

The Polynesian Pull

"Tahiti-Nui," by Eric de Bisschop (McDowell, Obolensky. 284 pp. \$5), disputes by demonstration the conclusions of the Kon-Tiki expedition. Harry L. Shapiro, who saw the author's raft half-finished in Tahiti, is chairman of the Department of Anthropology at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City.

By Harry L. Shapiro

ERIC DE BISSCHOP is right in at least one respect: Polynesia has a way of attracting adventurous spirits. From the days of Wallis, Bougainville, and Cook, the islands in the mid-Pacific stretching from Hawaii to New Zealand and from Samoa to the Marquesas have captured the European and American imagination as no other maritime world anywhere else has been able to do. Largely because these islands have drawn such men as Melville, Stevenson, Henry Adams, La Farge, Nordhoff, Hall, Maugham, Frisbie, Loti, Calderon, and Gauguin, they have been the subject of recurring waves of interest.

The present one, touched off by the famous voyage of the *Kon-Tiki*, is concerned with the origins of the Polynesians and how they reached these islands. Thor Heyerdahl, by launching his balsa raft in the Humboldt current, was carried from the shores of South America to the Tuamotuan islands in eastern Polynesia. Thus he dramatically demonstrated the possibility that American Indians might by similar drift voyages have populated Polynesia. The enormous public that has read his books seems more or less thoroughly convinced by this hypothesis. Unfamiliar with the evidence that has led most of the reputable scholars to believe that the Polynesians in fact must have originated in the West, somewhere along the shores of Southeast Asia and its adjacent islands, the general reader has fallen an easy victim to the interpretations arrayed by Heyerdahl. The scholarly debates and refutations have not appeared in the popular press and have, therefore, gone unnoticed except by the limited circle of specialists.

Eric de Bisschop, a Frenchman and well known for his maritime exploits, is a highly opinionated amateur in this controversy. He is convinced that the Polynesians developed their maritime skill in Polynesia. He is somewhat ambiguous about their actual origin but obviously it was not America,

since he attributes any resemblance in South America to Polynesians to trading and exploratory voyages. Indeed, to demonstrate that this was possible accounts in part for the voyage of the *Tahiti-Nui*. De Bisschop entertained confirmed ideas about the use of rafts by Polynesians and their ability to navigate them in the latitudes of variable winds below the steady, easterly trades.

De Bisschop constructed the *Tahiti-Nui* of bamboo poles lashed with native fibers. I saw the raft in Tahiti half-finished, and, along with most of the local population had serious doubts that it could survive the buffeting of the boisterous seas de Bisschop planned to sail. The amazing thing is that it did for more than six months. Officially he began his voyage in mid-November, 1956, and ended it at the end of May, 1957, on board the Chilean Naval Frigate

Baquedano, leaving the raft foundered. Even if he did not actually reach Chile itself, de Bisschop proved that such a voyage was at least theoretically possible.

Obviously, de Bisschop was a man of amazing fortitude and persistence. He was certainly not easy to get along with, judging from his book and from the log he reproduced in it. His venom against academic ethnologists sometimes seems plain silly, not to say ill-founded, and his own speculations on ethnological matters would not, I'm afraid, receive a whole-hearted approval from experts.

Undaunted by the wreckage of the *Tahiti-Nui* before reaching its assigned destination, de Bisschop built another raft for the return trip to Tahiti. Again the raft was wrecked just before attaining its goal. De Bisschop was lost along with the craft. This was an end that he preferred.

AROUND THE WORLD: Anthropologist Edward Weyer, Jr., in his book, *"Primitive Peoples Today"* (Doubleday, \$10), tours the globe in photographs and text to depict fourteen tribes who still live as if civilization never happened. African Bushmen, headhunting Jivaros of South America, the Australian Aruntas, all, in their diverse ways, live close to nature. How they live, gather food, worship, and endure as anachronisms in a modern world, is illustrated in more than 200 photographs. Reading clockwise: an Eskimo woman plays the popular ring-and-pin game; a New Guinea father wears a headband of wooden pins which symbolize his wealth—a pig, a wife, an axe; the geometric patterns typical of her tribe are worn by a regal Zulu girl; braided hair is the style of the Dahomeys, who live west of Nigeria; a fly-speckled Saharan girl carries a clay bowl ornamented in Moslem design.



Memoirs of Two Uncommon Men

"More than Meets the Eye," by Carl Mydans (Harper. 310 pp. \$4) and "The Masks of War," by George Langelaan (Doubleday. 320 pp. \$3.95), are both autobiographical accounts by unusual men, who filled their lives with adventurous exploits. Quentin Reynolds, who has traveled widely as a correspondent, has written many books, among which have been "They Fought for the Sky."

By Quentin Reynolds

HERE are two books any reader will be delighted to meet. "More Than Meets the Eye" is by Carl Mydans of *Life*. Mydans is a brilliant photographer who writes better than well. Once a fellow correspondent said to him, "You think with your eyes." He meant it as a compliment, but in this book Mydans thinks with more than his eyes, and he has shepherded his thoughts, not through the lens of a camera, but through the keys of a typewriter with skill, warmth, and humor.

Mydans has been with *Life* since its inception and there is little of importance during the past twenty years of violence that he hasn't seen and photographed. He saw the Finns crushed by the Russians in 1940, saw France collapse, and was then transferred to China. He went to Manila, where he was captured by the Japanese. He and his wife Shelley (a

writer for *Life*) spent two grim years as prisoners of war, but he does not dwell on their personal suffering; he writes about fellow prisoners, about some cruel and some kindly Japanese officers, and about the Filipinos whom he admires tremendously. Exchanged to freedom he wound up with the American army in Italy and was then hurried to the Far East in time to photograph the surrender aboard the U.S. *Missouri*. And later of course he covered the Korean War.

Mydans is a restless man with an urge to communicate more than his camera can say. There is always something the camera can't quite catch; a spoken word or the warmth of a memorable day or the agony of men in pain or the smell of death. No matter how great the picture there is usually "more than meets the eye." No book was ever better named than this one.

I photographed a man named Chou; a small-boned man in a dark frayed suit and dirty shirt and his unshaven face was black with whiskers. He sat in an unheated room in Chungking preparing reports. Now, years later, when I see Chou En-lai's picture in the newspapers his face is clean and smoothly shaved and his clothes are of good quality.

He ends his fascinating tale by concluding:

All of us live in history, whether we are aware of it or not, and

die in drama. The sense of history and of drama comes to a man not because of who he is, or what he does, but flickeringly, as he is caught up in events, as his personality reacts, as he sees for a moment his place in the great flowing river of time and humanity.

George Langelaan is an Englishman who was brought up in France, which made him a perfect candidate for espionage work during the war. "The Masks of War" is his story of a war that was not always blood, sweat, and tears; there was time for humor—even when an enemy had a gun pointed at your stomach. When the shooting began he was an obscure officer with the British Intelligence in Belgium. The regiment's Irish doctor snorted when introduced to him, "For us medical men there are three distinct sorts of intelligence which in their right order are: animal, human, and military."

The author's most significant tasks during the first year of the war were to undress and search two nuns (who did turn out to be women, but who later were revealed as German spies) and to interrogate a half dozen oddly acting suspects, who turned out to be escaped lunatics from a local asylum. Langelaan was one of those who survived Dunkirk and who made his way back to England. Now the war started in earnest for him. When he protested that it would be silly to drop him in France because he was so well known there, they tossed him to a great plastic surgeon who, quite literally, gave him a new face. After acquiring it he commuted from London to France as casually as a New York businessman commutes from Grand Central Station to Greenwich, Connecticut.

Like Carl Mydans this fine writer, too, is a modest man. He does not belabor us with his own ingenuity and courage; instead he writes of those with whom he worked, and an amazing group this was. He was eventually captured, but was helped to escape by a "woman in red" whom he writes about with admiration and always with humor. He tells us of a fellow agent named Jim Morris who escaped from prison when he was too weak to walk. He tells us of Albert, a fifteen-year-old youngster who was one of the most valuable members of the French Resistance. There was Mr. Brown, a colleague who spoke and wrote fifty-six languages—and many, many others all well worth meeting.

Once in Casablanca after dealing, in a most unconventional way, with a plump Mata Hari, he told an American security officer some of his fan-



—From the book.

George Langelaan, left, as an officer in East Yorkshire Regiment; right, after plastic surgery.