

ON THE TRAIL OF THE BANDIT VILNA WITH GENERALS ZAPP AND BIRSKY

BY MONTAGUE GLASS.

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"Believe It," Says Birsky, "the Feller Ain't No Deader as Mr. Roosevelt"—Something About This Here Carranza

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"IT'S a funny thing about Vilna and the Crown Prince of Germany," Barnett Zapp, the waist manufacturer, said. "They don't get no sympathy when they die. Take a feller which if he hears of the death of a comparative stranger 85 years old, carries on so that you'd think that he was a relation not mentioned in the will, y'understand, and tell such a feller that Vilna is cut off in his prime with blood poisoning, understand me, and he receives the news like he would be managing the death-claim department of an industrial life insurance company."

"Well, what do you want President Wilson to do?" Louis Birsky, the real estate, asked. "Write letters of condolence to the feller's widders and consent to act as honorary pallbearer?" Zapp shrugged his shoulders.

"For my part, he could celebrate it with a supper at Luchow," he said. "All I ask is that he should believe it." "Believe it!" Birsky exclaimed. "Why, that feller ain't no deader as Mr. Roosevelt."

"Suppose he ain't?" Zapp replied. "Nobody claims the feller is stone dead exactly, but for the purpose of getting our soldiers back from Mexico, Birsky, I am content if he is just so-to-speak constructively dead—non pro trunk as of January 1st, 1915."

"What do you mean—get our soldiers out of Mexico?" Birsky cried. "Why, we would be laughing stocks from the whole world if we left Mexico without capturing Vilna."

"Listen, Birsky," Zapp said. "You and me are business men, ain't it? So what is the use talking nonsense—capture Vilna? With the experience that feller has got mit aliases and alibis the chances is that right now he is running a Cuban hand-made cigar store somewhere around the corner from Thirty-fourth street and Broadway and laughing himself sick over the way the New York newspapers spells the names of the Mexican towns where them poor soldiers rebich think he is hiding."

"Well, it's anyhow a whole lot more interesting to read that on Saturday, April (deleted) General Pershing has reached a point nearly (deleted) miles beyond Namiquiquipa, as that in the position between Hill 688 and Hill 8923B in the Camembert sector determined attempts was made to pierce the enemies' lines," Birsky retorted.

"Did I say it wasn't?" Zapp continued. "As a matter of fact, Birsky, I have always claimed that what the Germans and the French should ought to do is to hire a parlor car namer from the Pullman Company and put him to work on them numbered hills near Verdun. To my mind, Birsky, the reason why the Germans ain't made more

progress there is because when the Crown Prince calls up from long distance and tells Falkenhayn he should attack Hill No. 729, you couldn't blame the feller if with all the guns shooting off around him he makes it 725; and when he in his turn telephones to an assistant general who is sitting in a bomb-proof shelter, which he knows is bomb-proof only if a bomb don't hit it, y'understand, it ain't surprising that the assistant general should understand Falkenhayn to say Hill 775. The consequences is when the assistant general orders the Kaiser's Own Brandenburg Artillery to fire

Birsky, Zapp said. "You see, Birsky, the Germans ain't trying to capture Verdun, because they claim that this Verdun Geschichte has got to stop, and if the person whose business it is to capture Verdun couldn't or wouldn't do so, y'understand, that they, Germany would—and just watch their smoke."

"Does anyone claim that about capturing Vilna?" Birsky asked. "Well," Zapp replied, "as I understand the matter, our soldiers are only in Mexico because the Mexican government ain't able to capture Vilna."



"AND LAUGHING HIMSELF SICK."

-\$181,322 worth of shells at Hill 775, and a couple of weeks later he is court-martialed for practically wiping out the Kaiser's Own Lippe-Detmold Infantry, which has been holding Hill 775 ever since February, y'understand, it don't do him no good to say that he thought it was very funny at the time, but orders is orders. And yet, Birsky, if instead of numbers 729, 725 and 775, they would of got the parlor car namer to call them hills 'Elkwood, 'Danora and 'Winghurst,' we would say, for example, such a mistake would never of happened at all."

"If that's the best excuse the Germans could give for not capturing Verdun," Birsky commented, "they've got nothing on us for not capturing Vilna."

"government?" Birsky demanded. "Do you call it a government that they got it over in Mexico?"

"I don't," Zapp said, "but President Wilson does. He claims that because this here Elkan M. Carranza has made such an impression on the Mexican people and things are so orderly over there that we would formally recognize him as head of the Mexican government, and that as Elkan M. Carranza don't seem to get a nickel's worth of influence over the Mexican people and things so mixed up and at sixes and sevens over there in Mexico, we must got to send our soldiers to capture Vilna, and that after our soldiers has captured Vilna they would return to the United States and leave Mexico to it self because Elkan M. Carranza has

made such a good record in Mexico and things is so settled down over there that it wouldn't be necessary to keep our soldiers there any longer."

"You may know what you are talking about, Zapp," Birsky admitted, "but this sounds like *Kabala* to me."

"I am only telling you what my idea of the matter is," Zapp explained.

"Well, what is Elkan M. Carranza's idea of the matter?" Birsky inquired.

"He don't know whether he should ought to feel complimented or insulted," Zapp continued. "On Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays he wired President Wilson he should please call off his soldiers or would positively take such steps as he thinks proper to protect his and Mexico's interests in the matter, and on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays he writes we should keep up the good work and hopes this letter finds Mr. Wilson well as it leaves him and oblige."

"Seemingly the feller don't know his own mind at all," Birsky commented.

"It ain't that exactly," Zapp said. "He's in a way up against the same proposition like Mr. Wilson; he couldn't rely on the backing of his own party at all. For instance, if he makes a speech in which he says that if America keeps the 5000 American soldiers in Mexico there is 100,000 Mexicans stands ready to die for their country, and it wouldn't make no difference if there was 6500 American soldiers, the 100,000 Mexicans stands ready anyhow, y'understand, then the next day General Diego Aogorman says the Americans is the best friends Mexico has got and that come one, come all, every loyal Mexican should give 'em a good, old-fashioned Mexican welcome. On the other hand, if Carranza makes a speech in which he says that, speaking for the Mexican people, he extends the long arm of co-fellowship to the President of the United States, y'understand, General Geofredo Maclemorez says: 'Yow, he speaks for the Mexican people! If he would speak what the Mexican people thinks about President Wilson it would make what the German-American Truth Society thinks sound like engrossed resolutions bound in watered silk-lined Morocco leather with President Wilson's name stamped on it in gold letters.'"

"Then, after all, you couldn't blame the feller," Birsky said, "nor President Wilson neither. No doubt if they was allowed to play their own hands without remarks from the Kibbitzers,* they would of done pretty good."

"Well, I'll tell yer," Zapp said. "Politics is a very similar game like playing pinochle oder skat in a coffee house. A feller who plays such a game must got to expect there would be Kib-

bitzers, and if he lets their remarks rattle him, y'understand, he's got no business to sit in at all. President Wilson is like a whole lot of fellers. He starts in with good cards and instead of playing them like a *Mensch*, y'understand, he considers first should he come trump, y'understand, and he's got his thumb and finger on the ace of trump, when he thinks why should he give his hand away like that. He then gets an idea it would be a good thing to lead a small diamond, and he's just about to play it when he remembers that he read somewhere in Hoyle where Hoyle says you should never

he might just so well have shecked it to 'em from the start, and I bet yer he would act the same way again in Mexico."

"At that I think Mr. Wilson is trying to do the right thing in Mexico," Zapp interrupted.

"Sure, I know," Birsky agreed, "but the trouble with Mr. Wilson is he is so busy remembering to play the game according to Hoyle that he don't notice it when Germany and Mexico deals themselves aces from the bottom of the deck. If you're a President oder a King, Zapp, the thing to do is to see that the other feller plays according to

the rules, whether you yourself stick to them or not."

"I don't know where you read that, Birsky," Zapp said, "but a President or a King who tried to do business on that basis couldn't expect to get a better rating as M. to P. third credit. But what is the use of talking so poetical, Birsky? When you are dealing with a proposition like Mexico, rules don't figure at all. As a rule, Birsky, Presidents are elected for a term of years, aber in Mexico they go out of office at unequal intervals, feet first, and looking very natural, if the bullets happen to hit 'em below the neck. As a rule, Birsky, generals in an army used to be colonels, and before that majors, and before that captains, aber in Mexico most of the generals used to be horse thieves, and before that sneak thieves, and before that nobody knows what they was. As a rule, Birsky, a dollar is worth a hundred cents or ten dimes, aber in Mexico the currency is so rotten that if you owe a feller a dollar and pay him a dollar, he practically got a new claim against you for a dollar and a quarter. And if you want to hear any more rules that don't apply to Mexico, Birsky, you would got to call

him, Birsky, for the present we are giving Carranza the benefit of the doubt, and if he continues to act as such we may go on recognizing him as provisional President."

"What do you mean—provisional President?" Birsky asked.

"A provisional President," Zapp explained, "is a President that gets his job through a revolution. He acts as President until an election is held, provided he lives that long. There's a whole lot of honor attached to it in Mexico. Every time a provisional President starts to go out of his house, Birsky, he receives a salute of twenty-one guns—sometimes fifty-one guns, depending on the number of people laying for him, so you can imagine what the front of a provisional President's house looks like, Birsky. If they don't get him with the first salute, it must cost him a fortune for window glass alone."

"Then if you would ask me as a real estate and insurance broker, Zapp, Birsky said, "I should say that a provisional President was, taking it all in all, an extra hazardous occupation."

"He ain't a sprinkled risk exactly," Zapp agreed.

"Then what does he want the job for?" Birsky asked.

"Well," Zapp said, "there's big money in it if he can get it deposited outside the country."

"I should think he would consider his health before money," Birsky said.

"Maybe he does," Zapp said, "but you take one of these provisional Presidents, Birsky, and as a general thing, he's a good family man and believes in leaving his wives and families well provided for."

"So a provisional President is like that, is he?" Birsky said.

"I don't say they all are," Zapp declared, "but when you recognize a provisional President, it don't do no harm to have had eyesight, Birsky, because in that case, what you don't like about him, Birsky, you could wink at."

*Kibbitzer—An onlooker at a game of cards.



"HE RECEIVES A SALUTE OF 21 GUNS."

Sketches From Life, by Temple.



"In Charlie's"



"Smallest I Got"



"Tapping The Till"