

Forward Into Battle

Marchant stepped aside to let Rand peer into that terrible room

By Charles M. Warren

RAND MANSFIELD and SCOTTO THORGENSEN, American newspapermen, are sent to Mexico City on an assignment that is unexplained to them until GENERAL SAM THRESHER, of the State Department, comes down and informs them that he wants their help in discovering the identity of the LEADER, the ace Nazi agent, spy-master, and saboteur on the American Continent. It is believed that his headquarters, as well as a mysterious and powerful radio sending station, are in Mexico. The General thinks that Rand and Scotto may succeed where his regular operatives have failed, because of their erstwhile friendship with STEW MARCHANT, who has reached high rank in the pseudo-peasant party of CARLITO TOLEDAREZ, an organization openly brown-shirt fascist in character, which is rousing great antagonism for the United States throughout Mexico.

Marchant, it is rumored, had been unable to reenter the United States after his participation in the Spanish War, because he had flown for Franco. Embittered and hating all things pertaining to his country, he settled in Mexico and openly avowed his admiration for all things Nazi.

THEIR TASK is rendered difficult from the outset because of the enmity of FELIX HABIG, German *chargé d'affaires* in Mexico City. He tells them openly that he knows they are spies and promises that their every move will be watched.

Habig secretly arranges that Rand shall "inherit" the vast Santoyo hacienda, which is his secret headquarters, feeling that the presence there of the two Americans will successfully divert all suspicion from the place. He counts on the COUNTESS NATA VON HOCHENLOBE, who is feigning madness in order that Rand and Scotto will not legally be able to evict her, and on ELSA ERLACH, her secretary, to keep Rand and Scotto in the dark. But the Countess is wildly jealous of Habig's interest in Elsa and refuses to cooperate. She drives the Americans away.

MEANWHILE, Rand has fallen in love with Elsa, who admits that she is no German, but a British operative; and the situation is complicated by the arrival of



This story began in the Argosy for June 7

ARDITH, Rand's estranged wife. Ardith yields gracefully and obtains the Mexican divorce for which she has come.

At the hacienda, Rand has also met ROLF KONSTANTIN, a dissipated German aristocrat, who proclaims that he is out of Habig's reach because of a mission to which he has been assigned by the highest Nazi official.

Rand and Scotto talk to Marchant but he refuses to have anything to do with them, and warns them to leave the country.

They are involved in a shooting scrape in which Ardith is wounded; and Scotto, who has always been devoted to her, flies her back to the United States. Rand is arrested and charged with murder, and after a hasty trial, is sentenced to be shot.

MARCHANT, in charge of the execution-squad, leads Rand to the hacienda, where he hands Rand his gun. Then he tells Rand the truth. He believes that the Leader is his own father, from whom he has been estranged for many years. His father had forced him to change his name. And, fearing Marchant's knowledge of his own fifth-column activities, had falsely given out the rumor that Marchant had flown for Franco, causing him to be barred from the United States. But Marchant, getting wind of his father's Mexican activities, had gone there and built up an elaborate sham-existence. His father had appeared to approve of this changed attitude, but Marchant is not sure that his suspicions are entirely stilled.

This is a strange and terrible story, leaving Rand shaken and a little incredulous.

They hear the drone of a plane, indicating the arrival of the Leader for his nightly broadcast. Two huge towers rear into the sky. Marchant leads Rand into a tunnel at the end of which is the room from which the Leader speaks.

In a moment they will see his face. . . .

CHAPTER XXXI

NO LONGER A MASK

THERE WAS NO room for Rand to look in, but by pressing his ear hard against the door he could hear a voice. It was quite audible once he discovered how to separate the sound of it from the beating of his heart.

He felt suddenly a little weak as though now, finally, when he stood within speaking distance of the man for whom he had searched since he had first set foot in Mexico, something would occur to prevent him from glimpsing the Leader or recognizing him if he did see him. Some trivial, ridiculous thing.

The voice was the cultured metallic voice he had heard many times. It came now, brittle and authoritative and he listened, holding his breath.

" . . . Men of the Bunds; men of German-America; I repeat my order for you to stand by, alert as always, but—as always—conforming to the letter with our Fuehrer's rigid policy of nonaggression.

"I tell you again Germany and Mexico have no interest on the entire North American continent except the development of the most extensive trade possible with each state on that continent. Once more I say to you the German-Mexican army is on the move and nothing can hinder it. But remember this:

"We have no intention of crossing the border; we are merely bent upon quelling rebellion in our own country. We shall obliterate the revolutionist, Jorge Cazan. And I warn each and every American citizen that the Reich will protect with force, war if need be, any German-American in the United States should harm befall him.

"I caution all German-Americans to arm themselves; not for aggression, but for self-preservation in the event the people of the United States are led to believe by their capitalistic government that our army moves against themselves. I repeat my solemn affirmation that we have no

intention of crossing the United States border. The people of the United States do not want war. Nor do we. Therefore it is ridiculous . . ."

The voice faded and Rand realized that it was because he himself was breathing so loudly. The Leader still spoke, but he could no longer hear it. He looked at Marchant.

Marchant's face was white. "I was right," he said. "He is my father." Marchant leaned against the wall, his eyes closed, the muscles in his throat working.

Rand edged his eyes to the aperture. The light in his eyes blinded him at first but this passed and suddenly he received the full-lighted panorama of the big room and the figures in it.

For him there was only one basic figure before him—the man the Nazis called the Leader.

The room was huge; its walls and ceiling apparently were made of sound-absorbing hair felt or celotex. Directly across the room was a large door which must open onto the *chuehete* grove. At the opposite ends were the bases of the twin antenna towers, not over fifty inches in diameter and resting upon porcelain insulators which disappeared through the floor to a ground base. Both towers seemed cut off sharply at the snug holes in the ceiling through which they had been hoisted.

To the left a glass partition separated the main section of the floor from what was evidently the control room. A whitecoated engineer sat at the huge console, his ugly, jowled face framed in earphones, his eyes raised to look steadily at the volume indicator needle.

To the right a line of great water-cooled tubes, over six feet in height, rose from behind a long panel, bright red-white tracings of light glaring from each window in the panel.

Men were seated behind the Leader. Carlito Toledarez sat with his arms folded across his tightly filled brown shirt; next to him was the small immaculately dressed, black-mustached Issaku Suzuki, Japan's ambassador to Mexico; sitting beside Suzuki, smiling a little, was Herr Felix Habig, for the first time wearing a uniform of brown; and on the chair next to Habig sat a man whose lower face was hidden by a brown cloth wound behind his head and serving effectively as a gag.

He was in uniform and it was brown, but a much lighter brown than those of the others. He was a plump man and his eyes were dark and tragic and protruded in anger and disappointment. But Rand had not, at that moment, the time or inclination to identify him by remembering where he had last seen the peculiarly expressive eyes.

He could only stare at the figure of the Leader, rage and disgust and shock welling within him, fighting the impulse to grasp the Mauser and blast him down.

And at that moment he felt himself seized from behind. The door before him was snatched open and Stew Marchant was pushed forward into the arms of a white-coated Gestapo man who had pulled the door open from a spot outside Rand's line of vision.

THE WHITECOAT threw one arm around Marchant's waist and hoisted him off the floor, shoving a hand over his mouth. Then he threw him to the floor, kneeling on him.

The man who had shoved Marchant from behind, another whitecoat, was already through the door, helping his companion hold Marchant down.

The entire thing had happened with the unreal mute slowness of action under water. The Leader's flow of words had not once been interrupted by the disturbance.

Convulsively, Rand threw his chest and shoulders forward, but this motion did not succeed in breaking the grip on his arms. It did, however, free his mouth and he

shouted with all the power he could pump into his lungs. "Scotto Thorgensen!" His voice filled the room like the blast from an explosive. "Scotto, can you hear me? It's Rand! They're not stopping at Monterey. They're coming across the border!"

The man's hand tore savagely at his mouth but he ducked his head, eluded it for another moment. The others in the room stood paralyzed, staring in disbelief. Habig and Toledarez were drawing revolvers from their holsters. The whitecoat at the console wore a stupid, angry expression.

Only the Leader, standing at the microphone, appeared unperturbed. He turned and gestured to the man in the control room.

"If anybody can hear me," Rand shouted, "tell Scotto Thorgensen—in Maredo, Texas—to get in touch with Burton, get in touch with Washington—with the whole damn' United—"

His head exploded then. Things went white and red and black. The man behind him had hit him with the butt of a revolver as hard as he could.

Foggily, he heard the Leader say, "He has done no harm. Franz cut the microphone switch in time. And who would possibly believe him in any case?"

He felt the explosion in his head again and knew that he had been hit a second time. It hurt but it didn't matter. Not half so much as his discovery that the large tragic dark eyes above the gagged mouth of the bound man belonged to General Jorge Cazan. And that meant that the *Panzer* division which was rushing north along the International Highway would not halt at Monterey for Cazan the revolutionist, because he was here.

No, the *Panzer* would thrust higher, and it could thrust no higher unless it gushed across the Border—

And the darkness and pain in his head were as nothing compared with the despair and shock which recognition of the bristling gray mustache and blunt blue eyes and hard thin nose of General Sam Thresher, the Leader, had pulled down upon him.

He wondered if it were raining outside. It felt as if it were raining in his head. . . .

CHAPTER XXXII

THURSDAY AT FIVE

BETWEEN TWO and three days had passed since he and Marchant had been brought into the soundproof room. Rand couldn't be sure how long he had lain, securely bound, on the heavy rug. But Marchant told him it was nearly three days.

And that was important.

Not having suffered two vigorous blows over the head from the butt of a revolver, Marchant was clear enough to estimate time and distances. It was 1,226 kilometers, or approximately seven hundred seventy-two miles from Mexico City to Maredo on the Texas side of the Rio Grande. Therefore, he reasoned, with the *Panzer* and *Schnell* divisions traveling two hundred fifty miles a day they should reach the international bridge at Maredo around five o'clock on the afternoon of the third day, Thursday, at five, maybe a little earlier or later.

It was Thursday now and the clock on the wall above the microphone said it was twenty minutes after four.

Rand lay quietly, swallowing and breathing through his mouth for the relief it brought him to be able to breathe through his mouth. Except for the brief minutes when Johann Kleinmichel brought food and when, as now, this room was not in use, he and Marchant had spent the time with sour gags in their mouths. That was because the Leader was almost continuously broadcasting and if

you were choking and mute you couldn't create an inconvenient disturbance.

And although the Leader did not wish them to use their mouths when he spoke, it gave him acute pleasure for them to use their ears. He had told them that the first day.

Sometimes, while he was speaking, he would turn to glance at them, his face calm.

When Johann Kleinmichel had appeared with the first of their daily solitary meals, an excited hope had pumped inside Rand's chest. But the Englishman's look of disgust and piercing admonition had dispelled any thought that he would provide even the smallest amount of assistance.

His silent lips had formed the words, "We cannot help you."

So nothing would come from Elsa or Johann.

HE TRIED not to think of Elsa. In a matter of this sort there were larger and more essential facts to consider. Still, a man who was helpless and who had done what he could, could not additionally injure his country or his country's security by wondering about the welfare of someone with freckles across the bridge of her nose and long slender legs and hair the color of September wheat. Those thoughts weren't vital, but they were the thoughts he had.

There was no one in the room at present except the engineer at the console behind the glass partition. Rand watched the small bulb above the door which opened from the passageway. When the door at the outer end of the passage was opened this bulb automatically flashed its red warning. That was how he and Marchant had been caught.

Exactly, he thought, as Frank Dana Brady had been caught. Brady, a capable member of the F.B.I., who had worked hand in glove with General Fighting Sam Thresher and never known about the General until the night he must have pressed his face against the aperture in the passageway door as Rand and Marchant had gone—too late.

But Brady and they hadn't been the only ones deceived by Thresher. Were there more like Thresher in Washington at this moment? Officials who had been bought and who could effectively counteract any concerted last-moment rush for active defense against the machine which at this moment should be reaching the border?

It was something to think about. He had been thinking about it for more hours than he could remember. He had thought about it while he and Marchant lay listening to Thresher's calm-voiced assurance to Washington that the objective of the machine moving up the International Highway was solely and indisputably to stamp out General Cazan's revolution in Monterey.

He had wondered where Washington thought General Sam Thresher was in this time of pending crisis. He had asked Marchant about it during the minutes the cloths were removed from their mouths.

"He's been at this a long time," Marchant said. "He's pulled all kinds of wool over all kinds of people's eyes. And then there are plenty of his organization in Washington to front for him when he isn't there. He gets sick a lot and can't see anybody. He's got a reputable physician in Washington who'll forbid him any activity or forbid anybody to see him whenever he wants. Usually when they think he's ill at his home he's made a quick flight down here. He can leave Washington at six in the evening and be in Mexico City by the time the shops open the next morning. The nature of his job with the government has always been independent. He's trusted. He's liable to put in an appearance or disappear at any place at any time."

Marchant's bitterness was not belligerent. It was quiet and deep.

"THEY don't come any more shrewd than he is. Look at his use of the filter mike. Millions of people are familiar with Fighting Sam Thresher's voice over the air. But not one would recognize it when it comes through the filter. I was never certain myself."

It was odd, hearing Marchant speak of the man who was his father as he might have of an opponent whose principles he despised but whose ability he did not under estimate.

Rand could understand how ingenious was the Nazi method of selecting the men who paved the way for German entry into the country. The choice of Thresher was an example.

They had not forgotten the man who had made use of the precarious excitement of war to elevate himself from an unknown private to the captain of a company. Here was an ideal instrument for the hand of National Socialism. Here was a man who prospered vigorously when faced with the ruction, the danger, and the chaos of war. Excitement apparently spurred him to achievement. Violence and risk appeared to awaken him.

And the same man, confronted by years of peace, had fallen into lethargy, resenting his relegation to the store-room of forgotten heroes, wallowing in the bitter muck of spiteful inactivity; living with his son in a tenement infested by rats which he shot with the rifle that had come to be merely a relic of his brief greatness.

He was ripe for the approach of men who promised to restore him to his former prominence, who were willing to pay generously for his assistance in formulating a government and a way of life which would never tolerate oblivion for its war heroes.

They found him in 1933 and Marchant remembered the years after that had been filled with pleasant transitions for himself. Although for some reason his father deemed it wise for him to change his name, Marchant was concerned at the time only with the unexpected advantages of preparatory school, college, a possibility of a job of his own choosing and a father of whom he became more proud with the passage of each year.

Sam Thresher's war record stood him in good stead and with the monetary backing and influence of the power behind him he had found seven years ample time in which to climb to the top of the ladder. He was an impressive man in the government when he approached his son, revealing his true work and asking for his approval, gratitude and assistance.

"I refused," Marchant said. "And immediately I became dangerous because I knew too much. So he forced me out of the States. Perhaps he believed my work for the Nazis here was genuine. Perhaps he was never deceived. In any case, it's over now. The taste of failure in your mouth isn't pleasant. But by now you know the taste too."

"Yes," Rand said.

FRANZ, the engineer at the console, who also acted in the capacity of guard while the others caught fitful naps in the villa during their brief spells away from the room, opened the door in the glass partition and came over.

He bent over Rand, picking up the strip of brown cloth which lay on the floor beside his head.

"Both of you speak too much," he said. He wound the gag around Rand's head, tightly, so that the cloth tore the corners of his mouth. Then he did the same to Marchant and returned to the console.

Rand lay still. He raised his eyes to the clock above the microphone. It lacked five minutes of being five o'clock.

For a moment he watched the strong red traceries of light in the windows of the panel which concealed the

enormous tubes. Then another light caught his attention. The bulb over the passageway door was flashing. Presently the door opened and General Thresher, followed by Habig and three of the Gestapo men, came into the room. The men had changed their white coats for full uniform.

The tall white-haired general glanced briefly at Rand. Then his eyes moved over the prone figure of his son. Rand watched the blunt unwavering blueness of them. The look almost confirmed what had been swimming about in his head for the last two days. It didn't make sense but there it was.

Then the General's voice was filling the room as he poured its metallic precision into the microphone. His words were ostensibly directed to the short-wave sets with which the tanks, armored cars, batteries and planes of the *Panzer* and *Schnell* divisions were equipped. He was issuing commands to Toledarez, who had flown up to take command of the divisions as they were about to enter Monterey.

His orders were that under no condition were the divisions to move farther north once the insurrection in Monterey has been quelled—not even in the event any of the insurrectionists escaped in that direction. He furnished complete instructions for sparing the life of General Jorge Cazan in order that he might be brought back to Mexico City and be provided with a military trial, as was the exemplary custom of the Third Reich.

Rand heard this and remembered the night, less than forty-eight hours ago, when he had first regained consciousness. The Gestapo men were releasing Cazan's bonds and escorting him to the door which opened into the *Ahuehuate* grove. The quiet, double-chinned little general with the light skin and neat uniform shook off their support although he had remained cramped in a position that would have paralyzed most men.

He walked jerkily but erectly to the door. If he knew what was about to happen to him he gave no sign. He turned and his dark tragic honest eyes fixed upon General Thresher. There was a bright contempt in the eyes. But the little man said nothing.

Then he preceded the Gestapo men into the grove and a few minutes later through the open door there had come the ragged flat popping of a pistol volley.

NOW THRESHER was glibly providing instructions for the safety of the little man. Rand knew the words were but a part of the assurances intended to deceive. But he saw no reason why they would not be successful. Identical promises has been desperately accepted by Austria, Poland, Holland and countries better prepared than the United States.

Now he heard Thresher's voice grow suddenly harsh and explosive. Rand turned his head and looked at Marchant. Then he regarded the Leader again. Thresher was ordering the complete demolition of Monterey.

Rand gathered that the rebels had made some small show of resistance and had then secured themselves in the partisan homes of Monterey, making it necessary for the divisions to destroy the city itself in order to wipe out hidden insurrectionists. He saw with what cold insensibility Thresher barked the order that would bring the destruction of the entire city if necessary.

But the business, devastating as it was, would require a certain amount of time. It would mean a delay. Perhaps of only several hours. But the *Panzer* and *Schnell* moved on calculations of minutes, not hours. An hour's delay meant the difference between daylight and darkness. He wondered how long the delay would last; and what if anything could be gained by it.

Thresher ceased speaking and gestured his hand to Franz at the console. He spoke rapidly in a low tone to

Habig. Habig made no answer. Several times he nodded his ugly head. It was evident he was in the habit of listening—not speaking—to General Sam Thresher.

Thresher crossed the room and stood for a moment, looking down at Marchant. He said quietly, "You see how futile your efforts were in the face of what is occurring?"

Marchant turned his eyes away from his father.

Rand noticed this and watched the nostrils of Thresher's thin nose flute. He recalled the cold apathy the General had displayed when ordering the mechanized massacre of an entire city. Things were adding up in his head incongruously; but they were adding up.

Thresher left the room without a glance at Rand. Habig followed, pausing at the door to turn his body and head so that his glassy eyes pointed at Rand. He smiled. His voice held the edge of restraint rather than triumph.

"By six-thirty in the morning, our divisions will be on the road to Houston, Texas. Long before nightfall we shall have occupied that city. I wonder, Herr Mansfield, if you would care to send that story to your paper? I am certain your friend, Herr Thorgensen, would enjoy doing a caricature of me as I enter Houston. He is excellent at high-lighting the obvious. Or do you remember?"

He went out, closing the door after him. Presently the red bulb ceased flashing and Rand knew that the door at the end of the passage had been closed.

Once again he tried sawing his hands behind his back. The skin was already raw and now the pain was so intense that he stopped. He wished he could speak with Marchant. Still, there were so many things to be done and that business in Monterey had provided a small grace of time.

He squirmed about so that he was in a position to look at Franz in the control room.

Franz had left the console and was standing, his nose pressed flat against the glass partition, watching Rand. . . .

CHAPTER XXXIII

DEATH HAS A TIMETABLE

THE NIGHT dragged interminably. At intervals Thresher entered and announced his commands with a concise clarity that left no doubt as to how things were faring in Monterey. He referred constantly to a map and spoke of bridges, sharp turns, steep inclines and villages as though he were conducting a tour of the International Highway.

Johann Kleinmichel had not appeared with their food by three o'clock, making it evident that they were not going to receive any until the morning.

At three-thirty a man Thresher addressed as Werner took Franz's place in the control room. But the newcomer was even more alert than Franz. From time to time he inspected their bonds. He made no attempt to remove the gags from their mouths.

Most likely, Rand thought, everyone was in the living room of the villa. They had made it their headquarters and he understood that at night they listened there to the progress of the divisions from a receiving set which picked up the short-wave broadcasts from the units themselves as they moved. In the daytime they listened in the control room.

He wondered what had happened at Monterey and whether Maredo would meet the same fate. He had caught a glimpse of those divisions and impulsively, feeling ashamed of his hope, he hoped Maredo would offer no resistance.

He could still see that nightmarish mechanized procession. Immediately after he had fallen unconscious from the revolver blows on his head three nights ago, Thresher had had him revived. He came to with that acute clarity

mind which illumines men for a short period after they have been severely injured.

Thresher's attitude was filled with a quietly enraged triumph.

"I want to thank you," his deep voice licked at Rand, "for the successful completion of the work I assigned to you. I couldn't have spoken my gratitude to an unconscious man."

"I was beginning to believe you had failed me," Thresher said. "But when you brought him"—his marble hard eyes turned on Marchant—"here, helping to reveal him for what he is, you completed your mission satisfactorily."

Characteristically, the General's blunt exposition took very little time. He had to make it to satisfy something within him.

He had selected Rand and Scotto for the mission to Mexico for two reasons: first, to serve as leak-detectors, relaying the information they were able to discover concerning the Nazi organization through the unsuspecting Brady to Thresher in Washington, thereby enabling him to patch up the leaks; and second, because of their old friendship for his son, to test Marchant, to cause him to confide his genuine motives to them. Accordingly, aware of Marchant's evening visits to the Countess von Hochenlobe, the General had arranged to have the Americans remain at the Santoyo where they could conveniently meet Marchant in private.

But the Countess and Marchant had inadvertently combined to circumvent the General's plans; the Countess by her refusal to let them remain at the villa; Marchant by his resolute, distrustful silence even with old friends.

"So, when finally he came sneaking here with you, my suspicions were confirmed," the General said. "It is to you I owe my gratitude. I am no ingrate. I reward those who serve me. I shall permit you to observe a thing you will never see the like of again."

HIS HEAD sick and dizzy, but achingly impressionable, Rand had been escorted to a knoll overlooked which overlooked the International Highway where it passed the Santoyo.

He had not thought ever to witness a sight such as the one that rolled over the smooth road beneath him. It was frightful and devilish and at the same time uncannily thrilling.

Flares carried on moving vehicles aided his vision.

The countless motorcycles and low-hung reconnaissance cars swept by in advance; then the armored cars, a steel ribbon of them, flowing with the flares glinting weirdly against their sides; then the whippet tanks, from six to ten tons, moving at their furious scuttling pace, their three-inch guns jutting and throwing shadows down their sides; then truck after truck after truck of wireless men, anti-tank squads with their wicked snout-mouthed machine guns, engineers with prefabricated bridges ready for instant construction, repair crews to salvage a tank in the midst of action; and finally the fuel trucks which could lay smoke screens and refuel armored cars, tanks and the smaller, speedier vehicles.

After what seemed to be hours, they were gone and there was nothing left except the throb that the planes overhead had set up in his brain. It was queer how you didn't notice the planes or their sounds until everything had gone. Then you remembered them most.

Later, Herr Habig took the trouble to point out, would come the crunch of booted feet, the juggernaut tramp of masses of marching men.

But Rand couldn't wait for that. His head was bursting and he was beginning to be actively sick.

They did not permit him to lie down. In the radio room

Thresher spoke to Marchant and to him, watching for the effect of his words on their faces, in their eyes.

He told them of the gradual process of the German infiltration of Mexico; of the more than one hundred thousand Nazis who had entered the Republic illegally in the last two years. Tourists, he explained, who became "lost." A part of their number officered the *Panzer* and *Schnell* divisions, he said, and many of them had been flown across the American border and dropped by parachutes in Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California, equipped with small cans of acid to destroy their parachutes so that they disappeared like the night into which the men had been cast.

He spoke of the American Pacific Fleet, unable to race from the Hawaiian Islands in time to hamper the advance of the Divisions; and of the depleted Atlantic Squadron scattered from St. Thomas to Nova Scotia on neutrality patrols; he spoke lightly of the acquisition of bases from England, dismissing them with, "They tell you that you have acquired new bases from Newfoundland to the West Indies. But what have you done other than the lease and the ground?"

He spoke of the work of the fifth columnists who, at the signal from him, were in a position to sabotage railroads, munitions plants and armories, airports, release pneumonia germs in both conscription and regular army camps, and in general precipitate a state of chaos which would render American resistance anemic.

"You see how completely we have foreseen and eliminated any concerted American resistance?" He laughed. His laughter was quiet, his tone convincing with an assurance that was not braggadocio. "The Fuehrer has said, 'America is permanently on the brink of revolution. It will be a simple matter for me to produce unrest and revolts in the United States, so that these gentry will have their hands full with their own affairs.' Can you understand how simple that task has been?"

The pain was returning to Rand's head, making it alternately hot and cold. He heard Thresher's words dimly, as a sleepy student hears the professor's words, drone-like.

"You are already a race of malcontents. You are waiting for revolution and disunion."

It was queer how he used the word "you," thereby dissociating himself from Americans. But everything was queer, Rand thought, and there was a wire binding his head tightly. He sensed that the General was addressing his next words to Marchant.

"You had a chance to be a part of all this and renounced it. And in doing so you renounced me and everything I have worked toward, everything which enabled me to provide you with the opportunities that I never had—"

But Rand's pain let him hear no more. . . .

NOW, a night and two days later, he was lying here waiting for morning to drag upon him, helpless in the hands of his own thoughts, while he knew the *Panzer* and *Schnell* to be rushing under the blanket of darkness from Monterey up the Highway to the bridge at Maredo. There would be no question of their finding the bridge intact. The parachute troops had attended to that. Or if by some miracle it were destroyed, the engineers would throw up a temporary one quicker than it had taken to demolish the original.

He rolled on his side to relieve the pressure of numbness from his back.

The room had no windows and he could not tell if it was becoming gray outside or not. At five o'clock Johann Kleinmichel brought Werner his breakfast. He did not glance at the figures on the floor except when Werner pointed to them and laughed. Then Johann looked at them and laughed too. He adjusted dials and spoke with

Werner about the console. Rand couldn't hear their voices but it was evident Werner respected Johann's knowledge of radio, as he kept nodding his head.

Then Johann left and Rand watched the hand of the clock crawl around to six.

At six-ten General Thresher came in, followed a few minutes later by Habig. At six-fifteen Thresher began to speak over the air.

He read from a black leather-bound notebook. The sentences were brief, childish exhortations, such as: "The men of the Heart are true men. The men of the Soul are fine men. The men of the Mind are logical men."

Rand twisted his head and looked at Marchant, who nodded, and Rand knew the General was sending the signal in code for the various Bunds and fifth columnists to touch off their sabotage.

At six-twenty-five the General ceased speaking and the microphone was cut off. Thresher spoke briefly to Habig and Habig walked over to Rand, bowing a little and saying companionably:

"It is my misfortune to inform you of your execution, Herr Mansfield. You are to be taken out and shot. It is regrettable but if you will remember I warned you that inevitably it becomes the fate of all agents who work against the Reich." His thin shoulders rose and fell. "However, as is the custom in your country, you are to be given breakfast if you wish it."

Johann Kleinmichel had stepped into Rand's line of vision. He carried a tray which he laid upon the floor and methodically went about the business of untying Rand's hands and taking the gag from his mouth.

He swallowed and drew his breath through his mouth. He chafed his hands. He tried the coffee, finding it bitter and Mexican, as was the peppery chile con carne. He was extremely hungry and ate as much as he could.

When he had finished Johann Kleinmichel replaced the gag and tied his hands behind his back and then untied his ankles.

Almost at once two of the brown-shirted Gestapo men entered and lifted him to his feet. He could barely stand and they were forced to support him. One of them bent and hurriedly kneaded the muscles of his legs.

Again he felt unreal, detached as a spectator is detached, as he had felt when he had been led to his intended execution in the prison in Mexico City. For some reason he was once more impressed with the fact that they were going to shoot him with pistols instead of rifles.

Only then did the realization come to him that the tiny object, which Johann Kleinmichel had placed in his hands as he had retied them, was still clutched by his fingers. What the use of it would avail him he could not see, but Johann's lips had formed the words, "This will help," and it occurred to him that Johann must have offered the object as a first step.

One of the Gestapo men said, "You can walk, can you not?"

He took a tentative step, wobbling a bit. Then they took him by the arms, supporting him, and began moving toward the door that opened into the *ahuehuete* grove.

But General Thresher's upraised hand halted them. He had been intently studying the clock above him. Now he signaled to Werner at the console.

It was exactly six-forty-five.

CHAPTER XXXIV

MISSION FULFILLED

RAND COULD not tell how he knew that the full volume and power of the transmitter was now being utilized for the first time since he had entered the room three days

ago. Perhaps it was merely the elevated note of the General's voice. In any case he realized that now the voice was intended to reach as far into the United States as the wave-band would permit.

He was choking quietly because of the hand which had been clamped over his mouth from behind. His restricted struggles could not dislodge the sour-tasting palm from his mouth.

Thresher's voice filled the room. It was angry and brittle and there was a cold note of outrage overtoning its vehemence.

"To the people and government of the United States. . . . The Republic of Mexico and the Third Reich of Germany have received the shocking news of the brutal murder in Houston, Texas, of a German, high in the official ranks of the National Socialist Party, and of two Mexican citizens, also preëminent government officials.

"We have warned you repeatedly that under no circumstances would we tolerate the abuse of German or Mexican citizens in the United States. You have ignored our warnings.

"The outrage perpetrated in Houston this morning shall not go unavenged. This vicious act has made it clear that it is necessary for the Mexico-German army to protect the lives of Mexican and German citizens.

"Already we are moving to prevent the reoccurrence of similar outrages. A part of our army is at this minute advancing upon Houston. We do not consider our act one of aggression, but one of necessity, as we intervene on behalf of an oppressed minority such as we were forced to do for the German people in the Sudeten and Poland. The world shall judge our justification.

"Not only have you provoked this action for the defense of our people, but in answering your challenge the Mexico-German army violates no international boundary, crosses no recognizable border! The territory of Texas in which the army moves, is and has always been the possession of the Republic of Mexico!

"We warn you not to resist. Resistance will mean war. You are not prepared for war. We are prepared to arbitrate for the territories belonging to us. We will not tolerate resistance. If resistance is offered we warn you the consequences will be chaotic—"

Rand threw his head and shoulders forward, kicking out and back with his right foot. He felt his heel contact a shin, but the hand over his mouth was not released. The two men holding him propelled him through the door which Habig had suddenly opened. The voice of the Leader, when the door closed, ceased as though hands had been clapped over Rand's ears.

Yet the words he had heard continued to sound in his mind, to echo there with a peculiar and terrible resonance.

IN THE grayness the bases of the *ahuehuate* trees appeared smaller than they were. He imagined it remained gray in the grove even when the sun had risen; the trees were that high and closely bunched.

They walked on either side of him, their hands impersonally supporting his shoulders. It was very cold but the numbness from cramp had left his legs and body, and his mind seemed abnormally sharp. As he walked he continued to saw at the tough cord ringing his left wrist with the razor blade, manipulating it precariously with the ends of the fingers of his right hand and not letting the motions reach his shoulder.

The path opened into a small clearing as the blade bit through the last strand, freeing his hands but leaving the cord dangling from his right wrist. He let the blade drop and kept his hands in the position they had been when tied.

He was trembling only slightly.

One of the men turned him by the left shoulder and backed him against the base of a tree. The other stood several yards away and took his Mauser from its holster and examined it in the gray half-light.

He saw that neither of them was going to ask him anything or say anything.

In the clearing a mist had settled, like smoky dregs, close to the ground. The legs of the two men from their knees down were obscured.

"I'd like to have something over my eyes," he said. It was queer the way he felt, the absence of fear, the absolute loss of reality.

Both men grunted. The man nearest him took a handkerchief from his pocket and handed it to him and then, remembering that his hands were bound behind him, came up and lifted the handkerchief and began to wind it around his head.

Rand put his hand gently on the Mauser butt protruding from the man's holster, bringing his knee up into the man's groin as hard as he could.

The man gasped with an agonized intake of breath and bent over as the other man swore gutturally and fired and swore again because his bullet had caught his comrade in the back.

Rand took a quick step to one side as the wounded man fell and then dropped on his knee behind the man and fired at the standing man and watched him kneel and shake his head and then slide forward on his face.

He got up, thinking that with the door closed those in the soundproof broadcast room would not have heard the shots.

The first indication he had that Habig had stepped into the clearing with a leveled revolver was the sound of his impersonal voice.

"Drop the Mauser, Herr Mansfield, or I shall shoot you in the side. Turn toward me, please. I imagined something of this sort might happen. It will be better if you keep quite still. If you make any move my bullet will most likely strike you awkwardly and painfully, necessitating my shooting you twice. . . ."

EARLIER the same morning, at exactly fifteen minutes after five in a suite in the Merlin Hotel in Houston, Texas, Herr Rolf Konstantin got up from the chair in which he had been sitting all night, shivered a little in the cold, crossed the room and put down the window which opened over the boulevard six floors below.

He couldn't see any sign of light outside; dawn was still more than an hour away. He checked his wristwatch, grinning a little at the illuminated dial. It was odd, he thought, checking your watch to make certain you would not be late with your own death.

He moved back to the chair and switched on the table lamp. The light caught the unopened bottle of cognac which stood on the floor next to the right leg of the chair. He grinned companionably at the bottle. There was humor in his grin. That was funny, was it not? Rolf Konstantin sitting awake all night beside a bottle of fine French brandy and leaving it untouched. It was the first time he had been sober for so many consecutive hours since he didn't remember when.

But this night, he had thought when he began it, is a special night because it is the last. And so he would enjoy his thoughts unenhanced by cognac and they would be pleasant thoughts of Berlin and the castle in the Rhinelands in the old days before the words "social order" had supplanted the gallant beauty of the word "régime."

But he could not localize his thoughts without including a hideous man's bald-appearing head and glassy, immobile eyes and lead-colored transparent skin. He could not get away from this man, even in his inner thoughts.

Now, with the time near and knowing what he had to do, he found it in him to smile and discard hatred and sadness and the feeling was as stimulating as the brandy could have been.

He opened the door leading into the bedroom adjoining his own. In the dark he could not make out the figures sleeping peaceably in the twin beds. He switched on the ceiling light, went over and first awoke Garcia and then Alfaro. Because they were Mexicans they did not come quickly awake. They sat up, yawning and rubbing their eyes and blinking at him. Then they smiled.

"*Cómo?*" Alfaro said.

"You must get up quickly," Konstantin said in Spanish.

"*Si.* If you say. But is early."

"I am sorry."

"*De nada.*"

He watched them dress with clumsy good humor. They were eminent, if superfluous, members of President Del Rio's cabinet. They were pleasant chaps, he thought, and had absolutely no idea why they had been dispatched by Herr Habig to accompany Rolf Konstantin to Houston.

He told them he had received a telephone message from Mexico City and they were to go down the street to the all-night restaurant and wait for him there. They smiled sleepily and nodded.

After they had gone he entered his room and took from the cupboard shelf a square steel strongbox, carried it to the writing desk, sat down and opened it with the key he took from his key-ring.

The box was empty. He examined it. At the boulevard store where he had purchased it they had guaranteed its sturdy strength. "That box will resist anything," they said. "You could dump a ton of granite on it and besides denting it a bit there wouldn't be any harm done."

He was glad of that. It was important that the box should remain intact.

HE PUT it aside and took pen and writing paper from the desk. He glanced at his watch. It was ten minutes to six. There was ample time.

He wrote uninterruptedly. The facile flow of words covered the front and back of the paper. Then he signed his name. He put the paper and his identification papers in the strongbox, locked it and left the key in the lock. He put the box in the cupboard. They will look there, he thought; they will certainly look in the cupboard if there is anything left of the cupboard.

He thought, smiling, of what he had written.

"*To the Citizens of the United States, whom this vitally concerns.*"

Not very impressive or clever; but to the point. And sincere.

The paper explained his "mission." He gave an example by citing the incident of the bombing of the Hofbrauhaus in Munich. That was the attempted assassination of *der Fuehrer*. He explained carefully the necessity of an excuse to embroil popular opinion against England.

One of Rolf's old friends, Prince Rudolph Wittge Stefield, had been selected as the "missionist" by the Fuehrer on

that occasion. The Fuehrer had completed his speech a minute and a half ahead of schedule and left, while Rudy sat with the neat innocent-appearing briefcase across his knees two feet from where the Fuehrer had stood.

When the explosion occurred, Rudy and many of the Fuehrer's friends were torn to pieces, but it didn't matter because the "English" had done it and popular opinion was catapulted into a frenzy against the English.

That was the way of it. The Fuehrer selected men of note and birth who were not ardent supporters of himself, for his "missionists." Losing them did not injure the Party and the missionists were important enough in themselves to gain a great deal of posthumous Nazi glorifying.

But because they must be important, as well as superfluous, they were rare, and therefore inviolate. Rolf had enjoyed a great deal of immunity at Herr Habig's expense because of this.

It was all in the note in the strongbox. It was all there. It explained how Rolf and the Mexican cabinet members had been selected and how their "murder" would serve as a "cause for protection". He had been very lucid and very careful in the writing of it. He wanted nothing misinterpreted.

Now he went to the cupboard and carried out the neat black traveling case. Herr Habig had presented it to him, smiling and saying, "No greater glory than to open this bag for the Fuehrer, for the Third Reich, for your fellow countrymen. *Deutschland über Alles.*" Extremely patriotic, Herr Habig, smiling at his and Rolf's private joke and rubbing his bald-appearing head in a gesture of great satisfaction.

Now Rolf placed the traveling case at the foot of the chair, picked up the cognac bottle and at last poured himself a drink.

He looked down at the bag. He did not understand how it worked except that you only had to unsnap the lock and start to lift the lid.

He sat down and lifted his drink. It had been a fine idea to send the Mexicans from the room. He hoped there wouldn't be too much damage done beneath him. Explosives, he had heard, blew downward; but the ceilings were high.

It was exactly six-thirty. He brought his glass to his lips. At six-forty-five they would announce the "news" from Mexico. But the contents of the little strongbox would be inconvenient for many people. Most of all, he thought, for the stable-man who had had aspirations that were at once lofty and base.

"*Prosit, Herr Habig,*" he said, and drank a little of the cognac and set the glass on the table.

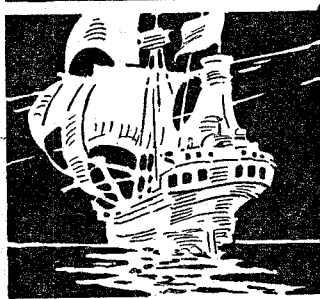
He leaned over and unsnapped the lock of the traveling bag. His face was wet. He couldn't, at the last, manage a smile. The lid did not raise easily and he had to pull at it.

The last thought he had as everything about him seemed to tear quickly and violently apart, was of the signature he had affixed to the note in the strongbox. For he had signed his full name: Count Rolf Konstantin von Hohenlobe.

His sister Nata, he thought, would like that.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK





Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint



SOME time back we amused ourselves (and you, we hope) with the idea of a meeting between ARGOSY heroes and ARGOSY readers. We said then that quite probably the readers would display a surprising knowledge of out-of-the-way places and curious professions. But now we've got a much better scheme: We're going to run an ARGOSY carnival.

What put us in mind of this was a letter, which appears below. Its author has a trained-dog act; he says he is the possessor of America's champion trick dog. Well, starting off with that gentleman and his dog, we will easily be able to produce a show that will knock Billy Rose's eyes out. Readers will take part; ARGOSY characters; and

of course their creators, the authors.

We know of two authors who are skilled magicians—sleight-of-hand men. There are boxers among our readers who would undoubtedly be willing to go a few rounds with, say, Refugee Smith. Mr. E. Hoffmann Price is a fencer, and we'll match him against both Cleve and D'Entreville. Any Argonotes reader knows that there are innumerable crack shots to call upon. Fan dancers—we don't know for sure; but we once ran a story about Cleopatra.

Don't crowd, folks. We are going out right now and hire Madison Square Garden. Bring sandwiches and blankets because the show will last several days.

Here is the reader with the trick dog. He has some sharp things to say about Jim Kjelgaard's Western lore.

TEXAS JACK

Please allow me to introduce myself and cry on your shoulder a little. My name is William J. Bruce—"Texas Jack." Have a dog act, have a dog that is considered America's champion trick dog by every audience I have played to.

Twenty-three years ago I punched cows in Wyoming and Colorado. Used to sit around camp fires at cattle round-ups and in bunkhouses of an evening and listen to the old-timers tell of early-day events.

Now here's my complaint. I have read ARGOSY off and on for thirty years. Was very fond of Jim Kjelgaard's stories till just a short time ago when I got my ARGOSY. And Jim had a Western story in it. I read a few lines and got so disgusted I threw it away. I wonder if Jim ever faced a Wyoming blizzard. I have, and I have never heard of an old-time Western scout wearing a derby hat in a blizzard or of a young boy throwing a green buffalo hide on a horse.

Just came back from playing at Boise, Idaho. Stopped off at Granger, Wyoming, on the way back. If you know your Western history, you know that Granger was an early-day army post, and now has a museum of Western relics. Jim

Bridger's daughter and squaw wife are buried there. The custodian of the museum is an old-time cowpuncher and rancher. We had a big visit and I told him about the silly story Jim Kjelgaard had in your magazine, and we both had a good laugh on it.

Now if Jim will stick to his Dabbit Run stories, he'll be all right. If you want to print some real Westerns, you should get a-holt of Walt Coburn. But don't print Western junk, for there's too many old-time Westerners who read your magazine.

Am reading my May 24th copy. "Citizen Moose" by Francis Gott is very good. Yours for a very good ARGOSY. Kearney, Nebraska.

TEXAS JACK obviously hasn't been following ARGOSY with care. For we've published five or more Coburn stories within the last year.

Our next correspondent wants a reprint magazine of ARGOSY's most celebrated stories. To some extent that's already being done; *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* draws its fine novels from the back files of ARGOSY, and the same is true of *Crack-Shot Western*.

EMMETT GEIBEL

I have been reading ARGOSY for the last fifteen years and have no kicks to make. Some of the stories I didn't care so much for, but they were few and far between.

What I want is a chance to read again the outstanding stories of the last fifteen years and the others before that, clear back to 1882. So how about a new reprint magazine in a monthly, quarterly, semi-annually or any old way? How about giving it a good think before throwing this in the wastebasket?

I know a lot of the stories have been printed in book form, but books are harder to get hold of than magazines, and there were plenty of them that never were reprinted anyhow.

Detroit, Michigan.

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