

the dark ships

BY HULBERT FOOTNER

A young federal agent, finds his beloved Janet, a gun and Prescott Fanning's freshly shot body locked in a cabin on Fanning's yacht at Absalom's Harbor, Md. Finding her nearby in a disused liner, Neill joins Mark Bonnier, local investigator. Neill learns Janet didn't shoot the flashy swindler, but has to find out who did to save her. He suspects a queer little Eyster, who hated Fanning, and Ira Buckless, Fanning's hulking bodyguard who is arrested, but both have alibis. Neill also distrusts Kettering, a lawyer down from Baltimore to fish. Neill is in a tight spot, himself suspected by Bonnier.

Chapter 36

Sparring With Buckless

DURING the short walk to the entrance, Neill had to do some hard thinking. He knew that he was about to be arrested. Matingly had the ear at the door. When he was arrested, what would Janet do? He must make a getaway. In the lobby they ran into Brager, the yacht broker, coming in from the street. "Here you are," he said. "I want down to the filling station after you and they said you had come here. There's something I want to tell you that I forgot."

"What's that?" asked Bonnier. "When Buckless and I motored down to Absalom's we stopped at the hotel in King's Green for a beer. It was then 9:45."

"Much obliged," said Bonnier. "This was a very small piece of information for the man to chase them around town and Neill wondered what was behind it. Brager wanted to shake hands on parting from them. When he took Neill's hand he pressed a piece of paper in it, and Neill palmed it. While Brager was shaking hands with Bonnier, Neill coolly turned his back and read:

Buckless just sent me a phone message to tell you to talk to him before you did anything.

Brager left them. Neill, having crumpled the paper in his hand, stood with bent head trying to dope out the note's significance.

"Come on," said Bonnier, beginning to show impatience. "Neill made up his mind to see what there was in it. 'Okay,' he said, following Bonnier.

The ride back to Absalom's was not a pleasant one. Bonnier's face was a study now. He seemed more sorry than sore, and that made Neill feel like hell. Bonnier rode with Matingly and Neill had the back seat to himself. There was no talk on the way.

When they got out in front of Longoep's store, Neill faced Bonnier frankly. "Mark," he said. "I've got a favor to ask of you."

"What's that?"

"I want to talk to Buckless alone. We could see last night that he wasn't telling the whole truth, and I think maybe I can get something more out of him."

This request surprised Bonnier. He thought it over, stroking his chin. "All right," he said at last. "Matingly will row you out."

Bonnier spoke quietly to the constable and went into the store to receive the reports that had come in during his absence.

The Threat To Janet

His words in the ear of Matingly smoothed the way for Neill. The constable rowed him out to the yacht, and he and his mate remained on deck while Neill descended the fo'c'sle hatch.

Ira Buckless was sitting on a seaman's chest in the half-dark and stifling forepeak. He looked up eagerly as Neill started down the ladder, and he sat down beside him. The hatch fell full on his flat and brutalized face with its ugly grin.

"So you come," he said. "How did you get word to me?"

"When I heard you went to town I got my lawyer to telephone Brager. I didn't want you to do anything foolish until you see me."

"Well, what do you want?"

Buckless scowled. "That cop guy will be listening on deck. Sit here beside me, and keep your voice low."

This was the man who had tried to kill him two nights before, but Neill wasn't going to refuse a dare from him. He had his gun in his pocket. He sat down beside him.

Said Buckless with a hard grin: "I only have to say one word and they could go get the girl. Room 212 on the Lincoln."

Neill said nothing.

"If I had said that word last night, she would be locked up now instead of me."

"Why didn't you?"

"I can still do it. But first-off I wanted to see you."

"Well, I'm open for an offer," Buckless hesitated.

Neill, with the object of putting him at ease, said as one crook to another, "Look, how did you get on so quick, anyhow?"

"That's easy," said Buckless. "All day Tuesday I was trailing you around Baltimore by Fanning's orders. When I seen you get on the bus for Absalom's, I let you go, because I didn't know then that the boss was at Absalom's. It

wasn't till after seven that evening that he called up and told me he was there. So then I gets a car as quick as I could and drives down to see what you was up to."

"And the night you visited the yacht and discovered that Fanning was dead and the loot gone?"

Buckless scowled at him. "I'll keep my trap shut about the girl if you go 50-50," he growled.

"Fifty-fifty what?" asked Neill.

"Ah!" growled Buckless. "Don't try to play innocent with me. I mean Fanning's stuff."

"It hasn't been in my hands."

"You lie! What did you kill him for if it wasn't for that?"

"I didn't kill him."

Buckless' upper lip turned back like a dog's. "I'm damned well sick of sitting in this hole and I'm not going to waste words with you! You got my proposition. Take it or leave it. I've only got to call that cop down here."

Neill began to sweat gently. If he did satisfy Buckless that he was telling the truth, Buckless would betray Janet anyhow out of sheer disappointment. His only course was to play a double game with the brute.

"Well, I see it is no use trying to lie to you," he said grinning.

"That's what a fellow says when he's getting ready to lie some more!" muttered Buckless.

"It wasn't all lies, that I told you, I didn't kill Fanning, so help me God! I was ready to do it, but the job was done when I got aboard the yacht."

"Expect me to believe that!"

"You can take it or leave it," said Neill. "My cards are on the table now." He went on to give Buckless an exact and truthful account of the finding of Fanning's body. In spite of himself, Buckless was convinced by the wealth of detail Neill related.

"You've Got No Choice"

"I RECKON Fanning was smoked just a couple of minutes before I came aboard," said Neill. "His body was warm. I reckon I scared away the killer by my coming because he didn't get the loot. I got it."

"What was it?" demanded Buckless. "In what form, I mean? What had Fanning turned it into?"

"I'm not going to tell you that. Something easy to carry around."

"How much is it?"

"Over a thousand G's."

"Oh, God!" growled Buckless. "What have you done with it?"

"If I told you that, you could give me and the girl up, and get away with the whole of it. You and me have got to trust each other for the present."

"Trust!" said Buckless. "I'd trust you as far as I would a rattlesnake! You fooled me once already."

"You've got no choice now," said Neill. "If you betray me or the girl nobody in the world will ever know where the stuff is hid."

Buckless scowled and muttered, "Rubbed his bristly chin. 'Well... what's your proposition?'"

Neill relaxed a little and wiped his face. "We've got to find the murderer," he said. "When we produce the murderer we can all go free and enjoy the stuff."

"Well, who was it?"

"That's what I was hoping you could tell me. You know all about Fanning's life, who had it in for him, and all."

Buckless shook his head dumbly. "The man who did it was concealed aboard the yacht," said Neill. "He came down from Baltimore."

"A Baltimore man?"

"Can you supply any Baltimore clues?"

Buckless shook his head again. "Thinking was a hard business for him. The boss, he kept me out of his Baltimore deal," he muttered. "He must have had a partner or partners in that deal."

"If he did, he never let me meet them. He kept me out of Baltimore until he wanted the yacht."

"Who gave him the lead that took him to Baltimore? Think back."

Buckless could only shake his head. "He was already there when I first heard of it. But I knew it was something big, something classy."

"How did you know that?"

"Well, once I hear the boss talking over the phone when I was in his room. He never let nothing drop, but I could tell he was talking to a smart-tongue guy."

"Can't you give me more than that to go on—a name, a telephone number?"

"No. The boss was too slick to mention anything like that over the phone."

"This man that he was talking to may have been the killer."

"How do you figure that?"

"I know that Fanning collected over a million on this deal. There's nothing to show that he divided it with anybody. If he had a partner he may have double-crossed him."

Buckless looked at Neill with a kind of admiration. "Sure," he said. "I wouldn't put it past him. With the yacht handy for a quick getaway out of the country, and all."

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Neill pries a strange clue from Buckless' memory. Monday,

emphasized that preliminary evidence is not altogether conclusive and said further studies would be undertaken.

Hoover Heads List Mills Pallbearers

NEW YORK, Oct. 15.—(AP)—Former President Herbert Hoover headed the list of honorary pallbearers at the funeral today of Ogden L. Mills, his secretary of the treasury.

Included among the honorary pallbearers were Vice-President Garner, Senator Charles McNary, Al M. Landon and six members of the Hoover cabinet. They were Charles Francis Adams, Walter B. Brown, Arthur W. Hays, William D. Mitchell, Ray Lyman Wilbur, and Patrick N. Hurley.

The continental divide between Colorado and Canada formed the western limits of the Louisiana purchase.

SUSPECT GARTERSNAKE OF PREYING UPON FISH

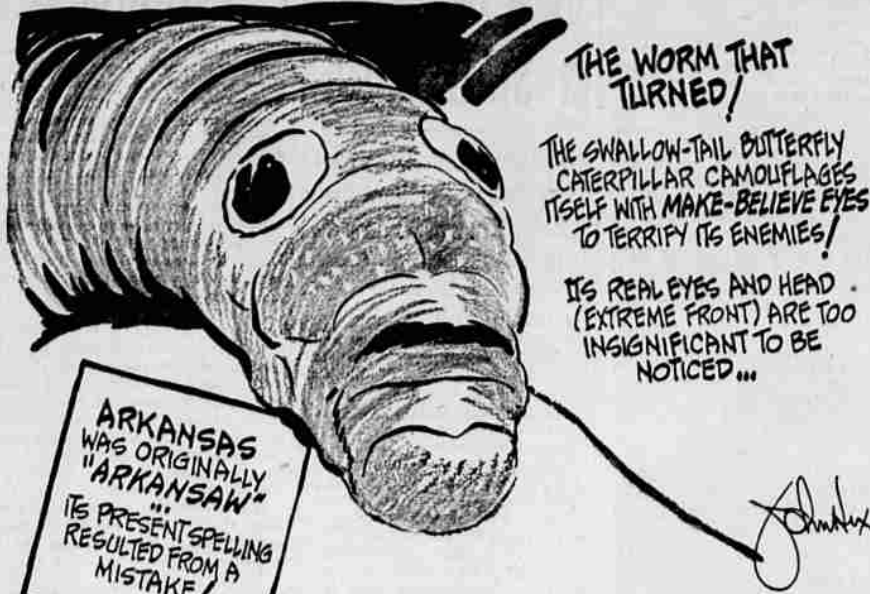
LANSING, Mich. (UP)—Research assistants studying fish predators have exposed two "villains" generally believed to be harmless. They are the gartersnake, long renowned as a killer of injurious insects, and the painted turtle, known as a destroyer of mosquito larvae.

Students' observations indicate that the gartersnake may be as great a liability near a hatchery or a trout stream as a water snake, and that the painted turtle is as much an enemy of young fish as the leatherback, blanding's and stinkpot turtles.

Directors of the research project

STRANGE AS IT SEEMS—By JOHN HIX

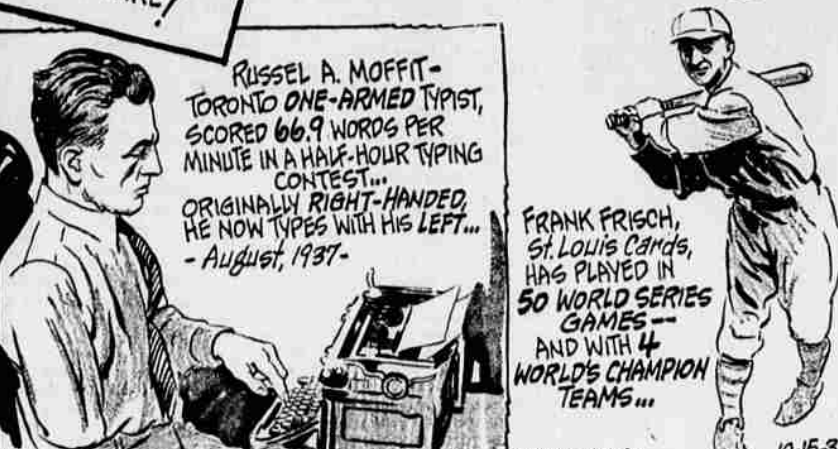
For further proof address the author, inclosing a stamped envelope for reply. Reg. U. S. Pat. Off.



THE WORM THAT TURNED!

THE SWALLOW-TAIL BUTTERFLY CATERPILLAR CAMOUFLAGES ITSELF WITH MAKE-BELIEVE EYES TO TERRIFY ITS ENEMIES!

ITS REAL EYES AND HEAD (EXTREME FRONT) ARE TOO INSIGNIFICANT TO BE NOTICED...



ARKANSAS WAS ORIGINALLY "ARKANSAW" ITS PRESENT SPELLING RESULTED FROM A MISTAKE!

RUSSEL A. MOFFIT—TORONTO ONE-ARMED TYPIST, SCORED 66.9 WORDS PER MINUTE IN A HALF-HOUR TYPING CONTEST... ORIGINALLY RIGHT-HANDED, HE NOW TYPES WITH HIS LEFT... - August, 1937.

FRANK FRISCH, St. Louis Cards, HAS PLAYED IN 50 WORLD SERIES GAMES— AND WITH 4 WORLD'S CHAMPION TEAMS...

Arkansas or Arkanasaw?

Confusion regarding the proper pronunciation of the name of the southern state, Arkansas, became so rife a half-century ago that a special investigation was launched by the state and a resolution adopted in March, 1881, to settle the issue.

The state's General Assembly found: "that the only true pronunciation of the name of the state is that received by the French from the native Indians, and committed to writing in the French word representing the sound, and that it should be pronounced in three syllables, with the final 's' silent, the 'a' in each syllable with the Italian sound, using the accent on the first and last syllables."

So amazingly wild did Russel A. Moffit rehabilitate himself after losing his right arm in the World war, where he served as a lieutenant of artillery, that today he is also proportionately as fast a typist as George Hoffield, world's champion, whose record is 139 words per minute, using, of course, both hands.

Moffit, using solely his left hand

BRUCE BARTON WOULD REPEAL LAW A WEEK

NEW YORK, Oct. 15.—(AP)—Bruce Barton, who wants to be known as "The Great Repealer," said today if elected to congress he would "move to repeal a law a week."

The advertising executive, Republican nominee for congressman from the "silk stocking" 17th district here, said an afternoon in a law library convinced him "no other nation in the world is so ridden to death by legislation."

GRANTS PASS, Oct. 15.—(AP)—Splinters rather than bruises are in store for the Grants Pass Cavers and Yreka Miners when they meet on the local high school football field Friday night. The decomposed granite soil is being covered with sawdust.

Closing time for Too Late to Classify Ads is 1:30 p. m.

TAILSPIN TOMMY—Rita Makes a Slip of the Tongue!



TOMMY TRIED TO TRAP BENTLY INTO ADMITTING THAT HE KNEW SOMETHING ABOUT PARACHUTE JUMPING, BUT THE MAN GAVE TOMMY A QUICK SUSPICIOUS GLANCE, AND DECLARED THAT HE WOULDN'T RISK HIS NECK WITH ONE FOR ANY AMOUNT! MEANWHILE, BETTY LOU IS FLYING RITA

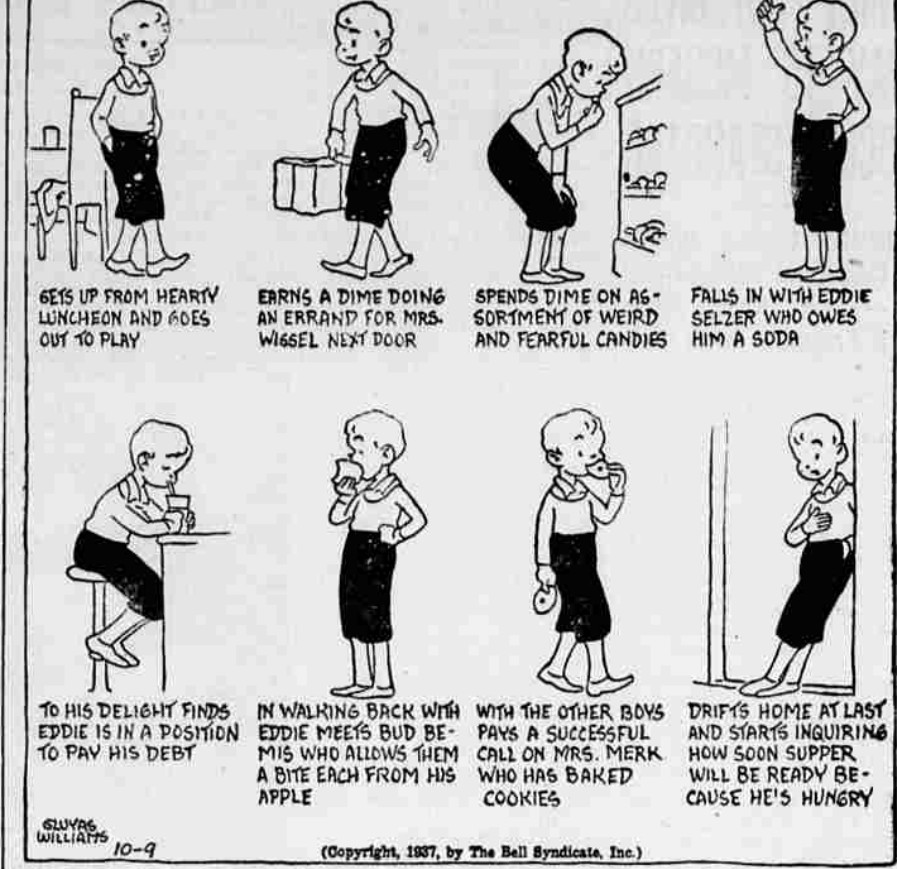
BEN WEBSTER'S CAREER—Marching Orders?



THE NEBBS—Too Late



VACUUM By GLUYAS WILLIAMS



By O. M. PAYNE



By HAL FORREST



By EDWIN ALGER



By SOL HESS

