

ATTACK ON AMERICA

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INSTALLMENT SIXTEEN

THE STORY SO FAR: More than 200,000 foreign troops secretly assembled in Mexico by Van Haskel suddenly invaded the United States. Vastly superior in numbers and equipment to the American forces which opposed them, Van Haskel's troops pushed relentlessly

forward. The U. S. army was not prepared for this sudden attack, and could only retreat in the face of overwhelming force. While an American spy in Mexico City, Benning had gained the confidence of two enemy officers, Fincke and Bravot. Weeks later he unexpectedly met

Fincke in Washington, and continued to pose as his friend. Benning accompanied him on a boat loaded with dynamite bound for the Panama Canal. On board he aroused the suspicions of Schmolz, the skipper.

Now continue with the story.

CHAPTER XVII—Continued
Benning went to bed after watching for several hours and managed to sleep through part of the day.

From his porthole, Benning saw flying fish scurry out of the course of the ship in late afternoon, which confirmed fast progress south. With evening he caught the blink of distant light myriads on the coast line. He explored the possibility of escape in the night by whaleboat, but concluded he stood slender chance of success in such an exploit. At dark he resumed his reconnaissance of the deck in his effort to locate Bravot.

Schmolz' stateroom was empty at nine o'clock, again at ten. On his third trip down the boat deck, Benning found that half a dozen men had assembled, including Bravot and Schmolz. He stationed himself again in the shadows of a whaleboat and waited. An hour passed without development, then the group fled out and went to the rail to strain their eyes into the starlit night.

One of them set off a flare, and ten minutes later a second flare. Benning's ears caught the distant hum of an airplane. The sound grew in volume until a plane zoomed overhead and circled to a stop.

The engines of the ship slowed down. Four men lowered a boat. Bravot shook hands with Schmolz and climbed over the rail to disappear down the ladder. A few minutes later Benning caught the flash of oars in the starlight. The plane burst into a roar of sound, lifted into the night, and streaked off into the void whence it had come.

Benning returned heavily to his cabin. Bravot's departure by plane clearly meant that the ship would not pause at Tampico or Vera Cruz. But at least, Benning consoled himself, he could play a stiffer game on deck with the French renegade out of the way.

Somehow, in the tense days ahead, he would find a solution to this hideous problem, he vowed. If nothing better, a chance at the radio room whence he could flash a warning code to the coast artillery forts and naval base guarding the Canal from Limon Bay.

During the next few days, while the dynamite ship ate up the long miles to Panama, Benning carefully went over the vessel and watched his chances. Land had vanished, escape by boat he had dismissed finally as out of the question.

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

"You been around here enough, mister," Smidt 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 hatchet-faced steward slouched past 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.

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 Gatun Locks.

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—Halt American freighter now approaching Limon Bay with cargo of high explosives. General plot in effect to wreck Panama Canal. Instant action imperative.—Benning, Major G-2"

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!" Smidt exploded as Benning stepped into the little room.

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

Smidt scowled at Benning's leveled pistol and yielded with a sullen nod of his head. Benning strapped the fellow's hands behind his back and forced him to stretch out face downward on the floor. Sitting down calmly, Benning started putting his message into Panama. He had buzzed out the words, "C. G. Panama—Halt"—when a voice challenged from the door.

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

Schmolz was framed in the door,

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

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

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

"Got here—just in time—didn't I!" Schmolz bellowed. "Not for nothing—did I have you watched!"

Schmolz' beefy fists pummeled emphasis to his words, flailing Benning's face and head.

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

Benning was driven to the rail. He gripped the rail with his hands and held tenaciously against the fatal plunge into the Atlantic. One of his assailants clutched his legs, an-



"So my ship has a new radio man."

other 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 bellowed an order before the knife could reach the flesh and bone of Benning's fingers.

"Stop it! 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 stateroom—where he can think—until—boom!"

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 winch sang, 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 pain-racked 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 fine snarl. Looks like curtains, doesn't it?"

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

pered in his ears. He guessed that the dynamite ship had come to the locks and was being made fast to the electric mules that would tow her.

By now Schmolz and his henchmen must have abandoned the ship, after setting detonators in motion for the explosion, he reasoned. Innocent hands were seeing the vessel through, a hundred seamen whose lives would roar into nothingness 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 hushed 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 mulled through priceless 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 hold. 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 stout 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 heave.

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!"

Under the soft light of a new moon, as he ran to the rail of the ship, Benning saw the thick concrete walls of the locks. Beyond were the rows of squad tents of an emergency guard detachment. Ahead the electric locomotives tugged at heavy cables.

Benning drove the force of his lungs along the deck in warning to the crew and climbed down the ladder, closely followed by Grimes. At coming abreast of the top of the walls, he leaped, propelling himself outward with his legs, and landed on chest and stomach. For several moments he lay stunned, then staggered to his feet and ran toward the tents. Sentries barked a challenge, a figure in pajamas burst out of a tent to level a vibrant voice.

"I'm the commanding officer—what's all this yelling about!"

Benning panted: "I'm Major Benning, of G-2. The cargo of this ship is dynamite—it will detonate at any minute! Get everyone clear here!"

The commander swung on his heels with cool promptness and began shouting orders. "All out! On the run! Leave everything behind! Get moving to Mendi—on the wagon-road—never mind formation!"

There was intensity rather than excitement in the officer's voice.

Benning saw that the crew was bursting from the doomed ship. Some, in their panic, leaped into the water of the narrow locks, others made the long leap to the top of the locks. He ran after the officer, Grimes trailing. A puffing sprint brought them to the railroad grade that led into Mendi. Another long run and the officer halted in a deep cup in the Sierra Quebrancha. He commanded his soldiers to scatter into the foothills.

Two miles lay behind. Half an hour had passed, Benning judged. The captain introduced himself, Marlin. He began asking questions, suddenly suspicious that he might have been tricked away from his post of duty. Benning quickly established his identity.

"But how do you know the ship's cargo is—?"

Marlin cut off his query as his cheeks caught the peculiar stir of air as from a gust of wind. Benning's hands drove to cup his ears. He felt himself pitched forward on his face. The earth heaved violently, his head rang with the pain of the volcanic might of the explosion that filled the world. All existence had been reduced to roaring, crashing, maddening bedlam.

A clap of thunder shattered his thoughts. It crashed out of distant hills and jungles far down the Isthmus from Gatun Lake. Benning halted. There came a second crash, a third, a fourth. The detonations followed one another successively, within the limits of a few minutes

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Kathleen Norris Says:

Live a Minute at a Time

(Bell Syndicate—WNU Service.)



To live each moment perfectly, to round it out so that it contains all that it can hold of love and service is to find your vague whirling fears strangely dissipated. You can live that one moment without them, and when it comes you can live the next.

By KATHLEEN NORRIS

THERE is no greater philosophy in the world than the philosophy that teaches us to live a minute at a time. There is no surer cure for doubt, anxiety or despair. There is no quicker road to security and happiness.

I say "security" because of late months we have been substituting that word for our old supreme goal, "happiness." We pitifully want security. Not wealth, titles, jewels, gaiety, travel. The world's bitter woes and bitter needs have swept away those old weak desires. We want security now; security for everyone. Security to have an untroubled home, though it be only of four rooms, and a lamp by which to read books, and a few beloved faces near us. Security to go to church on Sunday, to have simple food on the table three times a day, to teach our children what we believe of honesty and forgiveness and brotherhood, and to launch them simply and quietly into simple and quiet lives of their own.

Security for All.

We want everyone to have this; not just Americans, not just our friends. We want security for obscure Chinese women, pattering along beside their muddy canals with their open little baskets that hold life-giving rice, and with a clean bit of rag in which to wrap the precious scrap of pork. We want security for East Indian women, slipping through narrow streets and jangling bazaars, pushed aside by the arrogant cattle they hold sacred, obliged to hide everything of their beauty and youth except their dark eyes, stooping eagerly to drink the filthy sacred waters of the Ganges in which bodies and sewerage float together.

We want it—we women of America are begging God each day to grant it, to show us how to hold it!—we want security for women in the Balkans, in the jungles of Africa, in the hungry oppressed countries of northern Europe, in the poorest slums of the great cities. Just security!

It may be a very low roof, a platter of macaroni, a bowl of potage, a dish of Irish boiled potatoes, it may be the goulash of Hungary, the borscht of Russia, the rice of the Orient—nothing more. But after this war, with its fears piled upon fears, is over, let us begin to spread humble peace, humble plenty in every town and village and crossroads hamlet of the world, and let us gladly sacrifice half of what we have, two-thirds of what we have, for the divine knowledge that want and hate and fear are lessened in this world, and that fear and war have gone with them.

Remedy for Worries.

Things aren't going, in these days, the way many of us would have them go. Some of us feel that a very little spent upon peace departments will pay us better than a great deal spent upon war. But if you feel dissatisfied, if you feel restless and fearful, confused by conflicting arguments and assertions, un-

SECURITY

We want security now; security for everyone . . . an untroubled home, church on Sunday, simple food to eat, schools for our children . . . It's true, isn't it? And to discover how to obtain this security, read Kathleen Norris' up-to-date article.

able to believe all the badness that is floating about as current gossip, then turn to the age-old wisdom of the great spiritual leaders who gave us this theory of living each tiny space of time only for itself, who revealed to us the magic of "the sacrament of the moment."

To live each moment perfectly, to round it out so that it contains all that it can hold of love and service is to find your vague whirling fears strangely dissipated. You can live that one moment without them, and when it comes you can live the next. Through all life's changes this one simple little rule will still carry you safely; nothing can disturb it. No yesterday, with all its mistakes; no tomorrow with all its imagined pitfalls. Just this one moment to make as happy as you can for everyone about you.

We laugh at the small child who anticipates trouble. We quote with amusement the soliloquy of the New England woman on a Sunday night long ago. "Tomorrow Monday and that big wash, Tuesday all my ironing, Wednesday this big place to clean! Half the week gone and nothing done!"

Banish Fear.

But when it comes to nations borrowing trouble and imagining enemies there is no laughter. We take that very seriously. Too seriously. Stop taking it seriously this moment. Do what you can in all charity and loyalty, do exactly what your own conscience and knowledge of events dictates. Don't worry because it isn't more, and because perhaps—and maybe—and possibly—and they say—and someone heard—

Cut that all out. Banish it by the magic of the sacrament of the moment. The history of the past is full of strange twists, surprises, reversals, changes. The history we are living today will be. Nothing comes out as our fanciful fears construct it, and the only thing to fear is fear. Because nations have made mistakes and have been misled doesn't mean they will always make mistakes, always be misled. Sometimes they reform; sometimes they come to a new birth.

We were the rebel nation once, outcast colonials without grace or dignity, our decent blood thinned by the flotsam and jetsam, the leers and dregs of the old world's vagrants and criminals. We survived it; we didn't do so badly in making ourselves promptly into the greatest nation of the world. France had her dark hour, religion destroyed, intelligence destroyed, calendar destroyed, the very walls of her Capitol spattered high with blood. Only 140 years ago.

Decency, Civilization to Come Back. All central Europe swarmed with homeless, desperate outlaws for 20 years after the Hundred Years war. And so she will again. But time heals, dictators die in one way or another, decency and civilization creep back, and presently the ships begin to move again, and the returning travelers begin to tell us how things are going over there.

And this time we won't laugh at their debased currency, take advantage of their ruin. This time we'll rebuild together. We'll live a minute at a time, making the perfect moments run together.

Things to do



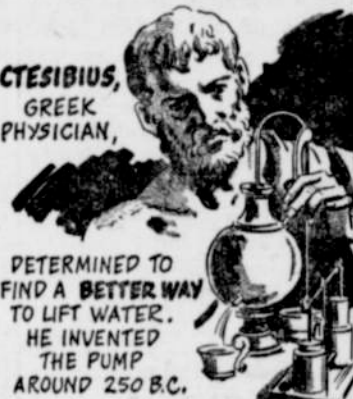
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That Nagging Backache

May Warn of Disordered Kidney Action

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