

Alder Gulch

By Ernest Haycox

ILLUSTRATED BY WARREN G. BAUMGARTNER

Beginning a new novel of the American West—the turbulent love story of a dangerous man and a daring woman, set against the violent background of the Virginia City gold rush

ONE moment he was a cool man who viewed his chances for escape and found them full of risk; and then a night wind moved over the river with its odors of dark soil warmed by summer rain and the resin scent of firs and the acrid taint of brush fires, and when these rank flavors came to him he knew at once he was done with caution. He belonged to the land, and the land summoned him. Before midnight came he would go over the ship's side, no longer caring whether it would be as a living man or a dead one. He stood on the foredeck and laid a hand on a capstan's bar, and excitement rushed all through him and sweat made a dry nettle-stinging on his face.

The bosun was a short black shadow hard by the foremast pinrail. The bosun said, "Pierce, come down from there."

This square-rigged ship, the Panama Chief, wound slowly around its anchor in midstream, bowsprit now pointed on the streaky glow of Portland's waterfront lights two hundred feet removed. One street lay against a ragged backdrop of buildings, beyond which the dark main hulk of town ran back into a mass of firs rising blackly to rear hills. All sounds traveled resonantly over the water—the crack of a teamster's whip, the scrape of feet on the boardwalks, the revel of a near-by saloon.

"Come down," repeated the bosun.

The ship's bell struck five short ringing notes. The moon's quarter-full face dimmed behind a bank of clouds and

The next instant he took his dive over the ship's rail, with a second shot from another gun following him





She darted behind a building and paused to catch his hand. "Careful with your feet," she said, and led him

The captain moved to the head of the ladder and he stared below him and gave the crew his hard, short laugh. "You'd like me down there, no doubt, to start a confusion whereby you could make your escape. I'll not please you till we put to sea. Then, by gad, I'll give you confusion."

On the hatch cover men softly and bitterly murmured. The first mate, Mister Sitgreaves, clanked down the ladder and took his station again at the starboard rail. The second officer hadn't moved from the port side, the bosun remained deep in the foremast's shadows. All these men were armed, and it was six months to Canton and back, by which time this year of 1863 would be gone. The Panama Chief was nothing better than the Confederates' prison at Andersonville, of which Pierce had his indescribable memories.

He closed his fingers around the rail, and his body, lank in the shadows, bent backward until all weight rested on the balls of his feet. Mister Sitgreaves saw this and smoothly said, "I wouldn't do that."

The men on the hatch cover stirred and rose up. Brought aboard by violence, starved and bruised by iron discipline, they caught the clear, wild smell of freedom and suddenly all of them were shifting softly along the deck. The captain issued a sharp call:

"Who's that by the rail, Mister Sitgreaves?"

The mate said, "Pierce, sir."

"Knock him down, Mister Sitgreaves."

The mate moved forward, his boots sibilantly scrubbing the deck. Pierce let his arm drop to the cool, round top of a belaying pin, seized it from the bitts and took one quick side step. A sound at his rear warned him that the bosun now was moving forward to slug him and a man in the crew called out, "Watch back!"

The captain roared, "Don't you know who's master on this boat?" and came down from the ladder in long jumps.

PIERCE gave ground and retreated to the hatch cover, thereby avoiding the mate and the bosun, who now came together shoulder to shoulder and moved slowly at him. The crew shifted toward Pierce, making a cover for him; faced with this unexpected resistance, mate and bosun paused.

The captain said, "I'll show you how to handle mutiny, Mister Sitgreaves," and came forward, bold and black in the night. Some man groaned, "You're done in, Pierce!"

Pierce gave ground as bosun and mate moved at him, backing toward the port rail. The captain wheeled to block Pierce's way. "You're a sea lawyer," he said. "I am going to make you cry like a dog."

These three, captain, mate and bosun, were pinching him in against the galley wall. He wheeled and ran around the galley, circling it to the starboard side, and reached the mainmast stays. He had shaken mate and bosun, but the captain had outguessed him; the captain was before him, softly laughing in his throat. Pierce saw the captain pluck a pistol out of his pocket and lift it for aim, and all this while the steps of the mate and bosun pounded behind him. Pierce, never wholly stopped, wheeled aside. He caught the flat explosion in his face and felt the violent pain of his eardrums; and brought the belaying pin down on the captain's head in one sweeping blow. The next instant he took his tumbling dive over the ship's rail, with a second shot from another gun

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the color of night at once deepened so that the surface of the river became a vague-moving oil surface into which a man might quickly drop and quickly vanish. Pierce bent and unlaced his shoes. He kicked them quietly off, moved to the break of the deck and descended the ladder.

He went by the bosun, passed the galley and paused near the mainmast shrouds. Mister Sitgreaves, the first mate, stood against the starboard rail and Canrinus, the second officer, was in the same sentry position on the port side. The captain was above them on

the aft deck, his cigar bright-burning in the shadows. "Mister Sitgreaves," called the captain, "come here."

There were two Sitgreaveses on this ship, the mate and his brother, the captain. The mate retreated aft and went scuffling up the aft-deck's ladder. On the amidships hatch cover the rest of the Panama Chief's crew silently and sullenly waited for a break to come, hating the ship and its master and its officers.

The captain said in his bold, steady voice, "If any man tries to jump ship, Mister Sitgreaves, knock him down. This crew is signed from San Francisco

to Canton and return. I'm no hand to lose my men."

The captain was afraid of losing his men, as well he might be. All of them, excepting the two mates and the bosun, had been shanghaied aboard at San Francisco by force and knockout drops. There had been, Pierce remembered, an amiable man beside him in the Bella Union saloon. The amiable man had suggested a drink and presently he, Pierce, had died on his feet, to awaken on the Panama Chief at sea.

"Bully boy," said a murmuring voice from the amidships hatch cover.



Author Ernest Haycox owns an excellently equipped woodworking shop and turns out furniture as a hobby

Books and Saddles

By Jim Marshall

Spread down, pardner, around the campfire and visit with the range boss of the Haycox country, whose seventeenth novel, *Alder Gulch*, begins on page eleven of this issue

EVERY once in a while—although he knows better—Ernest Haycox sits down and pecks himself out a complete Western serial plot. He writes the outline, describes the hero, heroine, complications, secondary characters and so on to the final clinch, sixty thousand

words away. This done, Mr. Haycox glances glumly through the six or seven thousand words of the synopsis and throws the whole thing into the fire. Once, some years ago, he figured out a complete plot and stuck grimly to it. The result was pretty terrible. None of Erny's friends even mention the thing, preferring to remember the sixteen good Western novels he's written—with no idea, when he started each, how it was going to turn out.

Today, when he feels a serial for Collier's coming on, Mr. Haycox simply dreams up a hero, a general situation and an opening scene. His heroes are pretty real to him. They're all rebels, more or less; strongly individualistic guys, with a touch of sadness some-

where. They represent to their creator something typical of the Old West. "The West," says Haycox, "was—and to some extent still is—the last major stand of freedom and the rights of individuals who are willing to fight for them. It still is the freest place in the world—and that is why Western stories have such a universal appeal."

What is going to happen after Haycox's hero has ridden into Haycox's scene no one has the slightest idea, least of all Haycox.

"You place your hero in a certain setting, at a certain period—maybe half a century ago—and let him meet the other characters," explains Erny. "Then if you have your characters and their setting clearly in mind, they'll write the story for you. All you have to do is hammer it out on the typewriter." Haycox, now ranked as America's acemer Western-story writer, has been hammering them out that way since he sold his first story for \$30 back in 1922. He was a student then at the University of Oregon, learning journalism and short-story writing and living in a converted chicken coop back of a fraternity house in Eugene. The walls of the coop were covered with rejection slips and it became a game among the several budding scribblers at the college to col-

lect rare slips from obscure magazines. But before he went to the university, Erny had had a pretty full life. At twelve he was making a living on the streets of Portland, Oregon, where he was born. He sold the Oregonian and the Oregon Journal and Portland News, and when he had fifteen cents he ate in a Jap restaurant. This sustained him until he could make another fifteen cents for more food. Well, it was steady work, but it got him nowhere.

He tried other jobs—bellboy in a family hotel, dishwashing at half the lumber camps in Oregon, anything he could lay his hands on. In 1914 he drifted south to San Francisco and got a job as a delivery boy for a hat factory. This paid \$5 a week. A room cost \$1.25 and a meal ticket \$3.50, leaving two bits for the more abundant life. Besides, the hatboxes were too large to go on streetcars and the kid had to walk around delivering them.

So he left the hat factory and got a job as news butcher on the old Oakland, Antioch & Eastern, an interurban line running to Sacramento. You rode continuously and met interesting people and somebody was always leaving half a package of popcorn or a chunk of peanut brittle that a growing boy could use.

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