

Ace of Woods Flirts With Death

BY DEWITT HARRY.
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THE high climber is the ace of the woods.

His life and limbs are in imminent peril all the time he is working. Necessarily he must labor alone. Like the diver and the steep-jack, his job is an industrial "forlorn hope." Like them, too, he has to be an all-around master of the requirements of his work. He has to set the ponderous and complicated tackle and guy ropes with which the "spaw" tree is fitted to enable it to stand and to drag to the landing point the reluctant heavy logs in its tributary territory. This part of the work alone is well nigh a trade in itself, and having to do it while clinging buglike, at masthead height by no means eases the task.

Master of Ax and Saw.

The exertion he has to make is exhausting in the extreme. Burdened with ax, saw and wedges, limbs weighted with heavy log irons, carrying the climbing spurs, he jerks and lifts himself hundreds of feet under a strain that would probably bring collapse to a record-breaking college athlete.

Then, too, the high climber has to be past-master of saw and ax. When the lofty tree bows its proud head to him one may be sure that the executioner's work has been done with the fewest possible strokes. In high-cut form he must also possess the craft of the ground feller. He must accurately gauge the "lean" of the tree and the direction and pressure of the wind.

On the ground a feller can run if the "lean" or a change of wind deflects the falling giant from the undercut—always made to direct the fall—and intervening trees may check the crashing doom, but up at his lonely elevation the high climber has only his eye and hand, sixth sense and quick wit, to save himself from almost inevitable death should his arboreal victim fall amuck. In any event, when the top falls the "stump" swings and weaves with great violence and the climber must hold with tooth and spur, and this experience anywhere from 150 to 250 feet above ground is racking in the extreme. Not infrequently the climber is badly nauseated and cases of unconsciousness have occurred occasionally during the shaking period while the tree is in its death shudder.

Best of Trees for Lead.

The high climber is a specialist in every way. His profession is one created by the exigencies of logging under the peculiar conditions encountered in the Pacific northwest. Here the stand of timber is exceptionally dense, the trees of huge girth and lofty height. These forest giants literally weigh tons, and when they are felled the problem is to handle them on the ground. This is where the high climber comes in. The lead trees are particular ones selected only after careful inspection of the tract to be logged. They must be of firm foundation, strong enough to stand terrific strain, and tall enough to handle all of the logs in a large acreage.

This tree once selected, generally in the center of the tract, all of the rest of the logs are "yarded" to it; that is, it is the central point and the sections of the fallen trees, after being trimmed and cut for the sawmills, are hauled there, assembled, and then sent on the next stage of their journey which is only completed when they are sawn and built into the structures of which they become an integral part. Thus the lead tree may be the initial stage on the trip of the log to Europe during which time it undergoes a number of manufacturing processes, much handling and thousands of miles of travel.

Knights of Woods Dare Death.

The fallers working on the ground are generally paired off, the teams taking their trees in turn and sending them crashing to earth. In this skilled labor they first undercut the great tree and then by means of wedges can usually direct its fall and get clear in time. This only serves to accentuate the danger of the climber's work, for he has no chance to take advantage of the artificial aids possible when working on the ground.

Harry Veness tells of trying a climb at one time when he visited one of the Sunset camps at Sufico near Raymond, Wash. Veness went there in the course of his work as a field man for the Loyal Legion of Loggers and Lumbermen, and found Ed Kendall employed as climber. Kendall, it might be noted, is a college man and one of the outstanding figures in the woods, and most of the high climbers will be found to be men of marked intelligence. Veness donned his heavy and complicated tackle, and though he is quite an athlete and was in perfect trim, could not get up more than a few feet. The resultant racking of bone and muscle left a memento of pain for hours following his attempt that he afterwards characterized as insupportable.

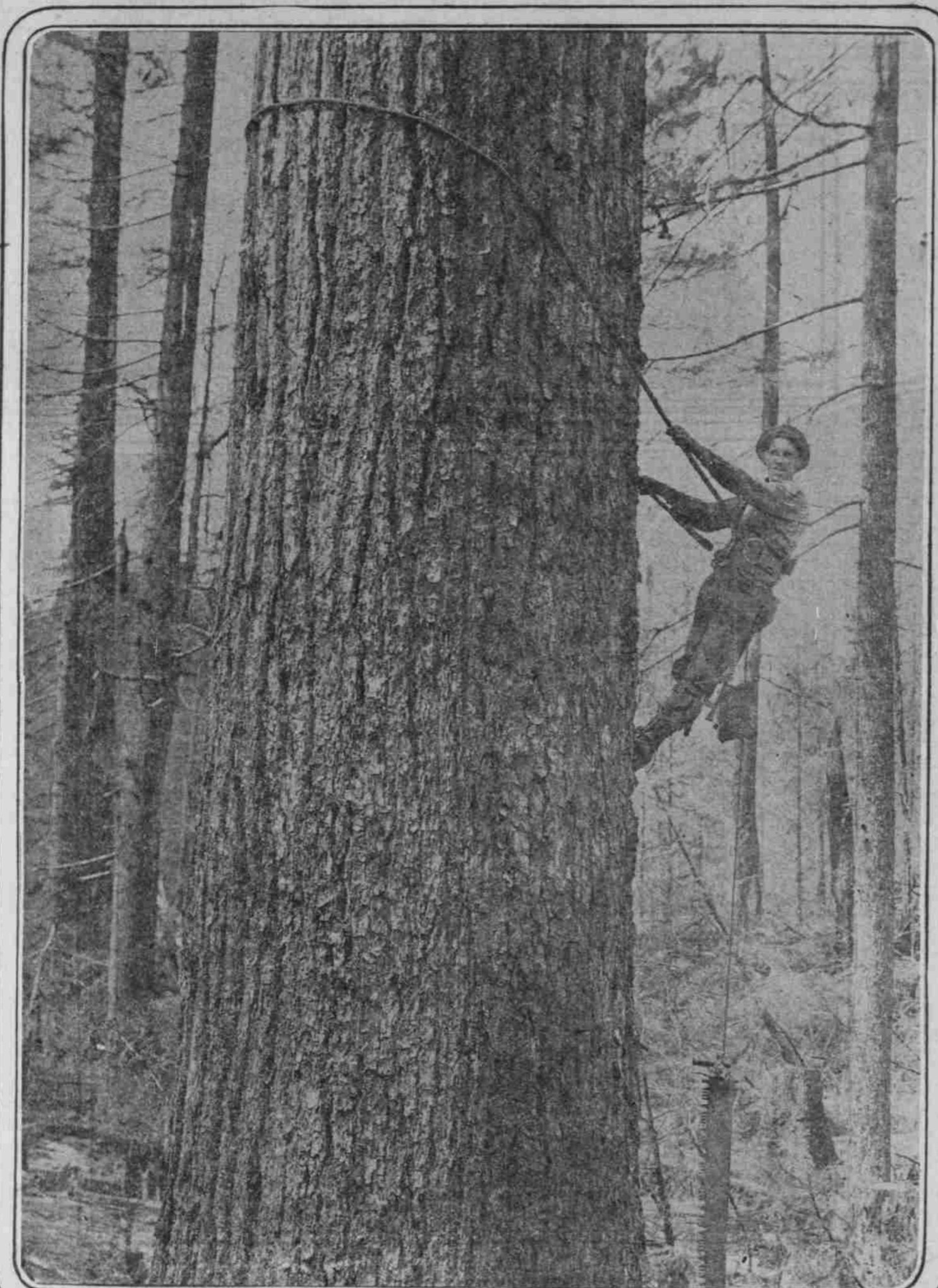
Human Squirrel Seals Trunk.

The exceptional pictures shown with this article were made near Knappa, Or., at the camp of the Big Creek Logging company, and show Axel Hallgren in action. The tree that Hallgren scaled that day must have been about 300 feet high, for it is 240 feet from the ground to the point where he is shown cutting off the top. It was six feet in diameter 10 feet from the ground. This tree was an unusually high one, for the top is usually cut off these high lead trees at from 160 to 200 feet from the ground. In his work the high climber starts at the bottom, climbs to the first limb and cuts it off with saw or ax, depending on the size of the limb, and then climbs on to the next one, and so on up the trunk. Thus it is easily seen that the ease of the job depends on the number and size of the limbs.

Axel Hallgren is such a man as you often read about in fiction. He has followed the woods for most of his life and is about 50 years of age. He weighs 160 pounds and stands slightly over six feet tall. He is one of the highest paid men in the employ of his company and his only duty is to climb.

On his trip up the tree the climber

High Climber Is Industrial Forlorn Hope. He Labors Alone, and Encounters Numerous Dangers



Photos © Krister

Axel Hallgren Ready to Start on Perilous Journey.

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takes with him an ax, a saw and a water bag. He is equipped with spurs somewhat like those worn by linemen, but they are longer and sharper, for they must penetrate the bark and hold firmly in the green wood underneath. He also uses a rope to assist in his climb, long enough to throw around the trunk of the tree. In this case it was about 20 feet long. With this rope about the trunk and his spurs set in the wood, he sticks on the side far from the ground like a woodpecker and looks off the limbs. Occasionally a limb is missed or does not fall completely away. One limb can be noticed on Hallgren's tree clinging onto the side far below the insect-like figure of the climber.

In doing this job it took Hallgren about one and a half hours to climb the tree, cut the top off and get back to earth. It is an interesting sight to watch a climber come down one of these trees. In this case Hallgren resembled nothing more than a red squirrel and it was estimated that he took him less than a minute from top to bottom. This particular tree was used as a high lead for six weeks and about 50 acres logged to it. When the tree is stripped a pilot block is set on the top and the tackle strung from here to all points in the area it is to handle. The logs are then dragged in over the rough ground. This method of logging has been perfected in the western Pacific slope as the most efficient. In the camps

in the middle west, around the Great Lakes and in the New England states they used to skid their logs over the ice in the winter and then haul them on runners or drive them out on the rivers when the spring freshets came. In eastern Oregon in the yellow pines they use what is called the "big wheel" system of logging, picking up the logs in bunches and hauling them away by horses, but none of these methods would do here. This section is damp, rough and the timber is exceptionally heavy. This necessitated the perfection of the high lead system with an auxiliary delivery to the streams by means of logging railways, huge motor trucks or caterpillar tractors.

Thrills Common in Climber's Work.

After the pilot block is set the climber is hauled up and down by a donkey engine and the insouciant manner with which they soar and descend is unforgettable. The necessary nerve is not due to obtuseness, as the work cannot be done except by a man of more than average bodily and mental development. Injuries in the calling are, of course, common and death all too frequently takes place.

In one case the climber lost his spur grip in some unaccountable manner and becoming reversed in his belt hung head downward at a sickening height. No other man in the camp being able to climb, a fellow worker in a near-by camp was sent for. But, woods communication is slow at best and when the newcomer finally reached the sufferer exhaustion had done its work and he was beyond aid.

Just last April Jack Olson, high climber for the Saginaw Timber company at their camp near Vesta, Wash. near Aberdeen, lost his grip on his safety line and fell 50 feet to the ground, dying an hour later. Olson was 45 years of age, a skilled man at

his work, and had followed it for several years.

Very often nothing but the operator's coolness and presence of mind saves his life and the unprecedented nature of the work occasions many instances of self-preservation that are consummately thrilling. One of these took place when, at a height of 200 feet, the tree commenced to split downward. In either ground or lofty felling this is one of the most

dangerous breaks of a falling tree. Usually the undercut prevents it, but sometimes a sudden gust of wind or an extra lean in the tree, or a foreign streak in the grain of the wood will cause the tree to fall before the cut has reached the calculated breaking point. Up high the result is easily predicted. As the split downward it opens and the climber's circling rope, attached to his broad

MANUEL DE VALLE, 176 YEARS OLD, CHIEF OF METHUSELAHS

Most Ancient Man of Authentic Longevity has Good Proof of Date of Birth Against Other Contenders.

"How old was Ann?"

No puzzle of the years has created more speculation than the age of this spinster, and she is still an enigma unless she has concluded to hobble to the polls and cast a vote.

But that was many moons ago, and she may before this be running a "hoss race" with Guler's has-beens. Too bad Sir William has gone to his reward without a passing notice to the record-breaker for age under modern chronology.

From the mass of speculation that attaches to longevity, from the myriad nostrums that were bottled at Ponce de Leon's spring of eternal youth; from the life that is so precious and so squandered in this restless age of thrift and pleasure, how illuminating are the data gleaned from medical press by the International Medical and Surgical Survey.

Manuel de Valle of Menlo Park, a suburb of San Francisco, is reported to be the oldest man who has satisfactory proof of the exact date of his

birth. His birth certificate, it is stated, signed by the chief magistrate, gives the date of his debut into the cold, hard world as November 24, 1745, which makes him 176 years old.

It has been found in general research work on centenarians that the average age is about 102-1-5 years. Of the males, the average age is 102-1-5 years, respective ages of 108 to 109 years. The average age for females is about 102-1-5 years, the respective ages ranging from 103 to 109 years. In many cases verification has been made by baptismal certificates or other records.

Elie Metchnikoff records the extreme old age reached by man as being 185 years in "The Prolongation of Life." Kentigern, the founder of the Cathedral of Glasgow, Scotland, known by the name of St. Mungo, died at the age of 185 years on January 5, 696.

Eighty Minutes Later Tree Stripped, Climber 200 Feet From Ground.

belt, is expanded by the awful weight of the falling tree top.

In the case in question the climber saw the split start. Luckily he was using a hemp climbing rope. Instantly he dropped, but the split pursued. Then he cut his rope and, desperately clinging by knees and spur, with one hand he coolly dropped into the widening fissure his axe and wedges, with the other hand holding to the broken edge of the split. When the top finally broke and the huge silver sprung back to place, the tools kept it open and the man thrust one arm and leg through the opening, and, thus supported, nonchalantly awaited relief.

Still more moving is another similar episode—an exhibition of presence of mind that would be hard to overmatch. Again the tree started to split. The climber was hanging in such fashion that his rope circled upward as in the illustration accompanying this article. To drop he

would have to first free it and for this there was no time. His position, however, did give him opportunity for a wide axe swing, so, leaning far back, with life and wife and children in the mighty stroke, he cut through the rope and also sank the axe so deeply into the tree that with one hand on its handle and the other on the top of the stump he was able to hold against the vibrations of the tree. Then he climbed on to the stump, applied his rope and descended to the ground. The only comment he made was an eloquent remark in regard to losing his pipe, which was shaken loose by the swinging tree.

Humorous incidents also arise. Once a climber dropped successfully his axe and saw, being compelled each time to make an 150-foot descent to retrieve them. On the second trip General Dawes himself could have taken a lesson.

"But anyway, to be a climber, as Kipling remarks, you 'have to be a man, my son!'"

other cases of death at ages between 147 and 172 years.

A still more authentic case is that of Drakenberg of Norway, born in 1626 and dying in 1772, at the age of 146 years. He was a sailor for 51 years and held captive 17 African pirates for 15 years. Thomas Parr, a poor Shropshire peasant, died in London at the age of 152 years and 9 months.

Alexander Graham Bell states that, out of 5797 persons included in the statistics, the age at death is stated in only 2945 cases. Out of this number, seven are recorded as having reached the age of 95 years or more, three dying at the age of 95, two at 96, one at 97, none at 98 and one at 101.

And then again, it is claimed that the oldest person in the world is a Kurd named Torah who asserts he has lived for more than 150 years. He may soon receive a special pension and food allowance from the French government. Torah's statement as to his advanced age is borne out by numerous persons who are more than 70 years old who declare that when they were mere youngsters in knee breeches, Torah was aged, gray and bent.

The recent world war scattered his

friends. He is now penniless and dependent on charity. Although his mind is considerably hazy regarding events of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, he is reported to have followed recent history closely. By declaring to the French officers in Constantinople that he always prophesied a French victory, he immediately won their hearts and good will. He then proceeded to pocket small sums of money with which to buy a month's supply of split peas, fruit and "Turkish delight," the only food he has eaten since he passed the century mark. Incidentally, Torah then stopped washing himself.