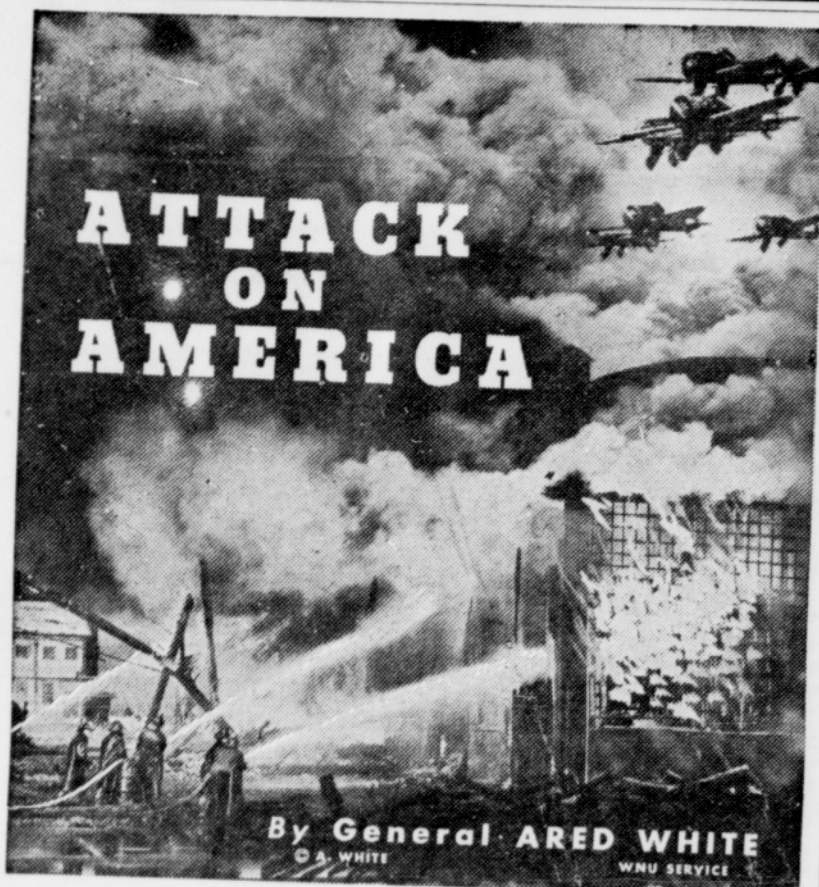




"Kelly field in flames."

INSTALLMENT FIVE

THE STORY SO FAR: Colonel Flagwill, acting chief of G-2, U. S. military intelligence department, estimated there were 200,000 European troops in Mexico preparing for an attack on the United States. Posing as Bromlitz, an American traitor captured in Paris, intelligence officer Benning went to Mexico City where he was unsuspectingly accepted as an officer by Van Hassek, leader of the foreign armed forces in Mexico. Fincke, another enemy officer,

CHAPTER VI—Continued

"I read a news flash on the President's ultimatum in the San Antonio papers last night before I took off for Washington, sir," Benning said. "If my opinion is worth anything, Colonel, Ruiz will merely stall around in a play for time. He's controlled wholly by Van Hassek."

"We're getting ready to mobilize the army and National Guard, Benning," Flagwill rubbed a tormented hand across his brow. "Gad, what a headache if it finally comes to that!"

"We'll be lucky if we get anything mobilized before Van Hassek hits us," Benning predicted. "I mean if we wait much longer."

"Wait? Wait? What else can we do but wait? The people just simply refuse to believe we're vulnerable, Benning. Late yesterday a prominent senator dressed down the President for sending an ultimatum to Ruiz. Said the present troubled time is not one to rock the boat—intimated the President was playing politics. The press gave that statesman almost as much space as it gave the ultimatum. But now you get busy and type out your report in detail, Benning. General Hague has called a General Staff conference for eight o'clock."

Benning dictated to a confidential clerk his report covering his movements and observations from the day of his arrival in Paris.

This done, he reproduced from memory the Van Hassek operations map with its numerous sinister red arrows indicating points of possible invasion of the United States by a major land force supported by warships and aircraft.

Colonel Flagwill came in from staff conference, his face gravely tense.

A stenographer brought in Benning's complete report and Flagwill seized it avidly. His brows met as he came to the scene in Van Hassek's quarters at the Palacio Nacional.

"You say, Benning, you saw a black flag with crossed sabers with your own eyes—and all the officers saluted it?" he asked sharply.

"Yes, sir."

"You didn't tell me that in your verbal account. Man, that's vital information! That same flag has been showing up in Europe among the armies of the Coalition Powers. It's also been reported in Tokio and China. Reports have leaked out that the militarists are rallying behind that flag, hell-bent on taking matters in their own hands if necessary. Of course, that's a subterfuge for Coalition governments to maneuver behind while they keep up a pretense of peace negotiations. But the presence of that flag in Van Hassek's headquarters is highly significant. I'll take your report at once to General Hague."

Benning spent morning and afternoon checking over the G-2 reports on complications and developments the world over.

Europe continued a maelstrom of rumor. Germany, Italy, Spain, and their allied Balkan states were shut off by rigid censorship. On the plea of internal necessity they had closed their frontiers to foreigners, denied aliens all use of mails and wire communications. Similar action had

been taken by Japan. Unverified reports came from China of heavy troop concentrations north of Shanghai together with concentration of transport fleets. Russia had drawn off to herself behind an unbreakable curtain of censorship. Diplomacy admittedly had broken down the world over, fretted capitals waited in the grip of fear for the next moves in a world gone mad.

Only in the United States was there tranquility left, a lack of fear and tension. G-2 reports gave the same story from over the country. There was lively interest but little tension. War was something on remote horizons, isolated by broad seas. America wanted nothing to do with it, wished only to be left alone with her peaceful intentions. Therefore no harm could come. The war scare was jingoistic poppycock promoted by militarists in their quest of heavier appropriations for armaments. Just as though recent millions pledged to them were insufficient. As for those mercenary troops in the Mexican army, our own army could gobble them up in a jiffy if they were senseless enough to start anything.

During the day Benning saw little of Flagwill. Endless staff conferences were being held, the whole War and Navy Departments a beehive of strained activity. A new plan was hot in the making, a tortured, impossible plan, out of which the best must be drawn.

It was a plan to meet the one emergency for which the United States was wholly and utterly unprepared, the emergency of sudden invasion.

At Fort Sam Houston, on the outskirts of San Antonio, Lieutenant Colonel Bart, Corps Area G-2 Chief, received a disturbing bit of information late in the day. Shortly after sunset a formation, identified as bombers, had passed over the Rio Grande at a point west of Brownsville, headed north.

The reported bomber expedition had followed a series of reports during the afternoon that had put General Brill and the whole corps area on the jagged edge. A Mexican had brought into Laredo the report that heavy motorized divisions were spending the day in screened bivouacs in Coahuila and Nueva Leon.

Half an hour later came news from Colonel Denn that was not to be ignored.

"Four flights have passed over Laredo within the past fifteen minutes," Denn said. "If my ears know an American plane these were not American. They were headed about due north, and traveling high and fast."

General Brill calmly made his own estimate of the situation. Parked in the grounds of Fort Sam Houston were the sixteen hundred shining new trucks of the Second Division, together with the division's material and supplies. The Second, alerted and with all leaves suspended, was in barracks and camp ready for emergency. At Kelly and Randolph Fields, near-by, were the planes and supplies used in training a small new army of pilots for an expanded air service.

"Have the Second Division get their trucks out of here as soon as

possible," he directed his chief of staff. "They'll also disperse their artillery. Notify the mayor of San Antonio and suggest that he have all lights cut off. Notify the flying fields of our information. Notify Eagle Pass and Fort Bliss."

He paused to receive another report from Bart.

"Sir, Third Army Headquarters just called in from Atlanta. They've a report from Charleston of bombers flying high over that city at ten-seventeen o'clock, heading north by east."

An hour later the Second Division's trucks, filled with men, were whirling out of the fort; rubber-tired artillery was shifting its light and medium cannon out of the zone of possible danger.

An aide, whom General Brill had sent out into the garrison to observe, burst into headquarters, breathless, his face stripped of color.

"Sir, airplanes!" he panted. "Flying high—but you can hear them coming!"

General Brill left his staff at their allotted jobs and went outside with his aide. The garrison was dark, headquarters worked behind drawn shades.

The roar of motors filled the air as trucks and artillery continued to roll out of the garrison. But above that he caught the sharp whine of higher-powered engines far overhead.

The 69th Anti-Aircraft Artillery had got its guns in position, but was withholding its searchlights pending development. Suddenly a small plane zoomed down over the garrison and dropped a flare that turned night into day.

Brill stood calmly observing. He knew that flare was the first violence of an invasion of the United States. He knew that in a few minutes the bombers would circle over their target of Fort Sam Houston and let drive. He knew, too, that there was nothing he could do to prevent what was to follow.

A hissing shriek caught his ears. Involuntarily he raised himself on his toes and placed his finger-tips at his ears. A savage flash of yellow flame leaped from the earth into the heavens. The ground under him shook with volcanic intensity from the savage wrath of a heavy bomb.

Long fingers of light leaped into the sky from the 69th's searchlights. A heavy demolition bomb detonated in the field from which the trucks were whirling. Brill caught, in the momentary flash of light, the grim tragedy of shattered men and material. Above the din he heard the cries of wounded men. Another bomb crashed and another. His anti-aircraft regiment began cracking, but his handful of guns were almost lost in the din of titanic thunder that crashed from the sky.

Incendiary bombs rained down, bringing an irresistible heat that ate its way into all combustible parts of barracks. General Brill turned back into his headquarters, sat down at his desk stricken by his utter helplessness, but maintaining his self-control.

His staff, their bloodless faces drawn and lined, worked coolly, outwardly oblivious to the danger. Information kept coming in, reports that had to be appraised until the whole picture of attack and disaster had been assembled and appraised as the basis for whatever later action was to be taken.

The wooden hangars at Kelly Field were in flames. Randolph Field was being hammered. San Antonio was in a mad panic which had got out of all police control. People were flooding the streets, rushing about in a mad frenzy in their efforts to escape the city. Roads were choked with passenger vehicles.

But the Van Hassek bombers were confining their major fury to Fort Sam Houston and the flying fields, which told General Brill that the attack presaged a crossing of the Rio Grande by mobile troops during the night or at daybreak.

From New Orleans and Galveston came reports of raids that were still in progress. Hundreds were killed in the streets. No other details.

Shortly after midnight the violence suddenly ceased, the bombers and their accompanying attack ships sailed off to the south. Colonel Denn called in again from Laredo. The head of a motorized column had halted at Nuevo Laredo just south of the Rio Grande. His intelligence patrols had verified this with their own eyes.

"All right, gentlemen," Brill told his staff. "Get the Second Division together as quickly as possible and start them moving south toward the Nueces River! Tell General Mole of the Second I'll meet him at Kirk in three hours with his orders for the defense of San Antonio. Get General Hague on the long-distance again while I report. We're going to do our best in a desperate situation, and I needn't tell you what we're up against! I'll be ready for your recommendations in an hour, gentlemen."

(TO BE CONTINUED)



Returned With Thanks

It was a very tense scene in the film. The audience sat enthralled. Suddenly the hero slapped the heroine in the face.

In the stunned silence which followed a little voice piped up.

"Mummy," it said, "why doesn't she slap him back like you do?"

Simple Modesty

"The best thing for you," said the doctor, "is to give up drinking and smoking, go to bed early ev-

ery night, and get up early in the morning."

"Doctor," said the patient, earnestly, "I don't feel I deserve the best. What's the second best?"

What He Thought

Mrs. Brown took her husband to a mannequin parade. An evening gown worn by an extremely pretty model attracted her attention.

"That would look nice at our party next week," she said, in the hope that her husband would buy it for her.

"Yes," he answered. "Why not invite her?"

AROUND the HOUSE Items of Interest to the Housewife

A Towel Tip—Instead of making kitchen towels roller shape, put a deep hem on each end and slip roller through. When one end becomes damp reverse the towel. Less toweling is needed and it will dry much quicker.

To prevent the odor of cooking cabbage, broccoli or onions from permeating the house, cook these vegetables uncovered with two pieces of bread on the cooking water.

Before hanging clothes on the line in freezing weather, put pins on the clothes in the house, then snap on line with double clothes pins.

Winter Hands—It is a good idea to have a bowl of fine oatmeal near at hand, and to plunge the hands and wrists in this after drying. The bowl can be kept covered, and the meal will last a long time.

Whenever possible add flavoring extracts to a food when it is cool. If the food is hot, much of the flavoring will vanish in steam. This does not apply to baked foods, however.

For washing windows—an old auto windshield wiper blade makes a good utensil to wipe water from house windows after they have been washed.

QUALITY PRESERVED IN AIR-TIGHT CANS—POPS ENORMOUS VOLUME!



Our Direction

The great thing in this world is not so much where we are, but in what direction we are moving.—O. W. Holmes.



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