from Postmaster General John Wamamaker in 1889, retired today under the 1940 federal retirement act.

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