

The Hour of Destiny Strikes For Ambassador Stufflebeam

WILLIAM HARLAN HALE

AT THIRTY seconds short of eleven o'clock in the morning, the Ambassador, always a punctual man, glanced up at the ornamental wall clock opposite his desk. "They're not going to be late, are they?" he asked.

The young First Secretary crossed to the window and leaned out under the awning beside the American flag that hung limply over the blazing avenue. Nothing could be seen approaching but dusty drays and rickshas. "They usually are, sir."

Both men mopped their faces. Even at eleven the capital sweltered, and the two men were particularly aware of its heat because at the moment they were both wearing full evening dress. The Ambassador rose, feeling perspiration trickling down under his stiff shirt front and threatening to wilt his white tie and collar. "This is like Aden," he said, standing before the fan and holding his tailcoat wide open to let air circulate. "In fact, worse than Aden." The clock struck eleven, and at once the fan stopped. "Now what?"

"The juice always goes off here at eleven, sir," the First Secretary explained. "They're economizing ever since we cut back our level of aid."

"Where are the attachés? Are they clear about the routine?" The Ambassador fingered his copy of a memorandum headed "Ceremonial for Presentation of Credentials at Imperial Palace . . . Departure, 11 A.M. . . ." The memorandum was wilting too.

"Last time, for your predecessor's presentation, the imperial escort was half an hour late in arriving. The attachés are probably down in the snack bar, staying cool."

The Ambassador looked up—a lean, gray-haired, precisely chiseled figure, whose eyes, no matter what they were looking at, managed to convey a sense of atmospheric distance between themselves and their object. "Indeed," he said. "Then

ask the attachés kindly to disengage themselves from the snack bar and be ready in the reception hall at once. They needn't assume that the escort will be equally late for me."

The First Secretary winced. His new chief returned to his memorandum, concealing any further expression. A good beginning, the Ambassador thought; let them know right off that things are going to be run differently here now that a professional has taken over from that visiting meat packer on whom the President thought he could rely. The place for meat packers is in Chicago. But not here, out along the eastern forefront, where a man must really be trained and know how. . . .

"Could I bring you up a Coke, sir?" asked the First Secretary as he went out, hoping to rehabilitate himself with his perspiring chief.

A Coke! Here he was about to be presented in high ceremony as plenipotentiary of the United States to an eastern court—a poignant moment marking the first time in his long service that he had reached the status of an envoy—and he was being invited to celebrate it with a Coke. He made no answer, seemingly absorbed in his memorandum and confessing to himself that despite his years of training he was nervous. There must be no mistake; the sensitive relations between Washington and Bingpuk depended on it, not to mention his own career.

"On alighting in the Great Palace Court," he read again, "The Imperial Master of Ceremonies will present the Baron-Commandant of the Guard of Honor, who will . . ."

THE FETID air of Bingpuk rose under the awning, leaving him feeling stifled and queasy. He had dreamed that when the great day of his Ambassadorship came at last, it would see him in some capital very different from this—some famous seat of western boulevards, his-

toric embassies and titles. Still, he had at least become an Ambassador.

The First Secretary returned with the Coke. Simultaneously a clatter of hoofs could be heard coming down the half-paved avenue. Any instant now the gilded state coach which the government at Bingpuk had acquired generations ago, secondhand from Paris, would arrive to carry him to the tinkling jigsaw palace, accompanied by a platoon of the boy-emperor's household cavalry. He arose, white gloves in hand.

From under the awning, the First Secretary shook his head. "Only more drays, sir." He held out the Coke.

Dress Rehearsal

It was already fourteen minutes past the hour. The new Ambassador wondered whether the boy-emperor and the palace gang intended some slight. What a pack of thieves these people in this hole of Bingpuk were! He was about to blurt out his opinion but restrained himself; in the Service one must maintain entire calm and self-discipline even before one's First Secretary. "We may as well run through the ceremonial again," he remarked distantly. "As I enter the sovereign's presence . . ."

"You'll want to watch that slippery floor, sir. The last Ambassador almost—"

"I advance to within six paces of the throne for my third bow and then address the twelve-year-old somewhat like this:

"J'ai l'honneur de présenter à Votre Majesté les lettres qui m'accréditent auprès de son auguste personne en qualité de . . ." He formed the words without further assistance from notes, and observed the First Secretary's dawning air of admiration: Evidently his predecessor from the stockyards hadn't been capable of this. *"Permettez-moi, Sire,"* the Ambassador continued, facing his assistant in rehearsal and rising into assured verbal flight, *"d'être à même temps l'interprète des sentiments d'estime que mon Gouvernement professe à . . ."*

The desk telephone rang. "Shall I take it, sir?" the First Secretary broke in while his chief went on without pause. As the words poured forth, the Ambassador could imagine for a moment that he was

standing not in Bingpuk but under the candelabra of some far greater capital and before some world-renowned head of state, in fulfillment of his dream:

"... J'accepte avec joie l'honorable mission de maintenir et de rendre plus intime les bons rapports entre deux nations soeurs par la communauté des intérêts et..."

"Sir."

"... et la foi démocratique. What is it?"

"There will be a slight delay, sir. The state coach has broken down."

AN HOUR LATER, when repairs had been made, the Ambassador proceeded to the Palace and then (changing from evening into formal morning dress) to the Foreign Ministry, from which he returned to the Embassy to dictate his report to Washington:

SECSTATE

PRESENTED CREDENTIALS TWELVE-THIRTY AFTER HOUR'S DELAY IN PALACE ARRANGEMENTS POSSIBLY REPEAT POSSIBLY UNINTENTIONAL. SHORTENED MY PRESENTATION SPEECH TO SUGGEST SLIGHT PERSONAL DISPLEASURE. FOREIGN MINISTER EXTREMELY APOLOGETIC AND VOWED CO-OPERATION. BELIEVE REALISTIC BASIS ACHIEVED FOR UPCOMING TREATY NEGOTIATIONS.

STUFFLEBEAM

"Good old Stufflebeam," said the young desk officer who first saw the message at the State Department, "Never misses a trick." He marked it at once for the attention of his superior.

"Can't you just see him out there?" remarked the bureau chief, initialing it. "Starchy. Guaranteed not to wilt in any heat."

"Damned good thing we've still got some of those old-timers about," thought the Assistant Secretary, marking it for the Secretary. "What with all these new brooms." But the Secretary was absent at the latest hemispheric conference, and so the report passed into his files.

A Five-Gun Salute

In Cadwallader Stufflebeam's senior year at Harvard, during the Administration of Calvin Coolidge, a questionnaire had gone around among upperclassmen asking them what

they planned to become after graduation, and among the hundreds of intended stockbrokers and corporation lawyers Stufflebeam had stood out alone by stating without hesitation, "Diplomat."

He had come upon this choice through family example and an



eager desire to serve his country. His uncle, also a Cadwallader, had captured President Theodore Roosevelt's attention when as a young man on a hunting safari he had dispatched a cheetah with a knife, his gun having jammed; as a result of this performance he had at once been commissioned a consul and had gone on to make a notable career in the Orient.

The younger Cadwallader was of more serious bent: He studied modern languages, Slavonic Culture, Islamic Folkways, took a semester in Colonial Expansion, another in Maritime Rights, and a year in the Diplomacy of Imperialism to prepare himself for his chosen career and its stiffened entrance requirements. Directly after graduation, he journeyed to Washington to present himself as a candidate. He never forgot his encounter with the courtly official seated under aspidistras with a stack of Social Registers at his back, who glanced approvingly along his profile and the cut of his clothes and finally remarked, "I see most promising material in you, Stufflebeam. How well I remember your uncle out in Foochow! I take it you also have . . . er . . . or may soon have . . . adequate private means?"

The gentleman had been following the society columns and knew that young Stufflebeam was engaged to a wealthy girl. So they were married, the examination went off easily, and before long he was commissioned and sent down to Central America to begin the long climb up the ladder to Bingpuk.

AH, THOSE DAYS in Puerto Castillo, when I was just a green young vice-consul!" he would reminisce after dinner when he had grown gray and hard-bitten in the service; "I remember how thrilled I was when a U.S. destroyer put in and I went aboard to pay my first official call and found myself piped over the side and given a salute of five guns that echoed around the harbor. Remember, Eleanor? And how the guns were so loud that the local population thought an American naval force was about to land and took off into the hills until I could coax them back!" Eleanor Stufflebeam for her part remembered chiefly the mosquitoes, the impossible servants, and the fact that her husband's official duties seemed to consist chiefly in bailing drunken American seamen out of local jails after waterfront brawls.

No matter, he told himself at the time; every experience helped to train him for greater things ahead. "Young man," his consul general had remarked one day at the beach club, "you're going to spend the better part of your life doing dull or trivial duties—reporting on banana or cobalt shipments, picking up the same kind of political gossip at five thousand almost identical official receptions in a dozen countries around the globe, making interchangeable speeches before monuments to heroes from Bolivar to Sun Yat-sen, dealing with traveling spinsters who've lost their passports, with heiresses who insist on being presented at Court, and with visiting Congressmen who must investigate everything, particularly the night life. Then, one day, if you're lucky, something may happen that actually matters: a local blow-up or a revolution, say, when it suddenly becomes a good thing for America to have an all-round hand at the spot, even if he's only what they call a cookie pusher. It's to be ready for that moment that you've

dedicated your life, son. Like a soldier. And don't stick your neck out till it comes."

NO REVOLUTION came to Puerto Castillo, and after two years Stufflebeam was transferred further south with a commendation. As a rising young specialist on Latin-American affairs he was next shifted to Reykjavik and then to Manila, dealing in turn with whale fisheries and Far Eastern trade and malaria. Finally came the reward of an assignment to Paris. "Nice life you picked for yourself, Wally," said a visiting classmate of his, now well up in State Street finance, admiring the eighteenth-century flat of First Secretary Stufflebeam on the Ile St. Louis. "Pretty soft." He did not know that his host had just received orders to proceed to Aden.

Cadwallader Stufflebeam and his wife moved among the continents, opening houses, closing houses, enduring blinding heat and six-month frosts, collecting old porcelain, exotic experience, titled acquaintances, and Chinese gongs—seeing the whole world and yet living wherever they went in their own special orbit apart from it. To the self-enclosed floating community of diplomats, each new capital was just a way station on the road of their advancement to the next. They were a clan distinctive in dress, punctilio, and speech, with even more punctilious wives. Often Minister-Counselor Stufflebeam came home from a day of wrestling in some outlying republic with matters of oil, extradition, or exchange to hear his Eleanor up in arms over an issue of diplomatic precedence at the bridge table. "Scarsdale," he muttered to himself; "that's what I drew: a lifetime of transplanted Scarsdales." But he said nothing; he had learned to be patient, and he was a dedicated man. One had to accept this life of exile and artifice in the hope that the moment for some signal service might still come.

He rose. He crossed deserts, faced up to Chinese war lords, evacuated Americans, endured air raids, endured also the oppressive fact that so many of his best dispatches dropped without comment into the files at home, and became a walking storehouse of information on a myriad of topics ranging from Arab

law and opium smuggling to the names of the mistresses of every Cabinet Minister of whatever country he was stationed in. He corresponded privately with old cronies in Washington and learned when to talk and when not to talk. (Several who had talked too much, or reported too fully on what they thought, were now in trouble on the Hill.) He grew introspective and secretive, and his life was blameless: He never took that second cocktail which might, under the new regulations, turn him into a security risk. He also aided his country late one night in Paris by physically restraining an exuberant member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee from jumping fully clothed under a fountain in the Place de la Concorde.

"Tact . . . diligence . . . varied skills . . . coolness under pressure . . . clearly ambassadorial material," a Foreign Service inspector minuted



Stufflebeam was brought home to Washington for a tour of duty on the policymaking level, after which, it was understood, if he made good he might be given a Mission.

So the Stufflebeams dismantled their latest overseas villa, discharged their servants, and underwent the discomforts of repatriation in a five-room Chevy Chase apartment while he performed the duties of Executive Co-ordinator of the Advisory Committee on Long-Range Contingency Planning. He examined all worldwide contingencies, tried zealously to co-ordinate the many advisers, and received from the new Secre-

tary's office the comment that his work was notably "constructive." It all went into the files.

"Does this mean we'll get an embassy at last?" his wife asked. The servant problem in Chevy Chase was wearing her down.

Before long, dreaming of Madrid or Brussels, Stufflebeam was summoned into the Secretary's presence. His face fell when he heard the name of his destination. "Now, Stufflebeam, don't underrate Bingpuk," the Secretary was saying. "As you know, our relations there are in immediate need of improvement, if we're not going to have to face a . . . a . . ."

"An agonizing reappraisal," Stufflebeam volunteered.

"Exactly. Stufflebeam, I've had my eye on you for some time. I've always maintained that when it comes to our most sensitive tasks abroad, there can be no substitutes for the disinterested, tested professionals of the highest constructive caliber. We need you right now to take over out there and reach a mutual-defense pact with them, Stufflebeam. You'll be performing a signal service."

An Unexpected Visitor

So at last his hour had struck. "We're off to Bingpuk!" he reported jubilantly to his wife, abandoning all reserve. "To where?" she gasped. "To line up Bingpuk with the West," he explained. "Don't underestimate it, Eleanor. All my life I've waited . . ."

As soon as he reached the capital of the minuscule empire, even before his far-traveled belongings had been settled into the Residence high up on its slope above the fever swamps, Ambassador Stufflebeam began upon the work that he hoped would crown his career: a pact with Bingpuk, a model pact. His opening move had shown his mettle.

The boy-emperor had become differential, and the Foreign Office was purchasable—somewhat too purchasable, he thought. The boy on the throne needed to be defended with dollars, the household cavalry with new uniforms, and the Foreign Office confided that a time might come when the rest of Bingpuk would want to be defended against the household cavalry.

The Ambassador, seasoned in

many continents, listened patiently to all the things Bingpuk said it needed, and then retired to his study to light a pipe and ask himself whether we in fact really needed Bingpuk. Surely we must do more than just add a link of paper to our chain of alliances. After all his years of anonymity, it would be pleasant to make headlines as the author of the Stufflebeam Agreement, but it must be one under which the other side at least started doing its share in return for economic and military assistance. He reported "progress" to Washington but said he was proceeding with "exacting circumspection" in order to achieve "favorable conditions" and advised "a posture of caution." The only question now was whether Washington would actually read what he had cabled. Since no reply reached him for weeks, he assumed that Washington supported him. He might yet become the author of that model balanced pact of mutual assistance. If only Eleanor weren't so impatient, thinking of her triumphal soiree.

Then, in the small hours one night, his duty officer arrived from the Embassy to awaken him with a priority night-action message from Washington. He threw on his dressing gown and hurried downstairs to read the hurriedly decoded sheet:

IN VIEW SPEEDY PROGRESS REPORTED RE TREATY, SECSTATE ARRIVING BINGPUK SPECIAL DIRECT FLIGHT WEDNESDAY TO TAKE OVER IMMEDIATE CONCLUSION OF NEGOTIATIONS ON BASIS COMPLETE EQUALITY TWO NATIONS. MILITARY AID MISSION FOLLOWS. SECSTATE PERSONALLY REPEAT PERSONALLY DESIRES REITERATE ENTIRE CONFIDENCE IN AMB. WHOSE WORK SO FAR NOTABLY CONSTRUCTIVE.

"My God!" exploded Stufflebeam. "I beg pardon, sir?" asked the duty officer, eyebrows raised.

Twenty-five years of training and discipline, he thought, with the hour of signal service at hand, and now this. "I was just wondering," he said quickly to his First Secretary, before whom he must show no emotion, "what is my wife going to say when she learns we'll have to vacate our bedroom and move over into the guest annex tomorrow to make room for the Secretary?"

VIEWS & REVIEWS

What's Wrong with Gold?

Mr. Marbly Knows

ROBERT ARDREY

IT WAS GOOD to be in Durban. I had been in the African interior, a mile or so high, and I do not sleep well at a mile or so high. Here it was good old drowsy sea level, and I had had my first sound night-long sleep in weeks.

There was a dampness like Galveston in the spring. There was a breeze off the Indian Ocean like a cool, poised hand, so steady that one might build a leaning house of cards against it. It was good to sit by a broad café window in the evening and feel the breeze, and listen to the surf, and watch the strollers outside on the Marine Parade, and see the twinkling blue-and-red lights of a carousel on the beach—to sense the respectability of this tropical little England, to put aside, for the time, the fears and hatreds of Johannesburg, and forget apartheid and a great lurking black continent like night at the white man's door.

The café orchestra was sitting silent, instruments on laps, listening. A large man with a Latin look was standing up and playing a trumpet. A blonde accompanied him on the piano. She kept looking at him and smiling. He played softly. His eyes were closed. His cheeks were undistorted. He played the trumpet as if he were whistling to himself, walking at night through some silent street. The long, sweet melody from Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet* strolled among the tables. A community of remembrance embraced us all, and I was a little boy in Chicago, in Jackson Park, and there was a bandstand, and my mother wore a dress with its hem in the grass, and somebody was playing a cornet solo.

"We are walking," said Marbly in a loud, hoarse whisper, "on the edge of a volcano."

He groped for the floor with his feet, and with solemn concentration walked around the table in a slow, unsteady circle.

"Sit down, you ruddy ruin," said Mrs. Coster, who was handsome. Mrs. Marbly, who was not, said nothing.

"Gold!" said Marbly. He pointed his forefinger, which had been broken at some time or other and was crooked, at Mrs. Coster's nose.

The orchestra's violinist, his instrument in his lap, was looking at Marbly with small appreciation. It's usually an American, I thought; thank heaven he's English, they're all English. Let them settle this among themselves.

The crooked forefinger was seeking my nose.

"Fort Knox," said Marbly, and he found his chair and collapsed into a great white rumpled tropical heap.

Oh, Lord, I thought, I have done it again. I have somehow given this man the impression that I'm an economist. He wants to argue with me. What is there about me that keeps giving people false impressions? This is how it was in Tanganyika, with Jack Coster. My whole career in Africa has been one fake after another.

Eve Coster still glared at the moody heap. Mrs. Marbly continued her drinking.

THIS QUALITY of inspiring false impressions is embarrassing. I regard myself as a sound sort of citizen, a man of dull integrity. It comes always as a blow when I find myself sailing under false colors.

I can recall a time in New York, back in the 1930's, when I was doing my first Broadway play and living at the Alpha Delta Phi club. I was not