

SERIAL STORY

MURDER IN CONVOY

BY A. W. O'BRIEN

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CHAPTER I

"I REGRET to state, gentlemen," said the commodore presiding at Troopship Convoy No. 1, "that the British Intelligence has obtained positive information that a Nazi agent will be among the 20,000 troops sailing with us tomorrow."

Across the expanse of mahogany table the Sea Dogs' bronzed faces failed to register any emotion. Only by their neglected cigar ashes and strained postures could you detect the suppressed excitement among the gathering of Canadian and British naval officers.

"This Nazi agent," the marbled-faced commodore continued in a dull monotone, "is reported to be a member of one of the units. It is obviously impractical at this late date to start an investigation of the 20,000 soldiers so he'll have to come along. His mission is possibly designed as a suicide chore—most likely to get information to the enemy in some fashion that will bring about an attack on the convoy."

"Now I have a surprise for you. There is lying in the basin a large merchant ship convoy waiting to sail. It will start at dawn. The 11 troopships will leave on a separate schedule later in the day and join the merchant men at a rendezvous as provided in your Sealed Orders and then take up Formation L."

There was a murmur of protest. These Sea Dogs knew the perils of this unprecedented move—fast ocean greyhounds and ponderous freighters milling around perhaps in a heavy sea. The commodore let the kettle boil before resuming:

"It's unprecedented and the Navy realizes the task lying ahead but it is all part of a plan the nature of which I am not at liberty to divulge. I shall now usher in the captains of the merchantmen sailing with you for the purpose of discussing convoy details."

THE gold-brained officers rose as a group of weather-beaten skippers, many fidgeting in uncomfortable starchy collars and wearing shiny blue serge suits, entered the board room. Shyly they took the places offered them, and you could sense the common bond between these humble rulers of the plodding freighters and the neatly groomed commanders of the sleek warships. They were co-operating factors in keeping the Atlantic pipeline open.

Four mimeographed sheets were passed to each man in the room. They carried the names of the vessels, the time schedule of leaving the basin, the time gap that would result if any ship failed to follow its preceding ship sharp on the minute, the course to be followed after passing the submarine gate, when the joint convoy would form and what signal code was to be followed in zig-zagging across the ocean.

"The freighters take the outer lanes," the commodore stated in discussing the items, "to provide added protection for the liners. In return you will be protected by the heaviest naval escort in history!"

The commander of the Atlantic Coast was then called upon to describe the protective measures under his jurisdiction. . . the flights of Stranraer flying boats that would be combing the inlets while the minesweepers worked ahead of the convoy. . . the R. C. A. F. bomber-reconnaissance planes flying almost to mid-ocean as an anti-sub measure. He concluded by introducing Captain Leeds-court, V. C., who would command the escorting warships.

Without employing a single excess word he outlined a plan of action "that has already met with considerable success." He explained that if attacked by surface craft he "would hit with the full force at my command while you must follow your Sealed Orders."

"And now you are asked to listen more closely—this is an important command to all cargo-carrying ships in the convoy as well as the troopships. If one or more of you should be attacked by a submarine, all other vessels must proceed at full speed AWAY from the torpedoed ship or ships, leaving the survivors to their fate—temporarily at least. The purpose is to curtail loss to an absolute minimum. Stationary ships would provide too good a target for even the poorest of U-boat marksmen."

THE commodore tugged at Captain Leeds-court's sleeve. They whispered together for a few seconds before the captain spoke again:

"I have just been reminded, gentlemen, that one of you ship masters commands a trawler. . . He looked around the room. A deep voice boomed from the far corner:

"Aye, sir, I command the Loch Lomond."

The Scot's rich burr seemed to please the captain.

"My compliments, sir, to yourself and the good Loch Lomond. I'm sure any vessel bearing so stout a name would relish the task I have in mind. Would you volunteer to sail at the extreme rear of the convoy and pause to pick up any survivors in case of emergency? It is barely possible that a submarine would risk staying behind long enough to attack a trawler—that and the lowliness of your vessel in the water would make the target a poor one for him. However, it is entirely voluntary and I cannot . . ."

str, I accept the post. She's always happy to help out the Navy!"

The room echoed with deep-throated, good-natured laughter. The friendly rivalry between the two services was never so superbly evident. The captain flashed a smile at the commodore.

"And the Navy is grateful," his tone sobered. "In conclusion, I must point out to you that should your vessel or vessels be overtaken by serious engine trouble, or should faulty navigation or bad weather cause you to lag behind the convoy, you must proceed as best you can to whatever port you may choose. The escort's duty is to remain with the main convoy and stragglers cannot be given protection."

"Somewhere around mid-ocean a heavy escort from the Royal Navy, probably accompanied by an aircraft carrier, will meet the convoy. They will relieve the Royal Canadian Navy escort as well as some of the Royal Navy ships assigned to special duties from that point."

The commodore took over. "There is only one more matter to bring before this conference. You are under strictest secrecy orders in being informed that we have good reason to believe a very forceful attempt is to be made by the enemy at some time during this crossing to attack the convoy—and particularly the troopships."

"I cannot divulge any further details but the information is sufficiently urgent to prompt an order from the Admiralty that all freighter captains be given full opportunity to withdraw from the convoy without any reflection upon themselves. If they remain, they must do so under complete

authority of the escort command and be prepared to sacrifice themselves, if need be, for the safety of the troopships. If any desire to withdraw, please do so now."

He looked around the room. No one moved. A salty smile wrinkled the captain's "sideboards."

"In which circumstance, gentlemen, I find nothing further to occupy this conference's attention other than the happier business of joining in a toast to our safe passage together. If you will all step into the lounge, you will find the essential liquids awaiting your pleasure."

(To Be Continued)

LEARNED LESSON

PORT MATILDA, Pa. (AP)—Take it from the girls of this small community, Uncle Sam's soldiers have learned a lesson about "yoo-hooing."

Greeting 30 truckloads of soldiers passing through here with a chorus of "yoo-hoos," the girls got only smiles in reply.

COMING

to

Poole's
Rollerdrome

Monday Nite, July 28th

Exhibition by
Champion Skaters from
Dayton, OhioAdmission - - 15c
Skating - - - 20c

STAR BALL PLAYER

HORIZONTAL
1 Late baseball
star.9 He played
in more than
2000 consecu-
tive13 Malicious
burning

14 Glossy paint.

16 Sun god.

17 Party-
colored.

18 Shoe brace.

19 To decay.

20 Alleged force.

21 Tiny clothes
room.

22 Bronze.

23 Into.

24 Balm.

25 Slender.

27 Uncooked.

28 To lay a
street.

29 Kill.

31 Before Christ
(abbr.).32 Newspaper
paragraph.

33 Frost bite.

34 Cravat.

35 Musical note.

36 Mother.

Answer to Previous Puzzle

MONKEY PRIMATES

ALL INNET ADORED

BAKE AMAIN ATEN

OCULUS BLOADE

RAREER PIN REDD

ENNUI ONE WIDER

A LITTLE OAG

TAR DALES

ELLI ANIMI

GREGARIOUS

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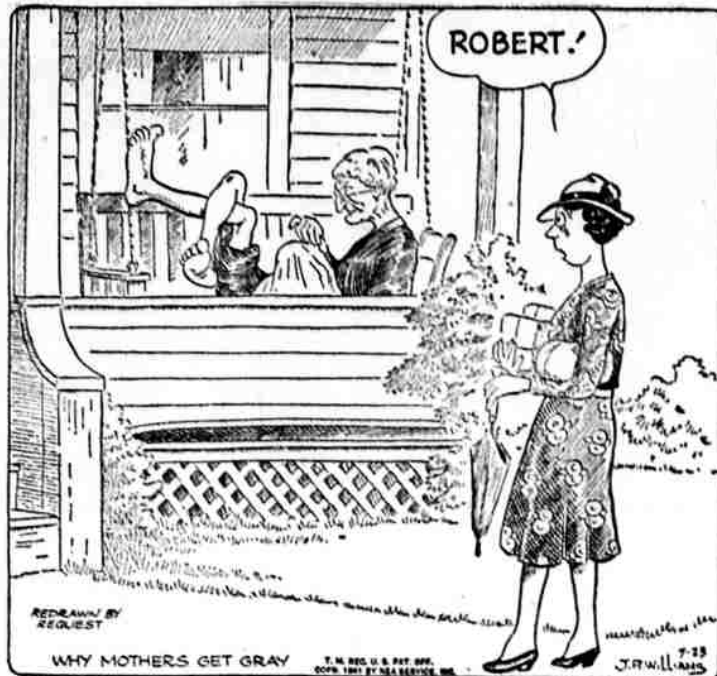
MONKEY

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OUT OUR WAY

By J. R. Williams



OUR BOARDING HOUSE, with Major Hoople

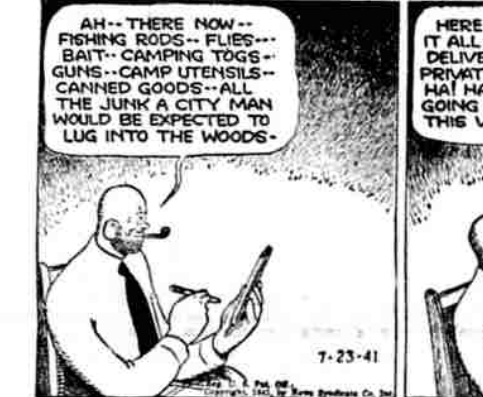


RED RYDER



By Fred Harman

LITTLE ORPHAN ANNIE



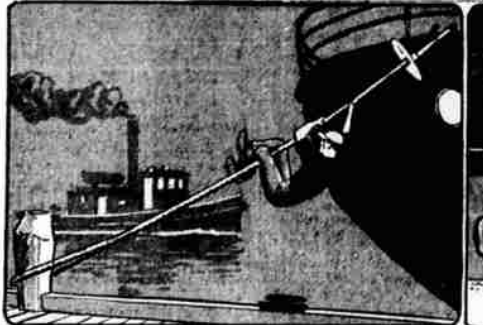
By Harold Gray

BOOTS AND HER BUDDIES



By Martin

WASH TUBBS



By Crane

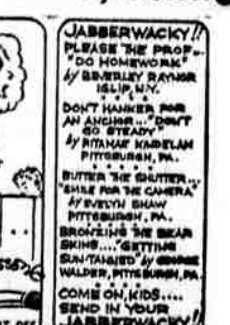
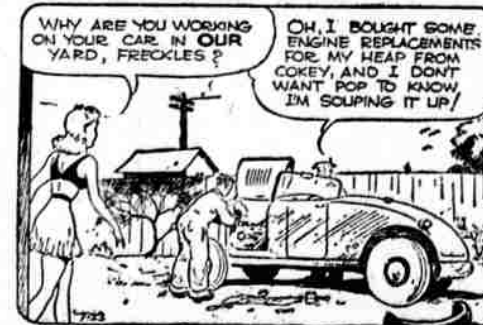
THIS CURIOUS WORLD

By William Ferguson



ANSWER: 1. Top Flight; 2. Kayak II; 3. Omaha; 4. Mad-Hatter.

FRECKLES AND HIS FRIENDS



By Blosser

ALLEY OOP



By V. T. Hamlin