

Reverse Formation

It would stir any patriot's blood to see Hot Dog and Bingo, side by side, fighting the good fight for life, liberty, and the pursuit of Emily

By S. W. M. HUMASON

I CAN'T remember ever not knowing Bingo. The first thing I can remember distinctly about him and me is our having whooping cough together. We had mumps together too and we fell in the pond together one January and we both played halfback on the high-school team and we both played forward on the basketball team. So when we fell in love together it only seemed kind of natural. Things being what they are, of course we couldn't both marry the girl. We thought quite a lot about marrying her but neither of us would be seventeen for several months so we didn't think either of our families would be reasonable, and we could talk about it to each other without making any plans for any fight to the death for her favors.

We'd only known her for less than one evening when we got in love. We met her (together) at 8:18 P.M., on the evening of November 18th. She was visiting Marilyn Grant. Marilyn Grant is a girl who our parents tell us we must be nice to for many reasons, none of them involving our feelings.

This particular night I had been drafted into taking Marilyn Grant to a high-school dance and got no deferment on account of a lot of things like a bent fender on the car and forgetting for three weeks to take out the rubbish can and other little odds and ends that made my family unfriendly and firm. The day before the dance Marilyn Grant's mother called up and said this girl was visiting and couldn't Barclay (that's me—known as Hot Dog, though not to Marilyn Grant's mother) bring a friend? Bingo was going stag, but he still owed me three bucks that he'd bet on the Phillies and besides we were used to helping each other out in emergencies knowing that the next time the emergency might be on the other foot.

Just as Bingo and I got inside Marilyn's house, she—not Marilyn, but *She*—this dream, this creature—came down the stairs. I quickly made signs to Bingo that he rightly took to mean that he could forget all about the three bucks if he'd switch partners, but Bingo was past caring about three bucks. But Bingo is a very right guy and he didn't take all the dances with her but occasionally answered my signals to take over Marilyn Grant. When we could get somebody else to be nice to Marilyn Grant (we had ways) we took turns cutting in on Her. Emily her name was. Emily!

She went away after three days and I wrote to her every day for a week. Bingo did, too, and one day twice. She wrote to each of us just once and sent us each a picture—same picture, same size, same inscription: In Memory Of A Gala Evening.

In January I got another letter from her. I looked at it a long time. Then I opened it. She had invited me to her home to a Valentine Dance. "Holy smoke," I said out loud. Then I started over to Bingo's house, which is two doors away, to tell him I was the one she liked. I met Bingo halfway. He had a letter and was invited too. The whole problem made us so hungry that we went into my house and ate three doughnuts apiece and drank a quart of milk.

"What gives?" said Bingo. "Does she think only one of us will come, or does she plan to hand one of us over to another pigeon? She says go with me."

"She wants us both," I said. "She wants me because I am handsome, rich and smart and she wants you because she is as kind and good as she is beautiful and doesn't want to hurt your feelings."

"Vice versa," said Bingo, which brought us, though only temporarily, to the fact that we hadn't

studied the next day's Latin which is a language which I don't see why as long as it's dead they don't leave it buried. It being a good half hour before supertime we went down to Jenkins' to soothe our mounting fever with a couple of sodas. The joint was full of people who were not going to a dance with Emily and the sodas tasted fine.

We wrote and said we were coming and Emily wrote back and said she was delighted. I went around with the inside of my head full of the thought of Emily being delighted because I was coming to the dance. Bingo had an expression that told me that his insides felt like mine and our fathers, who were playing bridge one night with our mothers, said they didn't know what made us look so happy, considering.

After we had been some time in a rose-colored fog, we got down to plans. We got out maps and looked at the name of the lucky town where Emily lived and realized that it was five hundred miles away and that the dance was on a Friday night. My jalopy wouldn't go five hundred miles. My family's car and Bingo's family's car had recently undergone considerable body repair. We thought if we asked our respective fathers for the loan of a car plus the finances for the trip, plus permission to miss a day of school, they would each and both say no. But we finally asked them and without any time to think about it, no is what they said. They said it in a way that you get to recognize as one which you'd better not bother them any more, at least for a time.

They were both mad anyway just then on account of something that had just been done by a character my father always calls that stinker Starrett. His name is really Starrett, Samuel W. He is a big-shot politician in our small town. My father and Bingo's father hate him and so do a lot of other good Joes. He rules things with a rod of iron. My father says the rod of iron is tin and is as crooked as a broken gutter pipe and smells worse. The muttering from our fathers and others was getting louder and they hoped that someday Mr. Starrett would find himself coasting down some other hill on his ear.

I don't like him either and I don't like his son also. Of course it was neither right nor just that our fathers being mad about that stinker Starrett should reflect on Bingo and me. We had nothing to do with that stinker Starrett. In fact except that I once, when I was younger, collected three hundred and seventy-six campaign buttons, I never had anything to do with politics. But Bingo and I decided that even if their irritation about that stinker Starrett was removed, they would still have enough left over for us.

WE GOT a timetable and studied trains and saw the only way we could get there would be to take a night train on Thursday. Even sitting up in a day coach it would take a lot more money than either of us had had for a long time and it meant missing a day of school. There was only one thing that we did not consider for a moment and that was not going. We decided to get finances out of the way first. We borrowed a dollar here and a dollar there and I collected some old debts and I sold my jalopy and Bingo hocked his radio and we washed cars and ran errands and still we didn't have enough.

One day when we were eating chocolate cake to help us think I remembered something. "Holy smoke," I said, "we're in!"

Every birthday since I'd been born my grand-

father had sent me twenty dollars toward my education. The checks were made out to my father but he put them in a savings account in my name and I knew where he kept the bankbook. It had seemed a holy sort of money and even I had never thought of touching it before—but this was a big-time issue.

"I don't believe it," said Bingo when I'd explained. "They'd never leave that money where you could get at it."

I got the book out of my father's desk drawer and the next day at lunch hour Bingo and I went to the bank. I found a teller who didn't know me and after I had signed a thing and showed my driver's license for identification, he handed over a hundred dollars as calmly as if he did it every day which I suppose he did, though not to me. I put the book back in the drawer. My next birthday was six months away and the future could take care of itself.

We bought the railroad tickets and I never had anything in my wallet that felt so good. There remained the matter of school. It seemed incredible that to miss one day of such a common occurrence as school should seem important to anybody but it did. We tried for parental permission. We didn't get it. We tried for permission from the principal. We didn't get it.

IN FACT, in both cases, we got instead a lecture, accompanied by everything but television, on our general behavior and social standing. We were in the wrong with all the authorities at school except the athletic coach and even he was getting irked at our dangerously low marks. There was this and that. There was the matter of the alarm clock in the piano at morning assembly, of three rolls of confetti in the principal's umbrella, of the rubber cement on the bottom of all the galoshes in the girls' cloakroom—and so on. All trifles, but they added up.

"We could get suspended easy," said Bingo. We were studying geometry at the time and eating chocolate bars and popcorn. We could, too. We had been warned. Just one more thing, however minor, we had been warned, and we would be suspended for a month. It could be that simple. We had plenty of ideas. We could pick out the best one. I was for the one that called for short-circuiting the fire alarm, but Bingo was for putting beer in the water cooler.

"We don't need to do anything," I said. "We can just go. Then we'll be suspended anyway."

"We might as well have some fun first," said Bingo, and I agreed.

But still and all we were neither of us coming out with the thing that was really in the way. That was basketball. The team was well headed not only toward the league championship but maybe toward an unbeaten season. Of course, if we got suspended, we couldn't play basketball, and of course if we didn't play, the team wouldn't have an unbeaten season.

"We can't do it," said Bingo.

"Can't do what?" I said, though I knew.

"Get suspended. On account of the team."

That was it. I've heard my father talk about a social conscience and I (Continued on page 47)

Bingo and I asked Cynthia to go to the other drugstore after school. She was very enthusiastic about the invitation. She is not a wench I could care for, but has her points

ILLUSTRATED BY MAURO SCALI



WHEN *and* WHERE do we

"Only if we are certain that its use is vital to our national existence . . . if

IF RUSSIA were to bomb Detroit, New York, Seattle or Washington, or otherwise directly attack the United States, we would have no choice but to strike back with the only force we have to meet such an attack, the terrible power of A-bombs. In a matter of hours the first of our long-range bombers could take to the air, with atomic bombs aboard, their destination the industrial cities and production centers of the U.S.S.R.

This, if Russia attacks us directly, is what we could, and I think should, do. But the question of whether or not to use the A-bomb is not likely to arise in circumstances where the answer is so plain. The very existence of our stockpile makes the Communists wary of frontal attack that would provoke direct and fearful retaliation. The chances are that the Russians will continue their policy of gradual encroachment, of indirect aggression, of using their allies and dupes to front for them, and die for them; always short of open attack upon us. It is in circumstances such as these that the question as to the use of the A-bomb is most likely to arise, and it is in this light that we need to consider it.

Should we use the bomb against the Chinese Communists, in Korea or in China itself?

If Indochina is about to go under the Communist heel, should we attempt to save it with the A-bombs?

If the East Germans, in obedience to their Soviet masters, move to take over West Germany, should we try to stop them by using the A-bomb either in Germany or in Russia itself?

Should we, relying on our present atomic superiority, attempt negotiations with the Russians on an agreement-or-else basis, as Winston Churchill apparently suggests?

There is no quick or easy answer to questions such as these. To reach for the A-bomb might be to play directly into the hands of the Communists. It might mean the waste and depreciation of a valuable military asset. It could jeopardize our position as leader of the free world. It would virtually assure the outbreak of general war, the very eventuality we seek to avoid.

This does not mean that only an attack upon the United States itself would justify use of the A-

bomb. We have recognized in the North Atlantic Pact that an attack upon Western Europe is an attack upon us. Nor does it mean that we should withhold the bomb if the attack comes elsewhere outside the Western Hemisphere.

It does mean that the A-bomb should be used only if we are certain that its use is vital to our national existence, only if we have reached a situation where use of the atomic bomb and all that it implies becomes the lesser evil.

There are no general rules that can be laid out governing the use of the atomic bomb. It is something new in the world. To say that it is all right to use an atomic bomb if Russia uses it first, but not if she wars on us with conventional bombs or shells, is unrealistic. Nor does it make sense to say that it should be used only in retaliation for direct attack upon the United States, for this ignores the ways in which Communist aggression advances. Today it is not a question of being "at war," in the old-fashioned sense of declared hostilities.

The question now is, not are we "at war" but what kind of war? Can it be limited in scope?



CONSOLIDATED VULTEE PHOTO

B-36s will drop the Bomb—if it is dropped. Six recently flew nonstop from Texas to England with dummy atomic loads

Collier's for March 10, 1951