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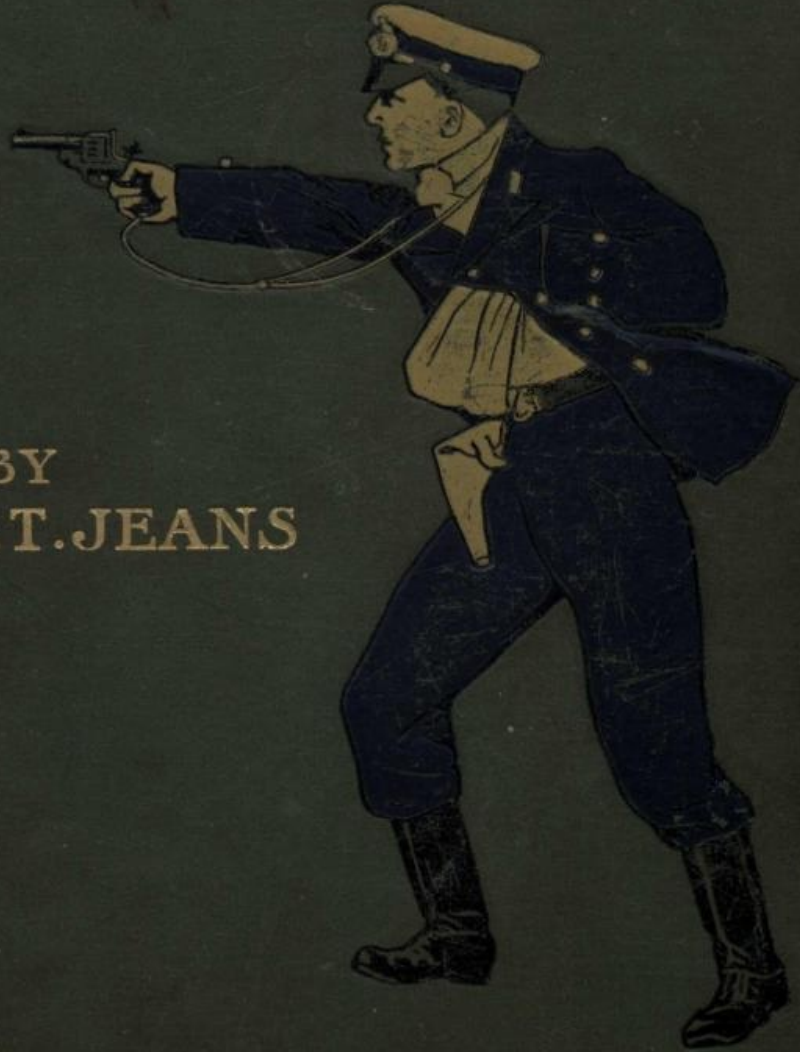
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK FORD OF H.M.S. VIGILANT: A TALE OF THE
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FORD OF H·M·S·VIGILANT

BY
T.T.JEANS



Cover art



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THE SKIPPER RECEIVES THE MANDARIN

THE SKIPPER RECEIVES THE MANDARIN

Ford
of H.M.S. Vigilant
A Tale of the Chusan Archipelago

BY
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Author of "Mr. Midshipman Glover, R.N."

ILLUSTRATED BY WILLIAM RAINEY, R.I.

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Preface

This story is written more or less on the same lines as my previous story of naval adventures —*Mr. Midshipman Glover, R.M.*—and describes events subsequent to those narrated in that book.

The proof sheets have been carefully read by messmates of different branches of the Service, and I am much indebted to them for correcting many technical errors.

Practically all the characters are drawn from life, and the cruisers and gunboats, British, American, and Chinese, taking part in the various operations are actual ships under altered names.

I therefore hope that the story gives an accurate representation of life in the Service under the war conditions described.

T. T. JEANS
Staff Surgeon, Royal Navy
H.M.S. ALBION

TO
E. R. W., K. G., AND E. M.
AS A SLIGHT RETURN FOR THEIR ASSISTANCE
WHILST WRITING THIS BOOK

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CHAPTER I How Dick Ford went to Sea

Old Gurridge—Appointed to the Vigilant—Dick sends a Telegram—The Vigilant at Last!—"Dear Little Dicky!"—Dicky gives his Messages

Written by Midshipman Ford

I don't expect that you have ever heard of Upton Overy, in North Devon, but it is there where Captain Lester, of the Royal Navy, lives, and, at any rate, you must have heard of him. Everyone in the West Country knows him by name and most of them by sight, and whenever he comes back from sea the villagers won't do any work, and the bellringers ring peals and "changes" on the old church bells all day long, till you'd think that the top stones must be shaken off. The noise always makes my mother's head ache terribly. You see, my father is the parson of Upton Overy, and our house is so close to the church, that the noise seems to go through and through it.

If he happened to be at home, on leave or on half-pay, the Captain sometimes asked my father to go out shooting with him, and when I was quite a kiddy I was so fearfully keen to go too, that once I crept away and followed them. My father would have sent me back, had not the Captain growled out—and he had an awfully deep growling voice—"Let the nipper come along o' us, Padré;" and you may be jolly well certain that I did follow them, keeping close behind the Captain, without saying a word, and with my eyes glued on him, just to see exactly what he did. I got so tired, that if I hadn't been afraid of making a noise I should have cried.

"Send the young 'un to sea. He'll do," he had said when my father, very angry at having his day's sport spoilt, had at last to carry me back.

That is the first I remember of Captain Lester, and is why I remember what he said. Afterwards he would often let me go with him, and when I was big enough would let me hold his great mongrel dog "Blucher". The Captain used to take this dog to sea with him, and always brought him out shooting; but he used to get so excited that he would obey nobody, and if let loose, always ranged ahead of the guns, and put up every bird for miles. The result was that he was kept on the chain nearly all the time.

Although he was so useless, the Captain would never leave him behind. "I've spoilt the dog taking him to sea", he would growl; "I ain't going to spoil his bit of sport", and he always let him have a run "on his own" towards the end of the day.

Sometimes his eldest girl, Nan, used to come too, and as she worshipped her father just as much as I did, we became quite chums, and had many a jolly day together, while we hung on to old Blucher's chain, and he tugged us about.

She worried very much because she was a girl and couldn't go to sea, but of course that wasn't her fault—I told her so, often—and it always made me feel what a jolly good thing it was to be a man, and that I was going to sea. I had made up my mind to that, and had never forgotten what the Captain had said. I simply longed for the sea, and used to spend every moment I could down among the fishing boats, helping to spread the nets out along the shore to dry, and sometimes taking a hand in mending them. I made chums, too, of the boys in the smaller smacks, which worked close inshore, and one of them took me out several times in his uncle's boat.

But just skirting along the coast was not enough for me, so one night I did a very silly thing. Upton Overy owned six deep-sea trawlers, which were generally away on the fishing grounds for a whole week, and one night, I couldn't stand it any longer, and crept out of the house, round by the back of the church, down a cliff path to the harbour, crawled aboard one of these trawlers, and hid myself under the nets. I knew that they were all going out before daylight, and that I

shouldn't be found till we were right out of sight of land.

When they did pull me out in the morning, old Gurrige—it was his boat I'd crept into—was rather beastly about it, and jawed at me till he was tired. He'd had some row with my father, and thought it a jolly good opportunity of having a "dig" at him, and the way he'd brought me up; but I didn't mind what he said—not in the least—for all round me was sea, no land whichever way I looked, and I simply felt mad with delight.

It came on to blow, too, and I don't think that old Gurrige could have taken me back, even if he'd wanted to—and he didn't want to either, because of that row with my father—and all the time he made me work, scrubbing and cleaning, and jawing at me for being so wicked as to run away.

Of course I got back safely, had a jolly good beating, and was sent to bed; but, honestly, I couldn't feel wicked, because, right down inside me, I knew that I'd done it because the Captain wanted me to go to sea, and, as I told you before, I simply worshipped him. Most people did—even the "grown-ups"—so it was no wonder that I did.

He heard about it too—my trip in the trawler, I mean—and that was one reason, I fancy, why he gave me a nomination for the *Britannia*, and when I had passed in, promised to look after me if I did well there.

I can't help remembering the first time I came home in cadet's uniform, and rushed up to the House to show myself to Mrs. Lester and the girls. Nan was most respectful, and she'd never been so before, and that pleased me more than anything else. I expect that I put on a frightful amount of "side", and must have been a horrid little bounder.

I only saw Captain Lester twice whilst I was in the *Britannia*, and then he commissioned the *Vigilant* for the China station. Of course, what I really wanted to do was to go to his ship, but I thought that probably he'd forgotten all about me. He hadn't, though; for when, during my last term, my father had to write out to him about some church repairs, he wrote in his reply, "Tell the young 'un he can come out to my ship, if he passes out of the *Britannia* well".

This news simply made me boil all over, and you may guess how hard I worked that term, and what I felt like when the lists came out. My name—Dick Ford—was seventh of my term, and next below me was Jim Rawlings, my best chum, and we both had just got enough marks to scrape out as midshipmen straight away.

Wasn't that splendid? It was grand, too, to see the little white badges sewn on the collars of our monkey jackets, and to know that we'd finished being cadets.

The next thing to do was to get Captain Lester to apply for me; but I funked asking Mrs. Lester, and my mother stood rather in awe of her too. However, it turned out that the Captain and Mrs. Lester between them had arranged it all, and one morning, after I'd gone home on Christmas leave, there was a large blue envelope for me in the postbag. I tore it open, and the first thing I saw was the name *Vigilant* scrawled in among the print. I yelled with delight, for there it was at last. It was grand, and at the end of the print was: "You are to embark on board the P. & O. Steamship *Marmora* by noon on the 14th January".

My mother ran up to her room directly I had read it aloud and she had looked to make certain, and my father frowned at me and said angrily, "You see what you've done? Broken your mother's heart," and that made me miserable again, though I couldn't feel miserable for long, and rushed up to the House to show the appointment to Nan and everyone I met. I shall never forget that day and the next three weeks, and at last driving off to the station, with my sea chest on top of the village cab, really, actually—I could hardly believe it—on my way to China—and Captain Lester.

Mrs. Lester and the girls were at the big gates, and I had to stop and wish them goodbye. Nan looked down her nose and pretended she wouldn't have given her soul to be coming too, and Mrs. Lester, before I knew what was going to happen, actually bent down and kissed me. My mother was so astonished that she left off crying, but I'm almost sure that Mrs. Lester had tears in her eyes. Of course I knew why—because I was off to join the Captain, and would—with luck—see him in six or seven weeks.

She had a big box of things for me to take out to him too, and it took a great deal of hoisting up alongside my chest.

You can have no idea how many messages were given me for him. Of course everyone in the village knew I was going, and for the last fortnight, I should think, half the village had sent "best respects to the Captain", and news about their children or gardens or the fishing. I stuck them all down in a notebook so as not to forget them—my mother advised me to do this. At the station old Puddock, the station master, gave me a pot of cranberry jam his wife had made—she'd been cook

up at the House before she married Puddock—"with our best respects for the Cap'en, Master Dick, and tell him we're both fair to middling, and I got first prize at Barnton Show for the pigs". Out came the notebook again, and we were off at last—my mother and I.

But the funniest thing of all happened at the next station—Bodington—for there Ned the Poacher—he was an awful nuisance for miles round, and spent half the year in prison—came sheepishly to the carriage and asked me to tell the Captain that he and his pals wouldn't be too hard on the pheasants this year, as they knew he was coming home for next year's shooting. "Tell the Cap'en they birds be mighty strong and healthy, and there'll be plenty of 'em next year when he comes home," and he shuffled away. I suppose he hadn't the face to come to me at Upton Overy itself.

I wasn't going to put that down in the notebook, but my mother said I had better do so.

When we went down to the docks next day and went aboard the *Marmora*, the very first person I saw was Jim Rawlings—on his way out to join another cruiser—and in the excitement of seeing him I hardly wished my mother "goodbye" properly, and it was only when the *Marmora* shoved off and left her standing alone in the rain, on the dock wall, that I felt what an awful brute I was, and wanted to jump across the bit of water just to say "goodbye" once again.

There were four cadets on board, as well; going out to join different ships. A lieutenant was in charge of all of us, and jolly nasty he made himself too; and we were all jolly glad when we found his ship lying at Singapore, and he cleared out. I'm not going to tell you all about the voyage. It would take too long, and there are too many exciting things for you to hear. For me they began there, and it was Jim who made the discovery. He'd got hold of a Singapore newspaper, and suddenly came flying along the deck, whooping like a madman, and shoved it into my hands. You can imagine how excited I was, for among the telegrams was this:

"Shanghai, February 22nd. Captain Lester, H.M.S. *Vigilant*, senior officer in the Chusan Archipelago, reports that the Chinese cruiser *Huan Min* has picked up Mr. Martin P. Hobbs and his daughter, adrift in a boat, and that their steam yacht has been captured by a gang of pirates in possession of a large steamer, and led by a European."

At the end of the telegram followed—"We understand that Captain Lester has been ordered to take the necessary steps to recapture Mr. Hobbs's yacht."

My Aunt! Wasn't that news? You can just fancy how I almost felt sick all over with excitement, and how frightfully important I felt at being the only one going to that ship, with a chance of chasing pirates. How I wished it was possible for Jim to come too. We thought and thought of any number of schemes, and then, "Let's telegraph to Captain Lester," he burst out; and we hunted out every penny we had in our chests, rushed ashore, jumped into a double rickshaw, and went off like mad to the Eastern Telegraph Office. The *Marmora* was lying at Tanjong Pagar wharf, and we needn't have gone fifty yards, if we'd known, but we drove right into the town.

When we got there our courage began to ooze away, because I knew it was a frightfully cheeky thing to do; but Jim bucked me up, and the telegraph people helped us, and put the best address they could think of. What we sent was: "Midshipman Rawlings chum mine wants come *Vigilant*—Ford Midshipman", and that took nearly all our money. Neither of us cared a "rap" about that, though, so long as Captain Lester would ask for Jim.

We were half-dead with funk at what we'd done when we got outside the office, but Jim cheered me up by saying, "we couldn't get hanged", and that they wouldn't send us home again, because of the expense, so we drove back fairly happy, though I couldn't sleep much that night for wondering whether the Captain would think me frightfully impertinent. He was terrible when he was angry.

We were a week punching up to Hong-Kong. It seemed a month, and when we did get there, both Jim and I were waiting at the gangway for the officer of the guard to board her, hoping to hear from Captain Lester. Of course there was nothing at all for us from him, and I was ordered to go across to H.M.S. *Tyne*, store-ship, for passage to the *Vigilant*, whilst Jim and the three cadets had to go aboard the *Tamar*, the receiving ship, always stationed there. Jim didn't say anything, but went down the gangway with his lips firmly pressed together, and I, very miserable, went across to the *Tyne* and wandered about her great ward room like a lost sheep all the afternoon, getting in everyone's way, till I got into a corner, and wrote a long letter home.

I couldn't keep miserable very long, though, because we unmoored directly after dark, and at last I was really off to join the *Vigilant*, and in the excitement forgot about Jim. Boats had kept coming and going, and I hadn't taken any notice of them, and they must have come over in the last boat, because just as we cast off someone banged me on the back, and there was Jim

Rawlings, grinning all over his jolly ugly red face, and behind him was that ass Dicky Morton, the junior of the three cadets, with his silly little eyes almost sticking out of his head with excitement.

"We're both sent to the *Vigilant*," he squeaked out.

Well, Jim coming too made me just completely happy, although it was a bit toned down by having Dicky Morton with us too. "He's not a bad little chap when you get used to him," Jim told me, but that was Jim "all over". He was the most unselfish fellow you ever met in the world, would have given you his last shirt if you asked him, and was always standing by to give a leg up to silly idiots like Dicky.

He hadn't the least idea why he'd been sent; he'd just been given an order, signed by the Commodore, and he hadn't heard whether Captain Lester had telegraphed or not. We tried to think that our telegram had just done the trick, but then that did not explain why Dicky was here. We didn't worry about anything, though, for long, and simply counted the minutes, and kept our eye on the cherub log all the time. You can imagine what we felt like when we ran into a fog, three days out, and had to crawl along at about five knots, rolling about in a swell on our starboard bow. Our navigator was much too wily a bird to try and make the Chusan group of islands from the south in that kind of weather, and that meant another twelve hours steaming; but at last the fog blew away, the sun came out long enough for him to take a sight, and away we went again.

The fifth day out from Hong-Kong we made the islands—you can bet your boots we were on deck—dodged in between several of them, and then the harbour of Tinghai suddenly opened out, and far away, under a hill, we could just see a white spot. "That's your ship, the *Vigilant*," a signalman told us as he hoisted the *Tyne's* number. We got nearer and nearer; she got bigger and bigger. Presently the signalman hauled down the pendants, and we knew that the *Vigilant* had seen us, and I wondered whether Captain Lester would be frightfully angry or not. I was really in a funk at meeting him, chiefly because of that telegram.

We anchored quite close to her, over to us bobbed a steamboat with a big "V" on her bows—our steamboat—my steamboat some day perhaps—and we were presently bundled in and taken across, the midshipman of the boat winking at us patronizingly.

"Have you caught the pirates?" we all asked him.

"Not yet. You bet! but we're in for some fun. You're lucky beggars, I can tell you. They're only expecting one mid. Where the dickens d'you other two come from?"

The first bit made us fearfully excited, but the last part made me miserable again; for it made it quite certain that Captain Lester had not asked for Jim Rawlings, and I knew he would be angry with us both if he had received that telegram already, or if he ever did get it. We were alongside in a jiffy, I climbed up the ladder, and, in my excitement at being at last on board the *Vigilant*, I forgot to salute the quarterdeck, and so did Dicky, and the officer of the watch "jumped" on us both and sent us both down below with a flea in our ears. I got red all over with shame, and it hurt me more because Dicky and I were in the same box; it wouldn't have been so bad if it had been Jim. The Captain was ashore—I was jolly glad of that—and the Commander was asleep, and didn't want to be disturbed, so we were left to ourselves, and saw our chests lowered into the gunroom flat, jammed together into a dark corner, and then we sat down on them for company, swung our legs, and felt miserable.

We weren't left alone for long, though, and soon we were hauled into the gunroom, where the Sub-lieutenant—a huge, great fellow—made us stand in a row in front of him, and asked us silly questions, to make all the others laugh. Jim and I got through this all right, but Dicky made a perfect little ass of himself—we were frightfully ashamed of him—squeaking out all sorts of things about his family and his sisters, and everyone roared with laughter.

"What do they call you at home?" the Sub asked him.

"Dicky, sir," the idiot bleated.

"Don't they ever call you 'dear little Dicky'?" the Sub said coaxingly. He was enjoying himself immensely, and I could almost feel Jim grind his teeth with anger when Dicky smiled feebly, and answered, "Sometimes, sir."

There were shouts of "dear little Dicky" all round the room, and the ass never saw what an idiot he had made of himself. He was always called "dear little Dicky" afterwards, by the Sub's orders, though there was no need for orders to make them all do that.

It was a horribly bad beginning.

They hadn't any news of the pirates either to cheer us up. They had had one look for them, but had found nothing, and were now waiting for fresh orders.

Just before it got dark someone sung out that the Captain was coming back with the Fleet

Paymaster. I hadn't the courage to go up on deck to let him see me, but just peeped out of a gunroom scuttle as he came alongside.

He was so broad and big, that he seemed to fill the galley's stern sheets. He was wearing the same stained old shooting-suit he always wore at Upton Overy—I never could remember seeing him in any other—Blucher, thinner than ever, was squatting between his knees, and the Fleet Paymaster, with white beard and a still older shooting-suit, was sitting next to him. He threw away the stump of a cigar, helped Blucher scramble on to the ladder, gave a gruff order to the coxswain, and followed Blucher. He looked so stern, and I felt so afraid of him, that I popped my head in again lest he should see me, and waited, hot and cold, expecting him to send for me. I wasn't so silly as to think that he would want to see *me*, but I knew that he would want to hear all about Mrs. Lester and the girls.

Jim knew how frightened I was, and promised that directly I was sent for, he and Dicky would bring along the packing-case which Mrs. Lester had sent, and put it outside his cabin door, so that I could get at it very quickly.

And then I remembered that pot of cranberry jam, and hunted for it in my chest. I couldn't find it anywhere. Jim asked what I was looking for, and he helped too. Suddenly he stopped, his face quite white.

"Was it a white jar with the top covered with brown paper?"

"Yes, it was," I told him, and knew that something awful was going to happen.

"I emptied it," he groaned; "ate the whole lot, half-way from Aden."

I went cold all over, and just then the sentry sang out that the Captain wanted me, and I shuffled aft, knocked at the door, heard the Captain's growl "Come in!" could hardly turn the handle for fright, went in, and stood before him absolutely speechless.

He was reading a letter—we'd brought a mail with us in the *Tyne*—and didn't look up for a moment or two, and just in that time, jolly old Blucher stretched himself, came over, smelt me, got up on his hind legs and licked my face before I could prevent him. I could have hugged him, because that did the trick, and made me forget all about the jam and the telegram—for the moment.

"Hello, Dick! Got here at last?" and the Captain looked up, and held out his great red hand. "How's the Missus and the girls? Where's that box of things she tells me she gave you?"

"Outside, sir," I squeaked—like Dicky—and simply rushed out. Jim and Dicky had just brought it along, and I dragged it in.

"Umph! Don't spoil my carpet. Where's Willum? Willum!" the Captain shouted, "come and open this box." "Willum"—I never knew his surname—was his valet, and between us we soon had the box open, the Captain all the time asking me questions.

"I had a number of messages for you, sir, from people in Upton Overy. I've got them all—nearly all of them—down in my notebook."

"Where is it?" he growled. "Read 'em out."

But I'd left it down in my chest purposely, so that I could get a "breather", and when I ran down to get it, Jim was waiting for me.

"Anything about the telegram or the jam?" he asked anxiously.

"Not yet; things are going all right so far;" and I raced back and began reading the messages, till I came to the station master's, and then I got red and spluttered a bit and didn't read it, but went on to Ned the Poacher's about the pheasants.

"Like his darned cheek!" the Captain roared, purple in the face. "I'll shoot him the first time I catch him! He knows that, and keeps clear when I'm about. What's become of his wife and kids?"

I told him, and then—I knew it must come out sooner or later—blurted out, "and Puddock, the station master, asked me, sir, to tell you that they were both 'fair to middling', and 'his pigs have won first prize this year at Barnton'. Mrs. Puddock, sir, sent you a pot of cranberry jam, but—but —"

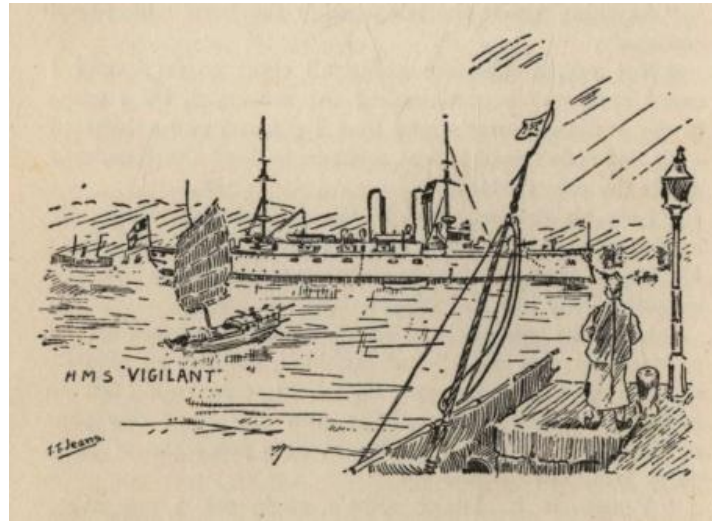
"Where is it, Dick? She's made me a pot every year since I went to the *Britannia*. Bring it out."

Well, there was nothing else to be done. I simply quaked with fear and stuttered out: "Jim ate it, sir—I mean we both ate it," and then, before he could say anything, I explained that Jim Rawlings had thought it was mine, and that it would be a good joke to eat it without my knowing.

I suppose I looked so terrified that he hadn't the heart to be angry. He gurgled and growled and got red in the face, and I waited to see whether it was going to be with amusement or anger, and oh! I was so thankful, it was only amusement.

He sent me away then. "You'll shake down all right; glad to have you in my ship;" and though

I longed to ask him whether there was any chance of going for those pirates, I hadn't the pluck to do so, and bolted like a rabbit.



H.M.S. "Vigilant"

CHAPTER II Introduces Sally Hobbs

News of the Pirates—Mr. Hobbs Tells his Story—The Chinese Captain—The Pirates—Three Cheers for Miss Hobbs!—The Skipper gets the Telegram

Written by Commander Truscott, H.M.S. Vigilant.

As I have been asked to assist in writing an account of the events which happened during the last few months of the commission of our dear old tub the *Vigilant*, I had better explain to you how they first arose.

We had been up to Shanghai, to be handy in case a serious effervescence of native feeling against Europeans should bubble over, and get out of the control of the local authorities. As it happened, the agitation fizzled out without our being required, and I think I can honestly say, to our great disappointment.

From there we steamed down to Tinghai Harbour in Chusan, the largest of the islands of the Chusan Archipelago, and anchored close to Joss House Hill and the tumble-down ramparts of the new town of Tinghai. All the islands of the archipelago simply abound with game. There are pheasants in every valley, and millions of duck, geese, curlew, snipe, and even wild swan are to be found on the marshes, paddy fields, and vast stretches of mud. It was for this reason that Captain Lester had obtained permission to come here, and he had chosen Tinghai because its harbour is the safest in the archipelago, as well as the most important, being the centre for a vast trade carried on with Ningpo and Shanghai on the mainland. Close inshore are always clustered a great number of fine merchant junks, loading and unloading, and anchored off the town is generally a small fleet of war junks. These are supposed to cruise round the islands and keep down piracy—as a matter of fact they don't. As an additional protection to the town and shipping, two little open batteries are built at each end of the harbour, mounting fairly modern breech-loading guns.

Half a mile inland, and only connected to the modern town by a rough causeway through the paddy fields, is the ancient town of Tinghai. It is surrounded by a deep moat and lofty mud walls, which are pierced by four gloomy archways. These are flanked by towers, closed in by heavy,

iron-bound gates, and only approached over drawbridges whose rusty chains are probably not equal to the task of hauling them up.

It looks gloomy enough from the outside, but it is still more so inside, and the sullen, scarcely concealed hostility of the inhabitants of its dark, horrid-smelling streets makes one exceedingly glad to get out again into the daylight, with no more indignity than being spat at or hustled.

The natives of the seaport town have grown accustomed to white men, and if they do not exactly welcome them, they tolerate them amiably enough. Indeed, a missionary and his wife—Macpherson by name—have lived here for years, and are always dinning into our ears the number of converts they have made.

You can imagine that everyone who could get away shooting did so, and one evening I came back to the ship after a long day's tramping through paddy fields after snipe. I had been using my new hammerless gun for the first time, I remember, and hadn't quite got into the "hang" of it, and kept on forgetting to push up the "safety" catch. Snipe don't give you much time for fooleries of that sort, so I hadn't been very successful.

I noticed that a Chinese cruiser was anchored close to the *Vigilant*, but paid no special attention to her, because she often came in. It was getting dark, and I was in a hurry to get aboard, have a hot bath, and change for dinner. The skipper of the *Ringdove*, one of our gunboats, had been shooting with me; I put him aboard his own packet, and then pulled alongside the *Vigilant*, where Lawrence, our navigator, met me at the gangway very excited, and I saw at once that there was something the matter. He followed me into my cabin, and whilst I changed into uniform, told me what had happened.

The Chinese cruiser—the *Huan Min* she was—an old wooden corvette belonging to the Peiyang squadron, had been making one of her regular cruises among the islands, and yesterday morning she had picked up two Americans—an old man named Hobbs and his daughter—adrift in a boat. They had reported that they and their steam yacht, the *Sally Hobbs*, had been captured by pirates, and that somehow they themselves had managed to escape. Turning out of her course to search for the yacht, the *Huan Min* had run into a fog, and presently found herself "right on top" of a tramp steamer and the yacht herself. Both had made off inshore as quickly as possible, and the Chinese Captain, following them, had rammed the poor old *Huan Min's* nose firmly into the mud. He had scarcely commenced to go full speed astern, when she came under a heavy fire, either from the tramp steamer or the shore, a fire to which she was unable to reply with effect. She was hulled several times, and had had some men killed and wounded before the rising tide enabled her to back off into deep water and get out of range. She had come along to Tinghai as fast as she could, and Lawrence told me that the two Americans were already aboard the *Vigilant*, and that Captain Lester was furious at having to look after them.

"He's had rather a bad day's shooting, sir, and is in a bad temper."

This was Lawrence's story, and excited enough he was about it and the chances of our having a "show". "Strangely enough too, sir," he said, "the First Lieutenant of that ship is an old chum of mine—a man named Ching. He was doing a year's training in the old *Inflexible* when I was a Mid in her. A jolly chap he was—we all liked him—and he's coming over after dinner to have a yarn, if he can get away."

I had to dine with the Captain that night—he positively refused to entertain the two Americans by himself—and I learnt from the old father, Mr. Martin P. Hobbs—I had seen his name in the papers—he was a wealthy railway magnate—the details of their extraordinary escape. This is what he told me, and you can take it for what it's worth; but he was such a weird, cunning little object, that I, somehow or other, found myself doubting his story. He and his daughter Sally, who was as pretty as paint, although her hair had been clumsily cut off, and who was now trying to twist the dear old bully of a Captain round her little finger, had been wandering about the Northern Treaty Ports, and at Shanghai had met some Boston people who were, what he called, doing a "splash". They'd been somewhere up country with a caravan of their own—somewhere where no one else had ever been—and in order to go one better, nothing would content Miss Hobbs but that her father should buy a small steam yacht, which happened to be for sale, and start away for a thousand-mile trip up the Yangtse. The skipper of the yacht—they'd named it the *Sally Hobbs*—seems to have been a dare-devil sort of scoundrel, according to Hobbs, and instead of taking them up to Hankow, got them to alter their plans, and brought them down among the islands.

One night they had anchored close to an island, and woke up to find the yacht in possession of a crowd of Chinamen, simply swarming all over the decks. They were forced down below and locked in their cabins, and there they stayed for a whole day, while the yacht steamed away.

Some time during the next night Hobbs was roughly gagged and bound, a long, blue, Chinese coat pulled over him, and he was made to get into a boat alongside. He found his daughter lying in the sternsheets, gagged and covered with another blue native coat. He heard a scuffle on deck, but it was too dark to see anything distinctly. He thought he heard the voice of the old Scotch engineer of the yacht, and then someone cast off the boat and they drifted quickly away in the darkness.

In the morning they had been seen by the *Huan Min*, taken on board, were in great danger whilst she was trying to fight the pirates, and were afterwards brought along here.

That was his story, and as I said before, it did not convince me. If the whole scheme had been arranged, and he implied that the skipper of the yacht was the arch villain, how on earth had he allowed Hobbs to escape so easily? He must have known of his enormous wealth, and would surely have kept close guard on him to extort a ransom later on.

However, there was his daughter, and no doubt her hair had been roughly cropped off, and from what I know about women, especially pretty ones, they wouldn't lose their hair if they could possibly help it, and when I looked across at her, the very picture of innocence, and heard her tell the Skipper how they'd shorn it off, putting her hands through the irregular bits left, her lips quivering, and her eyes filling with tears, I was bound to believe that there was some truth in it.

It was amusing to watch the change in the Skipper's manner. He had sat down to dinner with a scowl on his face that would have melted the paint off the bulkhead, and snarled whenever he spoke; but now he was telling her all about his wife and daughters, and she was holding up her wrists to show him where they had been bound and bruised, and had completely mollified him.

Presently Hobbs ventured to ask him if he would try and recapture the yacht, and then the Skipper flared up again and roared at him, "that American citizens should get their own ships to do their own dirty work". The Skipper's language was never too refined, but the little man wasn't to be browbeaten. "Guess the *Sally Hobbs* was flying your own red ensign, Captain," he answered defiantly.

"Darn my rags! Why didn't you say so before?" shouted the Skipper, and got purple in the face. "Those pirates dare touch anything under our flag? I'll go after 'em to-morrow."

"I rather fancy she was," put in Miss Hobbs. "Poppa and I were in such a hurry, we'd only time to paint *Sally Hobbs* on the stern and the lifebuoys, and didn't reckon it counted, altering the registration."

Well, that put matters in a new light, and I felt pleased at the prospect of our taking a hand in the game.

I happened to think of Lawrence finding his chum on board the *Huan Min*, and told the Captain about the strange coincidence. "He's probably on board now, sir; he was coming over after dinner, if he possibly could."

"Umph! I'd like to see him. He would probably be useful," growled the Skipper, and sent "Willum" for him.

He came in presently, a fine-looking fellow in his black silk tunic with gold dragons round the sleeves, tall and upright, with a determined, prize-fighting jaw, which took the Skipper's fancy directly.

He sat down, couldn't keep his eyes off Miss Hobbs, and told us the story which you know already. He was very bitter about everything: his guns were worn out, his ammunition rotten, and his shells wouldn't burst, and, he added, wincing, that they had not had sufficient medical stores for their wounded.

The Skipper, who, I could see, was much attracted by him—it was his square jaw that did it—offered to send carpenters over to help repair damages next morning (our doctors had already taken charge of the wounded), and promised that he would take the *Vigilant* down to investigate the island.

I waited only long enough for the Skipper to make out his orders for raising steam in the morning, and slipped away to bed.

Next day we sent Hobbs and his daughter ashore—they were to stay with the Macphersons at the Mission House—and steamed down to the island, off which the *Huan Min* had received such a hammering.

Though we spent the whole day examining not only the coast line, but the interior itself, not a trace could be found of the existence of any pirates or any battery. In fact, the island appeared to be uninhabited, and we steamed back somewhat out of patience with ourselves.

The next day the Taotai from the old town of Tinghai came on board in great state, amidst the firing of three gun salutes from the war junks and the *Huan Min*. The Captain of that ship came

with him, and Ching also, to act as interpreter. I don't quite know what their idea was, but they imagined that the Skipper could do anything, and they implored him to do something. The poor, feeble old Taotai seemed to be at his wits' end, and must have stayed a couple of hours on board, pouring his woes into the Skipper's extremely unsympathetic ears. It appeared that he was responsible for the maintenance of order throughout the archipelago, and that piracy had lately been increasing to an alarming extent. From island after island memorials and petitions had been pouring in for the last six months, and the old man quite broke down when he told us how impossible it was to do anything, and how he dare not report the whole state of affairs to his Viceroy on the mainland.

"Why not?" growled the Skipper, glaring at him.

"He'd probably be dismissed, sir, or lose his head," Ching answered.

"And a good thing too. Umph!" the Captain muttered. "Tell the old chap that I'm sending a gunboat up to Shanghai to-morrow or the next day, and will report everything to the Admiral, and must wait his orders. It's no use me looking for that yacht by myself—might as well look for a needle in a haystack. Umph!"

What annoyed him was that the Taotai wouldn't send out his war junks. We didn't know the real reason for some weeks, but the old Taotai almost cried when he said that if the *Huan Min* could be beaten off by them, the feeble junks wouldn't stand a chance. There was a good deal of sense in that.

Of course, instances of piracy are always cropping up among these islands—we had been long enough in Chinese waters to know that—and we knew, too, that unless they became very numerous in the same locality, the authorities did not take much notice of them. You see it was only in times of bad trade, when perhaps the fishing had been a failure, or when the crops had been destroyed by one of the typhoons which used to devastate the islands lying in its track, that the inhabitants, practically threatened with starvation, would take to piracy as a means of tiding over the bad time.

Just imagine the temptation of seeing some lumbering great junk becalmed off your village, or stuck fast in the mud, if everyone was hungry and desperate, and imagine what an easy thing it was to man all your boats, surround her, and capture her. The chances were that she was full up with foodstuffs, beans, or rice or fish, and there was little to fear from the authorities, far away in Tinghai. They would never hear of it either, if you knocked the crew on the head. That is practically what would happen, and one lucky capture would set a village "up", till next harvest enabled them to carry on their peaceable pursuits.

Sometimes, of course, it happened that their appetites would be so whetted with their success, that they would lay in wait for every favourable opportunity, and every crawling junk which passed. Sooner or later it would be known that it was dangerous to take that channel, and sooner or later, if the trouble continued, a war junk or two, or perhaps one of the Peiyang corvettes, would be sent there to burn the village and hang a few of the inhabitants.

That is what you may call the ordinary course of events, and so long as someone did get hanged and some village was burnt, all went smoothly, and very little notice was taken of it.

But now, according to the old Taotai and Ching, it was a very different pair of shoes. There was organized piracy now; pirate junks cruised in twos and threes, cutting out junks anchored in front of their own villages, appearing from where no one knew, disappearing as mysteriously, but scattering death and ruin wherever they did appear.

A whole fleet of merchant junks, crowded together for safety, had recently been attacked by half a dozen pirate junks, and but one had escaped, throwing her cargo overboard, and flying before the wind to bear the news.

Not only were they evidently organized, but they also must have had spies in the principal centres, because, not two months ago, a war junk carrying the monthly salt tax to the mainland had been surrounded by pirates and forced to surrender, in sight of land. She had put up a good fight, and was well armed—for a war junk—and not the least notice had been taken of several merchantmen sailing with her for protection. This outrage was the real reason why the *Huan Min* had been sent down.

Merchant junks always do carry four or five small muzzle-loading carronades, and these pop-guns had, up to now, been generally sufficient to scare away any sea robbers. Now, however, these gentry had got possession of such powerful weapons, that antiquated smooth bores were out-ranged entirely.

For months junks hardly dare quit an anchorage, unless they sailed in company with others, and if a strange lateen mat sail was sighted, would huddle together, and be only too glad to

escape by disabling one of their own number, and leaving her a prey to their pursuer. You can understand the fright of these poor wretches, as they beat or drifted through the narrow channels, burning joss-sticks on their high poops, to implore the protection of one of their sea gods, and scuttling down below in abject fear when a pirate junk swooped down on them like a hawk, showing no mercy and giving no quarter, if any resistance was offered.

It was then, in this plight, that the Taotai had implored Captain Lester to give him assistance, and you can imagine that he was only too eager to take the matter up, especially as the capture of the *Sally Hobbs* under our flag gave him the excuse and opportunity he needed.

But he could do nothing till he had communicated with the Admiral and asked for more gunboats. This is what he did immediately, sending despatches up to Shanghai by the *Ringdove*.

After that we had to be content to await events, and we had to wait for nearly three weeks, as something went wrong with the mails.

During this time the *Tyne* storeship arrived with a lot of gear for us, as well as three youngsters. Only one of them—Ford—had originally been appointed to this ship, and I was much annoyed at two more being sent, because our gunroom was already overcrowded, and I'm always having trouble there, Langham, the Sub, having peculiar ideas of running the "show" with which I don't always agree. Hobbs and his daughter seemed to have taken up their quarters permanently at the Mission House, and one day, before we eventually sailed, came off to tea with me—they'd asked themselves, and I could not well refuse—and brought with them a German named Hoffman, one of the finest specimens of a man I have ever seen. He caught the Skipper's eye immediately, and the two were soon engaged in trying various feats of strength, at which, as far as I can remember, the German generally won, very much to the Captain's annoyance. Little Miss Hobbs bothered me till I let her go down into the gunroom to have all the "dear little midshipmen", as she called them, introduced to her. She made herself so popular there, that they sang "For she's a jolly good fellow", which made her fly back, in double-quick time, with tears in her eyes, to my cabin, where her father was smoking my cigars, and spitting, most accurately (and frequently), into my fireplace.

Hobbs told me that Hoffman was the original owner of the *Sally Hobbs*, had heard of her capture from some of the *Ringdove* fellows at the Shanghai Club, and had come across country to Ningpo, and from there to Tinghai in a junk. Mighty keen, too, he was to get hold of her, because her rascally skipper, who had pretended to be his agent, had naturally never paid over the purchase money.

He rather foolishly asked Captain Lester whether he could be of any assistance to him in his search for her; but this made the Skipper flare up and say that he hadn't orders to do anything, and "if he did get them", he growled, "it was time enough when 'Old Lest'", as he always called himself, "had proved himself a blooming fool". I softened the Skipper's fierceness as much as I could, for Hoffman was evidently hard "hit" by his money loss, and, as he had lived all his life in China, I thought that he very possibly would be of some assistance when we really did come to business.

Well, at last, after we'd almost thought the Admiral had forgotten us, the *Ringdove* did arrive, and little Rashleigh, her Lieutenant Commander, came on board, purple in the face because he would wear his sword belt too tight, waved some official letters at me, and went down aft.

It was not many minutes before I was sent for, heard the Skipper roaring to Rashleigh to "throw away that cabbage stalk he was smoking", and to Willum, "bring those eighteen-penny Havanas of mine", so knew, before I saw him, that the news was good, and found him rubbing his hands together and grunting with pleasure. "We've got to go for 'em, Truscott, got to go for 'em. The Admiral's sending me a couple more gunboats, as well as the *Ringdove*, and I'm to have a free hand. We've got to get back that yacht, and Old Lest will give 'em a lesson not to meddle with the British flag. Umph!"

As he went over his correspondence I saw him read a telegram and turn round furiously. "Dash my wig, Truscott, look here, here's impertinence! What the dickens is the Service coming to?" and he handed it to me.

I couldn't help laughing. It read, "Midshipman Rawlings chum mine wants come *Vigilant*—Ford Midshipman," and was sent from Singapore.

"Well, he's managed to get here somehow or other, sir."

"Both of 'em, drat 'em! and brought that useless rubbish Morton with 'em too! Umph!"

The Skipper was really angry, but I managed to smooth things down.

"Pretty plucky thing to do, sir, and both Ford and Rawlings are not half-bad boys. They don't know much, of course, but will do well."

"Umph!" he grunted. "Plucky, do you call it? I don't. I'll see them both presently."

It was lucky for them that the Admiral's letters had brought such good news. As a matter of fact, we fully expected that they would, and in the meantime the Skipper had obtained a vast amount of information from the Taotai ashore, and had already roughly drawn out his scheme for dealing with the pirates.

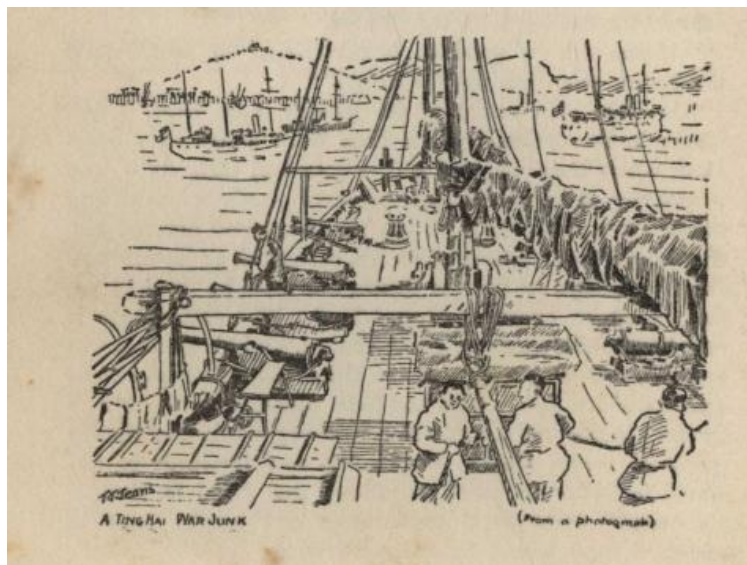
"If you want a good day's rabbiting," he said, "stop the holes, stop 'em up, Truscott."

His main idea was that the pirates must have, somewhere in the archipelago, a base from which they operated, where they repaired and revictualled their ships, and where they warehoused their captured goods before selling them. The authorities on the mainland had assured him that no such *dépôt* existed on the mainland, so he only had the archipelago to trouble about, and now he determined, first of all, to examine every island. The archipelago is roughly divided into five great groups, and his scheme was to examine each group, one at a time. The three gunboats and the *Huan Min*, which had been placed under his orders by the Viceroy, were to do the exploring work, and he was going to steam slowly, backwards and forwards to leeward, in order to catch anything that tried to escape. You must understand that junks can hardly beat to wind'ard, and would fly "down" wind.

His orders to Rashleigh and to the skippers of the other two gunboats, the *Sparrow* and *Goldfinch*, which arrived a day or two later, were—"You fellows, go in and turn out the game, umph! and Old Lest'll bag it when it comes down to him;" and his orders were the same, though not in those words, to the Captain of the *Huan Min*.

Once the last gunboat had arrived, he did not lose any time, but weighed anchor the very next morning, and with the clumsy old black corvette and the three little white gunboats puffing after him, steered for the north.

He chose to examine the northerly group first, because the winds, at that season of the year, always had a good deal of "northerly" in them, and, as I said before, junks beat to wind'ard so slowly that they would never think of trying to escape in that way.



A Ting Hai War Junk (from a photograph)

CHAPTER III The Vigilant under Orders

"Seven Bell" Tea Time—Sally Hobbs is Entertained—Mr. Rashleigh—The Pirates Raid a Monastery—A Fire on Shore—"A" Company Lands—"A" Company Doubles—A Fierce Tussle—Mr. Travers is Missing—The Return

Jim Rawlings and I managed to hold our end "up" all right in the gunroom, and hadn't been aboard a week before the Sub begun to leave us alone. We had hoped that that wretched telegram had been lost somewhere, but it turned out that it had only been "hung up" at Shanghai, and when the *Ringdove* came down with the Admiral's answer to the Captain's letters, she brought it with her. Dicky was on watch, heard Mr. Rashleigh tell someone that he had a telegram a fortnight old for the Captain, guessed it was ours, and rushed down to the gunroom flat to tell us. He looked as frightened as we felt. Jim suggested asking Willum to try and steal it from the Captain's table, and we did, but Willum didn't like midshipmen, and told us that the Captain had his hand on top of it too, so we could do nothing but huddle up on our chests and wait.

Presently someone shouted down that we'd been ordered to recapture the yacht and go for the pirates, and everyone began yelling and shouting and cheering; you could hear the cheers as the news passed along from one mess to the other. It was so exciting, that Jim and I forgot all about that wretched telegram, and we all made a fearful row in the gunroom, and Mr. Hamilton, the big Engineer Lieutenant, hammered out "Rule, *Britannia*" and "We won't go home till morning" on the piano. It was simply grand.

It was just about "seven bell" tea time when we heard the news, and when we'd let off steam Mr. Langham banged on the table for silence. "Gentlemen," he shouted, "on this great occasion, before you commence to stuff yourselves with bread and jam, we will perform the time-honoured ceremony of 'over the main top', the last midshipman down to have no 'seven bell' tea. Stand by!" and we all tried to get a good position near the door. "One! Two! Five! Go!" and we all scrambled out, helter-skelter up on deck, flattening out the sentry on the Captain's cabin, who did not get out of the way in time, up to the boat deck, into the starboard main rigging, clambered up it, into the fighting top, jumped across in a mob, down the port main rigging, half sliding and getting our hands trodden on, and dashed back to the gunroom, where the Sub-lieutenant and the A.P. were sitting with their watches in their hands, to see whether any records had been beaten.

I was amongst the first few, because I had got a good start, but Jim was nearly last—I'd seen him helping Dicky to haul himself into the fighting top. Dicky and Ponsonby—he was called Pongo for short—a fat little cadet, were actually the last, coming in together and both claiming not to be last. Dicky, like an ass, squeaked out, "He trod on my thumb," and held it up to show the blood, "going up the ratlines," and Pongo gasped, horribly out of breath, "I couldn't climb into the top, I couldn't really; I nearly fell," and we all yelled with delight. "You climb into you hammock fast enough, you fat little beast," said Mr. Langham. "The first three are Mr. Webster, Mr. Smith, and Mr. Johnson. Mr. Pongo and Mr. 'Dear Little Dicky' are last—a dead heat; neither of them will have any seven bell tea. Fall out! Dismiss!"

It had just struck seven bells too, and Ah Man, the Chinese messman, and Hong Cho, his steward, had covered the table with cups and plates, loaves of bread, tins of salt butter, and pots of jam. We all scrambled for places—there wasn't room for us all to sit down together—and grabbed at Ah Man's long white coat as the fat old chap came along, with his big teapot, and tried to get an early whack of tea. "No can do, Gen'l'men! Makee too muchee bobberee; no can do, all same one time," the old chap shrieked in his funny voice, as he pushed his way between the table and the bulkhead.

Poor Dicky and Pongo had to wait on the Sub, cut him slices of bread, spread them with butter, pile them up with jam, and then stand to attention, whilst he very slowly ate them, and made funny remarks with his mouth full—we had to laugh at them, whether we thought them funny or not.

"The great thing in life, Mr. Pongo," he said, stuffing a huge piece of bread and jam into his mouth, "is to be moderate in everything," and when he could speak again, "You, Mr. Dear Little Dicky, may suck your bleeding thumb if you're thirsty, and don't take it out again until I tell you."

So there Dicky had to stand, with his thumb in his mouth, looking an ass, and awfully miserable.

"There is still a chance of your getting some tea, my pet lambs," he went on. "Jones and Withers will be here in five minutes" (they were the midshipman of the watch and signal midshipman, and came off watch at 4 o'clock), "and they'll have to go over the 'main top' before I can make my final decision."

It wasn't much of a chance, and when they did come down and were ordered over the "main

top", they were back again in a very much shorter time than Pongo or Dicky had taken.

"I am so very sorry," said the Sub, chaffing them, "but for my sake, do try and keep alive till dinner-time!"

"Now do, just for our sakes!" shouted nearly everyone—except Jim, who was angry, and I rather fancy I didn't, because I was angry too, for it really wasn't fair sport to make fun of such an ass as Dicky.

The buglers sounded off "evening quarters" just then, so Pongo and Dicky escaped any more "rotting", though they dare not have any tea or cake, even when the Sub's back was turned, because that was against the rules.

Directly after the "dismiss" was sounded, Jim and I were sent for by the Captain. All our excitement simply fell out of us, and we were fearfully frightened—Jim was as pale as a sheet. We went in together and stood to attention in front of him, quaking all over.

"Umph!" he growled. "What's the meaning of this?" and he held out the hateful telegram; but we hadn't the pluck to say anything—words wouldn't come. "Infernal cheek, that's what it was, and must have cost you a pretty penny," and he glared at us over his cigar smoke. "A pretty penny, eh?"

Jim managed to tell him "One pound fifteen, sir."

"Umph! silly young fools," and then he hunted through drawer after drawer in his knee-hole table, we didn't know in the least what was going to happen—Jim told me afterwards that he thought he was hunting for a cane—found a couple of sovereigns and gave us each one—I nearly dropped mine, I was so surprised—and growled out, "Off you go; don't do it again."

We just had the presence of mind to say, "Thank you, sir," and streaked out like lightning, feeling happier than I can tell you, for now we hadn't a worry in the world—well, hardly, for the Sub didn't really count, nor Dicky either—and we had nothing to spoil our thinking about the pirates.

That very afternoon Mr. Hobbs and Miss Hobbs came on board to tea with the Commander, and he presently sent down to tell the Sub to have the place "tidied up", as she wanted to come down and see the gunroom. She came, too, in a few minutes, and those of us who could not escape were introduced to her, and then she sat down at our old "jingly" piano and sang nigger songs to us, and we got over being shy, and the others gradually came in, and we crowded round her, standing on the benches and table, and joined in the choruses.

She was so absolutely "ripping", that when she went away we all sang "For she's a jolly good fellow", and did the hip! hip! hooray! part jolly well—because we meant it. She got quite white, I don't know why, some tears actually ran all down her face, she put her hand on Mr. Langham's arm—he looked jolly uncomfortable, but couldn't move away because he kicked up against the gunroom stove—and said, "Guess you're all too sweet for words," and slipped away back to the Commander's cabin, where her father was. That made us quiet again—the tear part, I mean—and she looked such a regular "brick", that we all would have done anything for her, and it made it still more exciting to know that it was her yacht which we were going to try and get back. Jim swore that he'd "scupper" the brute who'd cut off her hair, if he could find him, and I'm certain that we all wanted to have a jolly good try too.

Well, at last we did get away, one exciting morning, the *Ringdove*, *Goldfinch*, and *Sparrow* coming along with us, and the *Huan Min* simply making the whole sky behind us as black as your hat. The smoke she made was so thick, that it looked as if it didn't like coming out of her funnel.

For a week we wandered backwards and forwards to leeward of one of the groups of islands, all of us in double watches at night, so as to keep a better look-out, but nothing happened, and after that we chose another group and waited outside while the gunboats searched it. Still nothing happened, and I don't mind telling you that this wasn't our idea of excitement and pirate chasing. A third week had nearly gone by when our first news of the pirates came.

Very early one morning the *Ringdove* was sighted coming towards us very fast, and presently her Captain, Mr. Rashleigh, bounced on board. He was quite purple in the face with excitement, and looked fatter than ever. "The Skipper hasn't turned out yet," the Commander told him, as he took him down below. "You'd better be careful. He's a bit 'livery' in the morning." He hadn't been below three minutes before he bounced up on deck again, looking "down in the mouth", went back to his gunboat without saying a word to anybody, and the *Ringdove* steamed away.

The Commander had to go to the Captain immediately, and through the open skylight I heard the Captain bellow, "that fat little blockhead has let 'em slip through his fingers. He drives the crew of a junk ashore, and never stops to see what becomes of 'em. I've sent him back, and we'd better follow him." Then I heard him give a terrific "Umph!"

Dicky found out all that had happened from the coxswain of the whaler which had brought Mr. Rashleigh across. He had slipped down the ladder directly, which was rather a smart thing to do. The coxswain had told him that yesterday evening, just as it was getting dark, they had sighted a junk becalmed under an island. Her crew could be seen getting out their sweeps and working at them frantically to try and escape, but Mr. Rashleigh had turned on the *Ringdove's* searchlight, and, so the coxswain said, thrown a drum of oil on the fires. At any rate, he jolly soon began to overhaul her rapidly, and as she came up, the junk's crew jumped overboard and swam for the shore. Mr. Rashleigh immediately sent a cutter's crew away to board her. Fortunately there had been some little delay in shoving off, and before they could pull halfway the junk blew up, which proves that she must have been a pirate. The cutter was so close that pieces of burning wood actually fell into the boat, and it was jolly lucky that they weren't actually alongside.

Mr. Rashleigh had only waited to pick up the cutter, and had then steamed back to us.

The *Vigilant* didn't wait long after the *Ringdove* had gone back again, and followed her to the island, but by the time we'd got there, there wasn't a trace of the junk. Then came more excitement, for "A" small-arm company—that was my company, the left half of it at any rate—was "piped" to fall in. I had to get my gaiters on, and a revolver and a cutlass, and then superintend the serving out of ammunition. Mr. Travers, a tall, very aristocratic Lieutenant, was in charge, and the Commander came too—more excited than anyone—and we were all sent ashore. The Commander sprang into the soft mud with a whoop, and more or less waded ashore, and we all followed him. I got covered with mud up to my knees, and that pair of trousers was never of any use afterwards except for dirty work. It was only a bit of an island, with a small village on the opposite side, so we spread out in skirmishing order and crept down on it, expecting to have shots fired at us every second. There seemed to be a lot of smoke about, and there was a burning smell in the air, and when we'd got within three hundred yards the Commander gave another whoop and sang out, "Rush 'em, boys!" and we all raced down as hard as we could, but the only living things, there, were some pigs and dogs, which ran away squealing and yapping. There was only one hut which hadn't been burnt to the ground—some were still smouldering—and down on the beach were two dead corpses—ugh! They were the first I had ever seen, and though I didn't really want to do so, I couldn't help going down to look at them closely. Some of my men turned them over with their feet, to see how they'd been killed, and then I had to go away.

Presently some of the villagers began to creep back, and then we learnt from them what had happened, through a Chinaman whom we had brought with us as an interpreter. In the middle of last night a band of men had swooped through the village and set fire to the huts. Whilst the frightened people were trying to escape or put out the fires, they'd cut the mooring ropes of a junk lying close inshore, and had sailed away. It was their only junk, too, and the poor brutes were absolutely ruined. Before we left the village they'd all come back, and were moaning and wringing their hands, but doing nothing to help themselves. I shall never forget one poor old woman, just a wrinkled bag of bones she was, sitting on a stone in front of one of the half-burnt huts. They had brought one of the corpses to her, and she was swaying from side to side, making a funny noise, and looking past everything, as though she was mad. One of the bluejackets gave her some tobacco as we went by. "Here, mother!" he said, "here's a bit of navy prick,"[#] and she snatched it from him, stuffed some of it into her mouth, and went on swaying and moaning.

[#] Navy Prick—Navy tobacco is served out in the raw leaf, and after being rolled and squeezed together by the men, is known as Navy Prick.

When we got aboard again—I'd never been so dirty in my life—the Captain was simply furious. I heard him say, "If that little fool had only stayed where he was, he'd have caught 'em," and we steamed back to our cruising ground.

That didn't end the day's excitement—not by a long chalk—for presently we sighted a solitary junk, thought it might be the one in which the pirates had escaped, and chased her. However, it turned out to be one of the Tinghai war junks looking for us, and bringing letters from the Taotai and Mr. Hobbs.

The news must have been very serious, for the Commander and the Navigator and the Engineer Commander were all sent for, and we could hear the Captain's bellowing voice talking very fast.

We soon knew why; Willum and the sentry told us. The pirates had raided the monastery of Tu Pu, cleared out all the monks' hoards, and left them hardly anything except what they stood

up in. The Taotai had written imploring us to go back to Tinghai.

We didn't understand how important this was till the A.P. (Moore, the Assistant Paymaster) heard of it, and then he whistled, "My aunt! you chaps, it's the richest monastery in North China, and you can see it from the top of Joss House Hill—it's not twenty miles away."

Well, that made it exciting enough for anyone, and showed how daring these pirates were becoming; and we all expected to go back at once, but someone heard the Captain growl, "I've made my plans, and I'm not going to fly this way and that way, every other second, for all the blooming Taotais and pirates in the world." So we didn't go back till the Saturday afternoon—as we had arranged. No sooner had we anchored under Joss House Hill, than the Taotai and Mr. Hobbs came on board, the old Chinaman in a great state of funk. They brought two other Chinamen with them, and they turned out to be two of the servants at the monastery. Six days ago the monks had given shelter to some seamen, who had knocked at the great gates and told a yarn of having been shipwrecked. At night these chaps had knocked the doorkeepers on the head, opened the gates, and let in a whole crowd of Chinamen, and while some of them kept the monks in their quarters, the others had looted the treasury and carted away everything of value. One of these two men had been too frightened to notice anything, but the other said that he had managed to escape, had hidden in a swamp down by the sea, and had seen two steamers, one large and the other small, close inshore, and that the robbers all went away in them.

"That's Hobbs's yacht and the tramp steamer, I'll bet you anything," the Sub said.

The Captain came up to see the Taotai and Mr. Hobbs over the side, and we heard him ask Mr. Hobbs: "What's become of that great German chap Hoffman, eh?"

"He streaked across to squint at that collection of old monks right away. Says he'll get information from them at first hand, and means to find that yacht of his before he's much older, I guess."

"Where's Darter Sally?" asked the Captain.

"Staying up at the Mission House. Guess she's gotten a shy fit and wouldn't come on board," and the little man smiled, whilst the Captain snorted, as if that was the last thing in the world he could believe.

We had been away from Tinghai for nearly three weeks, and of course we had run out of fresh grub down in the gunroom, so you can bet your boots the very first thing that Mr. Langham did was to send Ah Man ashore to buy some; and he came back with a sampan loaded down with things, mutton and fowls and ducks and eggs, and any amount of green stuff. We had a grand "blow out" at dinner that night, and afterwards the band played on the quarterdeck, and the ward room officers sent down to ask us to join forces in two double sets of "lancers".

Several officers from the gunboats, and that ripping Chinese friend of Mr. Lawrence, had come on board too, and we had a great time. Jim Rawlings was on watch, so he turned Dicky over to me as my partner, with a handkerchief tied round his leg, below the knee, to show that he was a lady; and though he spoilt the dance, because he didn't much care for the free fight part of it, that did not matter much, as we never finished it. Just when we were in the middle of the "grand chain", down came a signalman to report that there was a fire on shore, and everyone stopped to look at it. Then another started some distance from the first, and then a third, till soon flames were shooting up from several parts of Tinghai, close down by the water's edge, and we could hear a great row going on. Somebody suddenly sang out, "There's a rifle shot", and we all listened, and in a moment or two could distinctly hear rifles going off; and then tom-toms banged furiously all over the town, and one of the junks fired three guns and burnt a red light.

We all stopped dancing and watched the flames. We could see them eating their way along the water front, bending and curling as the breeze swept them in front of it, and spreading up the sides of Joss Hill. Seen through our telescopes, it was a very grand sight, for the native houses burnt fiercely, and soon the whole of the harbour between us and the town was glowing with the fire. We could see the trading junks hurriedly trying to cast off from the shore before the flames reached them, drifting across the reddened water, and disappearing like black ghosts. We could also presently hear the actual crackle and splutter of the fire, and even the shouts of the Chinese. The Commander had been all this time fidgeting round the Captain, evidently wanting to suggest something, but not quite liking to do so, and I heard him whisper to the Gunnery Lieutenant to get everything ready to land the fire engines. Mr. Whitmore went away with a grin on his face to do this, very quietly, and we all watched the Captain to see if he was going to give the order, and almost shivered with excitement at the prospect of being sent ashore—at any rate, I know that I myself shivered. The Commander still fidgeted round the Captain, when suddenly there was such a furious burst of flames, that he plucked up courage, and we—we were all listening and longing

for him to speak—heard him say: "It's getting pretty bad, sir. It seems to be working its way uphill towards the Mission House, and there seems to be a good deal of rioting going on, sir."

"Umph!" the Captain growled, sticking his cigar into the corner of his mouth, so that he could use his night-glasses better. The Commander knew that it was very inadvisable to actually suggest landing the fire engines, because the Captain hated anything being suggested to him; but we saw that he was getting more and more nervous, and at last he broke out again: "It's not more than half a mile from the Mission House now, sir, and a native crowd is very apt to get out of hand. I hope the mission people and those Americans can clear out in time."

"I suppose you want to land and put it out, do you?" grunted the Captain. "All right, do what you like, umph! Teaching your grandmother to— Umph!"

You may be pretty certain that we all heard every word, and were off that quarterdeck in a twinkling, rushing down below to change into our oldest uniform, even before the bo'sn's mate, who was standing by to pipe it, yelled out: "Away fire engines for landing," and then "'A' and 'B' small-arm companies fall in," whilst the bugler sounded off the marines' call.

Dicky came down to help me find my things—he was not to land—and the strange little beggar excitedly strapped on my gaiters, to save time. As you know, I was one of the Mids of "A" company, and was on deck again in a brace of shakes to see my half company of twenty-five men fall in, my heart simply thumping with delight when I saw one of the gunner's mates passing round ball cartridge. I don't know anything which gives you more of a thrill than the feel of a handful of loose cartridges, when you know that you may have to use them, in a few minutes, for the real thing.

In twenty minutes we were halfway ashore, towed by the steam pinnace. Looking back, we could see the sides of the *Vigilant* and the gunboats, simply looking as if they'd been painted red and glowing; and as we drew nearer the shore, it seemed to us that the whole town was on fire, the flames roaring and crackling in the most terrifying manner. Right up above the flames and the smoke we saw the Joss House on top of the hill all lighted up too, and perhaps what was the weirdest thing of all, was that funny strange sound that a frightened mob always makes.

Mr. Travers, the lieutenant of "A" company, formed up directly we landed, about fifty yards from the edge of the water, and we had to keep back an excited crowd which began to gather, while "B" company and the marines scrambled ashore and dragged the fire engines and hoses out of the boats.

I don't think that I had ever been so excited in my life. It was rather nervous work too, for the Chinese began pressing against us—an evil-looking crowd they were, come from the old town, we learnt afterwards—but Mr. Travers was simply splendid. He is a tall, thin, frightfully lackadaisical and aristocratic-looking man, and he stood there, in front of "A" company, and never stirred a muscle, though the natives thronged around him and hustled him. You would have thought that he did not even see them. Presently some stones began flying amongst us from somewhere at the back of the mob, and my men began to get impatient—you could feel that, even without watching them shuffling from one foot to the other, or jamming their caps down on their heads, or pulling their chin stays down, as if they were getting ready for a scrap. The crowd got bolder then, and began to press still more closely. I was nearly separated from my half company, and was really rather nervous, when Mr. Travers sang out: "'A' company, at 'shun! Fix swords!'"[#] I repeated: "Left half company! Fix swords!" and was very relieved to do so, I need hardly tell you, and drew my dirk. The men all bent down to the left, and it was very comforting to hear the rattle of their bayonets being snapped on the rifles. "'A' company! Stand at ease!" sang out Mr. Travers, and you could see the two lines of bayonets, like streaks of light, looking jolly sharp and pointed.

[#] Bluejackets' bayonets are always spoken of as "swords" in the navy, and the order is always, "Fix swords". The Royal Marines give the order, "Fix bayonets".

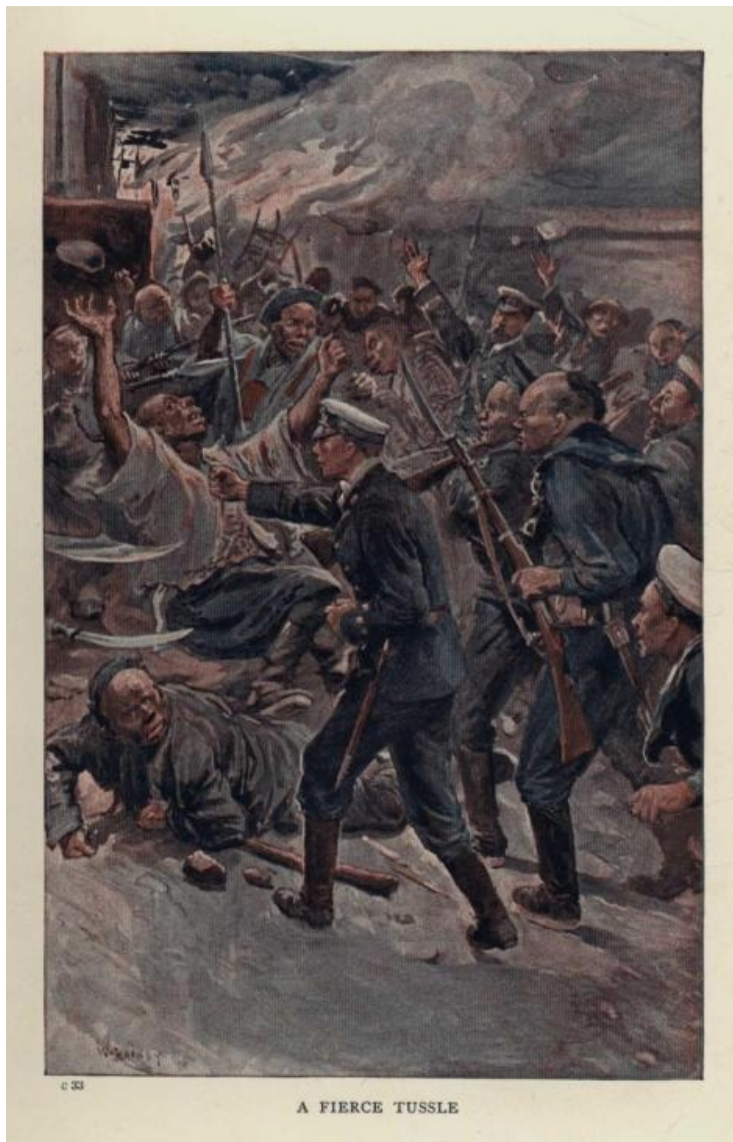
The Chinese didn't stay too close after that, especially as the remainder of the men had landed by this time, and we began to advance up the beach and into the town. It was very unpleasant at first, because the flames seemed so close and almost scorched us, roaring in places so loudly that we could not hear any orders. We had to move aside, too, every now and then, to avoid burning pieces of wood that fell, but we gradually worked round in front of the fire, to make our way uphill towards the Mission House, and pressed along through the streets which had not yet been attacked. A Chinese street is bad enough in the daytime, but it was perfectly horrid now, and we had to force our way along, pressing a yelling "smelling" mob in front of us. These streets were

almost dark, too, which made it all the worse, and I don't know how we managed to get along as well as we did, stumbling at every other step, and lurching into each other. I tried to keep as close to Mr. Travers as possible, but it was almost like a free fight, and we shoved and pushed for all we were worth, sometimes having even to use our fists to clear a way. More often than not, I was simply carried forward by the pressure of my men behind me, and all the time we could hear the fire roaring and crackling only two or three streets off. We had first to make a wide sweep round to the right, then go uphill to get round the fire and above it, and then back again to the left in order to get between it and the Mission, where, of course, we knew that the missionary, his wife, Mr. Hobbs, and his daughter must be in great danger. We fought our way along as fast as we could, and presently got into a broader street, where the crowd did not bother us so much, and where we made much better progress, but were right to leeward of the burning town, and were smothered with smoke and sparks. Just then Jim Rawlings rushed up—he was acting as "doggy" to the Commander—bringing with him a native, covered with blood. "The Commander wants you to hurry on as fast as you can," he told Mr. Travers; "they're looting the Mission. This man will show you the way; he's one of the Mission servants."

"My God, that's what I feared!" groaned Mr. Travers, and shouted to the men to "double". "Double, men! double!" and 'A' company, spitting and choking and coughing, because of the smoke, commenced running. From somewhere in the rear the Commander joined us, Jim panting behind him. He had his sword drawn, and looked terrible. "I've brought ten more men, Travers," he gasped, and had enough breath to shout: "Keep it up! Keep it up, men! There are women to be saved!" The men yelled, and went even faster than before, panting and sweating. We'd got above the town, well clear of the fire, but we could still feel its heat, and were wet through with sweat. The Chinese servant couldn't keep up with us, but that did not matter, for we suddenly turned a corner and saw, three hundred yards ahead of us, the white walls of the Mission House, and saw that it was surrounded by a howling mob of natives.

I heard the Commander give a groan, a funny kind of sob it was, and he and Mr. Travers and Jim and I simply tore along. We hadn't more than four men with us, because the others, with their rifles in their hands, were not able to run so fast; but I don't think anybody would have stopped, even if he had been alone, and the mob had been twice as big. You thought of nothing but pretty little Sally Hobbs with her great eyes and her cropped hair. Suddenly, from a street on our left, darted a tall figure, brandishing a sword and followed by twenty or thirty more. They rushed out from the dark shadows of the houses, and we thought they were going to attack us—at any rate, I did—and I don't mind confessing that I felt frightened, though chiefly, I think, because a scrap with them would hinder us from rescuing Sally Hobbs. One of our men fired his rifle, we heard a yell of pain, and then, before we could do anything more, the leader came out into the firelight, and we saw that it was Lieutenant Ching, of the *Huan Min*. "Come on, sir!" he shouted, and we all mixed together in a crowd, and ran as fast as we could. Two huge Tartar bluejackets panted beside me, their felt boots hardly making the least noise, and I don't think that I shall ever forget them, or their white faces, or the sound of their breathing as they ran alongside me, making not the least noise with their feet.

The mob was so busy, trying to fight a way for itself into the Mission, that they didn't see us till we were right among them. Mr. Ching got there first, then the Commander and Mr. Travers, and I and the two Tartars plunged in after them, and fought our way towards the little gate. Just as we plunged in, the mob gave a great howl of delight, and I saw flames shoot out from the downstairs windows. This took their attention away from us, but it was awful, and we hit all the harder. They didn't oppose us much till we got to the gateway, and there we met a stream of them coming back from the house, loaded with chairs and clothes and all sorts of things. We had a fierce tussle for a minute or two, knocked them over or brushed them aside, and rushed up the path to a verandah. It was then that I missed Mr. Travers. I had simply been following close behind, squeezing into the gap he made in front, but now, all of a sudden, I missed him.



A FIERCE TUSSLE

The remainder of "A" company had arrived by this time, and we could hear them at the back of the mob, fighting their way through to us. Some of them began shooting, so the Commander sent me back to steady them—a jolly difficult job, too, and I didn't like going through the crowd by myself; but they seemed to clear aside, and I managed to get hold of one or two of the petty officers, and gradually got the men into something like order. There wasn't any need to shoot, because the crowd had now fallen back in alarm, and were only booing and yelling and throwing stones.

Then I saw a commotion in the crowd, and suddenly that big German, who had come on board once with Mr. Hobbs, and beaten the Captain at weight-lifting, burst through and rushed past me, his face all drawn and haggard. "She's lost, mein Gott! She's lost! Too late!" and he dashed into the burning house, and I heard him roaring, "Sally!"

Jim Rawlings came up panting and asking for ten men, and disappeared with them among the sparks and smoke, into the darkness behind the house, which was now a mass of flames from top to bottom, with big flames licking out from every window. The heat was intense. It was really a most awful time, with the burning house behind me and that mob of wild people below, all longing to cut our throats, only not daring to rush us, because they had no one to lead them. I could still hear the Commander's voice bellowing inside the house and calling the missionary and Mrs. Macpherson, and Mr. Hobbs and Sally, by name—but no one answered, and there was no sign of any of them. For one moment Mr. Ching appeared at an upper window, then the roof began to fall in, but they both crawled out on to the verandah before it collapsed altogether with a crash.

They would have been buried and burnt alive if they had stayed another second.

"That German man has just gone in, sir."

"He's dead by now," the Commander answered grimly, and my blood seemed to go quite cold,

as the flames rushed up into the sky, hundreds of feet up, and I knew that Mr. Hoffman was being burnt to ashes.

The rest of our people—the marines and "B" company, with the fire engines—came up now, and the crowd split in two to let them pass, and I had an insane hope that even then they might be able to save that German; but by the time they had dragged the hand pumps up the path, and got their hoses led to a little stream at the back of the house, they might just as well have tried to put the fire out by spitting at it.

Seeing that there was no chance of looting any more, the crowd seemed to melt away. Probably they went off to loot elsewhere. They were more of the old town mob, and weren't going to waste time, I expect.

The Commander ordered the pumps to stop heaving—it was really silly to go on with them—and then we scattered in little parties to search the hill behind the house. The Commander was fearfully angry because Mr. Travers was not there to take charge of his men. "He's never where he's wanted," he said, and took most of "A" company away with him.

"Where can Mr. Travers have gone?" I kept on wondering, but hadn't much time for thinking, as I only had been left a very few men to guard the burning house, and there were still a good many prowling Chinese sneaking round, and I had to make my men keep them away. It seemed an awfully long time before suddenly we heard a shout and a cheer from somewhere up the hill. "Thank God, sir, they've found that pretty little American lady!" one of my petty officers said. "It's worth spoiling our clothes for that;" and in a minute or two Mr. Ching came out from the darkness into the glare, bearing in his arms a woman. It wasn't Sally Hobbs, however, but Mrs. Macpherson—I could see her black hair. As he came into the light I saw him look down at her face with a strange expression, and then he gave a groan—I was near enough to hear—laid her on the ground somewhat roughly, and disappeared again. Her husband came too—he was a "rotter".

"Where's Sally Hobbs?" I asked, jumping across.

He shook his head, as he supported his wife. "Don't know. She and her father went out to see the fire directly it started, and we've not seen them since."

That sent the blood to my feet again and I felt terrible, and almost thought of taking my men down into the town to try and find her, though, of course, that would have been idiotic; and, too, I had to stop where I was till the Commander came back. However, I sent an able seaman to find the Commander, and presently I heard the bugles sounding the "retire" and the "fall in", and gradually the men came scrambling out of the dark and formed up in the road in front of the ruins of the house. Lieutenant Ching and his men came back too.

"What's to be done now," the Commander asked, when he had heard the missionary's story. Mr. Ching turned a haggard face towards the town, where the fire had nearly burnt itself out, and the greatest noise was the noise of the mob, and I saw him shake his head in a terribly sad way, "You no good there. I take my men down and try and find news." He had no sword—he must have dropped it—but in his hand was a grey tam-o'-shanter hat, and I recognized it as the one Sally Hobbs was wearing that day she came down into the gunroom. He was clutching it very tightly, and suddenly fell on the ground. Our Surgeon, Dr. Barclay, was over him in a moment. He had only fainted, but then it turned out that he had been struck by that bullet, which one of our men had fired, just as he and his men had joined us on the road. It had gone clean through his left shoulder, and he had lost a tremendous lot of blood. How he had managed to keep "going" all this time, Dr. Barclay couldn't understand, and I wondered how he had managed to carry Mrs. Macpherson, and then remembered that he had put her down rather clumsily, and understood why. He called to one of his men, gave him some hurried orders, and then they all disappeared towards the town. "Sent them to try and find news," he told the Commander. It was practically dark now because the fires had gone out, but presently the *Vigilant's* searchlights were turned on to us and made it less horrid. Some Chinese soldiers also came running up, followed a little later by the Taotai himself from the old city, in his sedan chair, and surrounded by more soldiers.

He was in a terrible fright when he found that he was too late, and that Mr. Hobbs and his daughter had not been found. He did not stay long, and took his men down to the town to keep order and find news of them.

As there was nothing more to do till daybreak, the Commander sent most of the men back to the ship with the fire engines, and I had to go back with "A" company, as Mr. Travers had not appeared. It was horrid work finding our way back to the sea, but I hardly remember it, for I was very sleepy and awfully miserable, and simply stumbled back, half asleep, thinking of Sally and her father and that German, and of what could have happened to Mr. Travers.

We got aboard about half-past three in the morning, and I turned into my hammock, tired and miserable, and pretended that I was asleep when Dicky tried to ask for news, although I wasn't able to sleep for thinking, and for being so miserable.

CHAPTER IV The Loss of Lieutenant Travers

No News of Sally Hobbs—A Discovery—Those Villainous Pirates!—The Skipper is Furious—Weary Waiting—The Skipper Rages—"I'll do 'em yet"

Written by Commander Leonard Umfreville Truscott, R.N.

You have already heard of that disastrous fire at Tinghai, and of our failure to rescue the American, Mr. Hobbs, and his daughter Sally, the strange disappearance of Travers, and the death of that German fellow, so that I will tell you of what happened afterwards.

After sending Whitmore, our Gunnery Lieutenant, back to the ship with the fire engines, the marines, and "A" company, I waited for daylight, guarding what was left of the Mission House with "B" company. Our failure to save little Sally Hobbs and her father cast a great gloom over my men, which was still further increased when it became evident that something serious must have happened to account for the absence of Travers. Young Ford was most positive that he had seen him enter the Mission gate, but after that no one seems to have seen him. However, we fully expected him to turn up at daybreak, and could do nothing to assist him till then, if he had in some way or other lost his way in the darkness.

But I don't mind confessing that to protect Sally Hobbs was uppermost in the minds of every officer and man who had landed that night, and the thought of her, surrounded by a howling mob of maddened Chinamen, was the spur which had urged everyone so wildly through the streets. Our failure and her probable fate, down in the burning town, made us bite our lips in great agony of mind. Fifty times during the night was I implored by my men to take them down into the town itself; but I knew that it would be useless, and that lost among those narrow, straggling streets, and unable to keep in touch with one another, we should be simply courting disaster. If I had been alone I suppose that I should have gone, and it was a great strain not to go, and take my eager men with me; but I had no right to risk their lives uselessly. It was quite another pair of shoes for Ching and his men, because they were among their own countrymen, and ran little risk by doing so. Ching, himself, as soon as Barclay had dressed his shoulder—it was most unfortunate that one of our people had wounded him—followed his men there and left us to ourselves. I told him that we should remain near the Mission all night, and resume our search in the morning. Poor fellow, I think he was as distressed as any of us were at the fate of the little American girl, for even his thin, usually expressionless face showed traces of the anguish which we all felt. In the house he had found a grey tam-o'-shanter cap which she had worn, and I saw him stuff it into his tunic, and, you may be sure, was in no mood to chaff him about it.

Mrs. Macpherson told me, before her husband took her away to the house of some native convert, that directly the fire had started down in the town, Sally Hobbs, poor little girl, had made her father take her down to see it, throwing a shawl over her head and hurrying away, just as she would have done in America, in spite of the earnest entreaties of Macpherson himself.

As day dawned, Ching brought his men back, their faces and uniforms blackened and torn. "I have no news, sir. Not a trace of her to be found;" and then he threw himself down on the ground, utterly exhausted. His men—Tartars of splendid physique—were as worn out as he was.

As I expected, Captain Lester sent me a fresh lot of men, and food for the few I had kept with me. I therefore started with them to make a more systematic search than it had been possible to make in the darkness, leaving my other fellows to share their food with their Chinese comrades. We searched the ground behind the Mission, examining every hut and outhouse as we went, and gradually spread out towards the left and towards a little bay or sweep of the coast, which here ran into the land. For an hour we searched without result, but then a seaman came running back with a uniform glove which he had picked up by the side of a small path running down towards

the sea and that small cove. The glove might or might not have belonged to Travers, but I knew that he was probably the only one of us who would have worn gloves—he was rather eccentric about dress—so hoped that this might be some clue to his disappearance, and followed the path. Almost immediately another man picked up a handkerchief. The initials in one corner were H.C.L.—those of Lawrence, our navigator—but though he had not landed, I knew that Travers had a weakness for borrowing other people's things, and my hopes were again raised. I am afraid that my brain wasn't working properly—the terrible night was responsible for that—and for the life of me I could not imagine what reason could have brought Travers along this path. We yelled his name, my bugler boy blew the "close", but without result, except that all the mongrel curs in the neighbourhood started yapping and howling.

I followed that path till it dipped over the crest of a ridge and then led down to the little bay below us—a little bay with a curved mud beach. My men were on the point of rushing down to it, when Trevelyan, the Lieutenant who had brought them ashore and relieved Whitmore, suggested that we might find traces of footmarks to help us. I therefore sounded the "halt", and he and I went down alone. Trevelyan was quite right, the muddy shore was covered with footmarks in one place, and there were also three long furrows in the mud, evidently made by the keels of boats. These furrows led right up to high-water mark, and my brain was not too dense to appreciate the fact that three boats had been there at high water. We could trace the furrows for fifteen feet or more down the shore, and one went much farther than the others. "They shoved them off and had to push hard, sir," cried Trevelyan, bending down and showing me how deep some footmarks were, and how the mud was piled up at the back of them. "It was at the last tide too, sir, otherwise they would have been washed flat again." That was evident enough, but I couldn't think what he was driving at.

"When was Travers last seen, sir?"

"About one o'clock in the morning—there or thereabouts," I told him.

"Well, high tide was at about midnight, so these boats must have been shoved off about an hour and a half afterwards, half an hour or so after you lost Travers." He was getting quite excited, but, honestly, my brain wouldn't work.

"And this boat must have been later still, sir," and he pointed to the longer furrow.

Then there was a yell above us from some of the men who had been wandering about, and we saw several of them stooping over a clump of scraggy bushes, and one came down to tell me that they had found some dead Chinamen.

I went up and saw two—disgusting objects they were—with their noses and lips cut off. I couldn't stand the sight; I'd had no breakfast, and walked away, feeling dazed and sick, and opened my mouth and drew in the sea breeze to drive the smoke fumes away from my head.

Trevelyan joined me in a few minutes. "One of those fellows has been shot at very close quarters, for his clothes are singed and blackened, and the other has had his head battered in. Look, sir! they must have been dragged along there," and he pointed to a broad mark, running along the mud from the bushes to the furrows.

He ought to have been a detective, ought Trevelyan, and was off in a "jiffy" to search for fresh traces. "Footmarks! bootmarks! plenty of them, sir," he shouted presently, and I saw him bending down and measuring them with his handkerchief. "Ours, I expect," I sang back; but he shook his head, and presently came up to me in a great pitch of excitement—he had taken his own boots off by this time to avoid making any more marks—"There are at least three different sizes down there, sir! European bootmarks too. One of them might belong to Travers, but there are some very much larger ones than his, and I don't think that one man made them all. There must have been several Europeans down here early this morning. This must be where the pirates landed and shoved off again, sir—two of the boats more or less together, and the third half an hour or so later—but I'm bothered if I can make out those two corpses, and what they are doing here."

I dragged him away. He was very reluctant to go, and kept turning back and scanning the shore with his glasses. Suddenly he took me by the shoulder—I was so "jumpy" that his touch gave me quite a shock—"Look there, sir! What's that?" and before I could say anything he darted back, began to undress, and then wading and swimming, and clinging to some fishing stakes which jutted out from the shore, he made his way to where something hung from the farthest fishing stake. I could see that it was something coloured, and as he came back with it I recognized it as a shawl belonging to Mrs. Macpherson, and remembered that she had told us that Sally Hobbs had borrowed one before going down to the fire.

I knew what it all meant now—her disappearance—the bootmarks on the shore—the furrows of those boat keels—and the shawl—and that the poor little girl had again fallen into the hands of

those fiends of pirates. One cannot explain, or describe, how one feels on occasions like this, though I do know that when Trevelyan rejoined me presently, blue in the face with cold, and with his teeth chattering, but bringing the shawl, and intensely eager to solve the mystery, I felt as though I wanted to hit him, and hated to have to tell him all it meant.

"Give it to me," I said harshly.

"No, sir; I cannot. I found it, and if it turns out as you say, I'm going to give it back to her."

We said not a word as we trudged back to the Mission House, neither of us caring to speak of what we feared. Ten minutes ago I should have been inexpressibly pleased to have found Travers, but now I eagerly hoped that he had been kidnapped too, and that, in some way or other, he might be able to protect her—for her father I cared not two straws, nor did I place reliance on any effort of his to save either of them.

Fortunately Captain Lester was waiting for us near the ruins of the Mission House, and it was a relief to find him in a bad temper. He didn't wait to hear what I had to tell him, but, shaking his fist at me, bellowed out, "This is the work of those villainous pirates"—he was hardly able to speak for rage. "Set fire to the town—right under my nose—made a fool of Old Lest, and cleared out again without a scratch. And that little lass too! What's become of her and of that fool Travers? I can't trust a single one of my officers. Umph! Here you go ashore to put out a fire, don't save anyone, and shoot that chap Ching. Umph! I'd like to— Umph!"

I rapidly told him all that had happened.

"Poor little lass! Poor little lass!" he groaned, and all the anger died out of his face. He came down with me to that bay, saw the bodies and the marks on the shore, sent people to scour all the neighbourhood; but nothing more could be discovered, and we went back again.

Presently the missionary came up—he'd been down to see those bodies too. He was shaking like a leaf, and his sunburnt face was quite ashen in colour. "Ah, mon!" and he wrung his hands, "but one o' those puir dead things was my servant. I know him by his clothes—the one with his head fair smashed in."

I had had too many puzzling events suddenly sprung on me that morning, and, honestly, couldn't try to explain this last, and could only say feebly, "Poor chap! Poor chap!"

"A vary faithful mon, an' vary leetil expense," moaned the missionary. Trevelyan showed him the shawl, and he recognized it at once as the one Sally Hobbs had thrown over her head before leaving the Mission, so our last faint hope vanished.

Fortunately young Rawlings relieved the grimness of everything just then. He is a most pugnacious youngster, and though I had sent him on board with Whitmore, he had managed to come ashore again. He had got into trouble with two coolies—I suppose he had found them looting—and had gone for them with his fists, and was laying about him in fine style. One had taken to his heels, but the other stood his ground, and kept banging at him with a piece of wood. The Skipper caught sight of them too, and, for all the bad temper he was in, smiled grimly, and chuckled out, "Go it, youngster!" Rawlings had already received a nasty cut over the forehead, and would have been "knocked out" in another minute, if I hadn't stepped forward and knocked the fellow down. I don't mind telling you that I put more "beef" into that blow than was absolutely necessary. Somehow or other I felt I must hit somebody, and it was unlucky for that Chinaman.

"Go down to the boat, Mr. Rawlings. Umph! what d'you mean by brawling?" growled the Skipper, suddenly remembering himself.

The Skipper told me, as we walked back to the landing-place, that several Europeans had been seen during the night, and that they were evidently in command of parties of Chinamen, who had prevented the inhabitants extinguishing the flames when they first started. This made it positive that it had been the work of the pirates, and confirmed the rumours that Europeans had frequently been seen among them at different times, and when any outrage on a large scale had been carried out.

What made the Skipper so furious was that they had so completely outwitted him; and he became purple in the face with fury at their daring to swoop down on the town, under his eyes, as it were, burn half of it, kidnap Hobbs and his daughter, probably Travers too, and get away scot free.

He took it as a personal insult, and I can't tell you all the mad things he suggested. He felt very much as I did—he wanted badly to batter somebody's face, but he soon quieted down, and walked beside me with great strides, grunting and growling, and screwing up his face, and I knew that he was trying to work out some plan in his bull-dog brain.

But you can't hit a man till you've caught him, that was the difficulty, and we had to catch him first, and knew well enough that among these islands were a thousand places where those

two steamers—the tramp and the yacht—could lie concealed for years.

"Unless they want to make money over 'em, they're as good as done for," the Skipper said, as we went on board. "Poor little lass, not more'n a couple of years older than my lass Nan!"

I had served with "Old Lest" seven years, and I would do any mortal thing for him. He pretended he was a thundering bully, and was really as gentle as a child; and the men worshipped him, his gruff voice and great red face—even his bad temper. I was extremely sorry for him too, because the responsibilities resting on him were so great, prompt action so necessary, and the difficulties so enormous.

He did what I suppose was the best, and sent the gunboats and the *Huan Min* cruising, whilst we remained at Tinghai, with fires "banked". Leave to officers and men was forbidden, and that meant, of course, that the Skipper himself did not go ashore, and had to give up his shooting, which was the one thing for which he lived. The *Vigilant* was, in fact, kept ready to start within an hour of receiving any news.

Meanwhile natives—as trustworthy as Ching and the Taotai could procure—had been scattered through the archipelago, and the war junks also had been induced to leave Tinghai and endeavour to procure information. The Skipper seemed to depend upon these particularly, because they had naturally more intimate knowledge of the islands and the character of the people. They could cruise, too, without attracting so much attention as our gunboats. They generally cruised for a week, and at the end of that time came sailing back to Joss House anchorage, covered with flags and firing off guns, but with never a particle of news.

Week after week went by, and not a trace of the pirates could be found. Indeed, they seemed to have disappeared off the face of the seas, and not a single outrage had been reported since they had burnt Tinghai. Rashleigh, coming back in the *Ringdove*, did certainly report that he had one night heard what he thought was the sound of guns somewhere off the Chung-li Tao group, but had discovered nothing when he steamed in the direction of the noise. "Silly fool!" roared the Skipper to me, "he don't know the difference between thunder and guns."

These weeks of weary waiting were most depressing, and the constant confinement on board, without any exercise, most bad for our health—and tempers.

We now felt sure that someone, probably the dead Mission servant, had guided Travers down to the shore that night; that he, like the mad fellow that he was, had rushed off alone, hoping to rescue Sally and her father single-handed, and that he had been kidnapped with them. I forgot to tell you that Barclay, our Surgeon, had found the bullet in the body of the mutilated Chinaman, and that it was a service Webley revolver bullet, so it was quite possible that Travers had shot him. There probably had been a scuffle, and the Mission servant, not being worth capturing, had been killed and mutilated to prevent recognition.

We all were so worried and depressed, that two days of strenuous work, coaling ship from a collier, and another day of cleaning ship afterwards, came as a welcome relief. It's precious seldom that one does welcome that job, but we did then.

For some long time I had not heard the noise of the gunroom piano. Someone or other would be banging it at all hours of the day, and as the gunroom was immediately beneath my cabin, the noise was a continual source of annoyance to me. My messenger used to be always taking down fiery messages to the Sub, Langham. The absence of this noise was now a blessed relief, and when I mentioned it to Langham, he asked me to go down and see for myself the reason of it. I went down, and found that the piano was shut, and that *Vigilant* cap-ribbons had been glued across, to prevent it being opened. "Miss Hobbs was the last to play it, sir, and the Mids and all of us have sworn that no one shall play it again till she does, and till she cuts those ribbons with the senior mid's dirk."

"Who suggested that?" I asked, smiling.

"Mr. Langham, sir," several of the mids cried; but he, getting red in the face, said it was Hamilton, the Engineer, and he put it on to Moore, the A.P., so I left them settling the subject, and only too glad that the piano was so effectually sealed.

I think that everyone did feel, as the gunroom did, that some day we should see them all aboard again—Travers, with his mad, chivalrous notions and "tired" manner, and the pretty little girl, with her winsome face and funny twang.

At the end of the third week after the fire at Tinghai, the United States gun-vessel, the *Omaha*, came down to place herself under the Skipper's orders and assist us in our search. She was larger than our gunboats, very much more modern, and was rather quaint looking, with one mast and an enormously long, thin smoke-stack.

"If that chap comes along here giving Old Lest advice, Old Lest will—— Umph!" the Skipper

growled when she was sighted.

Her captain, a man named Parkinson, was a tall, gaunt, disappointed man, with grey hair, and as old as Captain Lester himself, though actually junior in rank to me. He came across to report himself, and I heard him say, "Guess my boys thought the old *Omaha* was a fixture in the 'chow-chow' water at Shanghai, and our mud-hook could never be hauled out again. Say, Captain, we are right pleased to come and assist you."

He was sent away cruising.

Another weary week went by, and still no news came.

Then it turned out—one of the gunboats actually caught them at it—that those war junks, on which the Skipper relied so greatly for information, simply went out of harbour, round the corner, and hid in a neighbouring creek till their provisions ran out, and they had to come back again for more.

This news put the finishing touches to the Skipper's bad temper, and he was mad with rage, and sent for the Taotai at once.

"Umph! A pretty how d'ye do! Those lumbering junks of yours simply skulk out of sight round a corner," he roared; and when this had been interpreted to the Taotai—I wondered how much the interpreter understood and passed on correctly—the frightened old man gesticulated feebly, and then out it came: "Taotai speaks, sir! If junks caught by Pilon, he makee buy new ones—he no caree."

So that was it, was it—the old chap didn't intend to risk losing them? He was given so much a year to keep so many in good order, and if one was lost he would have to replace it. No wonder that we could gain no information from them.

You should have seen—and heard—the Skipper when he understood this, and you should have seen the old Taotai hurry down to his state barge, hide under his red umbrella, and shove off for the shore—glad enough he was to get away, too.

Late that evening the Skipper sent for me. He was beaming all over his face, puffing out his cheeks and working his shoulders, as I hadn't seen him do for a fortnight. He banged me on the chest and nearly knocked me over. "Willum, where the dickens is Willum? Willum, you scoundrel! bring the Commander one of my eighteen-penny Havanas," he roared.

It was half past eleven; I wanted to turn in, and didn't care to smoke, but it had to be done.

"Hit on a scheme, Truscott; I'll wipe the old Taotai's eye; I'm going to put our own people aboard those junks, and see if we can't make them useful like that. Umph! What d'you say to that?" and he thumped the table with his huge fist, and glared at me.

"Six of 'em I'm going to take."

"Won't the old chap object, sir?" I asked.

"Object! I'll teach him to object! He's got it down in black and white from his boss at Ningpo to put all his forces at our disposal," and the Skipper winked at me from behind a cloud of blue cigar smoke. "He'll be pretty sorry he tried to pull Old Lest's leg before he's done with me. Umph! Our only sporting chance is to catch some of these rascals, and I'm not going to be too particular how I get information from 'em when I do catch 'em."

Fortunately the *Huan Min* came in that night, and Ching helped us negotiate with the old gentleman in the walled city. He, I am certain, did his best; but he told me, very candidly, that if we persisted in our demands, we should touch their pride very greatly, and that it would increase the already hostile feeling of the Chinese towards us, and would very possibly prevent any information coming in from private sources.

Captain Lester was much annoyed at the attitude he took up, and always thought that he was the cause of what happened, though, personally, I am sure that he had acted honestly by us. At any rate, the Skipper had blurted out, "If he won't lend 'em to Old Lest, Old Lest'll borrow 'em;" and somehow or other this threat got to the Taotai's ears, and so scared the old gentleman, that next morning not a war junk remained in harbour.

Ching came across directly, and protested that neither he nor his Captain had any knowledge of their going to sea. I believed him, and so did everyone, except the Skipper, who flew into a terrible rage, and I was very glad to get Ching away and soothe his ruffled feelings, but could not induce him to stay to breakfast.

"Made a fool of Old Lest again, have they? Umph! I'll—I'll—" he stuttered and bellowed when I reported "divisions" to him, "I'll do 'em yet. I'll buy half a dozen of their big merchant junks and man 'em myself! Old Lest'll sell a farm or two, if the Admiralty don't pay for 'em."

"D'you mean that, sir?" I asked.

"D'you ever hear me say anything I didn't mean?" he roared; and though I must confess I had

done so, I dare not say so.

I slipped away directly in my gig, and went across to the old *Huan Min*. I saw her Captain and Ching pacing gloomily up and down the poop, and it was very pleasant to see their faces open out again when they heard the news, and that their country's honour was not to be disturbed.

Ching gripped me by the hand—"You English, sir,"—and the muscles of his face were working strangely—"do not understand how these things, these slights, and—these little insults to our country hurt us. All you Western nations think we have no such love and pride of country as you have, and do not feel it. We do, sir! We do!"

I have always been glad that I did go aboard that morning, for my ideas of the Chinese were very much changed.

Ching himself came of a very old fighting stock—his people had always belonged to a high military caste, and his father had fought against the French well and nobly. He himself—Lawrence had told me this—had fought against the Japanese in the Yalu battle, and when all his senior officers had been killed, and his ship almost a wreck, had taken her out of action and staggered across to Wei-hai-wei, keeping the light cruisers, which hung round him, at a respectful distance with the one gun that was able to fire.

Japanese naval men had told me the story, in admiration of his plucky ship, but it was not till Lawrence told me that I knew who had commanded her.

I knew Ching a good deal better after that. He had done more fighting than I ever hoped to have the luck to do, and when one's job is to fight, and one gets paid to keep oneself ready for it, one always admires a man who has earned his pay.

Ching took me into his cabin once, a strange kind of barn, half Chinese and half English, with two old faded photographs hanging on the bulkheads, one of the *Inflexible* and the other of her Mids, Ching in the middle, and Lawrence, a fat little chubby-faced youth, by his side.

I often chaffed Lawrence about that photo—he looked so angelic.

CHAPTER V Midshipman Ford's First Command

The Junk—H.M.S. "Sally"—"Here's Luck to the 'Sally'"—Ready to Start—
Under Way—In Command—Night at Sea—The Strange Junk

Written by Midshipman Ford

If anybody had told me a week ago that by this time I should be captain of my own ship, I should have called him a blithering Ananias, and probably punched his head if he was anything like my size, and made him jolly sorry for trying to pull my leg.

But there it is. I am the captain of the *Sally*, converted junk, two guns, tender to H.M.S. *Ringdove*, and who, do you think, is my first lieutenant? Why, Dicky Morton, "Dear Little Dicky" of all chaps in the world, and he's turning out not to be half such a silly fool as he looks—I often tell him so, just to buck him up.

I must tell you how it all happened.

The Captain had found out that those war junks never cruised at all, simply hid round a corner out of sight, and as he depended a great deal on them for news of the pirates, he was simply furious when he heard of it, and sent ashore and bought six of the biggest merchant junks.

I was with the party of men under Mr. Whitmore sent to bring them off. The steam pinnace was to tow them, one by one, but got a rope round her screw, and delayed everything whilst it was being cleared. I happened to be on board one of them with six men, preparing to be taken in tow, and it struck me that it would be a jolly good "wheeze" to sail off. Mr. Whitmore sung out that I might try, and I did, and got her off quite comfortably, without breaking anything when I came alongside.

I had had a jolly lot of experience in sailing at Upton Overy, both before and after going to the *Britannia*, and I don't want to be cheeky or anything like that, but it seemed to come quite naturally to me to sail any boat, and I always seemed to be able to feel exactly what was wanted

to make it sail its best.

The Captain was very pleased with me for doing this, and that is how I got the command of my junk.

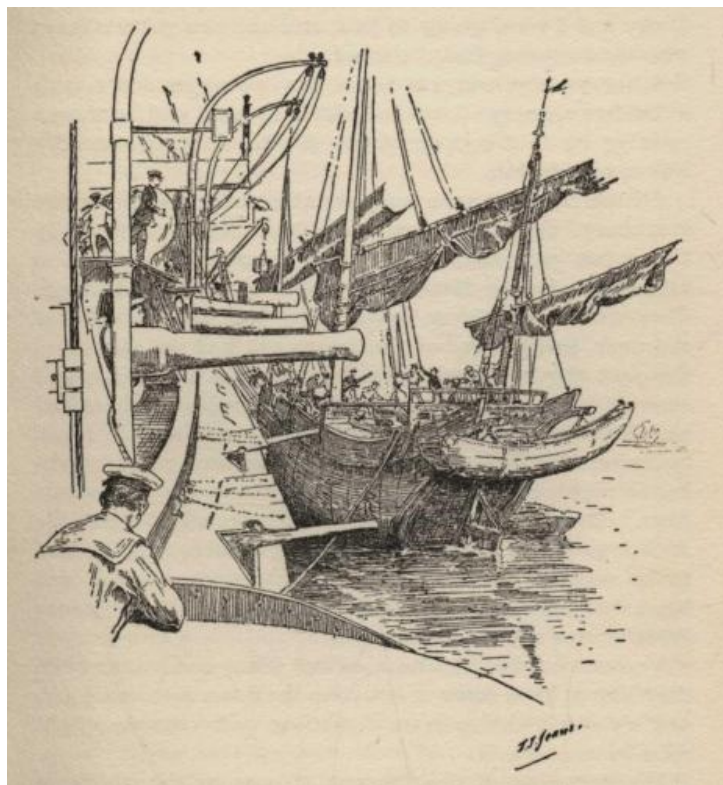
He had all of us Midshipmen and Cadets fallen in on the quarterdeck, glared at us and growled, "Now, you young gentlemen, you've got a job to do at last—no skrim-shanking about it either—jolly hard job—and I want those of you who can sail 'em best to take charge of 'em. You've got to get hold of some of those pirate fellows for me—don't care how you get 'em, but get some of 'em alive. Can't get anything out of the dead 'uns, umph!"

You can't imagine how excited that made all of us, and when the six junks had all been lashed alongside, we had to clean them first and fit them out afterwards.

The Commander told me that I could have the one which I had sailed off, and told me that I could choose one of the cadets to go with me. Dicky came and offered to do any mortal thing for me if I would take him—he was nearly blubbing with keenness—so I said I would, and we both had to start the job of cleaning her out. The Commander gave me twelve hands, and it was a jolly beastly job. She was perfectly filthy, and we had to scrape away half an inch of stuff from her inside with shovels before we could even commence scrubbing. The smell in the holds was almost enough to knock anyone down, and we worked till long after it was dark, and they had hoisted big yardarm group lights to make it easier for us.

It rained too, but we didn't worry about that in the least, because we were so jolly happy. I'd never seen Dicky like it before. He was chirping about like a bloated sparrow, and was much too happy even to speak.

You can see what the junk was like by the picture. The great stern place was where we all had to live, and it was something like a huge pigeon loft with three sliding-door places in it. One opened from the deck into a fairly big place, where the rudder head came up through the stern and the long tiller worked. The ten bluejackets were to live there. Above it and under the poop deck were two little places about eight feet square, and only just a little more than four feet high. In one of them Dicky and I were going to live, and the two petty officers who were coming had the other.



H.M.S. Sally

A narrow platform was below the two upper doors, with a ladder running down on deck at one end, and one running up to the poop at the other. It looked exactly like a pigeon loft.

All the time we were busy scraping and shovelling and scrubbing, the carpenters and blacksmiths were busy fitting two great balks of timber with some cross-pieces to take a six-

pounder Hotchkiss quick-firer and its mounting. They were bolting them down to the deck and the sides of the junk, just in front of the mainmast, and on the top of the poop they mounted a Maxim gun. The *Vigilant* hadn't enough Maxim guns for all six of the junks, so three had had Nordenfelt machine guns from the gunboats. I had never seen the ship so busy; she was humming from morning to night, and for most of the night too, for four whole days. Besides the carpenters' and blacksmiths' work, the anchor gear and all the standing and running rigging had to be refitted or overhauled. I only wish, as you will know by and by, that more of it had been refitted, because it really was not strong enough.

You can just imagine how excited Dicky and I were when they did at last lower a six-pounder down into our junk, and we saw it sitting in its mounting, and knew we might soon have to use it.

We got most of the filth out of ours by the middle of the second day, and the holds didn't smell so badly, though we could never get the Chinese kind of smell out of the living places under the stern. What troubled us most were the fleas and bugs and cockroaches. They were perfectly awful, and we couldn't get rid of them in the few days we had. We must have drowned thousands of them, but there seemed to be just as many left, and we were itching all over and covered with bite marks, even whilst we were only working in her.

The cockroaches would watch us cleaning the bottom boards, and when we went on to another spot they would swarm down over the clean places, and squashing the brutes made them dirtier than ever again.

It was Dicky who first thought of giving our junk a name. I wanted to call her *Nan*, because Nan was my chum, but then I thought perhaps the Captain wouldn't like it, and Dicky suggested *Sally* instead. It turned out that all the others wanted the same name, but Dicky was the only one of them that got it. You see, the letters had to be cut out in wood first, and as all the carpenter people were so frightfully busy, it was almost impossible to get anything extra done at all. But Dicky had made great friends with the old Boatswain and Carpenter. He used to go and yarn with them in their cabins on the other side of the gunroom flat, and used to take refuge there sometimes when we had driven him out of the gunroom with our chaff, and sometimes hide there when he was afraid of being bullied, and Jim was not there to protect him. It was really owing to this that we were the only ones who did manage to get it done, and then Dicky actually had the pluck to ask the Commander for some gold leaf to gild the letters. He volunteered to do that too, and I went with him to the Commander's cabin—outside the door—to give him courage. When he knocked timidly, and we heard the Commander sing out, "Yes, what is it?" in his gruff voice, Dicky looked as if he would have bolted away—I expect he would have done so if I hadn't been there and the sentry as well—but he just squeezed his lips together, wriggled in at the side of the curtain, and squeaked out, "Please, sir, gold leaf," and couldn't say another word, he was so frightened. I went in then, "Please, sir, we've got Mr. Williams, the Carpenter, to cut out *Sally* for our junk—in big wooden letters—and we want gold leaf, please."

The Commander grinned at us—he was a perfect ripper—took a book of gold leaf out of a drawer, and gave it to Dicky. "D'you boys think I'm made of gold leaf?" We didn't even thank him, we were so excited, but rushed for'ard to the "paint shop" under the fo'c'stle to see old Modley, the painter, and ask him to put the gold leaf on for us. We couldn't get anything out of him, though. He was a bit of a sea lawyer, and he "wasn't going to do nothink but what he'd orders to do from the Commander or the First Lootenant".

We didn't know what to do then, and went on deck and climbed down to the junk, feeling miserable. Scroggs was there screwing the letters on to a board—Scroggs was the petty officer who was coming with us—and we told him all that had happened, and how we'd got the gold leaf, but couldn't get Modley to gild the letters.

"You just give it to me, sir," he said; "that 'ere Modley be a bit of a 'ard nut, but we both comes from the same village down Dorset way, an' 'is missus goes to the same chapel as my old missus, and 'e may do it for me."

He managed to get round him somehow, and when, next morning, Dicky and I ran up on deck in our pyjamas, as soon as it got light, to have another look at the junk, the first thing we saw was the board on her stern, and the letters all beautifully gilded. We had to climb down, just as we were, and lean over and look at them. They looked simply gorgeous, and there were Scroggs, and Sharpe, the other petty officer, and one of the carpenter's crew, and old Modley grinning at us. They had just finished fixing the board to the stern. "Thank you very much," was all we could think of saying; and when we all climbed up aboard the *Vigilant* again, the ship's cocoa was just being served out, and Scroggs brought us a bowl of it and said, "Here's luck to the *Sally*," and we all sipped it, and Modley said, "May the Lord have mercy on the little lass!" but the carpenter's

crew didn't say anything religious, because he burnt his mouth.

Then we jumped down below before the Commander could see us on deck in pyjamas, and rolled ourselves in our hammocks again—we were jolly cold.

We had a good bit of gold leaf left, and I nudged Jim, whose hammock was next mine, to tell him that he could have it. I knew he wanted it very badly to make his junk look smart, and when we woke him and he knew about it he gave a whoop! and tumbled out and woke the others; and Dicky and I watched them having a grand pillow fight, till we couldn't stand it any longer, and joined in, and got splendidly hot—even Dicky joined in!

All that day we were busy getting ammunition on board, and it was simply grand to see the boxes being lowered into the hold and jammed there, so that they would not fall about. There were 200 cartridges for the six-pounder—the long brass cartridge and the little shell all in one—and three thousand rounds for the Maxim gun. Then there were the casks for the water, and a boat's stove to be secured, and one of the *Vigilant's* dinghies to be lashed down amidships.[#] We took the native boat, which you can see in the picture hanging over the stern, so that we should look more like an ordinary junk. Then there was all our own gear and boxes of biscuit and corned meat, and any amount of stuff. Dicky and I got heaps of things from old Ah Man—jam, sardines, ginger-bread biscuits, and things like that—and when we'd got them all into our little square pigeonhole, and our sea boots, mackintoshes, greatcoats, and a uniform tin case between us, there was hardly any room left for our hammocks, and, of course, it wasn't possible to stand up inside—it was much too low. When everything was ready we took her away to practise sailing, and the Captain came with us, and was jolly pleasant, and Mr. Whitmore, the Gunnery Lieutenant, came too, and we tried the guns and, I must say, made very wretched shooting.

[#] See page [77](#).

After that we had to wait for the gunboats to come back from cruising, fill up with coal, and take us away in pairs.

The only thing that did make Dicky and me feel rather sad was that Jim hadn't a junk all to himself. But he was going with Mr. Trevelyan, and as he was a splendid chap, we knew that they would have a grand time together.

They called their junk the *Ferret*. The Captain had said, "Ferret 'em out for me, Trevelyan," so we all thought the name was jolly appropriate. They only had it painted on the stern, not done with big wooden letters as ours was. They had tried to use the rest of our gold leaf, but had made a mess of the job and wasted it all, which was rather a pity.

The Commander sent Mr. Langham a list of all the fellows who were to go in the six junks, and he stuck it on the notice board in the gunroom.

This is a copy of it, and will explain how they were "told off", and who were to go in them.

H.M.S. Vigilant,
Tinghai Harbour.

The six junks will be told off as tenders as follows:—

Tenders to H.M.S. *Ringdove*—

Junk No. 1, { Lieutenant Mervyn L. Trevelyan.
 { Midshipman James Rawlings.

Junk No. 2, { Midshipman Richard Ford
 { Naval Cadet Richard F. Morton.

Tenders to H.M.S. *Goldfinch*—

Junk No. 3, { Lieutenant Ronald G. Forbes.
 { Midshipman the Hon. Talbot Withers.

Junk No. 4, { Midshipman Harry G. Webster.
 { Naval Cadet W. D. St. G. Ponsonby

Tenders to H.M.S. *Sparrow*—

Junk No. 5, { Lieutenant Benjamin Langham.

{ Midshipman Percy Jones.

Junk No. 6, { Midshipman Steven J. Johnston.

{ Naval Cadet John E. Smith.

Two petty officers and nine seaman ratings and one signal rating will be detailed to each tender, also one native pilot.

The tenders will act under the orders of the Commanding Officer of the gunboat to which they are attached, and will be prepared to leave Tinghai after the gunboats have completed with coal and provisions.

CHAS. E. LESTER,

Captain.

We had nothing to do now but wait for the *Ringdove*, so Mr. Trevelyan took his junk and our junk the *Sally* away sailing every day, till we really got quite good at managing the clumsy gear and the huge matting sails. We did some more gun practice as well.

The *Goldfinch* and *Sparrow* took their junks away before our gunboat arrived, and we gave them a jolly good send-off. At last our turn came, and the *Ringdove* finished coaling, and we were given orders to be ready to start at daybreak.

The evening before we had to start there hadn't been a breath of wind, and Dicky and I sat up whistling for it till very late. This was the first time we had spent the night aboard, and we really couldn't sleep because of the excitement and the fleas. The wind did come by the morning, but from the wrong direction, and the *Ringdove*, to save time, simply towed us away behind her.

It wasn't a very glorious start, but they gave us a grand cheer, and the Captain had shouted, "Good luck, Dick! pull your pound for the good old West Country," and that made me gloriously happy, because he had never called me "Dick" since the first day I joined.

When we had got round the corner, out of sight of the *Vigilant*, and knew that we were in for any amount of adventures, we felt simply ripping, and the sun came out too, and we sat on deck and dried our things.

We were so close to the *Ferret* that we could talk to Jim, and presently he came out of his "kennel"—he called his a "kennel", and we called ours a "rabbit hutch"—and yelled across to us to look. He had a huge cake in both hands. "You've got one too, I expect," he shouted, and we crawled into our hutch; and in a corner, under the sea boots, was just such another, all covered with icing, and "Chin Chin Joss from Ah Man" scrawled on it in sugar. Wasn't that jolly decent of the old messman? Of course we'd spent no end of money getting sardines and jam and biscuit from him—those sovereigns the Captain had given Jim and myself had come in jolly useful—but we never expected anything like this, and it just made us completely happy, and we had a piece each on the spot, and waved across to Jim whilst he and Mr. Trevelyan had slices too.

The pilot who came to us was named Ah Chee, a funny-looking old chap, and I'm sure you wouldn't have guessed his age within twenty years. He could talk a little "pidgin" English, and volunteered to do the cooking—in a tiny little galley place over a brazier belonging to the junk, and that boat's stove which we had fitted up—and did it jolly well too, except when he'd been smoking too much opium.

As I told you before, Scroggs was the name of one petty officer, a fine great chap, and Sharpe, a fat, good-natured little man, the other. They were both jolly good at their job, and the Commander had given us a good lot of seamen too.

When it got dark they started a "sing song", and Dicky and I each sang a song. I sang "We'll rant and we'll roar", and Dicky sang "Clementine", and we had an awfully jolly time, and were just as happy as anything, but for those wretched crawling and jumping things.

The *Ringdove* towed us along for two whole days, and on the morning after the second night Mr. Rashleigh had towed us to wind'ard of the Chung-li Tao group of islands. He then stopped her engines and hauled us alongside for orders. We took our charts with us, Mr. Trevelyan and I, and he told me I was to cruise to the eastward and search all the channels, and rejoin him to leeward of a certain island within four days—I forget the name of the island; and he told us a lot more of what we must do in case the weather or the wind changed, but as he had written it all down, it was not necessary to remember it. Then he said goodbye, wished us good luck, and his final orders were: "Keep your guns covered up with old tarpaulins, don't let your people show

themselves when you're close to a village or a junk, and don't attempt to look too smart. Don't hoist your sails as if you were in a blooming hurry, and if you're not sure where you are, anchor for the night. You're intended to be ordinary merchant junks, and you're just bits of bait—sprats to catch a whale—and you have to get hold of some of these fellows for the Captain, and get 'em alive too—he doesn't want dead 'uns. If you meet more than you can tackle, just run down to me, and," he added solemnly, "if other things happen, keep one cartridge in your revolvers for yourselves."

That made me feel rather creepy and coldish, but not exactly frightened, because Mr. Rashleigh is so plump and so—well—funny looking that, however solemnly he tried to say anything, you really wanted to laugh.

Just before we went away Dr. Hibbert, the jolly Surgeon of the *Ringdove*, gave Mr. Trevelyan and myself two big wine bottles each. They were marked "Foretop" and "Maintop". He winked cheerily at us: "You'll find 'em useful, you fellows. If any of your chaps gets a pain below the belt, shove in a big whack of the 'Maintop' bottle; if he gets a pain above the belt, give him half a dozen whacks of the 'Foretop'."

I marked mine "Above" and "Below", and stowed them away very carefully in a corner. He gave me some tobacco too; for though I oughtn't to have smoked—I wasn't eighteen—it was rather different when I was away from the ship. I had brought my pipe with me, but, like an ass, had forgotten any tobacco.

Well, we shook hands and then off we went, the "Ringdoves" cheering us, and all of us cheering each other. She steamed off to the north'ard to get to leeward of the islands, we went away towards the sun, and the *Ferret* the opposite way, Jim waving from the poop and sending a last "Luck to *Sally!*".

There was quite a good breeze blowing, and when we'd got all our sails hauled up and the leeboard down, we went flying along, heeling over till the lee gunwale raced through and under the water. It was simply grand. The sun came up too, and made it all the more cheerful, although there wasn't much warmth in it, and when the *Ringdove* and the *Ferret* had both got out of sight, Dicky gave a great sigh of contentment.

I must say that, at first, I felt frightened at being alone, and should have been jolly pleased to see the *Ringdove's* masts and funny little funnel sticking up over the horizon; but presently I forgot to be nervous, because the junk sailed so well, and it was simply ripping to be in command, all by myself, with a six-pounder and a Maxim gun, and all those two hundred shells down below, and to think of the surprise we should give any junk which tried to take us, because, you see, none of them had ever known what a bursting shell was like. There was Scroggs to fall back upon too, if one really got into a tight fix and couldn't make up one's mind. He was such a huge chap, that he could have lifted Dicky and me up with each hand; but he would always talk about his missus and his "kids" if we gave him the slightest opening, and—well—neither Dicky nor I were the least enthusiastic about them after the second day, and I'm quite certain that Sharpe felt just the same—he had to live with him, too—because I heard him say, "Now chuck it, if you don't want to drive me off'n my blooming rocker."

To show you how the pirates had scared everything off the sea, we never saw a single junk all those two days we were being towed by the *Ringdove*, and now we had the sea all to ourselves. Our first island was right ahead, and we soon got up to it, and Ah Chee came out of his pigeonhole and sniffed and looked, and sniffed and looked again, and smiled, so we knew everything was all right, from the "running-on-rocks" point of view. I didn't tell you before, but Mr. Trevelyan had had a great idea before we left Tinghai, and bought enough loose-fitting blue Chinese short coats, and enough native caps to go round his men and mine too; so now, as we got quite close to the land, we made the men stick them on, and Dicky and I put ours on, and looked jolly funny, I expect. I couldn't help thinking what my mother would imagine had happened if she'd been able to see me rigged up like this, and I was pretty sure that Nan would say something to make me get red and angry. But it was grand fun, all the same.

We had one of the *Vigilant's* dinghies, besides that native sampan hung over the stern, and it had to be covered up with a tarpaulin, so that its shape wouldn't show through. Good old Ah Chee seemed to understand our game, and ran in quite close, and when we were nearing a small village, began gesticulating and signing to me to lower the sails a little. "Too plenty quick—plenty too quick—pilons thinkee you no got"—and he pointed down to the hold, and I suppose meant "cargo"—"no good makee catchee." We lowered our mizzen altogether—it wasn't doing much good anyhow—and slacked off the sheets, and went past very slowly, Dicky and I looking through our telescopes, and hoping to see something coming after us. There was nothing there, though,

and Ah Chee shook his head—"Too plenty good fellow can do."

One or two small junks were hauled up above high-water mark, with their masts out—to make it all the more difficult for pirates to carry them off, I suppose—a few children were playing with the dogs and the pigs on the shore, and one or two miserable wretches were hauling in handlines and picking small fish off the hooks—we could see them glitter in the sun as they wriggled.

Then Ah Chee signed to us to go faster, so we hoisted the mizzen again, and hauled in our sheets and boomed along. We spent all that day doing this, running down one channel and beating up another, and only once saw any junks. There were two beating to windward very slowly, and when we sighted them Dicky and I were very excited, and brought Ah Chee out to look at them. He only shook his head and repeated, "Plenty good fellow can do."

Dicky suggested that we should see how fast we could sail and try and overhaul them, and we were getting on finely, gaining every minute, though we could see them doing their best to go faster; but presently Ah Chee, who had borrowed my telescope, made us slow down, shaking his head, "Plenty bad joss can do—if too plenty quick go—him Chinaman," and he pretended to dive overboard. Dicky understood what he meant first—that the Chinaman would think us pirates, and would jump overboard if we overhauled them, so we lowered our foresail, just to comfort them, and eased down.

We had to keep under way that night, because the next lot of little islands which we had to examine were about nine miles away, and the breeze had fallen considerably. I slept jolly soundly till midnight—I rolled myself in my blanket and slept on deck, to escape the bugs under the poop—and then relieved Dicky for the middle watch.

It was jolly cold, but the stars peeped out every now and again, and it was just light enough to see rocks or land a hundred yards ahead, so there was very little danger of our running ashore.

It was the first night I had spent at sea under sail since the Upton Overy days, and this made me think a lot of the old village, and to wonder what they were doing at home. It was so jolly to know, after all the time—the years, in fact—that I'd been longing to come to sea with the Captain, that I was now doing quite an important job for him, and that I might be lucky enough to help him, and even be able to find Mr. Travers and Sally Hobbs and her father. It was grand, and I did so enjoy myself that night, with, everyone, except myself and the men at the helm and a lookout man for'ard, sound asleep.

I had only the foresail and mizzen set, because there was no reason for going fast, and I was rather nervous about squalls. You couldn't see them coming at night—at any rate I couldn't, because I'd had so jolly little experience.

I stood up alone on the poop, near the Maxim gun, and kept my eye on the sails and the long, narrow deck below me, and I don't know whether you will understand what I mean, but I felt frightfully proud and conceited. I'd felt like that ever since we left the *Ringdove*, but I'd done my best not to let it ooze out, for fear that Dicky and the men should think me an ass, or too cocky, and now it seemed to swell up from my boots, and gave me an awfully funny feeling all over.

We sighted the island about six bells, and then I tacked away again, as it was no use to go in close till daylight. Scroggs relieved me at four o'clock, and I felt almost sorry, but crept in alongside Dicky, as it was raining, and went to sleep directly, without disturbing him.

It didn't seem many minutes before Scroggs woke me. "The breeze is steady, sir, and the island's on our port bow, and I think, sir, that something is following us and just smelling 'around'."

I crawled out like a shot. It was raining gently, and the sails were all damp and dripping, but I couldn't see anything at first except the long dark line of the island to the east.

Scroggs pointed down to leeward, and I thought I made out, just for a second, three great sails.

"She's there, sure enough, sir; I've seen her, off and on, for the last half-hour, and she's working up to wind'ard, as if she wanted to have a look at us."

I watched and watched, my heart thumping like mad, and presently I caught sight of her dark sails again.

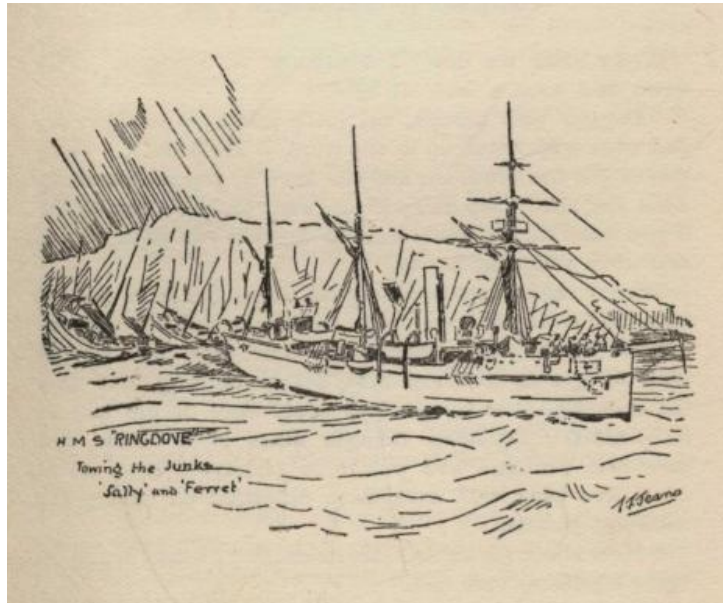
We went off on the other tack, and, sure enough, the next time I saw her she'd done so too.

I knew then that she must be following us.

"She don't quite know what we are, sir," Scroggs chuckled. "She'll know a bit later."

Presently, as it grew lighter and she got closer, we could see her all the time. She looked huge in that light, and had four masts and four immense sails, not three, as we had thought at

first. She was heeling over tremendously, sailing two knots to our one, and overhauling us fast. If you think that I was frightened you are jolly well right.



H.M.S. "Ringdove" Towing the Junks 'Sally' and 'Ferret'

CHAPTER VI The "Sally" goes into Action

The Chinaman draws Nearer—First Shots—The Maxim Gun—A Near Thing—
Four to One—Running the Gauntlet—"Well Done, Sir!"—At Close Quarters—
The The Grappling Iron—Left Alone

Continued by Midshipman Ford

"What shall we do?" I whispered to Scroggs. "Go down and have a look at her?"

"Beggin' your pardon, sir, you'll just keep straight on, and edge a bit more up in the wind, if she'll do it. Once you've got the wind, sir, and can keep it, you can do about what you like; keep away if you want to, run down to her if you want to, and she'll have to do what you want her to, and when you want her to."

Then I remembered reading all about fights in the old time, and when we were in the *Britannia*, and learnt about actions in the old sailing days, how each side always tried to get to wind'ard first, before fighting, and that the man who was to wind'ard could fight or not just as he pleased. I'd never thought much of it before, but now that Scroggs had put it so plainly, I saw, all at once, how practically everything depended on having the wind'ard position.

"How about giving her the mainsail?" I asked Scroggs. "She's gaining very fast."

"She's doing all right, sir! We doesn't want to run away. Just you edge up a bit more in the wind and wait for her. Time enough for the mains'l if she be a pirate, and we have to chase her."

So we edged up into the wind again and began to stand out to sea, beyond the island.

I pointed that out to Scroggs—I felt fearfully excited and nervous.

"That's all right, sir, never mind about the island; you'll be getting her out in the open, and she'll think you're just trying to give her a wide berth." Then I remembered Dicky, and shouted through the little sliding door for him to come and see the fun. He scrambled up on the poop, rubbing his eyes, and we both stood looking at her, feeling frightened because she looked so big and came on so like a ghost, and didn't notice that we were getting wet through. I did wish then

that the *Ringdove* was in sight.

"How about letting the hands have food, sir? Maybe, if we've luck, we're like to be busy later on, sir!"

Of course Scroggs was right, and Dicky said that Nelson always gave his men food before going into action—he squeaked again, he was so nervous—and that settled it; and the men were turned out, and were almost too excited to eat anything. Ah Chee was quite stupid and silly when we tried to wake him—he must have been smoking opium during the night—and the men had to make their own cocoa. Dicky and I managed to gulp some down, and had a couple of gingerbread biscuits each. We didn't like looking at each other for fear of giving away our—well—funk, though it wasn't exactly funk.

By this time it was quite light, and the island was about three miles away, right under our port bow, and the huge Chinaman was about half a mile astern, and still a little to leeward.

We dragged Ah Chee out of his hole again, but he hadn't recovered, and staggered about, shaking all over; and when he'd steadied himself, got both eyes to focus properly, and seen the junk, he simply let out a howl and crawled back, yelling "Pilons! Pilons!" which made me feel creepy, although I had to pretend it didn't. I had to pretend jolly hard.

"He'll kill himself with that pipe, sir, and we'll want him later on," Scroggs said, but I didn't know what to do. "You leave 'im to me, sir," and Scroggs dragged him out again, took away his pipe and tobacco and opium, and then shut him down in the forehold and jammed the hatch cover over it. Glad enough too he was to crawl into it.

The strange junk was coming up finely, heeling over and splashing through the water. We could only see one man on board, standing on the poop watching us, and he looked peaceable enough.

"She's got guns—I can see them sticking out!" Dicky squealed; but that didn't make it certain that she was a pirate, because all merchant junks carry guns too. "Couldn't we go for her now, Scroggs, don't you think? She isn't half a mile off."

Dicky and I were so excited and "quivery", we could hardly breathe, and this waiting for her to catch up with us was the worst part. But Scroggs wouldn't alter course, and said: "Just you 'oist the mains'l, sir, and get them tarpaulins off the guns, and stand by. When she sees that 'ere mains'l creaking up, she'll guess we're frightened, and maybe she'll let fly at us."

We got the tarpaulins off, and the men began working the clumsy windlass which hoisted the mainsail, and the great "clammy" thing went squeaking up the mast. That made us go faster and heel over more.

The guns were all painted a dirty grey, so didn't show up at all, but just what Scroggs had expected happened. The junk all at once luffed up, shot up into the wind, came on to an even keel, her great sails began flapping, we could see men pouring up from below, and four white clouds of smoke shot out from her port side, and before we could say "knife", there were four splashes in the water behind us, and one shot came ricocheting over us, humming like a top, and fell into the sea ahead of us.

Dicky and I ducked, and then we looked up to see if the ricochet had done any damage, and Scroggs pointed out a hole in the mainsail, close to the mast, where it must have gone through, and a piece of sail flapping down.

I'm certain that I wasn't frightened then, for I thought more of the mast than myself, and knew what a bad "egg" it would have been if the shot hadn't missed it.

I looked at Scroggs.

"Give 'em one, sir! Give 'em one!" he was beaming all over his face; "we can 'ardly miss 'er, sir."

I shouted for the six-pounder to open fire, but the mainsail was in the way, and they couldn't get the sights on.

"Gun won't bear, sir," the captain of the gun shouted, and I jumped for'ard to see for myself that he was right.

"What shall I do now?" I asked Scroggs, and felt stupid, and could just see the pirate junk paying off again to give us her other broadside.

She seemed so close that there wasn't time to think.

"Put your helm down and come into the wind yourself, sir."

I shouted to Dicky to do so, and the *Sally* came up all shaking.

"Now you've got her," Scroggs said, and as he spoke the junk shot off her starboard guns, and we could hear them yelling and beating tom-toms. There was too much to do this time to "duck", and besides, they had fallen astern by luffing and then paying off again, so their shots

didn't come so close.

Then Fergusson, the captain of the six-pounder, fired. The little shell burst as it touched the water halfway across, and we heard the pirates yell again. Scroggs let out a dozen oaths, and told him to steady himself; and his next went nearer, and the next burst close alongside, and they didn't cheer that—they'd never seen shell burst before, I expect, and wondered what it was, and how we could fire so fast.

"Take your time," I shouted, and was so excited that I bit a great piece out of my lip. We fired again, and must have hit her, for a cloud of smoke came out of her bows, and a very different kind of yell came back, and we yelled too; but she'd loaded again by this time, luffed up, and gave us her port guns. There was a crash and a whistling sound, and out through the poop bounded a round shot, struck against a big chock of wood at the foot of the mainmast, and bounced overboard. It only missed one of the men at the tiller by a hair's breadth, and he let out a squeal, he was so surprised, and then got red and tried to pretend that it wasn't him. "They're only smooth bores," Scroggs shouted. "Who's squealing like a furry rabbit?" and Fergusson fired again—she wasn't four hundred yards away—and missed her. They started easing off rifles at us too, and the bullets went splattering through the sails and splashing into the water.

The *Sally* had been jumping about up to now—that was why Fergusson had kept on missing—but for just about two minutes she was quite steady. She almost seemed to know things were not quite all right, and Fergusson must have got off a dozen rounds, and nearly all of them hit. I was so excited, I yelled every time, and we could see smoke coming out and pieces of wood flying, and though she turned to give us her starboard broadside, she didn't fire them, and fell right off the wind, with her stern facing us. She wasn't three hundred yards off, and suddenly remembering the Maxim gun, I rushed aft; but before I could climb up the poop, Dicky turned out "trumps" and began firing. "Tut tut—tut tut," it went, and you could see a lane of bullet splashes; and as we lifted our stern they must have poured into her, and we heard shrieking, and could see the Chinamen throwing up their arms and falling, till the roll of the *Sally* took the sights off again.[#]

[#] A Maxim gun is an extremely difficult weapon to use, unless the gun platform is absolutely steady.

Then the signalman shouted, "They've had enough, sir!" and we saw that they daren't turn round again, and were easing off their sheets to run down wind.

You should have heard us cheer; and there wasn't any need to tell the men at the helm to "hard a-starboard", for they did it of their own accord, and we eased away our sheets and ran after her.

"I thought he'd be sorry for it, sir," said Scroggs coming up. "Look up there, sir; that does one real good."

I looked, and saw that we had the White Ensign flying from the mizzen peak. Dicky and I grinned with delight. We'd been told not to hoist it—they'd not even given us one—but there it was—grand!

"I did that, sir," the signalman said bashfully. "Stole it aboard the *Vig.*, sir," and he grinned, and everybody grinned at everybody else, and looked to see what damage that round shot had done, just for curiosity.

My aunt! we did just bubble through the water, half burying our bows; the breeze must have freshened up without our noticing it. The pirate was digging out too, and had got a good start, and it wasn't any use firing at her, because we had a funny corkscrew rolling motion, and couldn't be certain of hitting anything. We only had two hundred rounds of shell to begin with, so I didn't dare to waste them, and waited till we could draw up closer and make certain of hitting. She was making straight for the island, and at one time we thought that we must try and disable her before she ran herself ashore. Dicky and I began to talk about capturing her. We were little fools, as it turned out.

Presently we saw that a channel opened out, right in the middle of the island, and she was making straight for it. I got out our chart, but couldn't find the island—not to make sure of it—so hauled Ah Chee out from the forehold. He was plucky enough now the pirate was running away, and nodded his head and said, "Vely good—vely good—plenty good," and pointed to the channel, so I knew we were all right to follow her.

She was almost in it before we began firing at her, and we hit her big square poop time after time, and saw pieces of wood flying in the air; but it didn't seem to make any difference to her, and she still kept on steadily.

In another three minutes we shot into the channel ourselves—between high cliffs—and as the tide was running with us and the strong wind behind us, we scooted along at a tremendous pace. We were catching her up fast, too, and had got to within two hundred yards, and Fergusson began pouring in six-pounder shells. I really wanted to frighten her so much that she would surrender, and I would be able to tow her back to the *Vigilant*, and give her up to Captain Lester. And I wanted to take back some of the crew as well, for Captain Lester had told me, "Don't want dead 'uns; dead 'uns don't tell things".

The noise our little gun made was tremendous, now that we were in between high rocks. You could hear a crash! crash! and then a rolling sound and another crash after every shot. It must have frightened the pirates, if it did nothing else; and whatever happened I don't know, but we suddenly saw her main shrouds on one side give way, her fore mainmast bent over like a whip, and before they could do anything, down it came with a snap, and the great sail with it, and the foremast and foresail went too a moment later, and she simply seemed to stop dead, turning her broadside to us and unable to move—just like a huge bird with one wing broken.

I had an insane idea of running alongside, but Scroggs put our helm hard down, and we swung round like a top, not fifty yards from her, and slid up into the wind. I rushed aft, furious with him.

"You'd have been atop of her in another second, sir."

"That's what I wanted," I said angrily. "What d'you mean by touching the helm?"

"Begging your pardon, sir, if you once got alongside, we'd be done for! She's got a hundred men aboard, and we twelve wouldn't 'ave stood a chance."

But I was so excited, that I never thought of that, and was just going to give him a piece of my mind about his cheek, when the pirate let off his broadside right in our faces. We were so close that the noise seemed to knock our ears in. I was half stunned and dazed, felt something hot all over me, and was thrown against the mast. I picked myself up, and found my hands and my clothes covered with blood. Scroggs was nowhere to be seen, two of the Hotchkiss gun's crew were lying near the gun groaning, and the dinghy had been smashed to pieces.

Sharpe, the second petty officer, was bringing the *Sally* round into the wind again, and Dicky was busy with the Maxim gun, but the six-pounder wouldn't bear—the mainsail was in the way.

"Heaps of time, sir," Sharpe said, looking at me in a funny way. "They daren't go near their guns to reload 'em. I thought you'd been killed, sir!"

"What happened?" I asked him, trying to shake the blood from my face and eyes; I felt quite stupid. "Where's Scroggs?"

"Scroggs is gone, sir. One o' them round shot took him in the middle, just as you were standing by, and carried what was left of him overboard, and another struck some of the six-pounder cartridges, and they blew up and knocked over Adams and Cooke, and threw you up ag'in that mast, sir."

Poor old Scroggs! and I'd been beastly to him too. I have always been sorry for that.

Dicky gave a yell when he saw me. He looked funny about the eyes—rather mad—and burst out crying, just for a second. "I thought you'd been killed," he stuttered, "and I've killed dozens of those brutes to revenge you."

I shouted something, and a funny hot kind of feeling came up inside me, and the only thing I thought of was to go on killing; and we edged up, just to leeward of the junk, and fired at her with the six-pounder as fast as Fergusson could load—Sharpe had sent him two more hands, and had hauled Adams and Cooke aft, out of the way.

Not a single live Chinaman could we see on deck—they'd all gone down below out of sight—but every now and again we could hear shrieks coming from inside her, and knew that our shells were finding them out. I felt mad, and Dicky was mad, and only Sharpe kept his head. We must have made some holes in her below the waterline, because she was now much lower in the water, and I simply longed to see her sink and drown all the crew—I'd forgotten all about trying to capture her.

Then suddenly, as we were expecting her to go under, someone pointed down to leeward, down the channel, and, looking there, I saw four great junks beating up towards us. They were about a mile away, and had covered themselves with pendants and streamers—all the colours of the rainbow—and began firing guns to frighten us, I suppose.

I went cold all over, for I knew we couldn't manage four more, and I saw that Sharpe thought so too. Dicky didn't seem to be quite right in his head, for he shook his fist at them, and yelled to me that there were more for him to kill. "Off out of it, sir; we can't tackle that lot. We're only nine all told, not counting orficers, sir. Back again, sir; beat up to wind'ard, sir; and get away into the

open sea."

We hadn't a moment to lose, either, and I knew he was right, and stood away from the sinking junk, and started to beat up the channel, through which we had just entered. The entrance was about half a mile to wind'ard of us, the tide was against us, and jolly slow progress we made, though I knew it was the same for those who were chasing us. We'd sailed so much more quickly than that sinking junk, when we ran before the wind, that I hoped we should be as good when we were beating; but I soon had a most horrible feeling that we were not pointing so high as they were, and not going so fast through the water, either.

We had time to look after Adams and Cooke now—Adams had one thigh broken, and I knew that that wasn't so bad; but Cooke had his hands and face and legs all badly burnt with the explosion, and was in awful pain. We made them as comfortable as we could down below under the poop, but it was horrid to hear Cooke moaning and shrieking sometimes.

We soon got so close inshore that we had to go about on the starboard tack, and we swung round and plugged away for the entrance, which never seemed to get any nearer. The junks behind us were still gaining, two of them very quickly. These two were leaving the others a long way astern, and just to show you what asinine ideas come to one, I thought for a moment that we might draw them on and on, till they were so separated that we could tackle them one at a time.

The breeze had been gradually freshening, and was now blowing down the channel quite hard, and as we went off on the starboard tack, we heeled over till the deck seemed almost upright (we were heeling over to port—the left side).

But then an awful thing happened. Suddenly, above my head, there was a noise like a pistol shot, and, looking up, I saw that one of the starboard main shrouds had parted, and that the mainmast was beginning to bend over. If I held on for another minute, the other two would be certain to go—the strain on them was awful—and the mast would have gone too. There was only one thing to be done, and I shrieked to "Hard a-port!" She heeled over, another shroud uncurled and parted, but before the last could go she staggered round into the wind, the strain was taken off, and the mast straightened again.

Sharpe came running aft; he was as white as a sheet. "It will take us an hour to repair, sir! What can we do?"

It was plain as a pikestaff that we couldn't beat out. Everyone on board knew that at once, and they all looked to me, but knew what would have to be done just as well as I did, and I could see them watching the pirates out of the corners of their eyes.

The current was taking us down towards them, and they were all coming along at a tremendous rate. It was no use drifting among them helplessly; we couldn't beat out with only the mizzen and foresail, so the only thing to do was to get before the wind again, with our sails out to starboard, so that most of the strain came on our port rigging, and try to run past them. Clarke and another man sprang up the mainmast, going up the big bamboo hoops which kept the sail close to the mast, and began reeving a temporary rope to act as a backstay, and we swung round, gybed very carefully, and the little *Sally* went bounding back to them.

The only one on board who wasn't—well—frightened was Dicky. He'd have charged an express train; he was so mad with fighting and killing people with that Maxim. We moved Cooke and Adams from under the poop, and put them down below in the big hold, out of danger, and by that time we were abreast the sinking junk; and as we went rushing by she gave a lurch, we saw her guns slide overboard, she went under, and we could see at least fifty Chinamen struggling in the water. Dicky yelled and shook his fist at them, and called them all the names he could lay his tongue to.

I had tried to keep my eye on those four junks all the time, and though I was still feeling "silly" after being "bashed" against the mast, I could see that they didn't seem to know quite what to make of us. The leading ones were half a mile ahead of the others, and we were coming down so fast towards them that we didn't give them much time to make up their minds. We saw them run into the wind for a second or two, and then they came along, on the other tack, straight for us, the leading one about two hundred yards in front of the second. They were almost as big as the one we had sunk, but only had three masts, so didn't look quite so ferocious.

I thought that we could slip by and pass the first two to port (our left-hand side), but as we got closer it seemed to me that the first one was trying to ram us, and I had sense enough to know that if she did, our masts would probably go overboard, and that all would be U P with us. Sharpe was still up aloft, reeving that temporary shroud, so I couldn't ask him what to do, and began to feel very frightened. Fergusson kept on firing the six-pounder very fast, and kept on hitting her, but that didn't seem to have any effect, and she didn't alter course. We were hardly

fifty yards away now, and Fergusson let off that gun faster than ever, and we could actually hear the shells bursting and see the pieces of wood flying out of her bows, and gashes opening out in her foresail. Her crew were yelling most awfully, and making such a banging noise with tom-toms and brass clappers, that that frightened me all the more. We were simply tearing along, with the water bubbling along the sides like a mill stream. We should be into her, or she into us, in a moment, and I held my breath and clutched hold of something, not knowing what to do. The men at the helm were looking at me for orders—they looked scared, too—and I was just going to tell them to "starboard", when I saw her begin to luff up. I yelled to them to "steady", and before you could say "knife", she slid along our port side, with her huge sails leaning right over us. The horrid brutes were all hanging on and glaring at us, and they shrieked and yelled, and I saw some of them throw things at us, and some of them fire off rifles. She couldn't fire her guns, because she was heeling over so much; but I knew she would let them off directly she was on a level keel, and I saw a lot of them scrambling over each other to get at them, and knew they would fire almost directly—right in our faces. But as they slid past, like an express train, Dicky began firing the Maxim right down in the middle of them.

I shall never forget how they screamed and fell down in heaps; and then, whether I gave the order or not (Clarke said I did, but I think that the men who were steering did it of their own accord), we put our helm "hard a-starboard", and flew round under her stern. Fergusson fired two shells straight into her poop, and in their fright they let off their guns—right away from us.



The battle between the Sally and the pirates

We put up our helm and flew away down wind, and left her standing still, all her sails shaking, and in any amount of confusion.

"Well done, sir!" Sharpe shouted from aloft, and that seemed to wake me again, and Dicky and his Maxim gun's crew were yelling with delight, and then everybody cheered because the second junk wouldn't face us, but luffed up and popped off her guns. She was too unsteady, or too much in a hurry, and we were going too fast, to give her a chance of hitting us. "Passed two of 'em, sir," Sharpe sang out cheerily; "get those stink things overboard, sir." That was the first thing which made me notice that I'd been coughing, and choking, and running at the eyes, and that there was a horrid smell.

There was a round basketwork thing spluttering and fizzing, and the beastly stinking smoke coming out of it, lying jammed in a corner close to me. I got it overboard somehow, and heard it fizzle as it fell in the water—ugh! the stink was awful. The others which had come on board were got rid of somehow or other—the men had thrown them or they had rolled overboard—but

everyone was coughing and wiping their eyes, especially the six-pounder gun's crew, who were to leeward, and so had got most of the smoke.

When I could see out of my eyes properly, there was Dicky grinning at me from the poop, and I did really think, at the time, too, that he must have either gone off his head or was actually enjoying himself. The two junks which we had passed were coming along after us now; the first one was a long way astern, and the second broad on our port quarter. Fergusson had got the smoke out of his eyes too, and began banging at this cowardly second one; and we could see that she was trying to edge away out of range of his shells.

But now we were rushing down towards the last two junks. They were lashing along on the port tack, heeling over till we could almost see their keels, and were coming straight towards us on the other side—to starboard (our right-hand side). I couldn't see them at all from the high poop because our sails were in the way, so went down close to the men steering, and could then see them by looking under the foot of the mainsail. Sharpe came and stood by me, and I didn't feel so nervous.

The nearer one was about a hundred yards off.

"Wait a little, sir! Wait a little!" Sharpe said. We were both peering under the sail, and Dicky had gone for'ard to see if he could get the six-pounder to fire. "When she's a leetil bit closer, turn away from her, sir."

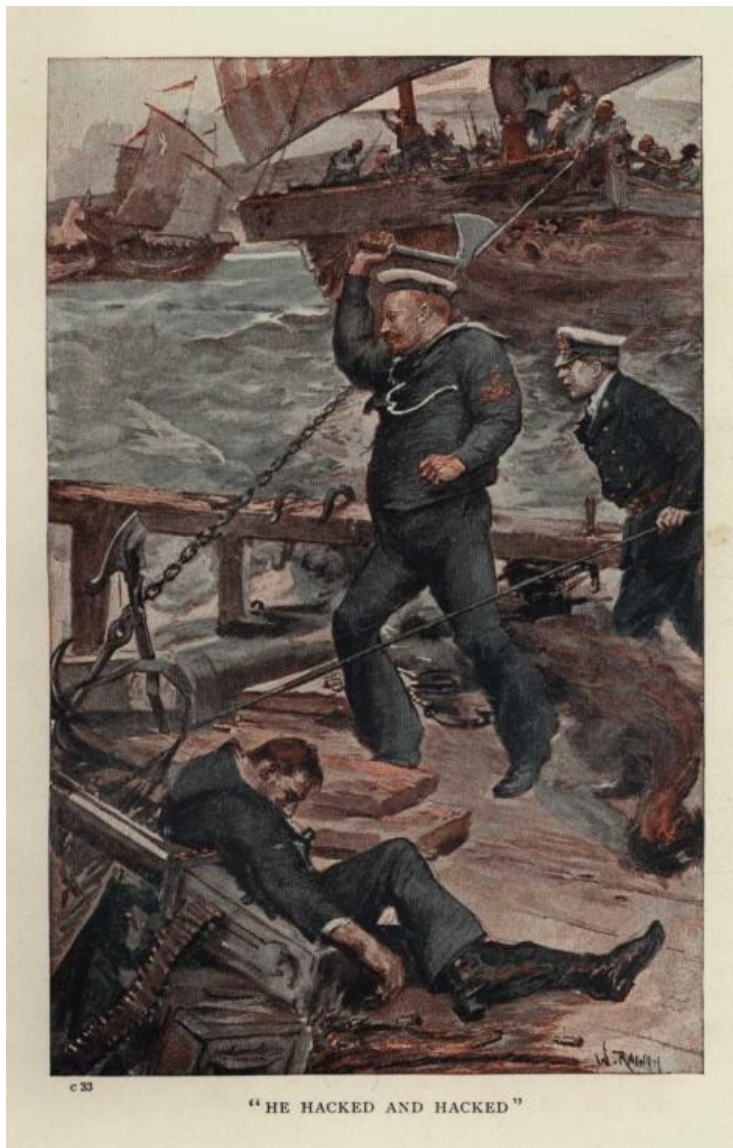
There was only fifty yards between us now, and we were rushing to meet at a point.

Thirty yards! Twenty yards! I couldn't breathe. They yelled and shook their arms about; we could see them all clinging to the weather gunwale.

I looked at Sharpe. "Now, sir!" he cried, and I sang out, "Starboard!" and our bows slewed away from her.

"Haul in the sheet, sir! Quick, sir! or she'll be on to us and carry away the sails," and everyone jumped to the sheets and began hauling in the huge booms of the foresail and mainsail. The *Sally* heeled over, with the wind on her beam, and seemed almost to give a leap through the water. We thought that we should just shoot past the third junk, and were going to cheer, but the next thing I knew (the sails hid her now) there was a bump, and the junk suddenly appeared right on top of us. I was flung down—we all were—the *Sally* seemed to rebound, and there was another crash under her poop. I bent my head down, expecting the masts and sails to come toppling on top of me; but she must have only struck us grazing blows, because they didn't, and when I looked up again we had cleared her. "For God's sake, ease off those sheets!" Sharpe yelled, "or we'll gybe," and I had enough sense left to know that if we did gybe we should either capsize or carry away all our damaged starboard main rigging and lose our masts. The men at the helm scrambled to their feet, and had enough wit left to "starboard" a little. The sails were just shaking, uncertain whether they would swing right across to port, but that extra bit of starboard helm just did the trick and saved her. They were all too busy with the sheets to fire the Maxim or the six-pounder, and the next I knew was a roaring hot noise right in our faces—she had fired her broadside at us. My head and ears seemed banged in, and I shut my eyes, wondering where I should be hit. Then I heard Sharpe yell, "Mr. Morton's down, sir!" and I opened them to see Dicky lying on the deck where the dinghy had been, with his face and head covered with blood. I forgot about everything else, and jumped across to him, and tried to stop the blood with my dirty handkerchief, and make him say something; but Sharpe sang out, "For God's sake, sir, look where you're going!" and I heard the most awful noise of yelling under our port bow, and there was the fourth junk, towering above us and rasping along our side. I was knocked over again. I saw some iron things, like grapnels, thrown on board, with ropes fastened to them. One near me caught in the starboard gunwale, but jerked itself free; another missed the main rigging, but two caught somewhere on the poop, and I could see the lines on them tautening and the pirate junk turning after us, to ease the strain.

There was a horrid feeling that the *Sally* wasn't going so fast. Sharpe rushed past me with an axe in his hand, and I found myself on the poop next to him. He was hacking away with all his might, and cut through one rope; but there was the other grappling iron, caught in the damaged woodwork, and it had about six feet of chain secured to it, and he couldn't break that. He hacked and hacked, and we all tried to pull the grappling iron itself free, but couldn't move it, because the crew of the junk were hauling on the rope at the other end of the chain, and there was a tremendous strain on it; the rope and chain were as taut as a bar.



"HE HACKED AND HACKED"

I can't quite tell you what happened for the next few seconds; they seemed like years.

The third junk was firing her broadside guns, and the one that had got hold of us was firing rifles; and we were covered with smoke, and could hear woodwork smashing somewhere all round us, and how it was we were not all killed I don't know to this day.

"I can't do it; God help us, sir!" Sharpe groaned, and left off hacking at the chain, and began to try and cut away the side of the poop where the grappling iron had fixed itself; but the edge of the axe was all blunted, and would hardly even cut wood. It was perfectly awful, and you could see the cruel brutes in the bows of the fourth junk hauling in the rope, hand over hand. They thought that they had caught us, and were making the most tremendous noise, shouting and yelling.

They had hauled themselves to within twenty feet of us, and would be alongside in another few seconds. We could see them crowding for'ard, waving swords, and getting ready to pour on board. They began throwing stink balls, too, but these fell into the water, or, at any rate, we were too terrified to notice them.

I suddenly wondered why the Maxim wasn't working—I'd not thought of it—and looked round and saw why. It was all battered in a heap, and two of its crew were lying underneath it.

I don't know what I did, or quite what happened then, but I found myself under the poop, hunting among all the wreckage for my revolver.

I didn't find it, but got hold of a cutlass and was rushing up again, when I heard Sharpe give a yell of joy, and was just in time to see that awful rope "part", and the people in the bows of the pirate junk fall on their backs in a heap.

"We're away, sir!" Sharpe shouted, and, darting for'ard to the six-pounder, sang out to the men steering to turn her round a little, and fired four times right into the pirate's bows.

They came round, too, and fired their guns at us; but we were beyond worrying about

gunshots now, after all we'd been through, and paid off again before the wind, the third and the fourth junks following us close behind, and the first two a long way behind.

My head was simply going round and round, and my ears were ringing and buzzing. We were still in a cloud of powder smoke from the junks, and our poop was a perfect wreck.

I had time to look round now—the Maxim gun was lying there, knocked to pieces, the two men near it were quite dead, horribly smashed up one was, and there was hardly an undamaged plank to be seen. The native boat hanging over our stern had been smashed to pieces, and the wreckage of it was trailing in the water. We cut it adrift. Bits of wood and sail and rope were lying all over the decks, and up above our sails were full of holes. The main gaff was hanging down and beating against the sail, and tearing long strips out of it; but the mast still stood, and the rudder wasn't damaged, and we were simply roaring through the water again.

Then the third junk began creeping up on our starboard quarter, not overhauling us very fast, which showed that our speed wasn't much decreased; and directly the six-pounder would bear, Sharpe, who had taken charge of it, began firing into her, and hit her several times. We could see her trying to edge away.

Right astern was the fourth junk, and half a mile astern the first and second. The third and the fourth kept on yawing, so that they could bring their guns to bear and fire at us, but lost ground doing this, and only made a few more holes in our sails.

My people began to cheer—the seven who were left—because the open sea showed right in front of us; and then they cheered more loudly, because the first junk, which seemed to be very low in the water, suddenly shot up into the wind, the second junk, which had always given us a wide berth, followed her, and both of them began tacking over to the island.

That left us only two to tackle—the fourth, which was about three hundred yards astern, and the third, which was broad on our starboard quarter, but was edging away to try and get out of range of Sharpe's little shells, and was quite out of it, as far as her own guns were concerned.

But before she could get out of range, something happened which made her gybe badly—we were all running before the wind, you must remember. Whether Sharpe had smashed her steering gear or not, I don't know, but, at any rate, she lowered her foresail and hauled into the wind as if to repair something, and lost a great deal of ground before she paid off, and came after us again.

Something, whatever it was, must have been very badly damaged, for she hauled her wind again; and the fourth did so too, sailing close up to her, and then—hurrah! how we cheered!—they both began beating to wind'ard towards the island, and we were left alone.

I don't know how the men felt, but I felt giddy and weak and horribly sick, and had to hold myself up against the mizzen mast, because my knees trembled so much, and my head was splitting, and my mouth felt absolutely dry, and my ears were all buzzing and humming, and very painful.

I jumped down to Dicky; he was lying just where he'd fallen, and he was quite unconscious, and had an awful gash across the side of his head. Some splinter must have struck him.

The signalman said he knew something about "first aid", and brought the "first aid" bag, and bandaged him up, and wiped the blood off his face, and we brought him aft.

Please don't think that I was cool enough to have written this down right on the spot. I couldn't possibly have done it. Everything went so fast, that you had no time for thinking, and really, after being thrown against the mainmast, when Adams and Cooke had been injured, I wasn't any use at all.

I was shaky and "jumpy" for days afterwards, and it wasn't till I got back to the *Vigilant* that I could write this down, and then I had to get everyone who was on board the *Sally* to help me.

It was Scroggs, and after he was killed, Sharpe, who had done it all, and but for them—well—I shouldn't have been able to write about it, or any of us either, for the matter of that.

And if, after Scroggs and Sharpe, you asked me to tell you who did next best of the men, I should say the two able seamen who stood to the tiller ropes and steered for that horribly long hour, and did things—right things—at the proper time, even without orders. They hadn't had the excitement of firing back, either, to keep them keen and from getting in a funk. One was John Corder, and the other William Young, and they both got their ratings as leading seamen some time afterwards, and I only wish that my father were a rich man, and could do more for them.

Mr. Rashleigh takes Command

Tired Out—Mr. Trevelyan Assists—A Trying Night—On Board the Ringdove—
The Sally in Danger—The Sally Disabled—Dicky is Better—Open Fire!—A
Surprise—The Sally is Done For

Written by Midshipman Ford

It must have been some time between seven bells and noon when we found ourselves clear of that hateful channel and the smoke that seemed almost to fill it, and the last of the pirates had given up the chase. We hadn't even enough energy to cheer, but we all wanted to lie down. Not a single one of us had escaped bruises or cuts from bits of splinters, and I know that I felt almost dead, as if I'd been bruised all over—being thrown against the mast, when poor old Scroggs was killed, did that.

I would have let the men sleep, but Sharpe shook his head and said that there was too much work to be done, and of course he was right. All the wounded had to be looked after, and the rigging and sails to repair temporarily. When we'd got well away from the island, we found that the wind had begun to go round to the west, and what bothered us most was a plank, under the starboard side of the poop, which had been smashed in when the third junk collided with us. The breeze going round to the west was good, because it brought all the strain on our port rigging, and the fore and main rigging on that side hadn't been injured; but it was bad for us, because it made us heel over to starboard, and this smashed plank kept on going under water and letting a lot in.

We had to turn the Sally round into the wind and lower her sails, and stayed like that for nearly an hour, all the time looking to see whether any junks were coming after us, and standing by to scoot off again if they did. But none tried to follow us, and when Sharpe had nailed some canvas and some of the dinghy's broken planks over the hole, we hoisted our sails again and sailed away for the island where we had to meet the *Ringdove*.

Ah Chee was plucky enough now, and began to cook something hot for us all over the big brazier. It had been knocked over and emptied, but there were so many bits of wood lying about, that he made a fire out of them. He kept pointing to himself and jabbering, "Ah Chee belong plenty blave fightee man," and then to the island, shaking his fist, "Pilons all same pig."

I had crawled under the poop to look at Dicky. I was almost afraid to go there, because I thought I should find that he had stopped breathing; but I watched him very carefully, and could just see his chest moving, and his lips too sometimes, when he breathed in and out. I crept back again, feeling very funny and glad. Adams and Cooke were moaning and groaning, and it was awful not to know the proper thing to do for them. Sharpe had wrapped the two dead men in their blankets and put them down below out of sight, and we had put Adams and Cooke and Dicky in the men's part of the poop, because all the upper part, where Dicky and I and Scroggs and Sharpe had lived, was simply a wreck. My hammock and bedding had been carried halfway through the bulkhead by a shot, which was still fixed in it, and my uniform tin case was almost doubled in half, and I couldn't open it. I know that you will think me an ass, but when I found Ah Man's cake, with only a gash across the icing, I could have whooped with joy, and divided it among the men, leaving a bit for Dicky, if he ever got well—I knew he wouldn't mind. That was the first thing we had to eat after the pirates left off chasing us. You should have seen us drink. I had never been so thirsty in my life, nor the men in theirs either, I should fancy.

Our compass had been smashed, but we could guess our course roughly, and Ah Chee knew his way pretty well among the islands, so we didn't worry much about that.

We were really too "played out" to worry about anything. By the middle of the afternoon it was blowing very hard, and we were plunging, and shaking, and heeling over so much, that we had to lower the mainsail altogether, and could only carry the foresail hoisted halfway up, and the little mizzen sail. That eased her, and made her much more comfortable, and I should have let the men go to sleep, but Sharpe wouldn't hear of it. "No, sir. It's going to be a dirty night, and we'd best set up that damaged rigging temporarily." So he and the four hands—all that were left, if you don't count the two men at the tiller—worked wearily away till it was nearly dark.

But long before that I'd gone to sleep myself. I was very ashamed then, and am still ashamed

of myself; but I had got into a corner, more or less out of the wind and the spray, propped up between the poop and the side of the junk, close to the men at the helm, and must have simply gone to sleep standing up, and slipped down without knowing it.

"The *Ferret* is in sight, sir!" I suddenly heard, and there was Sharpe standing over me, and trying to shake some life into me. "She's asking for news."

I hardly dared look at him, because I felt such a "worm", and got on my feet again. At first I thought he meant the *Vigilant*, but it was only Mr. Trevelyan and Jim in their junk. Oh! I felt so stiff and sore, and had to rub my eyes to get properly awake; but then I was frightfully glad, for I thought that Mr. Trevelyan might know something about doctoring. She was slanting down towards us, with only a bit of her mainsail hoisted, and flying some signal.

"We've given her our name, sir," the signalman said, "and now Mr. Trevelyan wants to know what news you have, sir."

I told the signalman what to say, and he semaphored, "Captain to Captain" (that didn't even make me smile, or feel proud, so proves how tired I must have been). "We have sunk one pirate junk, and escaped from four more in the channel between East and West Nam Chau Islands" (we had found the name on the chart, after all). "Petty officer Scroggs killed, two able seamen, Midshipman Morton and able seaman Cooke badly wounded, and able seaman Adams has leg broken."

We saw them take it in, and I knew how unhappy Jim would be about Dicky. Then they hoisted a signal which meant "heave to", and we lowered the bit of foresail and swung round, with our mizzen to keep us in the wind, whilst Mr. Trevelyan came lurching down, swung up into the wind just ahead of us, lowered his mainsail, and hoisted a tiny bit of mizzen. I could see them all looking at us, and Jim was standing on the poop waving to me, and I waved back to him. They got out their dinghy and two men, and Mr. Trevelyan began dropping down towards us. We threw them a rope and they caught it, swung in under our stern, and Mr. Trevelyan clambered up over our poor old wrecked poop. It was a jolly tricky thing to do, because a big sea was running. I was so awfully "done up", that I could almost have burst into tears when I saw him. I was never so thankful to see anyone in my life before.

"Holy Moses! Ford, you've been and smashed up the Skipper's junk, and no mistake! My jumping Jupiter! you must have had a warm time, and you look like a blooming butcher yourself."

"It's not mine, sir," I told him; "it's Scroggs's." I had been too tired to wash my face and hands and my clothes, and the spray hadn't done it either; it was all caked and brown by now. I implored him to come and see Dicky and Adams. "I don't know a blooming thing about doctoring," he said, scratching his head, and looking awfully serious; but he picked his way across the smashed-up poop, and where the Maxim gun had been, and we crawled in to see Dicky. He was still unconscious; he wouldn't even look at me, though his eyes were open, and we shouted his name, and every time the junk flopped about, both Adams and Cooke moaned terribly. Mr. Trevelyan did make it more comfortable for them all, because he made us roll Cooke in blankets, so that his legs did not stick together, and he made us tie Adams's legs together to keep the broken one steady; and then we put them in their hammocks and slung them, somehow or other, and after that it didn't hurt them so much when the junk rolled and pitched.

All this time I had told Mr. Trevelyan everything, just as I have told you, and he was fearfully excited, and made us show him on the chart exactly where we had been, as far as I could make out. "You have had luck," he kept on saying; "and I'm going to have a go at them." You see, I hadn't really got any information—none worth having—and no prisoners. I had been much too excited to notice anything on the islands themselves, and, as Mr. Trevelyan said, "They might have their whole bally 'fit out' there."

"Don't bother about that, you lucky little beggar" (I suppose I looked miserable); "you can't do every blessed thing! Now you shove along to the *Ringdove*, and I'll beat up to your pirates, if my crazy old 'ditcher will face it—she won't sail for nuts, Ford—and just 'makee look see' first thing in the morning. Give old Rashleigh my love, and if I'm not back again by to-morrow night, or the morning after, get him to come along and pick up the scraps."

He was just as excited as you can imagine. I wanted him to take back all the Maxim ammunition I had left—of course it was no use to me now—and he jumped at the idea, and we hauled the dinghy under the stern and passed the boxes, with the unused cartridge belts, into her.

The *Ferret* had dropped down to leeward of us, so that he would not have to pull back to wind'ard; I don't think he could have done so even if he had tried. "Goodbye, my sucking Nelson; keep your pecker up, and I'll give 'em 'beans' in the morning," he said as he slid down into the

dinghy. He was always so awfully cheerful and "buckish". "What d'you think of Dicky?" I asked him before he let go. "I'm jiggered if I know!" he shouted. "Get him to the *Ringdove* and Hibbert as quickly as you can."

He was just casting off, when he happened to look up, and sang out to the bow man to hold on. He had seen our white ensign, and shouted out to me: "I say, Ford, let me have that, there's a good chap; you'll have no more fighting, and I'd like it so much." I had it hauled down and passed it into the dinghy, though the signalman wasn't half pleased.

Back he went, alongside the *Ferret*. I saw the flag and ammunition boxes and then the dinghy hoisted on board, a man hauled himself up the mizzen and made the flag fast there, and then she hoisted part of the mainsail again and began to pound away back to our islands. We cheered her and she cheered us, and the last shout I heard was a "tiger" from Jim.

Then I hoisted the foresail halfway up, and off we went again; and by this time it was nearly dark, and we soon could only make out where the *Ferret* was by the white splash when she flopped down on top of a sea, and in a very few minutes we couldn't even see that, and felt awfully lonely.

I should never have found the way back, and I don't think that Sharpe would have done so either, but for Ah Chee. He was a grand chap, when there wasn't any fighting to be done, and seemed to know every island we passed that night, and just where we could trust ourselves.

Sharpe and I had to be on deck nearly all night, it was blowing so hard, and of course there were those islands to avoid. Sharpe wouldn't leave off talking about Scroggs and the family he had left behind him, and that made it more miserable still, that and hearing Adams and Cooke groaning, and knowing that Barton and Hicks, the two men who were killed, were lying down in the hold. We got a little lee from one of the islands some time during the middle watch, so then we made better weather of it. It must have been soon after that when Sharpe woke me—I had fallen asleep again.

"Who's that?" he cried, his voice all of a shake, and I listened, and all of a sudden could hear someone singing out "Dick" from under the dark poop. All the blood rushed to my head, and I could have blubbed with delight, for it was Dicky's poor little bleating voice; and I crept in with a lantern, picked my way over the men asleep, held up the lantern, and there he was looking at me and asking for a drink. Well, I did blub then—just for a second—and don't mind saying so, I was so happy, and went and found a little water and gave it to him; and Sharpe stirred up the hot bits of wood in Ah Chee's brazier, which the wind had kept glowing, and we warmed some tinned milk and gave that to him. When he'd drunk it he turned over and went to sleep, without asking anything, only just saying, "Thank you".

Still, that was enough, and I do believe that Sharpe was a little bit husky too; and I wanted him to let me shove on a little more sail, so that we could get back to the *Ringdove* all the more quickly, but he wouldn't let me do it. "She's carrying all she can do with, sir, and the men are asleep." He was right, too, because we should have had to turn them out to hoist more sail.

Ah Chee knew all right where he was going, and at daybreak we sighted the island at which we had to meet the *Ringdove*, and two hours later saw her three masts and her funny little funnel sticking up.

I had signalled across all my news, and you can imagine how thankful I was to run the Sally alongside her, and to see Dr. Hibbert clambering on board us over her "nettings", smoking his pipe and looking jolly.

"Find my medicine stuff any use?" he asked me.

"Both bottles were broken, sir," I told him, "so I hadn't the chance," and took him under the poop, and a lot of men came and hoisted all three of the wounded on board the *Ringdove*.

Dicky woke up and managed a bit of a smile as they took him away, but he was still dazed and half silly. They took Hicks's and Barton's bodies on board too, and before we went off again buried them overboard.

Then Mr. Rashleigh sent for me. He was angry that I hadn't reported to him directly I had come alongside. I told him all that had happened, and how Scroggs had done nearly everything, and when he'd been killed, how Sharpe had practically done everything, and how Mr. Trevelyan had taken all my Maxim ammunition and gone back to have a look at the pirate place himself. The last bit seemed to make him jolly angry, and he muttered something about "confounded disobedience".

The wind, too, had gone round to almost due north, so that Mr. Trevelyan couldn't possibly get back for at least three days.

"That ass Trevelyan would put his head into a lion's mouth, if he thought he could get any

news there," he said, and swore angrily. "I'll have to go and haul him out by the feet, and hope the pirates won't have snapped his head off. If they haven't, I will."

We had to go back with him, he couldn't leave us there, and as soon as his people had set up some more rigging, and done a bit more to make our poop water-tight, and the stern as well, we had to follow the *Ringdove* back again. It was a fair wind for us, and we didn't delay her very much. Mr. Rashleigh had offered to let me sleep aboard his gunboat, in order that I could get a good rest; but I had had a jolly good feed in the ward room, and had had a bath, so this made me rather angry. "Just as you like; I don't care a tuppenny biscuit," he said, and gave me another petty officer to take Scroggs's place, so at last Sharpe was able to get a little sleep.

I must say that I felt frightened about Jim and Mr. Trevelyan, because neither of them would have thought twice of taking on all the pirates in the world; and they had already had nearly thirty hours to themselves, and I wondered what had been happening. By noon next day we were two miles off the islands, and the channel from which we had escaped; but we had heard or seen nothing of the *Ferret*, and thought that we might possibly have passed her beating back to the rendezvous during the night.

Presently someone shouted that they thought they had heard the noise of a gun. Everyone listened, and in a few minutes we could hear three sharp bangs. "That's the *Ferret's* six-pounder," someone said, and we were all frightfully excited.

The *Ringdove* signalled us to follow as fast as possible—she had heard them also—and shoved on for all she was worth.

She had all her little sails set, and smoke was pouring out of her funnel.

We saw her enter the channel, half a mile ahead of us, and just as she got into the mouth of it, two clouds of white smoke jumped out from the left-hand side, down by the water's edge, we saw two great splashes of water leap up behind her stern, and then came the roar. If you've never heard the roar of a gun, it's awfully difficult to describe it; but with cliffs all round, you can hear the noise smashing up against them with a crash, and rolling about and crashing again.

"They've got some guns there, sir! Now we've got some information as will please the Captin, sir, when he hears of it, sir, eh?" and Sharpe winked at me.

We kept our eyes glued on the *Ringdove*, and saw that she was clearing for action. I have always thought that Mr. Rashleigh might have done that before; and the two guns had reloaded before he could commence firing, and they plugged in two more shots. "One's hit her," the signalman sang out, "close to the foremast, sir." But she didn't seem to be badly damaged, and started off with her four-inch guns (three she had on each side, one on the poop, one in the waist, and one on the fo'c'stle). They made an awful noise in the narrow channel; and we could also hear the rattle and see the spurts of smoke from under her bow and stern, and knew that she was working her Nordenfelt machine guns. "They're digging up the ground all round them pirates' guns," one of my men sang out, though, as far as I could see, most of the *Ringdove's* shells were falling in the water—at first, at any rate.

I couldn't find the guns, but soon the "Ringdoves" made better shooting, and I could then spot them. Just as I had spotted them they fired again. "Short," yelled a man. "Two hundred over," another shouted.

"They're too much bothered by those 'Ringdoves' to do much aiming, sir," Sharpe said very coolly. Then I began to wonder what would happen whilst we were passing them, and whether the *Ringdove* would wait for us. She didn't, however, and you can imagine how frightened I was to see her steaming away out of range, and cease firing, after the shore guns had fired another round at her, which fell a long way astern. She was almost hidden in powder smoke too. "They'll just have time to reload before we get abreast of them," I said to Sharpe; and I don't mind telling you that I felt in a horrid funk, and, if there had been no one to know anything about it, should have turned the *Sally* round and run away.

"All right, sir!" Sharpe said; he didn't look frightened. "Keep her across as far as you can, and send all of 'em who aren't wanted down below. Mr. Rashleigh will be back in a minute." He took charge of the six-pounder, with one man to help him load, and, "my eye!" he did let off quickly. I sent everyone else down below into the hold except Fergusson and another man, who looked after the tiller tackles, and went amidships myself and stared at those two guns reloading—I couldn't take my eyes off them—and—and—then they began slowly to train round, till I could only see the black muzzles pointing straight at us, with Sharpe's little shells bursting on the ground in front of them. I've told you how frightened I was, so I must tell you that I did not get behind the mainmast. I would have done anything to get there, but something inside me prevented me, and I have been awfully proud that I didn't, ever since.

It's bad enough standing behind a big gun and waiting for it to go off, but it was awful standing in front of two; and I felt that they couldn't possibly help hitting me—to say nothing of the junk—because, although we had crept over to the far side of the channel, we were only about four hundred yards away. Then off they went, the smoke and the flashes and the roar, Sharpe's yell, "Look out, sir!" a crash somewhere in our poop, and another crash up above; all seemed to come together.

"The tiller's smashed, sir! We can't steer," Fergusson shouted, and I saw that one side of the poop had been blown clean out, and the whole of the upper part of the mainsail had fallen down, and the top of the mast with it.

Sharpe rushed aft and cut the mizzen halyards, and down that sail came. You must understand that we were sailing very fast before the wind, and, of course, if we had only the foresail set, we should have blown along in more or less of a straight line, but the mizzen made us yaw from side to side.

This steadied the *Sally* a little, and we were going to lower the rest of the mainsail too, when there was a tremendous roar, and the *Ringdove* came splashing back, in between us and the guns, with all her sails flat "aback", and she didn't give those guns a chance to fire again. She ran in quite close, and we could see men running away from them; and then round she turned, still firing, and followed us as we staggered this way and that way up the channel.

"Lower that cursed fores'l or you'll be ashore," Mr. Rashleigh shouted, "and we'll take you in tow." Jolly coolly he did it, too, and everyone hauled in the grass hawser and made it fast.

In five minutes we were out of range.

"What the furies is the matter?" he shouted from the poop.

"First shot carried away our tiller," Sharpe shouted.

"Anybody hurt?"

"No, sir," he answered. I was too excited to shout.

Still there wasn't a sound or sight of Mr. Trevelyan's junk, and we went very slowly up the channel, almost as far as where we had sunk that first pirate junk.

Then all of a sudden we could hear the six-pounder banging away somewhere on our left, and the tut—tut, tut—tut of the Maxim, and in a little opening in the rocks I caught sight of the white ensign I had given Mr. Trevelyan, against the dark shore, and could make out the *Ferret* herself, jammed at the foot of some rocks, and people on board waving their arms.

The *Ringdove* had spotted her as well, and we all cheered and steered straight across towards her—at any rate, the *Ringdove* steered and we were towed round—and the gunboat dropped her anchor about a hundred yards off.

The poor little *Ferret* was all over to port. She had only her mizzen mast standing, and was evidently hard and fast on the rocks, right in the middle of a small creek.

Mr. Rashleigh went across in the whaler at once, and as he got close to her we could see his boat's crew pulling very fast, and noticed some bullet splashes round the boat, and the *Ferret's* Maxim spluttered out. We couldn't see what they were firing at, and it was most exciting.

"Mr. Trevelyan, he's bottled 'em, sir; that's what he's done, sir," Sharpe said. He was busy repairing the tiller, and going about the job as if he was on board the *Vigilant* at Hong-Kong, or Portsmouth, or anywhere else where there was no chance of a scrap.

Well, that was just what it turned out to be. Mr. Trevelyan had fetched the mouth of the channel the morning after he had left me, hadn't been fired at by the battery, but had coolly crawled through and examined the shore on each side. He had found this creek, sailed up it right past a bend, and found himself in sight of a dozen or more junks all anchored together. He had carried on and opened fire on them, but found that they were too much for him. He had lost his mainmast, had two men killed when it fell, had to haul out again, and, not being able to avoid the rocks in the middle of the creek, had run hard and fast on them.

Jim told me the story, and how they daren't try and get her off again because she had such a big hole in her bottom, and how the junks had tried to come and capture her, but had to come singly, and couldn't face the six-pounder shells and the Maxim, and had drawn back. Last night they had tried to rush them in boats, but Mr. Trevelyan had rigged nets all round, and it blew very hard, and many boats were stove in on the rocks, and the nets and the Maxim gun drove off those that did not get alongside.

"It was a most awful night, Dick," he said, "but I wouldn't have missed it for the world, now it's all over. And what we should have done without that ammunition you gave us, I don't know."

All that day the pirates had been firing rifles at them from both sides of the creek, and only one man at each gun was allowed on deck, and they had had to be changed, because three of

them had been wounded. Everyone else had kept down below in the hold, with the dirty water up to their knees.

"We couldn't have stuck it for another day," Jim told me, "and Mr. Trevelyan was going to attempt to land the guns on one of the bigger rocks, which had some trees on it, that very night, and try and cut them down and make a breastwork of them, and hold out till you came."

Mr. Trevelyan had sent him across to that rock during the night to see if it was all right, and he had waded and swam across, and then in the dark slipped down on his way back, and cut himself against the rocks. His hands, and face, and chest, and all over, in fact, were all scratched—great long scratches—and he was so stiff, he could hardly move. He had to be bandaged pretty well all over, but was as happy as anything. "Mr. Trevelyan is a fine chap," he kept on saying. "He's always thinking of some new dodge. It was grand."

"What are you firing at?" I asked him. "Can you see the junks from the *Ferret*?"

"No, they're round the corner, but the cliffs are full of the brutes with rifles."

Dr. Hibbert wouldn't let us see Dicky. "He's asleep again," he called out from the *Ringdove's* poop. "Don't you come aboard, bothering round. He'll do all right." He had a lot of work to do, because one of the "Ringdoves" had been very badly smashed "up" by that shot which had hit her, and four or five of Mr. Trevelyan's men had been more or less badly wounded, and had come across with Jim in the whaler. Dr. Hibbert, and the Paymaster, and the sick-berth attendant were busy in the ward room patching them up.

They had got up steam in the *Ringdove's* little steam cutter, and Mr. Rashleigh and Mr. Trevelyan steamed up past the rock and out of sight round the corner.

The *Ferret* fired her Maxim and the *Ringdove* her Nordenfelts to keep down the rifle fire, and they got past the entrance safely and out of sight, but came back very soon.

I could see that Mr. Rashleigh was puffing out his cheeks with importance, and that Mr. Trevelyan was looking very vexed about something, as they went aboard the *Ringdove*, and I heard afterwards that Mr. Rashleigh had wanted to steam back to Tinghai at once to report that he had found the headquarters of the pirates. Mr. Trevelyan, however, wanted to burn the pirate junks first, and, if the *Ringdove* wouldn't go in and try, had offered to do the job with her boats.

Eventually Mr. Rashleigh gave way, but he wouldn't take the *Ringdove* in till his Sub-lieutenant had surveyed the creek, and he sent him away in the whaler to take soundings, although Mr. Trevelyan swore that there was enough water.

The whaler was all right whilst she was in sight, but directly she got round the corner she lost a man wounded, and came hurrying back again. There was another row then; but Mr. Trevelyan had his own way, and a Nordenfelt machine gun was put in the bows of the *Ringdove's* cutter and another in the steamboat, and we saw that they were going to follow the whaler and protect her.

Jim and I were supposed to be getting some sleep all this time, but we couldn't—of course we couldn't; and just then Mr. Trevelyan shouted to us that I had to go away in charge of the cutter, and Jim in charge of the steamboat, if we'd had enough sleep. The boats dropped down alongside the *Sally*, and we were aboard in a jiffy, Jim grinning with delight. We shouted that we'd had all the sleep we wanted and were quite wide awake, and shoved off after the whaler, Jim taking me in tow and I taking the whaler astern of me.

The steamboat towed us past the *Ferret*, quite close to her. She was an absolute wreck, and all one side looked as though it was smashed in by a big rock. She fired a shell or two to prevent the brutes firing rifles at us from the shore, and the five men left aboard her cheered us. We got past without being fired at, and then we were out of sight of the *Ringdove*, and the steamboat cast us off, and we had to pull in towards the starboard side of the creek and search that with our Nordenfelt, if anyone fired. The steamboat did the same on the other side, and the Sub in the whaler went on taking soundings between us.

"Cutter!" the Sub had shouted, and I held up my hand (he didn't know my name), "open fire directly you hear rifle shots;" and I sang out, "Ay, ay, sir!" and you may bet we were keen as mustard, and "stood by" with the Nordenfelt's hopper full of one-inch cartridges, and the lever all ready to jerk backwards and forwards.

You should have seen us watching the banks. I had borrowed the signalman's field glasses, because my telescope had disappeared in the wreckage of the *Sally's* poop, and watched every bit of rock or bush, and saw several Chinamen creeping about. They had rifles, but didn't fire them.

"There's a shot, sir!" cried the coxswain, and I saw a splash near the steamboat, and Jim began banging away with his Nordenfelt, but stopped after he'd fired three times, and we had never another shot fired at us. I was rather pleased. To make up for it, we suddenly came in sight

of the whole fleet of pirate junks, and a whole crowd of ordinary junks lying behind them. They weren't more than five hundred yards away, and, when they saw us, began beating drums, and clashing brass things, and yelling, and letting off crackers to frighten us. One of the nearest had her side turned towards us, and began letting off her guns as well, and the din was simply hideous.

It was just like going up to a peaceful wasp's nest and stirring it up with a stick.

We were both close to the whaler, and the little round shot began to come rather too near. I heard Jim shout, "Couldn't we go for them, sir?" and my boat's crew bent forward to be ready for a spurt; but the Sub, who was standing up in the whaler, shook his head, and ordered Jim to take us in tow again. He looked as if he'd jolly well like to have tried, but he had to obey orders.

"There's enough bally water for an ironclad," he shouted, "all the way up, but we must go back, or it'll be too late for the *Ringdove* to do anything."

So back we went again, the men pulling their oars to make it easier for the steamboat, and the round shot bobbing about in the water astern of us, till we'd got out of sight.

But Mr. Rashleigh wouldn't move for anything the Sub or Mr. Trevelyan said to him. It would be dark in half an hour, and he wasn't going to risk anything in the dark, and would wait for daylight. I was ordered to take my cutter alongside the *Ferret*, and transfer her guns and stores to the *Ringdove*. This took nearly two hours in the dark, and Mr. Trevelyan came in charge. He was simply bubbling over with anger. "She's got a searchlight, and the old *Vigilant* could go up there without winking. I bet 'Old Lest' would have cleared out the whole blooming crowd by now. My aunt! fancy wasting the whole jumping day! Call himself Rashleigh! My blessed grandmother!" and he spat in the water to show his contempt.

The last thing I took away was my white ensign, and although it was nighttime, I hoisted it on board the *Sally* again. It had several bullet holes through it, and was torn and looked jolly warworn. I thought even then that I'd keep it—if the signalman didn't collar it himself—for my mother, or perhaps give it to Nan when I got home.

We had cast off from the *Ringdove*, and had anchored close to her. My orders were to make the cutter "fast" along-side, man it in the morning with all the *Sally's* crew who were left, and follow the *Ringdove* up the creek directly it was light.

I was very excited, but managed to find some place to lie down, and slept jolly well, which only shows how very tired I must have been.

Sharpe woke me at six, half an hour before sunrise. We all had some hot cocoa and some biscuit, and then we got as many rifles and revolvers and cutlasses as we could find, and filled the Gardner's hopper with cartridges. We crept about in the dark without making any noise, could presently hear the hands "turning out" aboard the *Ringdove*, and took our places in the cutter and waited to shove her off. When it was light enough to just see the rocks, Mr. Rashleigh called out that he was not going to weigh for another half-hour, and there we had to sit, and the longer we waited the less brave we felt—at any rate, I felt. I don't believe that anyone can feel brave on a dark cold morning.

It seemed like hours before we heard her cable "clanking in", and that woke us up again with a funny, cold feeling, and in a few minutes the water under her stern began to swirl, and she started very slowly for the entrance, and we pulled away from the *Sally* after her.

Then there came a surprise, if you like. My aunt! it did startle us.

Right on top of the cliffs, over our heads, a terrific roar broke out, and splash went a shot right under the *Ringdove's* stern, and the water fell right aboard her.

"They've hauled a gun up there—on the right, sir," Sharpe said very quietly, and somehow or other I felt certain that this would decide Mr. Rashleigh not to go up that creek. I am certain that he never really wanted to go there.

He yelled to me to come alongside, and then he yelled for me to go back to the *Sally*, cut her cable, and clear out of it.

I was very frightened, and hurried back to the *Sally*—Ah Chee was the only one aboard her—when another roar came from above, the shot fell between the *Ringdove* and ourselves, and wetted us all. I saw the *Ringdove* hurrying towards the foot of the cliffs, where the gun couldn't touch her.

"We must be nippy, sir," Sharpe said, very excitedly for him.

Just as we were going to run alongside, someone sang out, "What on earth's that, sir?" pointing to a small rock on the other side of the creek. We all looked, and could see someone standing there and waving his arms. "He's trying to semaphore," several men cried, and a moment after, "It's Lieutenant Travers, sir."

None of us thought of that gun then, and we shoved off towards him as hard as we could—there were only six of us in a ten-oared cutter—and gave a shout.

"Swim towards us, sir," I yelled, as we got closer and bullets came round, though I didn't really notice them much. There was a Chinaman with him, and they both waded out as far as they could, and we grabbed them and hauled them in, and pulled back again with another shout, Mr. Travers taking one of the spare oars, and the Chinaman, who was almost dead of fright, hiding under the gunwale.

As we hauled Travers on board he asked, "Have you found Sally Hobbs?" but I shook my head, and hadn't time to think what that all meant, and shouted to Sharpe, "Cut the anchor rope directly we get aboard and hoist the fores'l." I needn't have troubled, because that gun above us fired again, and we saw the stump of poor little *Sally's* mainmast come toppling down, big pieces of her deck went flying about, and she began to heel over as we ran alongside. Mr. Travers and I jumped aboard, but I saw that she was done for. Her deck was absolutely smashed up amidships, the six-pounder had fallen on top of the cartridge boxes in the hold, and water was bubbling up through two great holes in her bottom.

"We shall have to leave her, sha'n't we, sir?" I asked.

But there was no doubt of it, and I only just had time to haul down the white ensign and get back into the boat and shove off, before she settled right down, and with a bubbling noise slid under.

"'Twill drown all them cursed bugs and cockroaches what's been biting at us, curse 'em!" Sharpe said coolly, and we shoved off for the gunboat under the cliff. You bet that Ah Chee had jumped into the cutter directly we'd got alongside!

The *Ringdove* was waiting for us, and we were all aboard in five minutes. She sneaked out round the foot of the cliffs—Mr. Rashleigh didn't wait to take soundings now—ran out of the channel past where the two guns had been, without being fired at, and started off for Tinghai.

I saw Mr. Rashleigh rubbing his hands, and heard him chuckling, "I've rescued Travers, and the 'Old Man' will be jolly pleased." He seemed to be awfully proud of himself, but Mr. Trevelyan told Jim angrily: "Of course the Skipper will be pleased; everyone knows that; but he might have burnt the whole nest of them as well, wiped out the whole boiling crowd, if he'd only had the pluck to go in yesterday. Instead of which he gives those chaps time to haul their guns up over his head, where he can't touch it. Confound him!"

Mr. Travers came up on deck soon afterwards, shaved and clean, with some of the Sub's plain clothes on. He shook my hand. "Long time since you shoved me in the back in that crowd outside the Mission House, Ford. Thought they would have plugged some of you in that boat. They were firing pretty fast." That was tremendously demonstrative for him.

It was jolly good to have got him back safely, but we were all awfully disappointed that we hadn't found where Sally and her father were. We had thought we had done so, but he told us they weren't there, and he hadn't the faintest idea where they were. The Chinaman who'd helped him to escape, and had come along for his reward, didn't know anything about them either. Ah Chee found this out.

Dicky was a jolly lot better, and could talk, but hadn't the faintest remembrance of anything after we'd sighted those four junks beating up to wind'ard after us. He remembered the junk running away from us and the masts coming down, but nothing after that.

Dr. Hibbert wouldn't let him talk to us much. Poor Cooke died before we had got out of sight of land, and we stopped our engines and buried him at sea.

That brought the killed ones in the two junks up to six—two of Jim's and four of mine—and there were six wounded besides Dicky.

I managed to hide away the ensign before the signalman could claim it, and felt rather a beast; but I meant to keep it and get it home—some day. Jim lent me another monkey jacket. It was quite "sopping" wet, but it was clean, and we soon dried it, so that I looked more respectable, and didn't feel so horrid as I had felt in my bloodstained one.

CHAPTER VIII The Vigilant Sails Again

Written by Commander Truscott

I had had an extremely busy ten days superintending the fitting out of those junks, and getting them and the gunboats away to their cruising grounds. I think that I had offended pretty nearly everyone in the ship, from the Fleet Surgeon, who disliked parting with so many sick bay stores, to the youngest cadet, who thought that he ought to have been given a chance.

The Skipper was positively in a vile temper all the time, and I, myself, and old Bax, the Fleet Paymaster, who came from the same part of the country as he did, were the only ones who dared to approach him. He simply spat fire whenever anyone spoke to him, and the simplest thing used to bring forth a torrent of oaths, and it was best to beat a hasty retreat.

Don't think that I minded, or anyone else—really. "How's 'Old Lest' this morning?" they would ask, after I had reported morning "divisions" to him, and I must say that I generally had to say "Worse than ever". They would all chuckle at that.

For some reason or other everyone, except the Skipper himself, seemed to be proud of his temper, and the more he roared and swore, the more the men liked him.

"He's the worst-tempered man in the service, I should imagine," the young Padré had remarked one morning, when he and I and Mayhew, the Fleet Surgeon, were walking up and down the quarterdeck, and could hear him storming at "Willum" down below.

"For worst-tempered read best-tempered," Mayhew had replied fiercely. "You've only been a 'dog watch' in the service, and when you know something about it, you'll know that you are wrong. Why, man, he's the best Skipper to serve under in the whole blessed navy. Call him bad tempered! Why, great snakes! that's the temper coming out of him instead of being bottled up. It's only fools and rotters who have tempers that don't come out."

I fancy that the Padré's knowledge of human nature was of the slightest, and I also must admit that it was probably very difficult to preach a good sermon to the accompaniment of the Skipper's snores, but he hadn't quite shaken down in his new surroundings.

When he first joined the ship his sermons were full of "my dear brothers", or "dear brethren", and it was as good as a play to see the Skipper's face when he happened to be awake and first heard himself called a "dear brother". I thought he would have had a "fit", and after church he stalked down below without saying a word, Blucher at his heels, and sent for me.

Then out it came. He had bottled it up for nearly twenty minutes, and he pretty well excelled himself. "That little—little—whipper—snapper call 'Old Lest' his 'dear brother'! Don't let him come near 'Old Lest'. I'll 'dear brother' him if he does it again!" and he glared at me and shook his huge fists in my face absolutely unable to say anything more.

"Very good, sir; I will speak to the Chaplain," I had answered, and fled.

For some reason or other I forgot to do so, but, after lunch that morning, the younger people in the mess spread him out on the sofa, very gently, and sat on him. I happened to go into the ward room at the moment, and found eight of them and Old Bax in a heap, with bits of the young idiot showing out here and there under them, and heard them sing out, "Here's another dear brother," as they bumped him and he gasped for breath, and implored them to leave off. I slipped back to my cabin, and, as I expected, there was a knock at my door a few minutes afterwards, and in he came, very dishevelled, and complained of the indignity.

"You surprise me, Padré," I told him. "I can only say that I happened to go to the mess, and saw you 'scrapping' with your brother officers in the most unbecoming manner, and endeavouring, as far as I could make out, to break up the mess furniture. I trust that such conduct will not occur again."

He got very red and confused, and was going away, when I called him back: "Of course, Padré, you must remember that if they do dislike any of your expressions, you often enough complain of some of theirs, and I should advise you to humour them. It's often a great effort on their part to humour you, and you should be proud that they do try. I will speak to them, but strongly advise you to drop the 'dear brother' part of the show."

I'm glad to say that he did, and eventually became quite proud of relating the bumping incident as "a stepping-stone in my education for a life so strange, and at one period so apparently uncongenial, ah!"

As a matter of fact, he was always called "dear brother" after that, so never had the chance to

forget it. To come back to my yarn, the absence of three watch-keepers and so many petty officers and men, to say nothing of the midshipmen, made it difficult enough to carry on the ordinary work of the ship. This was a constant source of irritation to Lawrence, Whitmore, and myself, and above all, there was the added overwhelming anxiety at the fate of Travers, Sally, and her father. It was now five weeks since they had disappeared, and I assure you that these weeks had only increased our anxiety and the feeling of utter helplessness at our inability to discover their whereabouts and rescue them. Somewhere, but whether north, south, east, or west, we had not the faintest notion, they were waiting for a sign of our coming, and every evening, as the sun set and the dark clouds and grey twilight shut out the islands all round us and wrapped them in darkness, the feeling of depression used to become still more acute, and we used to imagine them beginning another dreary night of waiting, and longing, and praying that the morning would bring them rescue, which we all knew it wouldn't. These things, and the want of exercise on shore, were excuses sufficient to account for any irritability of temper.

The Skipper used to tramp the quarterdeck from after "evening quarters" till sunset, but then the sight of the long skeins of ducks, geese, and swans flying across the harbour to the mud flats round some of the smaller islands used to drive him down below. He used to growl: "Umph! That's what 'Old Lest' came down here to do, to shoot 'em, and he's only made a fool of himself so far. Umph!" and he'd send "Willum" round for three of us to go aft to make up a rubber of whist.

But at last the long period of inaction came to an end. One morning, just a week after the *Ringdove* and her two junks had left, I had turned out with the hands, and was walking up and down till my servant had made my morning cup of tea, the quarterdeck men scrubbing and holystoning round me in the dismal light.

I noticed a little native sailing boat beating up to Tinghai, and I remember that I thought it strange for so small a boat to have been out at night time. As it came towards the harbour, I watched it idly through my telescope, and presently saw that there were three men in it—a Chinaman steering and two people pulling lee oars, one a Chinaman and—I looked again to make sure—the other a tall gaunt fellow with a shaggy black beard. "That's a rum go," I thought, and was still more surprised when I saw them lower the sail—they were directly to leeward of us—and begin to pull straight towards the *Vigilant*.

"What on earth's going to happen now?" I thought, as the boat crept alongside, the men pulling very feebly. The gaunt European half crawled up the ladder and advanced towards me, and for a moment I did not recognize him.

"Hoffman!" he said.

Good heavens! I recognized him then, even with that black beard, and with his face sunken and starved looking. "We thought you'd been burnt," I said, holding out my hand, as he tottered on to the quarterdeck.

"Give me some drink and food, and those men too," he gasped; and I led him down below to my cabin—I thought he would have fallen down the hatchway, he was so weak. Fortunately my servant had just brought my tea and some bread and butter, and he drank and ate as if he had not touched food for a week.

I sent for another plate of bread and butter, and when he had finished that, and drunk all my tea and two tumblers full of water, he didn't wait for me to ask him any questions, but, clutching at the chair, and with a wild look in his eyes, began, "For God's sake, Commander, get the Captain to start at once! I know where Hobbs and his daughter are, or were, six days ago, and if you are quick you may rescue them before they can be hurried off somewhere else."

"Good heavens, man! and Travers, do you know where he is too?" I shouted, jumping up.

"Yes, I do; but he's not with them," he answered.

"Is she safe?" I asked eagerly; and he nodded, "Yes; up to the present."

"How the dickens did you escape being burnt? We've actually read the funeral service over the ruins of the Mission."

"Wait," he half moaned. "Go and tell your Captain I am here, and give me a cigarette—I haven't tasted one for a month."

I woke the Skipper. "That German, Hoffman, has come aboard, sir. Says he knows where Sally is and Travers."

"What?" roared the Skipper, opening his eyes.

"That German chap Hoffman has come aboard, sir."

"Well, don't wake me," he grunted, not hearing me properly.

"He's that man we thought had been burnt in the Mission House. He knows where Hobbs and Sally and Travers are," I repeated in a louder voice; and he jumped out of his bunk, swearing

angrily, "Why didn't you tell me before?" and roared for "Willum" to help him dress. "Bring him aft in five minutes' time," he growled.

"For goodness sake, don't suggest anything to him! Don't attempt to give him any advice," I implored Hoffman. "Ten to one, if you do, he'll put obstacles in the way. Just tell him what you know, and nothing more."

"I'll remember," he said wearily, as I took him aft. He had to steady himself with one hand on my shoulder, he was so weak; his clothes simply hung in loose folds.

I slipped away and turned out Hutton, our Engineer Commander, telling him what I knew, and that the Skipper would be sending for him in a minute or two. In fact, he hardly pulled his trousers over his pyjamas before he was sent for. "How long will it take to get up steam?" I asked him, as I helped him on with his monkey jacket. "An hour; we're still under banked fires—have been all the time," and then I went round, turning everyone out. It was such a godsend to have at last some news to tell.

"D'they know where Mr. Travers and the pretty little lady be, sir?" the captain of the quarterdeck asked me; and I heard him tell his men, and they left off scrubbing to discuss the situation. "Little lady or no little lady," he sang out, "just you go on with your 'olystoning."

In less than half an hour we had steam on the capstan, and were shortening in the cable, and in another hour were under way. It was glorious to feel the engines moving round again and the beastly steam steering gear rattling under my cabin once more, and to know that at last our long six weeks of inaction were at an end.

There wasn't a long face or a sour face in the ship that day.

The Skipper had filled his pockets with his beloved Havanas, and pulled one out for me on the fore bridge too—a sure sign that he was in the best of tempers.

"That chap Hoffman couldn't lift a hundredweight now," he chuckled. "I'll take him 'on' when he's had a bit of sleep—the only chance I'll get," and he gurgled and croaked with laughter. "He don't exactly give himself away, does he, Truscott? Couldn't get him to suggest a single thing."

"I told him not to, sir," I said, smiling.

"Umph! Think 'Old Lest' an obstinate old fool, do you? Think you know 'Old Lest' better'n he knows himself, do you? That's the worst of having a commander who's been shipmates for seven years. Umph!" And he glared at me, and was in a grand humour.

As a matter of fact, there were several reasons which made it inconvenient to leave so hurriedly. For one thing, we were, as you know, very shorthanded, and for another, we expected the gunboats to return at any moment with their tenders, and it would, at the best, be a tedious business to call them all in. Fortunately we met the old *Huan Min* pounding back to Tanghai for more coal; judging by the smoke she made she seemed to grind it into dust and then blow it up her funnel. We stopped her, and the Skipper sent on board to tell her Captain where the *Vigilant* was going, and to ask him to communicate with the other gunboats, and with the *Omaha*, which had gone off by herself.

Ching evidently wrote the letter which came back, promising to do this, and he sent a private one to his chum Lawrence to say that they were all immensely pleased to hear that there was a chance of rescuing the captives, and that the *Huan Min* would come along after us as soon as possible.

"He says that his shoulder is practically all right again now, sir. He's made a jolly sight less fuss about it than I should have done." Lawrence smiled when he'd finished reading this letter. "I wonder how much he cares whether we ever see Hobbs or Travers again? He doesn't hurry the old *Huan Min* round these islands to find them, I bet you anything you like, sir. He's hunting for Sally. He's simply head over heels in love with her."

"More power to his elbow," I said. "We all are, more or less."

We had left orders for the gunboats to follow us—left them with Macpherson the missionary, so felt sure that they would fetch up, sooner or later, even if the *Huan Min* missed them.

The island for which we were now steering was right away in the SE. corner of the archipelago, one of a group marked on the chart as the Hector Group (it was so named after a transport which was wrecked there in 1851).

It was there that Hobbs and his daughter were reported to be by Hoffman, and it took the Skipper but a very few minutes to determine that he would go there first and leave Travers till later.

As it happened, by great good fortune, there was no necessity to regret his decision, because just after dark we sighted the lights of a steamer, flashed the "demand" from our masthead lamp, and it turned out to be the *Ringdove* on the way back to Tanghai. I wasn't on the bridge at the

time, and had only just reached the deck after she was reported to me, when I heard men cheering, and a midshipman rushed up, "Mr. Travers is on board, sir, and well, sir! Isn't that grand?"

It's extraordinary how good—and bad—news comes in lumps together, and this seemed suddenly to make me feel ten years younger. I was up that bridge in a "brace of shakes". We had stopped our engines, and the *Ringdove* was flashing across a long signal, and everyone bent eagerly forward to try and take it in, whilst the signalman wrote it down, and clicked the shutter of his hand lamp to show the *Ringdove* that he had taken it in correctly.

Most of us were so much out of practice that we only got a word or a number here or there, but enough to know that she and her junks had lost a lot of men. At last the *Ringdove* had finished, and the signalman brought his signal pad to the Captain.

"Read it out, Truscott; your eyes are younger than mine."

Someone held up a lantern, and I read: "Have rescued Lieutenant Travers uninjured from island of Chung-li Tao Group. No news of whereabouts of Hobbs or daughter. Tender *Sally* sunk by gun fire; tender *Ferret* wrecked and abandoned, guns saved. Losses—*Ringdove*, one man wounded, since dead, two wounded; *Sally*, four[#] men killed, Mid Morton, two men wounded; *Ferret*, two men killed, five wounded."

[#] Cooke, A.B., had died as a result of his injuries.

"Phew!" whistled the Skipper. "They've had a hot time! Read it again."

I did so.

"Do they mean young Morton's killed or wounded?"

"Ask them."

Click, click went the shutter of the signalman's lamp.

You could not hear a sound whilst the *Ringdove* light twinkled the reply, and we all gave a gasp of relief when we read—W-O-U-N-D—O-F—S-C-A-L-P—O-U-T—O-F—D-A-N-G-E-R.

"Get 'em all aboard," the Skipper told me; "best send both cutters," and he sent a midshipman running aft. "Tell the Doctor—ten wounded coming from *Ringdove*."

We signalled across for her to "close", and that we were sending for the wounded and for the rest of the crews of the two junks.

This was a jolly ticklish job, because a rather heavy sea was running; but we ran our searchlights, and I sent Lawrence and Whitmore away in charge of the boats, and we managed to transfer them all without anything happening worse than breaking one or two oars.

We gave Travers a cheer when he came across, and all crowded round and congratulated him; and we cheered Trevelyan, young Rawlings and their men, and Ford and his. They had come over in the first boat, and Rashleigh had come as well—to report personally.

Whilst he was down below I got a list of the names of those killed and wounded from Trevelyan, and had it stuck on the lower deck notice board. Scroggs was a serious loss to me—the captain of the fore top, and a fine reliable man—and the others were all good men; they wouldn't have been sent there, of course, if they hadn't been.

Ford and his six men had lost everything except what they stood up in, but every one of them was in the best of spirits. The second cutter came along-side with the wounded, and young Morton was the first to be carried up the ladder, managed a smile from under his bandages, and we gave him a cheer.

The mids who'd been left behind sang out, "Good old Dicky". I knew perfectly well that he had been called "Dear Little Dicky", and that the inoffensive, harmless little chap hated it, and was glad to hear them drop it for once. I knew a good many more of the "ins and outs" of what went on in the gunroom than the Mids used to give me credit for.

The rest of the wounded were carried up, or hobbled up the ladder, and they all went for'ard to the sick bay.

Then Rashleigh went back, simply bubbling over with importance and excitement, the Skipper actually coming up to see him over the side. He didn't often pay anyone under the rank of post captain that compliment.

"I thought that chap a blooming blockhead—told you so often—but he's done a jolly sight better than I gave him credit for; that he has, Truscott, that he has. And he's found a place where they're as thick as thieves—big guns mounted, and all that. I've sent him back to keep his eye on it. Jolly smart chap! Things are just coming along now, eh? They'll find 'Old Lest' ain't such a fool

as they think, eh?"

"We've made a good start, sir, although we've lost rather heavily."

"Put up a subscription list, Truscott; some of those men have left families. Stick me down for twenty-five 'thick 'uns'. It's more than 'Old Lest' can afford, but stick 'em down. If the Admiralty don't pay for those junks, and the others get knocked about or lost as well, 'Old Lest' 'll find himself in the Bankruptcy Court, umph!"

"Make a signal: Captain Lester to Captain, officers, and men of the *Ringdove*."

"The Captain, officers, and men of the *Vigilant* congratulate you on the plucky rescue of Lieutenant Travers and the two junks' crews."

He sent for'ard to tell the Fleet Surgeon to let him know directly he could come down to see the wounded, and then stalked along the upper deck to the bridge, swinging his great shoulders and striding down an admiring lane of men, who made a gangway and stood to attention as he passed. You could see, even by the little light there was, how they worshipped him.

We hoisted in our boats and steamed off towards our island, the little *Ringdove* turning back to hers and signalling, "Captain, officers, and men," to ditto. "Thank you very much. We are very proud to have the honour of serving under your orders."

That pleased the Skipper—the last part, I mean—for he was simply a huge simple-minded baby, and he grunted, and puffed at his cigar.

"He's tickled to death with that," Lawrence whispered to me. "Old Rashleigh knows how to get the soft side of him, doesn't he?"

Rashleigh had brought over a written report of his proceedings, a copy of which I give you, so that you may draw your own conclusions. He had not had time to finish it properly, and I hardly think that he could have read it over either, after having written it.

H.M.S. *Ringdove*,

Off the Chung-li Tao Group, Chusan Archipelago,

May 7th.

SIR,—In pursuance of your orders, I have the honour to report that I towed the two tenders, the *Ferret*, Lieutenant Trevelyan, and the *Sally*, Midshipman Ford, to a position five miles to wind'ard (the wind being SSW.) of the Chung-li Tao Islands, arriving there at 8 a.m. on the 2nd May.

At 10 a.m. I despatched the *Sally* to search to the east'ard, and the *Ferret* to the west'ard, and repaired to a rendezvous to leeward of them, giving them instructions which should meet any probable eventualities which might arise.

I waited at the rendezvous till the morning of the 4th May, and then sighted the *Sally*, and ordered her to come alongside. She reported that she had three men killed, Mid Morton and two A.B.'s severely wounded, and that she was much damaged by shot above the water line. She had chased a pirate junk and sunk her, but had then most unwisely attacked four others, and only escaped with the above losses. Her Maxim gun had been destroyed, and she had expended practically all her six-pounder ammunition.

Mr. Ford also reported having met the tender *Ferret* the night before, and that Mr. Trevelyan, contrary to my orders, had at once altered course to the island where the *Sally* had been attacked. The wind had veered to NW. by N. during the night, and was now blowing a strong breeze. As it was therefore impossible for him to beat back to me under three days, I took the wounded on board my ship, buried two of his men at sea, and steamed towards the island and channel in which Mr. Ford had engaged the four junks. The *Sally* followed me at all speed.

I arrived off the entrance to the channel at noon of next day, and on entering it was fired at by a two-gun battery at close range. One shot came aboard me and wounded two men—one, Edward Larking, ord. sea. No. 867037, has since died. I silenced these guns, and proceeding up the channel, discovered that Mr. Trevelyan had wrecked his junk at the entrance to a small creek, and was in a desperate position, being attacked by rifle fire from both sides of the creek.

I made a hasty exploration of the creek, and found that a quarter of a mile inland it opened out, and that anchored there were a number of war junks, and a very large number of merchant junks.

I determined to attack, but first deemed it necessary to survey the channel, which operation was successfully performed, under a heavy fire, by Sub-lieutenant Harrow, who worked with great coolness, and lost one man wounded.

By the time the channel was reported as being sufficiently deep to allow the passage of the

Ringdove, it was dusk, and I determined to take her in at daybreak of the following day. Meanwhile I transferred the guns and most of the stores of the *Ferret* to my ship.

At daybreak I weighed, and was at once fired upon by a gun, mounted on the cliffs three hundred feet above my head, to which it was impossible to reply.

I immediately recognized that it would, under the circumstances, be impossible to force the entrance, and stood off, ordering the *Sally* to follow me.

She was, however, struck by a large shot or shell, and commenced to sink, and I had only sufficient time to bring off her crew, and could not save any of her stores.

The cutter which brought off her crew sighted a man on the rocks, who semaphored that he was Lieutenant Travers, and most pluckily brought him off under a heavy fire.

I then altered course for Tinghai with the crews of my tenders on board.

My officers and crew behaved with gallantry and coolness under trying circumstances.

I am, Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

A. S. T. RASHLEIGH,

Lieut. and Commander.

To

Captain CHARLES E. LESTER, R.N.,

H.M.S. *Vigilant*,

Senior Officer, Chusan Archipelago.

It was no doubt written hurriedly and finished off abruptly after sighting the *Vigilant*; but from what I learned afterwards, hardly gave a correct, or rather fair account of the doings of his tenders.

I was rather amused by young Ford coming to my cabin next morning. He had a boat's ensign under his arm, looked very sheepish, and wanted to know if he might keep it. "The signalman of the *Sally* borrowed it, sir, and hoisted it, without my knowing, whilst we were fighting those junks—he didn't know that it was against orders—and I do want to take it home 'so badly'."

I told him to run and hide it, and he could not have been more pleased.

CHAPTER IX Mr. Hoffman's Secret

Bored Travers—Bored Travers Continues—"Old Lest" in Form—"We've Got 'em at Last"—A Dirty Night—"Old Lest" Unfolds a Tale—Mr. Hoffman's Tale—"Old Lest" and Hoffman—A Marvellous Old Chap

Written by Commander Truscott

At the time of parting company with the *Ringdove* the weather was extremely unpleasant—heavy rain squalls and a bitterly cold northerly wind—but it was snug enough down below, and, to celebrate the return of Travers, we gave him a great dinner in the ward room.

It is hardly necessary to tell you that we were all in the very brightest spirits, and spent a most jovial and riotous evening—all except, funnily enough, Travers himself. He was always a bit bored at these shows, and "turned in" early, only too glad to find himself once more in his own bunk. He was known throughout the fleet as Bored-Travers, or "B.-T.", his full surname being Gore-Travers, and was rather a weird chap, with a superior, supercilious, "Bond-Street-on-a-swagger-morning air" about him, which, somehow or other, gave everyone the idea that he looked "down" upon everybody else. You couldn't help liking him, however, for all that. I had never seen him enthusiastic about anything except a pretty girl or a game of cricket, and now after dinner he looked bored to distraction, leant wearily against a stanchion, and told Lawrence

and the others his yarn. It was like drawing teeth out of a horse, to get him to tell anything at all.

"Oh! that night, um! Oh yes! I remember. One of those Mission native chaps got hold of me when I'd got inside the gates—couldn't shake him off—too much bore altogether, you fellows. He was so jolly earnest, I just went along with him. He said something about Old Hobbs and his daughter being carried away, or something. I had to go, you know—had never seen the girl—all you fellows said she was pretty—forgot 'A' company wasn't coming along too."

He stopped in the most irritating way to fill his pipe. "Same beastly old tobacco in the mess—can't get it to draw—never could."

"Didn't you find them, and have a scrap down there on the beach?" Trevelyan asked. "There was a Chinaman down there—dead, with a Webley revolver bullet in him."

"Did I kill him?" he asked, without the faintest display of interest. "I knew the beastly revolver would go off some day and hurt someone. Someone took it away after that—lots of them—shoved a beastly cloth over my head, and shoved me into a boat. They seemed to want me to stay still, so I did."

"Did they knock you about much?" "Didn't you see Sally?" several asked, and Trevelyan very eagerly added, "How many boats did you see? We thought there were three. We saw the keel marks of three in the mud."

He seemed quite amused at their eagerness.

"Well, you chaps, I think they must have knocked me on the head. I didn't remember much about it—didn't see anything I could swear to—rather fancy, though, there were two boats, and, now you mention it, that I did hear a girl's scream just before. Don't remember anything else till I woke up, with a beastly headache, and a mouth like a limekiln, in a jolly sight better cabin than I've got on board here."

"That must have been Hobbs's yacht! What happened then?"

"Nothing at all—couldn't shave—had forgotten to bring my razors and" (yawning) "my dressing case with me—there wasn't a towel there, or water even—and there they kept me till they shoved me ashore, where young Ford found me."

"Ford?" I said, chipping in. "I thought Rashleigh did that." The Skipper had just shown me his report.

"Rashleigh! No, sir. He was shoving out of it as hard as he could go. Young Ford came along and picked me off—he and the rest of his junk's crew—in the *Ringdove's* cutter. The Chinamen wasted a lot of good ammunition over the lot of us, and I'd have made 'em pay for it if I'd been in" (yawning) "charge of 'em."

"Plucky chap that," he went on placidly, ordering the marine servant to bring him more sugar for his coffee. "I told him so. Hope it won't make him more conceited than he is."

"How about that Chinese cove who came along with me in the *Ringdove*!" he asked, with some little display of interest.

"He's all right, B.-T.," someone said. "Came aboard with the wounded."

"Um! I thought I'd given him the slip. Promised him a hundred dollars for getting me out of it, and" (yawning several times) "I haven't got a hundred cents in the world."

"That's all right. You've got your last month's pay due to you," Old Bax growled impatiently. "But, man alive, shove on with your yarn."

Travers simply opened his eyes a little more widely, looked amusedly at him, and yawned again.

"What did you do all the time?" "Give you decent grub?" "Did you see the boss of the show?" Questions simply poured in, but he languidly helped himself to more sugar, and stirred his coffee.

"Why the dickens can't our cook make better stuff than this? The grub was beastly, and I grew a beastly beard, and everything was" (yawning) "beastly. There was a chap there—an old Scotch engineer fellow—seemed to belong to the show—came across to yarn once or twice—said he was tired of having no one to talk to—but he bored me, so didn't come often."

"Weren't you excited when you heard the firing?" the young Padré asked.

"Interested," Travers drawled; "I'm never excited—just interested," and he put on his most superior look, and the young Padré retired in confusion. "There was a bit of a shindy—guns, and all that—about a week after I'd been there. It was rather interesting—at any rate the coves there thought so."

I remembered now that Rashleigh had reported having heard the sound of guns in the direction of the Chung-li Tao Group about that time, and had had his head snapped off by the Skipper for his pains. He may have been right, after all. "What happened? Who were firing?" I asked.

"I don't know, sir; think they must have had a bit of a 'pick up' among themselves. I did mention it to the old Scotchman, but he wasn't giving anything away just then, and I never thought of asking him again."

"Was he a prisoner too?" I asked. He was very irritating.

"Oh no! Think he bossed the show—when he was sober. Told me one day that they'd sent the Old Yank and Sally somewhere, where we'd never find them. Seemed to know a good deal about it, and seemed sorry for the girl too."

"I'm going to turn in now, you fellows, if you don't mind. Thank you very much, but I haven't slept in a bed for six" (yawning) "weeks," and he stretched himself and yawned again and went away.

Trevelyan disappeared with him and came back triumphantly. He had that glove which we had picked up behind the Mission House. "We were right, after all, sir! That was his glove, and he had borrowed Lawrence's handkerchief. I've got that much out of him. He says he'll never stuff a handkerchief up his sleeve again. He'd given a couple of pounds" (if there had been anyone to borrow from) "not to have dropped it."

"It's the first thing I've ever got back after he once borrowed it," Lawrence sang out, and we all laughed with him.

The Skipper came in presently (Hoffman had been dining with him, but had turned in directly afterwards), and we dragged Old Bax, the Fleet Paymaster, to the piano and made him sing, "Tam Pearce, Tam Pearce, bring me my grey mare"; and the Skipper joined in the chorus and smoked, and Old Bax "cadged" his best cigars from him and smoked them, one after another. The Skipper grunted and growled, and was redder in the face than ever, took off his mess jacket and loosened his braces, and beat everyone else at feats of strength, and was as happy as a sand-boy. He went down into the gunroom to say a few words, as he put it, and I went with him. He squeezed himself in, and, as they all stood up, growled out, "Umph! Sit down, please! 'Old Lest' will give you all a show—later on. If those two steamers are there when we get in to-morrow afternoon, umph! we'll go in and sink 'em. If there ain't enough water for the boats, we'll swim" (huge yells of delight). "Good night, gentlemen; three of you have done a bit of fighting, the Fleet Surgeon hopes to get Morton off the sick list in a day or two, and I hope you others will do as well. Umph! You can have half an hour's extra lights."

They made a perfect deafening noise, gave three cheers and a "tiger", and then he came back to the ward room, and stayed there till after midnight—the youngest of the lot of us—he and Old Bax chaffing each other in broad West Country dialect. Old Bax had "wiped his eye", the last time they had gone shooting, by bagging a woodcock which the Skipper had missed with both barrels, and never lost an opportunity of reminding him of it.

Whitmore and I slipped away long before the ward room singsong was finished, and the ship quiet again, because we had to make all arrangements for manning and arming boats if necessary. You see, we had so many seaman ratings away, that it was rather difficult to fill their places.

Hoffman had his breakfast in his cabin, and spent two hours alone with the Skipper during the morning, and I did not see him again till we were nearing the Hector Group late in the afternoon. He then came up and helped Lawrence pick his way among the islands towards the one where he said that Hobbs and Sally were imprisoned.

We all hoped to discover the tramp steamer and the yacht anchored there, but very much feared that the prisoners might have been spirited away again in one or other of them. The anxiety grew greater as we drew nearer, and was shared by every soul on board, for everyone knew by this time all that I myself knew.

It struck me as peculiar how intimate and accurate was Hoffman's knowledge of the local pilotage. There seemed to be some strange "bond" between him and the Skipper, and I felt sure, from the Skipper's manner to him, and from his silence to me, that there was something which I did not know, and which would explain a good many things when I did know it.

One thing indeed the Captain had told me, blurting it out when I reported "defaulters" to him, and found him and Hoffman together. "Hoffman tells me that that rascally Englishman, who sold that yacht of his to Hobbs, is bossing this show. He's hanging on to Hobbs and Sally, and trying to force the poor little lass to marry him—umph! or make her father pay a pretty penny. He'll skin him out pretty thoroughly, I'll be bound."

"If you don't get hold of her quickly, Captain, I believe she'll consent," Hoffman said.

"Just to save old man Hobbs's dollars, eh? Poor little lass, eh?" the Skipper grunted.

"Partly that and partly because he is such a handsome, dare-devil scoundrel, that I don't think

she'd be unwilling;" and Hoffman moaned and buried his face in his hands. He was still as weak as a rat, and couldn't control his feelings.

"Poor little soul!" the Skipper said softly. "God help us to get her out of his clutches!"

At about five bells (2.30 p.m.) in the afternoon we eventually sighted the island, a low irregular line on the horizon right ahead, a gloomy enough prison under its dark sullen banks of rain clouds. The wind had gone down during the morning watch, and the sea was fairly smooth, but the rain still came down mercilessly, and everything was dripping with moisture and extremely uncomfortable. "Masthead lookout!" roared the Skipper from the fore bridge, "keep your eye lifting for two steamers lying under the land," and to assist him sent up the sharpest eyed signalman.

In spite of the drenching downpour, the fo'c'stle and under the fore bridge was crowded with men, all their eyes glued on the land as we very slowly forged towards it through the muddy yellow water. I don't suppose that there was a single field glass or telescope in the ship not in use.

Then there came a yell from the masthead which made us all look up. "Yes, sir, I can see them—two steamers under the land, right ahead, sir;" and we all stared ahead, and in a few minutes could see them ourselves, and, quite without orders, everyone cheered and waved his cap, looking up at the Skipper from the fo'c'stle to see whether he was looking happy. The cheers were as much for sighting the steamers as for knowing that now "Old Lest" would have a chance of paying off old scores, and the Skipper, looking bigger than ever in his dripping tarpaulins, roared out to ask me if I'd ever been aboard a man-of-war before, and knew what discipline was; so I sent my midshipman down to stop the noise.

"Umph! Truscott, we've got 'em at last;" and he slowly dug his fingers into the palms of his hands, as if he was crushing something, glared at me, and shook them in my face.

We slowly steamed along, till we took soundings under six fathoms, and then anchored. "Can't go in any farther," I heard Hoffman tell Lawrence, and again wondered how he had picked up all this knowledge.

The cable had scarcely finished rattling out before the Skipper, turning to me, said, "Man and arm boats, Commander; I'll go in directly. Old Lest ain't going to let grass grow under his feet."

"We've only got about two hours more daylight, sir," I told him, thinking that there was scarcely time for the boats to get ashore.

"Umph!" he growled, and went down below.

In forty minutes I'd got them all away, the steam pinnace, with the Skipper and Hoffman aboard, towing the launch and sailing pinnace, and the steam cutter towing the barge and the two cutters. We were so short of men that Marshall and his marines had to man the sailing pinnace, and very few men were left aboard to give them a cheer as they shoved off, only about half a dozen seamen, a few marines, and the stokers.

I had thought of keeping Trevelyan on board, but the Skipper growled out, "Send him in with me. 'Old Lest's' brain's not as sharp as it was. He'll smell out something."

It was still raining hard, but the sea remained smooth. Personally, I thought it rather unwise not to wait for the morning; but the Skipper was so anxious not to give the pirates a moment's rest, and to start by sinking those steamers or driving them ashore—to do anything, in fact, to prevent them escaping—that the risk was probably worth taking. The steam pinnace had her fourteen-inch torpedo dropping gear fitted, and the Skipper's main idea was to blow holes in the steamer and the yacht, and so effectually to prevent them moving. Once more, it was not so much our chief object to destroy the pirates or recapture the yacht, as to rescue the little American girl and her father. We hoped that we had now found where they were concealed, and our first object was to prevent them being smuggled away again.

We kept the boats in view till they disappeared in the gathering dusk and the heavy rain, and then could only wait for them to return. It was so cold on deck, that I went down to warm myself in front of the ward room fire. Mayhew, the Fleet Surgeon, was sitting cosily in front of it, and made room for me. "Heard or seen anything?" he asked. "I shall have them all on the sick list if they ever do come back. I've never seen a night I should less like to spend in an open boat."

I hadn't been there five minutes, when the quartermaster came clattering down from the quarterdeck in his dripping oilskins and sea boots. "We can see some flashes ashore, sir. I think our boats are firing as well, sir."

Both of us ran on deck. Several dull "booms" gave us the direction in which to look, and every now and again we could see the twinkle of a gun flash a very long way off, generally a single one, then perhaps two or three quickly, one after the other. It was just as if someone a hundred yards

away was striking matches, which the wind blew out as they were struck. The reports came along a few seconds later, and among them we could hear quite distinct sharp cracks. These were from our boats' guns, I expect. In spite of it being so wet, every soul on board was on deck, staring through the darkness and the incessant rain, to try and make out the boats returning. We ran a searchlight, throwing the beams vertically upwards to guide them, and could do no more. This beam lighted up the raindrops, and made everything even more depressing than it was before.

I only wish that all men were obliged to supply themselves with oilskins or thick pea-jackets, for, as it was, hardly one in twenty away in those open boats had them, and I could imagine pretty plainly the state they were in now.

By ten o'clock there was no sign of them whatever, and I was very anxious. Midnight came (I don't know what foolhardy ideas hadn't occurred to me in the meantime), and shortly afterwards we heard the sound of more guns, and a muffled, long-drawn-out "boom", which made me almost jump out of my skin, my nerves were so very much on the stretch. "That's a torpedo, sir," the signalman said. I didn't much care what it was; I really was so thankful to know that they were still in existence.

The noises ceased almost immediately, and I again trusted that they were on their return journey. A long, dreary wait followed, and then one of the people on the bridge spotted flames from the steam pinnace's funnel. We watched them flicker out every now and again, drawing steadily nearer, and I sent down to Mayhew to have everything ready in case there were any wounded. Presently she came close enough to hail, and to see that she was towing the launch, sailing pinnace, the barge, and the cutter. She had a good deal of "list" to port, and I thought at first that she must have been damaged, but then saw, as she rounded up to come alongside, that she had dropped her starboard torpedo, which accounted for it. The boats ran alongside, and the Skipper came up the gangway.

"What luck, sir?" I asked him. "Where's the steam cutter and the second cutter? Anyone hurt, sir?"

His face was purple blue with the cold, but he was in the highest spirits. "Blown a hole in that tramp steamer; made the little yacht run up inside the creek. That's a good beginning for 'Old Lest', eh? Haven't had a man touched, and left the second cutter and the steam cutter inshore to come off at daybreak. Got the galley fires alight?" he asked, before he went below. "The men are pretty well dead with the cold and the wet."

"I'd thought of that, sir," I told him; "they shall have some hot cocoa and pea soup directly they have fallen out."

I had never seen such a washed-out crowd of people as clambered on board that night. Even though those in the boats had pulled their oars on the way off to the ship, they were simply blue and shivering and stiff. You may guess that I got all the gear replaced, and the men dismissed to their messes as quickly as possible.

When I went in to report to the Captain, he was standing in front of his blazing fire in a thick dressing gown. He had a great bowl of pea soup in his hands, and Blucher was leaning up against his legs. "Umph! that's good," he said, smacking his lips and rubbing himself. "Warm's one's inside, eh?" and he roared to "Willum" to bring his eighteenpenny Havanas, and made me smoke one: I should have very much preferred a pipe.

"Willum" had been sent round to collect all those officers who had been away, and they came trooping in in all kinds of rigs, all looking jolly pleased with themselves, and Willum served them out hot drinks, and the Skipper said, "Here's luck to the little lass and the old *Vig*," and when they were thoroughly warm sent them all away to turn in.

"They're not going to turn in yet, sir," I told him; "they are going to have a sardine supper in the ward room."

"Umph! Good idea that! 'Willum'," he roared, "make me some sardine sandwiches, and put plenty of onions in 'em."

"How about sending the steam pinnace inshore with some hot soup for the people in the boats you left behind?" I asked him, after he'd devoured a plateful of sandwiches and had sent Willum for more.

"No good; couldn't find 'em in the dark. I've stuck 'em right in under the guns, in the middle of the creek which runs up there. They've got to fire a Very's[#] light, if the yacht tries to get away, so tell 'em to keep a good lookout on the bridge."

[#] A Very's light is somewhat the same idea as a Roman candle firework. It throws out one very brilliant ball of coloured light.

"It was grand work in those boats," he continued; "they couldn't see us, and went on firing and wasting ammunition. I kept on running away in the steamboat, easing off a few shells at them, and then going back again, and they'd fire off twenty or thirty rounds where she had been."

"I expect you had some pretty narrow shaves, for all that, sir?"

He growled out "Umph!" and winked at me very slowly.

Now that he and I were alone, I saw that he had something which he wanted to tell me, and when presently he had sent Willum to bed, he lighted a fresh cigar and began. "You know that man Hoffman? What d'you think of him, eh?"

"I can't quite say, sir. Can't quite 'place' him."

"What would you say if I told you he *is* the pirates—bosses the show, or did. What d'ye say to that?"

I supposed I looked surprised. I certainly felt so.

"He's told me all about it. He is running this show, or was."

"What d'you mean, sir?" I could hardly understand him.

"It's this way, Truscott," and, puffing his cigar, and grunting and growling, the Skipper told me the most extraordinary yarn I had ever heard.

Hoffman had for years owned quite a small fleet of merchant steamers, and had endeavoured to compete with the native junks for the coastal trade between Ningpo, Shanghai, and the Chusan Archipelago. Local prejudice and the hatred of the white foreigner had been too much for him, and he had failed. The idea then occurred to him that if he could make a clean sweep of the merchant junks throughout the islands, he would have the monopoly of the carrying trade.

"That explains why we have seen so many small steamers about lately," I burst out, absolutely dumbfounded.

"Umph! It does," the Skipper nodded, and went on to tell how Hoffman had built and armed a fleet of large junks, and carried out the raids of which we knew so well.

"But what's he doing now?" I exclaimed. "Coming on board here half starved?"

The Skipper explained. "That rascally skipper of the yacht was his first lieutenant. It was he who did most of the work, headed most of the expeditions, and thought himself as big a 'pot' as his master. He thought he would strike out a new line for himself, too, and kidnapped Hobbs and Sally. Thought he'd get enough ransom to make his 'pile' in one swoop."

The Skipper went on to tell me that this wasn't Hoffman's idea of doing business, and that it was owing to him that they escaped, that time they were picked up by the *Huan Min*. It meant finally breaking with the Englishman, and (Hobbs told us, I remember, that he had heard a scuffle that night) they actually had come to blows, Hobbs and his daughter being shoved off alone in the boat during the confusion.

Next morning Hoffman had found himself practically a prisoner. Nearly the whole of the Chinese sided with the good-looking scoundrel, who had so often led them on their forays, and the German had to clear out, and was lucky to find a junk whose crew remained faithful to him. That is how he first came to Tinghai, and it was there that he saw Hobbs and his daughter for the first time. The girl reminded him of his wife, or daughter, at home in Germany. He hadn't seen either of them for twenty years, and the daughter would have been about her age. At any rate, whatever it was that made him take such a fancy to her, he wasn't going to let her fall into that chap's hands again. Directly he had heard of the raid at the Tu Pu Monastery, he had gone across to endeavour to regain his influence over his men, found that impossible, but learnt that they were going to raid Tinghai itself and kidnap Hobbs and the girl again. He had come back in his junk as fast as he could, but too late to save her.

That accounted, then, for his sudden appearance at the burning Mission. He had landed in the same bay as the pirates themselves, an hour or more behind them, and rushed up to the Mission, but too late to save her.

"Travers says that he saw two boats there, sir. Probably those were the two close together, and probably Hoffman's made that third mark we saw farther along the shore."

"Dare say it was," the Skipper grunted; "and he tells me, too, that he got away about half an hour after they had left."

"Trevelyan is a regular Sherlock Holmes," I said. "I must tell him; he'll be very pleased."

But the Skipper scowled and growled, "No, no; I don't want anyone to know yet;" and went on with his yarn, whilst I listened, wideawake enough, you may be sure, although it was past two in the morning.

"Hoffman thought that the people at his *dépôt* in the Chung-li Tao Group would still stand by

him, so packed off there," the Skipper went on to tell me, "and found the old Scotch engineer in charge of the place. It was this man who had separated him and the Englishman—that night they fought. He was a friend of his, and gave up the place and the junks; and everything was going well, till one morning the Englishman appeared off the town, fired a few rounds from the tramp steamer, the junks' crews wouldn't fight, and Hoffman had to surrender. He was eventually taken to the Hector Group, and kept there till he managed to escape to us again."

"Travers heard some fighting, but never saw Hoffman," I interrupted.

"Well, Hoffman was hardly likely to give himself away by interviewing him. At any rate, that was the reason he gave me when I asked him," the Skipper said. "He was waiting until he felt more sure of his people before trying to get him away—he couldn't trust any of them—and the chance never came."

"By the way, sir," I said, suddenly remembering that he had not come back, "where is he now?"

"Umph! I left him and one of his Chinese fellows in the boats. They're going to try and get ashore to-night at low water, find their way across the mud, and see if Sally and Old Hobbs are still there. The boats are to wait for them for half an hour after daybreak. If Hoffman and his man don't turn up then, the boats have to come back to the ship, and I've told him I'll have another waiting at the back of the island for him. There's a big rock somewhere there—can't mistake it, he says—and I want you to send a boat round there in case he can't get back this side."

"He's not strong enough for much hard work, I fear, sir," I said.

"'Fraid not, Truscott; 'fraid not."

"Whenever did you know all about this, sir?" I asked. I was a little nettled that I hadn't been told before.

"Only this morning," the Skipper replied; he was lighting his third cigar since coming back. "Only this mornin'—couldn't keep it to himself any longer—came and told me. Umph!" (I suppose that he saw I looked as if I might have been told too) "I'd have told you then, Truscott, but I wasn't certain of him till to-night, and wasn't going to let you think 'Old Lest' had had his leg pulled again, if he turned out a wrong 'un."

"What happened to-night, then, sir?" I asked.

"Directly they saw us coming along, the yacht began to push inland—close up to the town, up a bit of a creek—and just as it was getting dark, we saw the tramp steamer trying to do the same. I wanted to shove along after them, but he wouldn't let me, said we should have to pass within twenty yards of a battery, and they had had plenty of time to man the guns. He said it didn't matter either, as the tramp couldn't get up there, and would be aground before she'd gone fifty yards. He promised to find her, too, later on, and I took him at his word. They blazed off a few rounds at us, I kept 'em busy for a few minutes, and then lay off, out of sight, as if I'd gone back again."

"I didn't know what had happened, sir, when I could neither hear nor see anything of you. I was in a bit of a 'stew' when you didn't come back.

"I wanted to go and torpedo her, but he wouldn't let me. Said she'd be half out of water in another two hours, and he'd do the job then, without getting into danger."

"He did, too; guided us in—how he did it, beats me—somehow or other got her in between us and the battery, and we let rip a torpedo right into her bottom, just amidship. We weren't fifty yards away, and not a soul saw us till we'd fired. I tell you, Truscott, that man's straight. 'Old Lest' don't often make a mistake when he's sized a man up and seen him under fire. He's as straight as a die. It was his own steamer he blew up."

"Well, he's the first man's advice you've ever listened to, sir," I said, smiling.

"Umph!" he growled, "but 'mum's' the word;" and he patted old Blucher, who was squatting between his knees and yawning.

"If he can't get back to that cutter—and I don't know how the dickens he means to do so—he'll go across to the back of the island."

"What boat shall I send, sir?" I asked, getting up, for it was time to be off; it was nearly three in the morning.

"Send the other cutter, and Trevelyan; I believe in that chap," he growled. "Umph! You are going to turn in, eh? Umph! All right! I'll write home to the Missus and the Admiral. Don't know when I can send 'em. Umph!"

"Have you read Rashleigh's report?" he asked me, as I was going out. "I've read it again. He don't say much about Trevelyan and Ford."

"No, he doesn't, sir; and I've heard their accounts. They throw rather a fresh light on the loss

of the two junks. Well, perhaps not quite that, but they seem to have done better than we thought."

"Umph! Good night! Tell 'em to send their reports to me—to write 'em."

I left him lighting a fresh cigar—a marvellous old chap he was—and warned Trevelyan and his boat's crew before I turned in myself.

On deck they had seen nothing of the two boats, still remaining inshore, and I felt extremely sorry for the drowned rats in them.

CHAPTER X The Vigilant under Fire

A Foolhardy Undertaking—"Who's Captain?"—Mr. Trevelyan Returns—Taking
Precautions—The Skipper's Plans—A Ticklish Job—The Commander's Show—
The Skipper's Few Words

Written by Commander Truscott

I sent Trevelyan away an hour before sunrise, and told him where to lie off and wait for any sign of Hoffman and the Chinaman—they were to wave a piece of red bunting—and then turned in for another forty winks, and was called as it grew light. I went up to the fore bridge and found the Skipper already there. He was smoking, even at this hour, and looked as fresh as paint, although he probably had had no sleep at all.

Hardly had I reached the bridge before we heard guns firing again, strained our eyes to see what was happening, and presently saw the steam boat puffing towards us, with the second cutter in tow.

"Get their breakfasts ready for 'em, Truscott; they'll want 'em, and 'Old Lest' wants his too;" and he went down below.

In twenty minutes the boats ran alongside, and pretty well worn out all the people were. Hoffman was the first to come aboard. I have never seen such a dirty object in my life. He was covered with mud from head to foot; even his face and hair were caked with it. He looked terribly exhausted. I felt a strange feeling of curiosity in speaking to him, now that I had learnt his history and the part he had played in shaping the events of the last two months. "Found out whether they are still there?" I asked him anxiously; but he shook his head, "Couldn't do it; too weak, Commander; had to give it up."

The Captain coming up then, took him down below.

"Brought back the steam cutter and the second cutter, sir," Whitmore reported. "I waited as long as I could, but that Chinaman never came back, and I daren't stay any longer, sir, as they began to plank shots all round us."

"What happened to Hoffman?" I asked. "He looks as if he had had a bad time."

Then Whitmore told me that Hoffman and his Chinaman had tried to get across the mud flats at low water, and find their way ashore in the dark. It was a foolhardy undertaking, because Hoffman was evidently not strong enough; but they lashed flat pieces of wood to their boots. Whitmore ran the cutter's bows into the mud, and they had crawled overboard and soon disappeared.

Whitmore backed the cutter into deep water and waited for them to return, and in about half an hour had heard a cry coming out of the darkness and had answered it, and rammed the boat into the mud again. Presently Hoffman came stumbling back, falling and scrambling to his feet, and floundering through the mud. He had lost one of his flat pieces of wood, and was unable to reach the shore. Sending on his Chinaman, he had tried to retrace his steps, and had had an awful time before he heard their hail. He only just had sufficient strength to get back to the boat, and had to be hauled in.

"That Chinaman didn't come back at daylight, sir. I don't know how he intended to do so, but, at any rate, we saw nothing of him."

I told him that Trevelyan had gone round to the back of the island, in case he tried to get off

there.

"I hope you don't think I shoved off too soon, sir?" Whitmore asked me anxiously. "We were very nearly hit several times—as it was."

"My dear chap, of course not. Go down, have a hot bath and some food; you look as though you wanted both pretty badly. You've not had much of a time, I should fancy."

"I've never spent such a night in my life," Whitmore said, and I could quite believe him.

"That steamer is as safe as 'eggs', sir. She's right over on her side," he called out as he went below.

That was one thing accomplished satisfactorily.

As it turned out, he might have waited for that Chinaman till he was blue in the face—well, hardly that, for he was already blue in the face, but till he'd been sunk—because the Chinaman came off with Trevelyan a couple of hours later.

The Skipper was waiting for his return before making any plans; but long before that, something occurred which thoroughly upset him.

We were all at breakfast, when suddenly we heard the distant report of a heavy gun, and through the open scuttles could hear the "swish, swish" of a shell. Everyone jumped up and rushed on deck, the gunroom people clattering up behind us. "They've fired a gun at us, sir," the midshipman of the watch told me. "It went right between the masts and fell over there, sir," and he pointed to where you could still see the spray of the splash, just drifting to leeward, about four hundred yards away. "Don't think it was a shell, sir; no one heard it burst." He was extremely nervous and excited, twitching all over.

The Skipper came up his ladder, red in the face and indignant, and as he stepped on the quarterdeck there was a shout from for'ard, "They've fired again, sir!"

Several people sang out, "Can see it, sir, coming straight this way, sir!" a spout of water leaped into the air, and, "whizzle, whizzle"—with that funny whistling, whispering noise only a ricocheting projectile makes—it passed overhead, and fell close to where the first had fallen.

It was rather amusing to watch how our people "took it". One officer, whose name wild horses shouldn't drag out of me, threw himself flat down on deck, several tried to get behind each other, and most of them looked as if they were—well—thrown off their "balance". But you should have seen the Skipper. He stood there, with one foot on the quarterdeck. His mouth was wide open, his face was absolutely crimson, his eyes stood out of his head like lobsters' eyes, and his neck was so swollen that it was a purple colour, and even from where I stood I could see the veins standing out. He actually couldn't speak, he was in such a frightful rage.

"Close water-tight doors," I sang out, and "steam on the capstan," not knowing what else to do, and then went up to the Captain.

"Who's captain aboard this ship?" he managed to bring out; "Old Lest or you?"

Then, pausing to take breath, he roared: "What the—the—Jerusalem d'you mean by ordering steam on the capstan? D'you think 'Old Lest' is going to get up anchor, and move off, because a lousy Chinaman fires a gun at him? Umph! What's the range?"

"About eight thousand yards, sir."

"Well, he won't hit us," he growled, and with his field glasses slung round his bull neck, he commenced tramping up and down, scowling to left and right, as everyone hurriedly cleared over to the port side to get out of his way.

Two more shot—they certainly were not shell—came along presently, one after another. They were both a long way short, and ricocheted overhead like express trains. He never turned his head to look at them, but roared for me. "See those darned youngsters leanin' up against the quarterdeck rails! See 'em—loafin' on my quarterdeck! Give 'em half an hour's extra drill in the morning, and send them up to the masthead. I'll teach 'em to loaf."

I wanted to suggest clearing for "action", going to "General Quarters", and sending them a few rounds to quiet that gun, for a lucky shot of theirs might do a lot of damage, and they must get the range before long; but, to tell you the truth, I hadn't the courage to do so.

"I'll teach 'em to loaf," he growled again. "Sound off 'Divisions'."

The buglers rather nervously sounded off, and the men began "falling in". Pretty nervous they were, most of them, especially those with their backs turned to the shore; but they knew that this was "Old Lest's" way of "showing off", and I could see them winking at one another and grinning.

That was a "Divisions" with a vengeance. It usually lasted ten minutes, but this morning the Skipper, glaring and snorting, went round each "division" himself, stalking along and finding fault if a cap ribbon wasn't put on correctly, or any small detail of the men's uniform wasn't exactly to his liking; and there was no blinking or shrinking—the men simply dare not—whenever another

boom was heard, and another shot came whistling past.

When he had at last finished, the men were all marched aft on the quarterdeck, and the young Padré, pale and nervous, and with half an eye for the shore, read prayers, making many mistakes, at which the Skipper growled like a bull dog. I'm certain that one of those projectiles passed not ten feet above us all, and it fell into the water not twenty yards the other side; but not a scrap of notice did the Skipper take, and presently they left off firing altogether, much to our relief. Then he growled out, "Umph! I said so," and went below.

In the middle of all this Trevelyan was sighted coming back round the corner from the other side of the island, and as soon as he came alongside, I saw that he had the Chinaman on board, and looked happy. "I've got him, sir, and from what I can make out, Hobbs and Sally are there all right. A lot of those shot have been pretty close, sir; I've been watching them all the way off. I wondered why you didn't fire back."

"Ask the Captain," I said, and took the Chinaman down to Hoffman's cabin, where the Skipper joined us, and we soon learnt the good news. He had not been able to communicate with them, but they were both safe, and were kept well guarded in an old house, with a high wall round it, just at the back of the town. It was on a little rising ground, and we thought we could actually make it out from the ship through our big telescope.

The man had heard that Evans—that was the name of the rascally Englishman—was laid up with fever. The town, he said, was in an uproar. Hoffman told us that he was always going down with fever, which generally lasted for four or five days, and that probably a Swede, named Jorgensen, was running the show. "It's a six-inch modern gun that they've got there," he said, "but they haven't much ammunition, and no shell at all for it; and it's just the mad, silly thing he would do, to go easing it off at this long range."

Hoffman kept on imploring us to prevent Hobbs and Sally being taken off somewhere again. He felt sure that Evans would try to do so, and told us that plenty of junks were always lying in the creeks at the back of the island, and could get away in half an hour, with the wind as it was now blowing.

"Directly he is well enough he'll be off, and take them with him. He doesn't care a straw about anything else, so long as he can force Sally to marry him, and bleed the old father. He won't wait for you to come and try to capture them, you may be certain of that." Hoffman was so earnest, that he made us realize the danger of the poor little girl being once more spirited away by that unscrupulous villain, and how very urgent was the necessity of losing no time in preventing this, at all costs.

The breeze was still blowing dead on shore, so that we were fairly certain that no junks could hope to beat out from this side and escape. The steam yacht dare not come out during the day, and as he had done last night, so the Skipper intended doing every night—leave a boat lying almost in the creek itself to signal directly she attempted to move. Till the arrival of the gunboats, we had nothing but the ship's boats to send round to the back of the island to patrol; and the Skipper was so impressed with Hoffman's earnestness, that he gave me orders to "man and arm" the sailing pinnace, the sailing launch, and the steam pinnace for this purpose. I had done this, and they were, in fact, just going to shove off, when they reported that the *Ringdove* was in sight.

The Captain belayed the boats and ordered Rashleigh round there instead. He had signalled, as he drew near, that he had found the pirate dépôt deserted, and not a junk of any sort or description to be seen, and had therefore come along here at his utmost speed. Whatever demerits Rashleigh may have had as a writer of despatches, he certainly could not have turned up at a more opportune moment, and we all felt grateful to him. I had forgotten to order Trevelyan and Ford to send in their own reports concerning the loss of their junks, but the arrival of the *Ringdove* reminded me of the Captain's order, and I sent for them. They were both very bitter about the way in which Rashleigh had reported on them, and I heard Ford say to Trevelyan as they went away, "I'll write a snorter, sir." As the reports had to go through my hands before the Skipper saw them, I knew that I should be able to "tone" them down if necessary, so said nothing at the time.

The Captain was in great good humour now, and had forgotten all about the firing and his morning's wrath. "Hoffman tells me," he said, "that there are about a thousand men ashore; got plenty of rifles, too, and ammunition, and will probably put up a good fight. So long as Hobbs and Sally are safe, 'Old Lest' ain't going to be hurried for nobody, and he's going to wait till the other gunboats come along. Can't do any more by myself, Truscott."

Hoffman himself was down with fever, and, old Mayhew told me, was pretty bad. I met him coming out of the cabin, and he held up a thermometer for me to look at. I couldn't get the hang

of it myself, but he told me it marked 104 degrees.

"Get him on his legs again as soon as you can, old chap," I said; but Mayhew shrugged his shoulders, and he and Barclay went away together to yarn about him. Thank goodness the other wounded people, young Morton included, were doing well.

We took every precaution to prevent anything escaping that night, and sent in both Hoffman's Chinamen, with a couple of Very's lights apiece, with orders to try and find out if any attempt was made to move Hobbs or his daughter, and to fire them, down at the water's edge, if any such attempt was made.

They were evil enough looking fellows, but Hoffman swore that they were to be trusted, so we had to trust them.

The night passed quietly, and early next morning the *Goldfinch* and the *Omaha* arrived. The latter was at once sent round to assist the *Ringdove* at the back of the island, as her searchlight was much more powerful than the *Ringdove's*, and she would therefore be more useful there than on this side of the island.

In the afternoon the *Sparrow* also came along. They all reported that the *Huan Min* had rounded them up, and we felt very kindly disposed towards the melancholic Chinese Captain, and Lawrence's chum, Ching, and hoped they would bring the *Huan Min* along to share our adventures. The *Sparrow* and *Goldfinch* had left their junks behind, and brought the crews and guns and stores along with them, so that, I am glad to say, we had all our people aboard once more.

We felt now that it would be impossible for anything to escape from the island, and our feelings were much relieved. In fact, I think everyone felt sure now that it would only be a matter of a few days before the pretty little girl and her old father would be safe and sound on board; and all day long there was a constant stream of people going up to the fore bridge and looking through the big telescope to "spot" the house where they were imprisoned.

Directly the Skipper believed that the rascally Englishman and his pirate crews were at last cornered and unable to escape, he sent a letter ashore demanding the immediate release of Hobbs and his daughter, and the immediate surrender of the island. Whoever was in charge of the battery at the mouth of the creek respected the white flag, and the letter was jammed in one of a row of fishing stakes till some Chinese ventured out and took it ashore.

It was a mere matter of form. I do not suppose that anyone imagined that the man Evans would comply with either demand; and so it turned out, for he sent back—the morning after, when the same boat went in again—a most impudent letter, in which he stated that he was going to marry Miss Hobbs, and "hoping that it would not be necessary to hasten his marriage on account of any attempts being made to prevent it", a threat which infuriated the Skipper, and made us all feel extremely distressed.

The Skipper told me what his general plans were.

Two brigades were to be formed, one under his own command from the *Vigilant*, and the other under the command of Captain Parkinson of the *Omaha* from the gunboats.

They were to disembark at the back of the island, behind the town, at places about two miles apart, and were to march inland as quickly as possible, get between the town and that walled house, and join hands there.

He had not yet decided whether he would land at night or during the day, but rather favoured daylight. "Like to see where I'm goin', Truscott. 'Old Lest' ain't a badger."

This was the general idea, but to make certain that no chance should be left of Sally and her father being spirited away, the *Ringdove* and *Omaha* were ordered to destroy every junk and boat they could find in the three little creeks on their side of the island.

At the same time the *Sparrow* and *Goldfinch* were ordered to anchor as close in to the town as they could, to make escape impossible from there. They weighed anchor, and proceeded to take up their station inshore, directly after the receipt of the Englishman's letter, but had not steamed within five thousand yards of the town, when the six-inch opened fire on them. We watched anxiously, and saw that the first shots were very wild. They steadily kept on their way, and, unfortunately, almost directly afterwards, the *Goldfinch* was struck in the bows, and we could see was badly damaged. It was very awkward to know what to do, because the little hill, and the house in which Sally and Hobbs were imprisoned, were directly behind the six-inch gun, and might be damaged if they tried to return the fire. Their little four-inch guns were not of much use at that range, being very old and very inaccurate, and their erratic shells might have fallen anywhere.

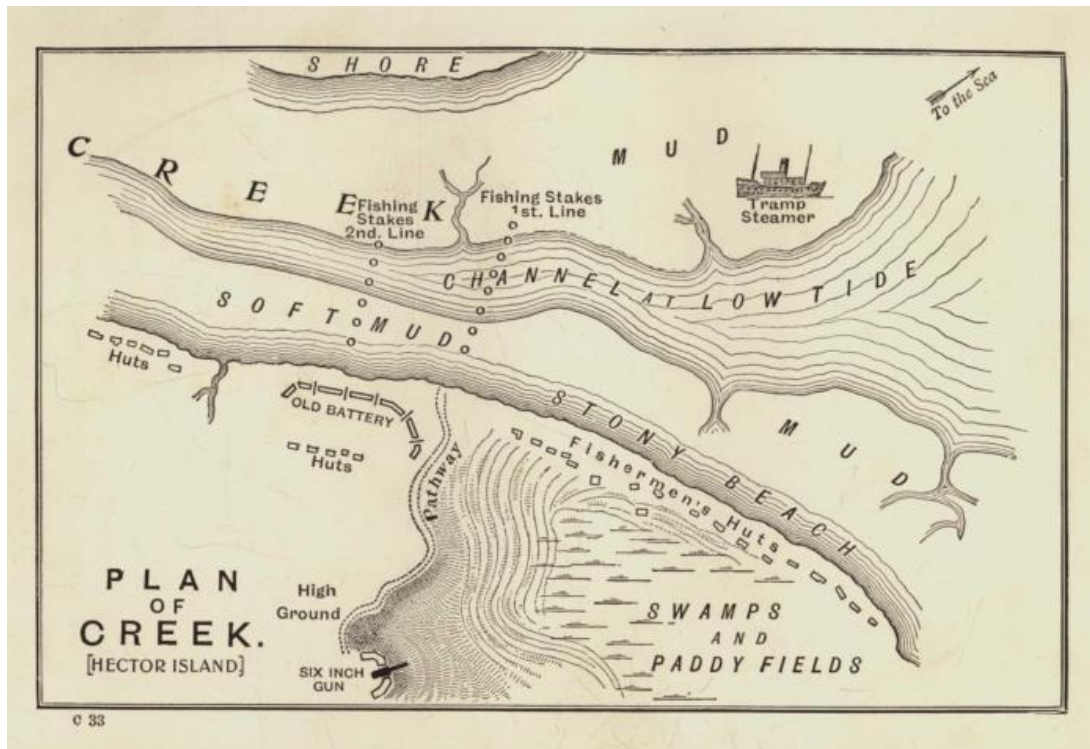
The Skipper swore angrily, and ordered them to return, which they did, followed by six-inch

projectiles, until they were well past us. It was a very anxious and exciting few minutes, because a single lucky shot would have sunk either of them, and many were falling extremely close.

We could see the hole in the *Goldfinch's* foc's'tle as she steamed up, and she signalled for medical aid, and that she had two men killed and four wounded. The Skipper cursed roundly, and sent Mayhew and Barclay across to her.

"You'll land and destroy that gun to-night, Truscott," he turned to me and growled out. "I daren't fire at it for fear of hurting the little lass, and I'm not going to have it interfering with my plans. Take what men you like, and make what plans you like, and blow it up. Umph!" and he went across to see what damage had been done aboard the *Goldfinch*.

This rather staggered me—I'd not been expecting anything of the kind—but I had sense enough to stammer out, "Thank you very much, sir," before he went away, and went off to find Whitmore, and to get Hoffman to assist us as well.



PLAN OF CREEK. (HECTOR ISLAND)

Whitmore was wildly excited; but he is a good deal younger than I am, and hasn't a wife to worry about, and I have, and a couple of youngsters too, which makes a good deal of difference.

Hoffman shook his head when he heard of the job, but gave us all the information he could. The six-inch gun, he told us, was mounted behind an open earthwork, on some rising ground, about five hundred yards from the little battery at the water's edge, the one that had fired at our boats on the first night.

He drew the rough plan which I show you opposite, and which I have lettered, so that you can understand more easily where we had to go and what we had to do.

Our first idea was to land clear of the battery and advance straight towards the six-inch gun; but Hoffman said that there were many native fishermen's huts all along the beach, and that we should wake their dogs before we'd gone five yards. Even if we did get past them, the ground between was a swamp, and after the continuous downpour of the last few days we should never get through it at night.

He sent for his Chinamen to help him, and apparently they were of the same opinion.

"How about landing on the other side of the island and approaching it from the rear?" I asked. He shook his head. "There are huts all over the island, and where there are huts there are dogs, and you'd wake every dog for miles. There's not the faintest chance of your rushing it and surprising the people there."

I scratched my head. I didn't like the job a little bit; but the Skipper had said it was to be done, so that was the end of it—it had to be done.

Whitmore suggested landing abreast the battery and rushing that.

Hoffman thought that could be done easily enough, though it was hardly worth it, in his opinion, as the guns were useless old smooth-bores. He was evidently afraid of irritating the people.

"If once they get out of hand," he said earnestly, with a haggard expression on his thin face, "they'll rush that house and murder Hobbs and little Sally."

Whitmore hadn't intended merely rushing the battery, but had thought out an entire scheme. One party was to rush the farther end of it—the right-hand end of it—the one opposite the fishing stakes, and they were not to try to do it silently, but to draw any fellows there towards them, whilst another party slipped round the left end and made their way up to the six-inch gun with a gun-cotton charge.

"The ground is all right if you could find your way in the dark," Hoffman told us.

"Why not send one of your fellows?" we suggested; but he said he couldn't trust them, couldn't be sure what they would do under fire, and besides, they were not natives of the place, and wouldn't know the way.

There are any number of small huts and fences and pitfalls there, and you could never get past them in the dark.

I had enough experience of Chinese villages to recognize that it would be a jolly ticklish job.

We left him then—he looked too ill to be worried any more—and went back to my cabin, taking his rough drawing with us.

The landing seemed easy enough—it was the getting back again which worried me. The party who held the right end of that battery would have to hold it for at least forty or fifty minutes; the destruction party couldn't possibly find their way up to the gun, disable it, and return in less time than that.

"It has to be done," I said finally, "and your way seems the best. We'll do it."

I don't mind confessing that I had never run a "real" show previously. Plenty of times I had worked out schemes, and carried them through successfully, at manoeuvres and things like that; but it was very different now, and I devoutly wished that the Captain hadn't put all the responsibility on my shoulders, and, without really meaning to do so, I more or less shifted it on to Whitmore's.

Whitmore wanted to land at nine o'clock, an hour before high water, so that we should have firmer ground under us, be able to get closer in to the battery, and have less trouble with the boats. I, however, thought the early morning the best time, somewhere about three o'clock, for my experience in manoeuvres and sham attacks had taught me that the attacked side was generally at its worst, and that men, all the world over, were more likely to be surprised and "shaken", at that hour. It had the disadvantage of being at low water, but we should have those fishing stakes to guide us. Hoffman had told us the mud was fairly firm there, and, perhaps what appealed to me most, daylight would not be far off.

Whitmore eventually gave way, and we decided that we would leave the ship at about 1.30 a.m., be towed as far as possible, and pull in with muffled oars.

Then it was a question of what men I should take, and I decided to take Marshall[#] and his forty marines. Speaking generally, they were an older lot of men than a seaman company, and the older the men were, the less liable they would be to lose their heads.

[#] Captain S. A. Marshall, R.M.L.I., was in command of the detachment of Royal Marines.

It was decided that I should rush the battery, and that Whitmore should take twenty picked men and three torpedo hands with the gun-cotton charges and try and make for the gun.

"How about midshipmen?" he asked.

I personally didn't want to take any; the job was too risky a one. However, we finally decided to take one each, and thought we had better choose Rawlings and Ford, as they had had some experience lately.

"Heads, Ford; tails, Rawlings," Whitmore said, tossing a dollar; and Ford fell to me. There was nothing to choose between the two boys.

I am not going to weary you with all the details which had to be thought out and prepared, but I will just say this. There is no possible similarity between preparing for a landing party or a sham fight during manoeuvres and preparing for the real thing. When you are getting ready for the first, someone comes along: "The Gunnery Lieutenant's compliments, sir, and he doesn't want the small-arm magazines opened this morning". "All right; very well," you say; so no ammunition

is passed round, you take it for granted that water-bottles are filled, and a hundred-and-one other things which are essential in active warfare. Besides—and this is more serious than everything else put together—for one you prepare as for a football match, for the other you cannot help realizing that the lives of the men actually standing there in front of you, cheerfully getting ready, are to be dependent upon your judgment. If other people who have the same responsibility are as keenly conscious of their own lack of skill and experience as I was that day, I am very sorry for them.

By six o'clock in the evening everything that Whitmore and I could think of had been prepared. The men had all seen Hoffman's rough sketch, and all thoroughly understood what was to be done. They were thoroughly happy too, and the Skipper sending up to tell me that he wanted to say a few words to them, I fell them "in" on the quarterdeck. There was very little light, though enough to see his great wrinkled red face.

"Landing party present, sir," I reported, calling them to attention.

"Umph!" he said, speaking in his gruffest tones. "You went in last night, most of you, and blew a hole as big as a house in that tramp. You know why you did that, and got wet skins doing it—to stop 'em taking away the little lass, now I've cornered 'em. To-night the Commander is going to take you in to blow up that gun which had the confounded cheek to fire on the *Vigilant* the other day, and killed two men aboard the *Goldfinch* this forenoon.

"Umph!" he growled. "Last time the Royal Marine detachment went ashore there was a good deal of leave breakin'. I hope you'll all come back this time." (The men guffawed and chuckled.)

"Captain Marshall," he roared, and pointed to one of the front-rank men, "have that man's hair cut before he leaves the ship. He's a disgrace to the detachment;" and he went round and inspected them all.

"Well! Umph! Good luck to you!" and he looked them up and down again, growled, and went below, the marines all grinning with amusement.

I dismissed them.

"What a grand chap the old man is!" Marshall said. "No wonder the men would do anything for him. Hasn't he a grand 'few words'?"

The rain had ceased, and the night showed signs of being clear though cold, and the breeze was not strong enough to make boat work difficult.

I tried to make Ford and Rawlings turn in directly after dinner, but they—like the two young fools they were—were much too excited to do any such thing. I turned in myself, but that drawing which Hoffman had made seemed to haunt me. Directly I turned my light out and shut my eyes, I saw it, and even now, when I am much worried, it comes before me as clearly as it did that night.

I couldn't sleep a blessed wink, and at one o'clock my servant called me, bringing some cocoa and biscuits.

I had no appetite for anything, and it was so cold that I shivered as I dressed.

CHAPTER XI

The Landing Party

Left Behind—"You'll Do—Some Day"—"Dicky"—Preparation to Land—"Good Luck, Men!"—In the Boats—Scrambling Ashore—Rushing the Battery—Setting Fire to the Huts—A Hot Corner

Written by Midshipman Ford

I have so very much to tell you, that I hardly know where to start; but I think that I had better begin where we met the old *Vigilant* steaming away from Tinghai. It was simply grand to take Mr. Travers back to her, and to go alongside her in the dark with everybody looking over the side and cheering. There was a very nasty sea running, and they were a long time getting the wounded across; but no one was hurt, and it was splendid to know that Dicky would now be a jolly lot more comfortable than he could be in the *Ringdove*.

They gave Jim and me a splendid "blow out" in the gunroom, and we simply had a grand time.

There was only one thing which made us miserable—the Captain didn't seem at all pleased. I had been so longing for him to be pleased—everything I had done I had done for him—and had been looking forward to what he would say when I saw him, and when he knew that I had rescued Mr. Travers.

It wasn't till after Mr. Rashleigh had gone away that he spotted me. I had been hanging about and getting in his way on purpose, and when he growled out in a surly manner, "Umph! Lost my junk, have you, and four good men—Umph!—and haven't got anything to show for 'em either?" and turned away, I almost felt inclined to blub, and Jim was just as miserable.

Mr. Trevelyan had been snubbed nearly as much, and he was furious, and said, "That fat little beast Rashleigh has been spinning yarns, that's what it is." The Captain was certainly rather nicer when he came down into the gunroom after dinner and made a speech; but no one ever says nasty things in a speech at that time of night, so it didn't nearly "make up".

Still, everything else was so jolly, and it was so glorious to know that Mr. Hoffman had escaped from the fire after all, and that we had found out where Sally and her father were, and that we were actually on our way to rescue them, that we couldn't feel miserable for long.

Next morning Mr. Trevelyan sent for Jim and myself in his cabin.

"I told you what it was," he burst out, red with rage. "It was that overfed, bloated hog! Look at his report! The Commander has just given it to me to read. I'm going off to tell him our side of the show," and he rushed off, but came back again redder than ever. "I'm to wait till I'm cooler, as if I wasn't as cool as a cucumber in an ice chest," and he stamped about his cabin.

Later on, however, we were all sent for, one after the other, and told the Commander our own accounts of what happened, and some time afterwards were ordered to send in our own reports in writing.

Neither Jim nor I went ashore with the Captain that first night when he blew a hole in the tramp steamer, and we knew that it was because he was still angry with us. We would have given our skins to go; but we both pretended that we didn't mind, and that as the night was so cold and awfully wet, it was jolly lucky that we hadn't gone. We determined to have a jolly good feed, and then turn in early and get a jolly good night's rest, and we yarned with Dicky and tried to pretend that we were having a good time. It wasn't much of a success, however, and we soon found ourselves on the fore bridge in the rain, looking at the flashes and then waiting for the "booms" from the guns with a beastly feeling inside, because we weren't there ourselves. We got just as wet and cold as they did, almost.

I was more lucky than Jim, because I did have something to do, and went with Mr. Trevelyan very early in the morning to bring off Mr. Hoffman's Chinaman. We had to hang about near a big rock at the back of the island, and directly it was light "stand by" for a piece of red bunting to be waved from shore. We must have been there for more than an hour, and thought that he had either gone back to Mr. Whitmore in the steam cutter, or perhaps been collared by the pirates. When we did see it wave, we fetched him off pretty quickly, and shoved along back to the *Vig* just as hard as we could go. You see, we were certain that he had good news, because Mr. Trevelyan drew pictures of a thin little man and a girl and showed them to him, and he seemed to understand, and nodded his head and pointed to the island. He kept on saying "Vely good" all the way off to the ship. I don't think he knew any more English words.

On our way back we watched the six-inch gun firing, and dropping her shells or shot all over the place. Some of them fell very close to the *Vigilant*, and we wondered why Captain Lester didn't reply.

"How would you like to be there?" Mr. Trevelyan asked.

"Ra—ther!" I told him, and he smiled. "It's all right if you're doing something yourself, but it's a jolly different thing when you're simply waiting for them," and that made me think of my horrible funk when those two shore guns had fired point blank at the *Sally*, and I was rather sorry I had spoken.

Mr. Trevelyan laughed when he saw them all falling in for "Divisions" on board the *Vig*. "That's 'Old Lest' all over," he said. "I bet he's in a towering passion."

Jim told me afterwards that he didn't like the shooting a little bit, and if they all hadn't been so afraid of the Captain, they would have hated it all the more. That was the day we wrote our reports—the *Ringdove* coming made the Commander remember about them—and I put it all down very clearly, how I had done my best to escape from the four junks, and why I had been obliged to run down through the middle of them. I told exactly how I and all those who were left of the *Sally's* crew had brought Mr. Travers off in the *Ringdove's* cutter, and put in a lot about Scroggs and Sharpe and all of them. You see, I wanted Captain Lester to get Scroggs's wife as

big a pension as possible, because of all the children.

I didn't want to say much about Dicky, because—well, you know what I mean—I was only a very few places senior to him, although he was only a cadet, and it seemed so cocky.

But Mr. Trevelyan made me do it, and I explained it all to Dicky. Afterwards Mr. Trevelyan wrote some pretty hot stuff too. This was part of it: "With regard to the alleged disobedience of the orders of Lieutenant and Commander Rashleigh to proceed to the given rendezvous, I considered that the information obtained from Midshipman Ford of the *Sally* made it imperative that further and more definite information should be obtained. Your" (that was Captain Lester's) "original orders to me were to obtain such information at all costs, and I considered this the opportunity to act upon them. As a direct result, I discovered the whereabouts of one of the headquarters of the pirates, and indirectly was the means of the rescue of Mr. Travers."

We took them to the Commander, who made us rewrite them and "tone down" many things; but they were pretty good "snorters" for Mr. Rashleigh, even after that.

The Captain must have thought that he had been a little unjust, because later on in the day he saw me on the quarterdeck and stopped me. He glared at me for a moment, and with his legs wide apart, growled out: "Seem to have shown more sense than I thought. Umph! You'll do—some day," and left me feeling jolly happy.

Of course when the *Goldfinch* and *Sparrow* arrived, Mr. Langham and Mr. Forbes and the midshipmen of the other junks came back to the *Vigilant*. They hadn't any experience worth telling, compared to ours, except Webster, who had managed to run his junk ashore, and the *Goldfinch* had spent all her time getting her off again.

Jim and I nudged each other; we didn't like Webster.

Dicky didn't come off badly either. You know that we all called him "Dear Little Dicky", all except Jim, who flatly refused to obey the Sub's order, and had been caned twice by him for not doing so. He was let alone afterwards.

Dicky hated it; it had made his life absolutely miserable; and now Mr. Langham, as soon as he got back, held a Court of Enquiry down in the gunroom about our losing the junks. I didn't care a snap what he thought or said about it, nor did Jim. The whole thing was only got up for his amusement—his and Hamilton's (the big Engineer Sub) and Webster's; but one of their "findings" was this. I copied the "rot" off the notice board in the gunroom:

COURT OF ENQUIRY,

Held in the Gunroom, H.M.S. *Vigilant*,

At Sea, *April* 7th.

As a result of the Court of Enquiry held last night to enquire into the loss of H.M.S. *Sally* and H.M.S. *Ferret*, Mr. Ford commanding the one and Mr. Rawlings the second in command of the other, these officers have been adjudged to have borne themselves with credit to the gunroom, but are cautioned not to do so again. It has also been decided, affirmed, and we do hereby solemnly declare, that Mr. Morton, hitherto known as Mr. Dear Little Dicky, worked a Maxim gun so accurately, and polished off so many niggers before he was knocked over, stunned, incapacitated, and otherwise by flow of his blood rendered *hors de combat*, that he is entitled to some signal reward.

We do therefore proclaim, announce, and order that from henceforth, evermore, and hereafter he shall be known as "Dicky".

For "Dear Little Dicky" in future read "Dicky". (This was in big print.)

Given under our hand and seal,

BENJAMIN LANGHAM, Sub-lieutenant.

A. E. HAMILTON, Engineer Sub-lieut.

HARRY G. WEBSTER, Senior Midshipman.

Of course it was silly rot. Still, so much silly rot goes on in a gunroom, and a lot of it makes a difference—actually, and nothing they could have done would have made Dicky more pleased. He still spent most of the day in his hammock, but was allowed "up" for two hours every afternoon in the gunroom.

He told Jim, on the quiet, that he quite liked going there now. He had hated doing so before, and used to sit for hours on his chest outside, or wander about on deck, because he so dreaded having his leg pulled, and hearing himself called "Dear Little Dicky".

He could remember very little about the fight with the junks, and nothing at all after seeing all those Chinamen struggling in the water when that first junk sank. He didn't even remember Sharpe and me giving him that hot milk during the night, and nothing till he was carried up the side of the *Ringdove*.

You may bet that Jim and I had plenty to tell him; and we brought Sharpe along to back us up, because I couldn't get him to believe, by myself, that it was his Maxim gun which had done the trick when the first of the four junks came along.

"I didn't fire it myself, though, Sharpe, did I?" he asked; and Sharpe said, "No, sir, you didn't hardly do that, but you was a-steadyin' of the cartridge belt, and seeing as how it was 'fed' properly, and a-knocking back the crank handle, and you was shoutin' and cheerin' like Billy Loo, that you was, sir. You was about the only one of us who wasn't skeared, or—well—if you was, you didn't look skeared," he went on, for he saw that Dicky wouldn't believe him.

"We was all a bit skeared, eh, sir?" and he winked his eye at me.

I knew jolly well that I had been.

The others all wanted to be very civil to him now, but Jim and I boomed them off. He belonged more or less to us, and we weren't going to have them shoving their oars in too quickly.

Jim and I were very excited when we heard that the Commander was going to land with the marines and try and blow up the six-inch gun. We hung about outside his cabin, and shoved ourselves under his nose up on deck all the afternoon, so that he shouldn't possibly forget us. We expected that he would take one, if not two midshipmen with him, and we didn't see why we should not go, and you can imagine how badly we wanted to go. Everyone wanted to land with him especially, for he was such a "ripper", and so jolly pleasant, and was always "smoothing over" things when everyone was cross and bad-tempered, and felt he wanted to bite everyone else's nose off. He was very strict "service", but he never did small irritating things, and treated us Mids and Cadets as though we were human beings; several of the ward-room officers didn't seem to think so, quite. He had a great leathery face like the Captain's, and was tremendously popular with the men. We heard that he had nothing but his pay to live on, and had a wife and family to keep. That was quite enough, the A.P. used to say, to make any man solemn at times. He did very often look worried, but when anything was "doing", he was always as "buckish" as any of us.

Nobody had ever seen him in a bad temper, so no one ever minded having to report things to him. If we had to report anything, a light or a change of course, or anything like that, we had often to screw up our courage before we tapped at the Captain's door, for often he would nearly bite our heads off. It was jolly different with the Commander, for time after time I have had to wake him, at night or during his afternoon sleep, and he would say, "Right you are, boy", as cheerfully as anything. I remember once he said, "No trouble to wake me, Ford, eh?" and I couldn't help smiling, and he asked me what the joke was, and I told him that I had just called the Captain, and—well—he hadn't enquired very civilly whether I had had trouble in waking him.

He knew all the Captain's family. He used to go down there to shoot, and had met my father and mother there too, so that was probably the thing that just made the difference when he had to choose a midshipman, because he did choose me.

Wasn't that absolutely splendid? And Jim was to go with Mr. Whitmore; so we were both simply wild with delight, and rushed down to tell everyone. He had sent for us in his cabin, and he looked very grim and sad when we went there, but he didn't look quite so serious when we left. He was so amused at our being so jolly excited, I expect; but we couldn't help that.

He had shown us the map thing which Mr. Hoffman had drawn, and explained exactly what he was going to do; and told us to take revolvers, not dirks or cutlasses, as they would only get in the way, and to wear the boots with the broadest soles, as we should have to wade through mud; and as they would be slippery afterwards, to get big nails put in them, because we should probably have to do a lot of scrambling.

We were the only two midshipmen who were going to actually land; but Withers was going inshore in the barge, Jones in the first cutter, and Webster in the steam pinnace.

Webster was to tow us in as far as he could go, and the cutter and the barge were to wait for us after we had landed, and in case they should be wanted to cover our getting aboard again, a Maxim gun was mounted in the bows of the barge, and another in the bows of the cutter. The others were rather jealous of Jim and myself, because, of course, we had only just joined the ship. We didn't care a tuppenny "rap" about that, however.

We sent for our bandsman servant, and he took our boots away to one of the bluejackets who mended boots. He hadn't the proper kind of nails—none left, at any rate—but the ones he did put in were a jolly sight better than none at all.

As it got dark, and the rain stopped and some stars came out, and everything seemed to be promising well, we were too excited to eat our dinner, and as to sleeping, we couldn't possibly get a wink, and were out of our hammocks directly it struck one bell (half-past twelve), long before the sentry came round to wake us. We had two bits of candle all ready, and we dressed by their light, very quietly, not to wake anybody, and then slipped on deck. But of course we were much too early, and had to wait a very long time. However, it made us hungry, and we ate a whole tin of gingerbread biscuits between us; and when the rest of the people began turning out, and they brought round hot cocoa, we had a jolly big whack of that.

Then they began "falling in", and the Commander came up with a sword and revolver and haversack, yawning and looking tired, and Captain Marshall, with his eyeglass just showing in the lantern light, pulled on his gloves and looked jolly much a soldier all over. He had his long sword hitched up to his waist, and his cap beautifully on the side of his head, and his moustache all carefully trained, and he winked at us with the eye that wasn't holding the eyeglass.

We heard him start a yarn to Mr. Whitmore and Dr. Barclay, who was coming with us as well, "When I was the handsomest subaltern in the British army, my dear chaps—" and they both laughed and "hee-hawed" till the Sergeant-major came up, jerked his arm stiffly to the salute, and reported the marines ready for inspection. This was the time we often waited to see, because he used to change from being a funny man to a soldier, and we always watched to see him snap his teeth together, shove out his under jaw, look very fierce, and walk round his men, looking as though he'd never had a funny thought all his life, and was simply thinking of nothing but soldiering.

The Commander's grimness was gradually wearing off, and when Captain Marshall had told him one or two funny stories, and he had laughed several times, he became quite cheerful. The Captain came up, too, when everything was ready, and he nodded at me, "Getting more experience, Ford?" and stood under the quarterdeck lantern, where everybody could see him, and growled out, "Good luck, men! Hope to see you all back by daylight." The boats had dropped alongside by this time, and we all began to file down into them. Jim gave me a parting pinch, and went down the port side into the cutter, and I went down the starboard side into the barge, with the Commander and Dr. Barclay and the marines. The steam boat took us in tow, we picked up the cutter, and began to move away from the ship. I had just thought how jolly it would be to have a send-off "cheer", when we heard the Captain's voice roar, "Three cheers for the Commander and the 'landing party'," and to judge by the noise, I should imagine that everyone on board had turned out and come on deck. Without waiting for orders, we started cheering in the boats, and as we passed the *Sparrow* her people cheered us too. It made my heart go thumping like mad, and just did the right thing for the Commander. You knew, by the way he cheered, that he had forgotten all his worries.

The *Goldfinch* was on the other side of the *Vigilant*, and I don't know whether they cheered us or not. She still had those two dead men on board, so probably didn't.

"They won't hear us ashore, I suppose, sir?" I asked the Commander.

"Too far for that, Ford," he said, and sang out for the men to carry on smoking. The steam pinnace seemed to make a tremendous noise ahead of us, but I expect that that was only "fancy". At any rate, we seemed to bubble along jolly fast in the dark. The stoker in her, like the ass he was, must have been keeping up a very big head of steam, because once or twice flames came out of the funnel. The Commander shouted for them to ease down, and we had some difficulty in making them hear. I thought that they never would, and the funnel was like a big torch, and could have been seen many miles away; but at last they heard and eased down. The Commander ordered them to disconnect her fan, and after that no more flames showed. You see, the air is forced through the fires by means of a little fan, worked by an endless belt from the main engines, and when they are going fast it blows the flames up the funnel.

If it had been the Captain, I know that he would have been frightfully angry, and punished the stoker later on; but the Commander only said, "The poor idiot was doing his best", and was quite calm, although, of course, it might have given the whole "show" away directly.

Although we went along much more slowly, the few lights on shore were getting bigger and bigger. Presently the steam boat steamed very slowly, indeed, and then stopped, and we ran alongside. It was low tide, and we had begun to get into the narrow channel, running up the creek into the town.

Mr. Lawrence was in the steam boat—I had not seen him before—and had been navigating us. Then we heard Mr. Hoffman's voice.

"Good heavens! what are you doing here?" the Commander asked.

"I'm coming with you," he said. "I will show Whitmore the way up to that gun."

The Commander told him that he was not well enough, and tried to persuade him to go back, but he absolutely refused, and crawled across us into the cutter. "I've taken half a bottle of quinine, and shall be all right. You could never find that gun by yourselves."

We could see, even in the dark, how "shaky" he was.

Then Lawrence shoved off back again to wait for us, the steam boat giving a few swirls with her screws, and slipping away out of sight in a moment.

It was simply pitch dark, and when I tell you that though Withers was sitting behind me, and had his knees in my back, and yet I couldn't see his face when I turned round, you will understand how dark it was.

We then started to pull inshore. The oars had been muffled by having strips of fearnought (thick flannel, almost like felt, which the stokers make into trousers for stokehold work) bound round them where they rubbed in the rowlocks, and the rowlocks themselves had more fearnought nailed all over them, so that they only made a soft noise, with a squeak now and again.

We were quite close to the shore on our port side, and one or two little streaks of light—I suppose they came from the fishermen's huts—didn't look more than a hundred yards away.

I was very nervous and excited, and when a dog suddenly began to bark, and we could actually hear him rushing down a loose stone beach close to us, my heart seemed to stop beating with a jerk for a little time.

We lay on our oars, he gave one or two angry barks—they seemed to be just outside the boat—and then we heard him give a whine as though he was tired and yawning, he scampered up the beach, gave a low growl, and was quiet.

We went on again, but it was so dark that the Commander crept for'ard into the bows, and we felt our way very slowly along the edge of the mud, shoving her off with boat hooks whenever we got too close.

We had passed some of those lights—they were right behind us now—so that I knew we were well up the creek. We couldn't see where the water ended, but farther away it was blacker still, and I knew that this was the steep beach and the shore behind it. I tried to remember that drawing, and hung over the side and tried to make out those fishing stakes. We seemed to go on like this for a very long time—we were pulling very slowly against the last of the ebb tide—and then the blackness on our left seemed to get nearer and more upright, and I knew that we must be almost abreast of the battery. I couldn't see Mr. Whitmore's cutter, and could very seldom hear it, although we knew that it was very close behind us. A few dogs were barking somewhere inland. There was one, away on our right, howling every minute or two, a most creepy kind of howl, and there were two who answered him on our side of the town. Sometimes others would join in, and you would almost recognize the different barks. I longed for them to leave off. That was the only noise, except the slight splash as the oars dug into the water, and the soft thump against the sides of the row-locks as they dragged them out; but now that we were listening so hard, and were so excited, even this seemed to be very great.

Then something scraped against our bows and knocked the low oars, and the noise seemed awfully loud and startling. A lot of the men let out "Oh!" under their breath; they were so excited and jumpy. I don't wonder either, because the marines were simply sitting on the thwarts, with their rifles between their knees, and they had nothing to do except to prevent them rattling against anything.

We hauled ourselves up, and the Commander came aft, leant over the side and felt it, and the coxswain, who had been there before with the Captain, felt it too, and he whispered to the Commander that it was one of the fishing stakes.

We pulled to the side and came across some more, so felt sure.

The dark mass of the cutter came quite close to us.

"I've found the first line, the second is fifty yards farther on; you go back about thirty yards," the Commander whispered across to Mr. Whitmore. There were a few click, clicks, and the cutter disappeared again. We started to pull out round that first line of stakes, but we had made more noise with our oars, knocking against them—the men couldn't help that—and suddenly, right over our heads, it seemed, someone yelled out.

I clutched hold of Captain Marshall's arm—it was the first thing my fingers touched—and I heard him give a gulp; but the Commander "hissed", and we lay on our oars and held our breath. It must have been a sentry or a watchman, and he sang out again, and I felt as if I was throbbing all over. Then we heard him muttering to himself. The tide had taken us clear of the stakes, and

the Commander whispered "to give way", and we pulled round the end one without hitting it; but the sentry could hear the oars, and sang out again. The men began to pull faster, and the oars made an awful noise. More Chinamen began shouting—one quite a long way in front, and then several more.

"Starboard!" I heard the Commander say; "starboard, hard!" and then knew that in another half-minute we should be scrambling ashore. I crept along to the bows with the Commander, to be ready to follow him. We had hardly got there when the bows ran into the mud with a jerk, and I had to hang on to the gun mounting to prevent being knocked over. "Keep on 'giving way', Withers!" the Commander sang out, and slipped down into the water without the least hesitation. It was up to his waist, and he held out a hand for me. I fell in after him up to my armpits, with my feet sinking in the beastly mud at the bottom. I was so excited, that I didn't notice how cold it was; but it just flashed through me how Captain Marshall could do it, with all his beautiful uniform on, and then I found myself wading after the Commander, and pulling my feet out of the mud. There was enough noise now to wake anybody. No one could help the rifles and everything else knocking against the side of the boat, and the splashing, and the men cursing under their breath. There were some frightened cries above us, and a rifle was let off (it sounded like a six-pounder), and all the dogs in the town seemed to start barking; but we were all too excited and busy getting through the water and mud to notice much. In half a dozen steps the water was only up to my knees, and in two or three more I dragged my feet out on to firm mud, and started to break into a kind of "splodgy" trot to keep up with the Commander—I could only just see his dark figure, and had to keep close for fear of losing him.

Then the beach began to slope up, and was quite hard, and we ran over a lot of shells and loose stones, the water running off me and squelching inside my boots. I was out of breath and panting, and my clothes had all stuck to me, especially my trousers over my knees, and the Commander wouldn't stop, and never once looked back to find out how many men were following. He seemed to disappear in a very black shadow; but it was only a bank about four feet high, with stiff grass on the top, and he helped me, and someone shoved me, and I got a lot of sand or earth in my mouth, and spat it out. The Commander stopped for a moment, and I was only too glad to get back my breath. We could see some lights moving backwards and forwards, and appearing and disappearing at regular intervals, and knew at once that men were running about inside the battery, and that they shone out when they passed one of the gun embrasures. There was any amount of calling and shrieking going on. The Commander drew his sword, I saw Captain Marshall close to me with his sword drawn, any number of dark figures kept scrambling over the bank; the Commander yelled, and we all yelled and rushed straight ahead.

Several people behind me fell—I heard them—and I heard Captain Marshall cursing, and asking "Where the blooming buttercups his eyeglass was?" and then there shot out from the dark wall a most tremendous flame, with an awful roar—they had fired one of the guns. It seemed as if it was almost in our faces, and I turned my head half round, and the flame lighted up the men's faces just for a moment. It showed us all the outline of the battery as well, and, what was better, a little path, and we raced along it, cheering like mad. I think that they must have been firing at us with rifles as well, but I don't know, and the next thing I remember was clambering up a stone parapet, with someone's feet in my face, which I hardly noticed at the time, digging my nails into some cracks, and then getting my arms round something hard and round. I "muscled" up, and found it was one of the little guns, and knew I was in one of the embrasures. "Get along, curse you," someone yelled; "give me a hand with this rifle," and scrambled up after me. I couldn't get down for a second, because there were so many in front, and the man simply took a flying leap past me. He didn't know who I was in the dark.

I got down somehow or other, and then hunted for the Commander, heard him shouting away to the left, and got close to him again. We were right inside the battery, and we followed the wall—inside—all round, and not a Chinaman was there. We were all cheering like mad, or panting for breath, and then we saw some lights from huts fifty yards away, and crowds of Chinamen running backwards and forwards in front of them, and heard more yelling. Without waiting for any orders, everybody rushed towards them and carried me along too, doing my best to keep with the Commander.

There weren't any Chinamen there when we got to the huts, and the men were for rushing on, but the Commander managed to halt them, and we could hear the mob running away and making a squealing, frightened noise, but couldn't see them. Three yards away from the lighted huts everything was simply pitchy black.

"Get back to the battery, boys!" the Commander shouted; "they'll be coming back soon." The

men had to fall "in" just inside the battery wall, behind the little guns, and we found that no one was missing.

I don't think that the Commander knew quite what to do then. I heard him telling Captain Marshall and Dr. Barclay that he wished the Chinamen had made a fight of it instead of running away, because he feared that they would simply bolt back to the six-inch gun, and that Mr. Whitmore's party would never get to it.

Whilst we were waiting like this, I had time to notice all the noises. Talk about dogs! I should have thought that all the dogs in the world wouldn't have made so much noise. There must have been simply thousands of them barking away all over the town; and some came running out of the darkness into the light from those huts, and we could see their eyes. It was something for me to do to throw stones at them, and the bugler boy—Wilkins—helped me; they would howl if a stone went near them, and rush away yelping. It was jolly good fun doing this. All of a sudden there was a dull crash behind us, as if a heavy weight was rolling down outside the battery.

"What was that?" I heard the Commander shout, rather nervously, and he went across, and I followed him.

"Very sorry, sir," the Sergeant-major said. "Some of the men chucked a gun over the wall, sir. I've taken their names, sir."

"Let 'em chuck them all over, sir," Captain Marshall suggested; and we did. We had them all—five there were—tumbled in the ditch in no time. Four men could lift a gun, and if they couldn't heave it out of its wooden carriage, another two would help them, and heave it over, gun and carriage too. The men enjoyed it, and so did I, and we began pitching over the little round shot which lay there in heaps, and some grape-shot done up in basketwork.

There was another wait after that, and we all were bitterly cold. My nose was running, and below the waist I felt like ice.

The Commander still didn't seem to know what to do. He had put a few men out past the huts to warn us in case any Chinese came along, but it was so dark that he couldn't see how the ground lay, or the best position to take up, in case we were attacked.

Then Dr. Barclay had a brilliant idea, and suggested setting fire to the huts. "They'll light the place up and dry our clothes, sir," he said.

"Right O!" the Commander chuckled, and it didn't take many minutes before they were all of them blazing away like fun.

The Commander said that I could help, so Wilkins and I ran over to the huts, turned over a funny old lamp burning inside one of them, and set fire to a lot of shavings and straw. The smoke drove us out, but then we set fire to the outside in half a dozen places, and soon had a grand blaze going. It was jolly comforting to stand there and feel our clothes drying, though the wind would puff the smoke back into our eyes sometimes.

"Fifth of November, almost, ain't it, sir?" Wilkins said.

"And there go the fireworks, too," he shouted; and there was a banging and spluttering in the hut next to ours, and little bits of it flew about.

"Those are cartridges going off," the Commander shouted, running up. "Clear out of it, men."

They had begun to move away, and, when he called, moved faster; we'd hardly got clear before there was a tremendous "hurroosh", and the whole hut seemed to go right up, and burning planks, strips of thatch and matting, went flying along through the air, and began blazing away wherever they fell. My aunt! it did make a smoke, though there wasn't much noise, only a very loud "poof", and everyone went scampering back to the battery with his head down, trying to dodge the bits. We did laugh.

"Funny place for their magazine, eh, Commander?" I heard Captain Marshall chuckle; and we all kept pretty clear of the others. The explosion had made the dogs stop barking—just for a few seconds—just time for us to hear noises as if the townspeople were waking up at last.

"They're getting 'busy' over there," Captain Marshall said. "That sounds as if our friends would be coming to call on us shortly."

I think that the Commander and he wanted them to come very badly, and I didn't mind either, because I wasn't so cold now, and the flames lighted the place all round grandly.

They walked all round the lighted-up part, and decided that the best position for the men would be standing on the shore of the battery wall, firing over that, and for some men to stand on the beach, farther along, at each end, and fire over the bank which we all had to climb over. We couldn't hear a sound of Mr. Whitmore's party; but there was another strange noise like the quacking of thousands of ducks—you could hear it even with the flames roaring and crackling and the dogs barking.

"Whatever is it, sir?" Wilkins asked me; but I didn't know, and asked Dr. Barclay.

"Bull frogs, down in the paddy fields below the six-inch gun," he told me, and I didn't say any more, because I thought that he was pulling my leg.

A few minutes afterwards, the Commander and Captain Marshall and Dr. Barclay all went along past the huts—they were having a look round—and Wilkins and myself followed behind them. The flames were between us and the sea, and suddenly something whistled past me, and I jerked my head round, and then there was the noise of a rifle going off—and another—and another, and flick—flick—flick—flick, the bullets went whizzing past us.

I put my hands up to keep them off.

CHAPTER XII Midshipman Ford on his Mettle

Ford Sees Red—Close Fighting—"Where are we?"—Comparing Notes—A
Strange Reception—The Captain's Letter—The Chinese Doctor—Investigating
—The Mob Attacks—To the Rescue

Written by Midshipman Ford

Directly they started firing we all ran back to the huts, because we were in between the Chinese and the flames, and of course made splendid targets.

Captain Marshall sang out, "Run, Ford, run!" and I did, and jolly fast too; but he and the Commander and Wilkins, the bugler boy, only came along at a jog trot, and "miles" behind me, and Captain Marshall was "hee-hawing" as if he had never seen anything so funny before in his life. He asked me whether I had done the hundred yards in ten seconds, or some rot like that, and before all the men, too, which made me get very red and simply furious. It was all his fault for shouting out "run", and with those bullets kicking up the ground and flying past, I jolly well couldn't stop myself when once I had started. I don't think anyone could. Do you? I caught Wilkins grinning, and this made me more angry still.

"Don't you worry; it was only Marshall's joke," the Commander said. He meant to be nice, but I knew that he thought I ought not to have run, and I simply hated myself.

I was so mad at being such a coward, that I think I would have run straight at them if they had gone on shooting, just to show the men that I could run just as fast that way; but they had left off, and were only shouting at us from the darkness behind the huts. I felt most horrid, and wondered what the Captain would think when Captain Marshall told him. I knew that he would tell him—"hee-hawing" like a grampus, and thinking it a tremendous joke.

"May I take six men out there, sir, out to the right, creep round in the dark, and see if I can find them? Do let me, sir!" I blurted out, almost before I thought of it.

He looked at me very grimly, and must have seen that there was something the matter (there was, very much the matter—everything inside me was working), thought a few moments, smiled at me, and said: "Right you are, if you can get volunteers. Don't go far, and come back when I sound the 'close'."

Get volunteers! Why, they all would have come, and I just took the six nearest, I didn't really care who they were, or if none of them came, I was so mad, and we dropped over the battery wall, and then behind the bank to the beach, and crept along in its shadows. I could just see the water jacket of the Maxim in the bows of the barge lighted up by the flames, and they must have seen our shadows and thought we were Chinamen, because I heard Withers sing out some order, and if I hadn't given the gunroom "whistle", I do believe he might have tried to shoot us. We crept along till we were clear of the firelight, and then I told the marines what I was going to do, extended them to three paces, and started to make inland. I knew pretty well where those rifles had fired—I'd seen the flashes—and I didn't think that there were more than seven or eight altogether, and meant to get behind them, get the Chinamen between me and the fire, and try and bag one or two.

I don't believe anything would have frightened me. That silly "hee-haw" of Captain Marshall,

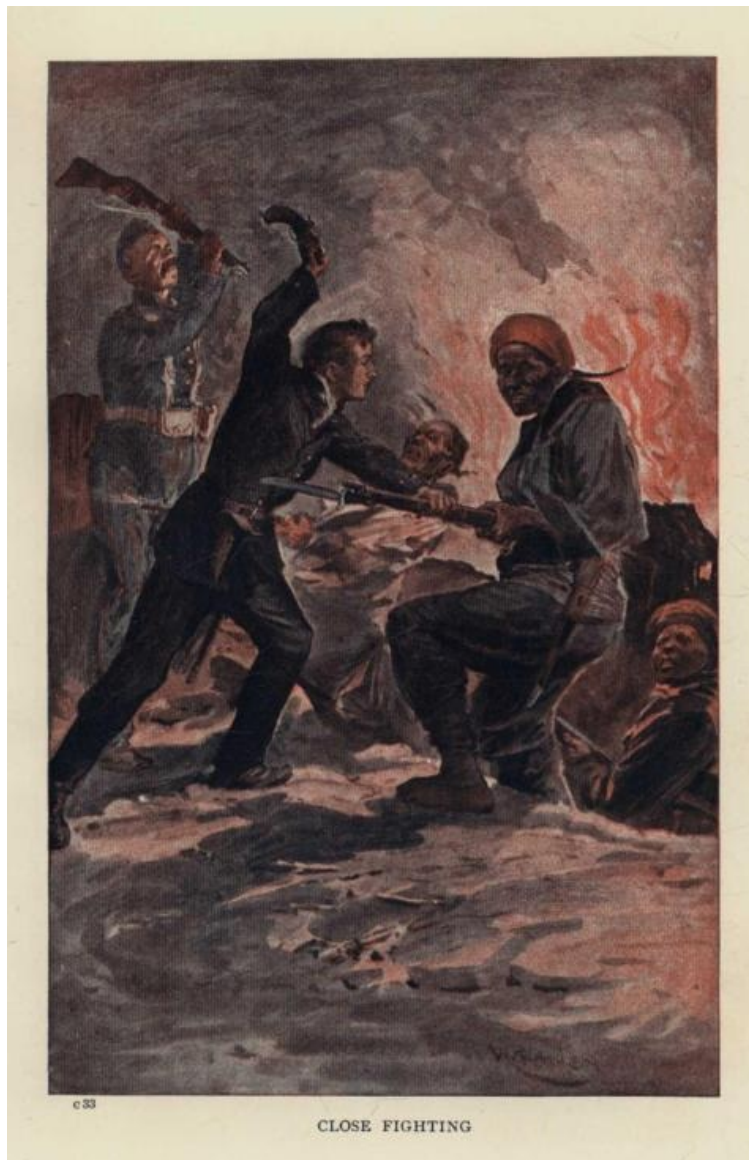
and thinking of running back so fast, simply shoved me along. I wasn't going to let that story get to the Captain and to Mrs. Lester, and my mother and Nan, and all over Upton Overy, without something else tacked on to it.

We crept up to a deserted hut, made a great noise breaking our way through a fence behind it, and were bothered by a lot of beastly dogs rushing at us, till I gave one of them a jolly good "welt" in the head with my boot, and they all ran off yelping. We went scrambling over rough ground, and stumbling over what seemed like heaps of broken crockery, and then we came to a ditch. I was so "mad" angry, that I simply slid straight down into it, and had to swim one or two strokes, and nearly got my feet caught up by weeds; but I didn't care in the least, and only worried lest my revolver cartridges were not water-tight.

Two of the men wouldn't face it, and went along the side to find an easier place, and I never saw them again. At the other side there was a high mud wall, and we skirted along it till it came to an end, and then we suddenly turned a corner and came upon four or five men standing watching the flames. They yelled and fled, and we went after them as hard as we could go; but they were running away from the flames, and were not the men we wanted, so I pulled up, and waited till the marines had got their breath. Right away inland we could hear a lot of rifle-firing and then some volleys.

"That's the Gunnery Lootenant an' 'is little lot, sir," one of the men whispered, and I recognized his voice. It was Martin, one of the sentries in the gunroom "flat". We used to plague the life out of him.

We couldn't see the flames now, only a few sparks rushing up, and thought that the fires must be dying down; but I felt certain that we were right behind them, and that those brutes who had made me run must be close to us now.



CLOSE FIGHTING

I don't quite know why—it may have been because we couldn't see the flames, or because I was wet through and cold again, or because we could hear people running about near us in the dark, without being able to see them—but I forgot all about being so brave, and felt frightened, and was jolly glad when I heard the bugle sound the "close". I wasn't certain which way to go, for I funk'd that ditch, and didn't think we could have found our way back there. Whatever it was, we found ourselves going straight towards the sparks, came up against another wall, turned round the end of it, and then found that that was what had prevented us seeing the flames. They were still making a great light, and in between them and us there was a crowd of Chinamen. We could see their heads showing like black discs, and they were all jabbering together, with their backs to us.

I don't know who started—I didn't—but we all began shouting and charging down at them. They had just time to turn round before we were on top of them. The men let off their rifles, and I pulled the trigger of my revolver, and haven't the least idea whether it went off or not. They must have thought that all the demons in the world were after them, for they opened out and let us through; but directly we had rushed past and came into the light, they saw that we were only five, and came howling after us. Right in front of me a man jumped up with a rifle and let it off almost in my face. He didn't touch me, but probably hit some of his own people, and before he could fire again I had hold of the barrel with one hand, and was banging him in the face with my revolver, though that didn't seem to hurt him. He was just going to pull the rifle out of my hands, when I heard Martin curse and swing his rifle down on his head, and he fell so suddenly that I fell on top of him.

Before I could get up again, someone had thrown himself on top of me, and began clawing hold of my windpipe. I felt my ears beginning to sing; but then he gave a gurgle and a squirm, and his fingers loosened, and as I crawled out I saw Martin trying to pull his bayonet out of him, holding him down with his foot whilst he tugged at the rifle. Before he could get it out, a huge fellow sprang at him with his rifle clubbed. I sang out, and he just managed to turn his head in time, but got an awful blow on his shoulder which knocked him over. The man jumped at him again, but one of the other three marines was on him in a moment, struck at him with his bayonet, and caught him just under the armpit. There was a frightful yell and he fell, and I seized his rifle, pointed it at the crowd, and pulled the trigger. Nothing happened. Hardly knowing what I did, I shot the bolt backwards and forwards and pulled again. The magazine must have been loaded, for it went off then and hit a brute who was running at me, somewhere in the leg. I know that it hit him there, because he stumbled, and sat holding on to it, and I quite well remember thinking that it served him jolly well right. The other three marines were close to me, and Martin scrambled to his feet, trying to twist his bayonet off his rifle to use as a dagger, because one arm was useless. The others were jabbing with their bayonets, springing out, thrusting, and springing back again, and parrying and trying to keep a circle clear. One of them (Tuck) threw up his arms and fell face downwards. I saw his fingers dig into the earth. Then something struck me on the left arm, just as if it had been struck by a wooden hammer, and the Chinaman's rifle fell out of my hands. I stooped down to pick it up, but couldn't—I remember that perfectly.

* * * * *

I don't remember anything more till I woke with a splitting headache, feeling as if I wanted to be sick and couldn't be. It was almost dark. I thought that I'd had a nightmare—I often did, after too much gunroom tinned salmon—and wondered why the lanterns had gone out. You know how you often wake up and think that you are in some strange place, and gradually work things out till they come right again.

That's what I tried to do, but I couldn't fix things, and one eye didn't seem to work, and I wondered why I had my boots and my uniform on, and why it was all so wet. I put out my arm to feel if Jim's hammock was in its place, and then I let out a yell and rolled back pretty quickly.

That yell seemed to blow away the cobwebs, and I lay back and began to make out that I was lying on a funny kind of floor, in a small room with whitewashed walls and a broken-down roof, with straw hanging through the cracks. The walls seemed to be made of bricks and mud, and one had a door in it and a small square opening above it, through which a little light came. Someone close to me began to move, and then sat up, very slowly. It was Martin, the gunroom "flat" sentry, and then I remembered that he had saved me from being choked, and all the things that had happened came back to me all at once.

"Where are we?" I asked.

He gave me a startled look. "Crickey, sir, beggin' your pardon, you does look a awful sight!"

"What's the matter? What's happened?" I felt that it was awkward to talk, my lips felt uncomfortable, and I put my hand up to my face and it felt all raw and swollen. I couldn't see at all if I shut my right eye, so knew that my left one was closed up.

"Kicked you in the face, sir, and dragged you away afore we could stop 'em."

"What!" I said, very alarmed. "The Commander not here? Where am I?"

"I don't exactly know where we be, sir, but them pirate chaps 'ave got 'old of us, and Old Tinker Bill too; 'e was brought in 'ere after us."

Then I saw that there was a bluejacket lying asleep on the other side of him, and he dug him in the ribs—"Ere, wake up, Tinker!" and he sat up growling.

I saw that it was Miller, one of the armourers, and I remembered that he had gone with Mr. Whitmore's party, and I forgot all about worrying about where we were for a second.

"Did we smash that gun?" I cried, and tried to sit up in my excitement, but fell back again pretty quickly—my left arm was so painful every time I tried to move.

Miller yawned and shook his head dolefully: "We never got nowhere near it, sir. Jerusalem!" he gasped, "you do look a fair 'knock-out', sir, that you does."

"Well, tell me. What happened? Did Mr. Rawlings get hurt?"

Then he told me that Mr. Hoffman had guided them all right, but they made a goodish deal of noise themselves, and our party (the Commander's party) had given the alarm too soon, and they simply found themselves running into hundreds of Chinese, and had to fall back again.

"You see, sir, it was like this. We went along all right till those huts began a burnin', but the light from 'em just gave the show away, and let 'em see where to fire. Mr. Rawlings was knocked over, an' a lot more, sir, an' the last as I seed of 'em was going back, very slow, a-carryin' some people, an' stoppin' and firin' back—occasional."

And all the time we had thought how jolly comforting those flames were, and that they might help them to find their way back. I tried to get more from him about Jim, but he didn't know any more, except that there had been a lot of firing, and he had seen him fall, and two men lift him up. But that was enough to make me feel frightfully sad, though I didn't really seem to imagine that it was all quite real; and the pain in my head was so bad, and my arm was so painful, and I was so stiff and cold and cramped all over, that nothing could make me much more miserable, not even knowing that we had been captured by the pirates, or Jim had been badly wounded.

"I fell into a ditch or something," Miller went on, "an lost my way and got be'ind'and, and tried a-takin' a short cut, and something 'it me on the head and fair dazed me, and them ugly devils came up and collared me—came up from be'ind, they did. I never got a chance.

"I've got a bit of a scratch 'ere, sir," and he crawled over to me, and stooped to show me a groove across the top of his head. A bullet must have done it, and the hair was all matted together with blood.

"How did they catch you?" I asked Martin.

"Well, it was like this, sir. I saw 'em a-picking of you up—that not being so difficult, beggin' your pardon—and, not thinking, I slipped along arter you, forgettin' that I'd only got one arm that 'ud work. Well, sir, I got separated from them two others, and had 'em 'eathens all round me, and they got the best of it, sir." He was very gloomy, and lifted his left arm a little way from his side. "Ain't no good, sir! Somethin's broke in my shoulder."

Miller had found a bowl full of water, and that made me remember how thirsty I was, and he knelt down and gave me some too, holding my head up. It was jolly difficult to drink, my lips were so swollen, and a good deal of it ran down my neck, but it was jolly refreshing.

"What's the matter with my arm?" I asked him. "I think it's broken."

He took hold of it very gingerly, whilst I held on to the wrist and jammed my teeth together, and then I saw by the funny way the sleeve bent up halfway above the elbow that it must be broken. I felt the broken ends grate together when he tried to move it. Oh! it was so painful.

He knew something about bandaging and splints, and tore down some of the thin rafters and lashed them on each side of it with his black silk handkerchief, and that made it more comfortable, and I managed to get on my feet. I felt an awful wreck, and was as weak as a mouse.

We were all plastered with mud and green slime, and were wet and horrid. I had lost one of my gaiters and my cap, and my revolver, lanyard, and cartridge belt were gone; but I didn't really worry, because I felt too ill, and my head throbbed so much that I had to lie down again, and it was impossible to think properly, because everything was going round and round inside it.

There was a noise on the outside of that door, and it opened very slowly, whilst we all stared at it, and a Chinaman put his head very slowly in, looked at us, saw me turn to look at him, drew it back again, and shut the door. I suppose he must have heard us talking. I think that I must

have gone to sleep after this, because the next I remember was a tall, gloomy-looking man standing over me. "You're an officer, aren't you?" he asked me, and I told him that I was a midshipman.

"Come down with me," he said, and helped me to my feet, and supported me down a spiral wooden staircase.

He got me into a room below, which was fitted up with European furniture—a writing-table, some cane easy chairs, and a camp bed. He made me sit down, and began pacing up and down the room. There was a clock on the table, and I saw that it was nearly midday. He went on pacing backwards and forwards, and I wondered whether he was the Englishman who had stolen Mr. Hoffman's yacht. I hadn't the least idea what was going to happen. Then he took down a shaving glass and held it in front of me.

My aunt! I was a sight, if you like. All the left side of my forehead and face was black and blue, and my left eye was quite shut up, and my upper lip was tremendously swollen and cut. No wonder that Miller and Martin had been surprised when they saw me.

He smiled grimly, put the glass down, and just then a Chinese servant came in and spoke to him.

"I have some food ready for you; come and take some, it will do you good," he said, and led me into the next room, where there was a big bowl of hot soup. The sight of it made me feel ill; but I swallowed a little, and found that it was doing me good, and managed to get through it all. It was jolly painful to put the spoon in my mouth.

He told me that he had sent some food up to Martin and Miller, and that an old native who "doctored" for him was coming soon.

He seemed strangely worried, and couldn't sit still. I should think that quite a dozen Chinamen must have come in whilst I was getting through that soup and soaking bread in it. They all seemed very excited when they saw me. Most of them scowled at me. Several of them were plump, prosperous-looking men, jolly well dressed, but others looked more like soldiers or sailors, great bony, leather-skinned, fierce-looking fellows. He seemed to have trouble with them, and once or twice spoke very angrily. I noticed, too, that whenever any of them came in, he put his hand to his pocket. I think, from the bulge, that he had a revolver there.

He didn't look in the least fierce, except when he was angry—not at all like a man who could have done all those wicked things—and I began wondering whether he could really be the man everyone had been cursing. I suddenly thought of Mr. Travers, and blurted out, "We've got Mr. Travers back—that lieutenant you caught"—and, like the conceited ass I am, said, "I found him."

"I know," he said bitterly; "I never wanted to take him along; it was either killing him or taking him prisoner, just as it was with you and those two men. He fought like a demon, simply threw himself on us, and had a revolver, too. I had to knock him on the head and take him along. You'd better not let those people you've just seen know that you were the one who found him. They've vowed to torture every one of those junks' crews who fall into their hands."

I wished then that I hadn't spoken.

He began working himself into a passion, and his face did look wicked. He was tall and lean and very good looking, and he clenched his fists, and jerked his arms about, and began cursing everyone—Captain Lester, the Admiral, Mr. Hoffman, himself, and Mr. Hobbs.

"How are they? How's Sally?" I asked; but he didn't seem to hear the first time, and raved about his cursed bad luck. Presently I asked again.

"I wish to heavens I'd never set eyes on either of them."

"Why don't you send them back to us?" I asked.

"Send 'em back? I daren't; my life isn't worth an hour's purchase now, and they'd never let me. They'd kill them first, and me too. I don't run this show—not really; it's run by some of those Chinese mandarins—two or three of those who've just been in here. They think that as long as Hobbs and his daughter are in their hands they can get their ransom, and that your old fool bull dog of a Skipper don't dare touch them. They want me to marry the girl—to make it more certain."

"We thought that you were trying to marry her," I said stupidly.

"That's nothing to do with it—nothing to do with you," he jerked out very fiercely.

"If your fool Captain will run his head up against us, I shall have to marry her to save her life and mine too."

"That's what those fat, oily-looking beasts want to do, and want me to do; and those other bloodthirsty rascals want to cut their throats and have done with them, say they've only brought us trouble, and wish to get back to their old established pirate business," he added, sneering.

"I've got them in the only strong walled house in the town, and I've got a hundred of my best men to guard them, but I can't trust 'em."

"If I'm caught I hang," he began shouting—I really thought that he'd forgotten me—"and if she knows that it will save my life, I believe she will marry me. If things go wrong I go, and directly I go, you all go—Hobbs and all of you, and the poor girl too" (he clenched his hands across his forehead). "We've the scum of the Yangste here. They'd cut my throat for a cent if I left off being useful to them, and they'll cut all your throats for pure devilment."

He sank down on a chair and stared in front of him.

I had dropped my spoon and was very frightened.

A man came running in with a letter, talking very fast. He gave a horrid smile when he had read it. "It's from your fool Captain. Wants to know whether you're alive, and says if any harm comes to you, he'll do I don't know what."

"Go back upstairs and don't move till I tell you," and he sat down at the writing-table.

"Please tell the Captain that I'm well, all but my arm, and that it was my fault that I was captured, not the Commander's," I asked him, because I had been worrying about that all the time, and knew that the Commander must have had an awful time with Captain Lester, and that that would be unfair. I knew jolly well that I'd made an ass of myself, and made things worse and more difficult for everyone by getting myself and Martin taken prisoners.

He nodded grimly.

"Do tell me whether they all got away safely last night?" I blurted out.

"They left one marine dead, no one else." He began to work himself into a passion again. "My men almost got out of hand last night—I'd a hard job to keep them back—and if that old fool of yours lands again I shall lose all control over them. He won't believe what I wrote to him, so I'm going to write it stronger this time. If he comes lumbering along here they'll all see 'red', and kill every white man they can get hold of—and woman." Then he suddenly came across and gripped my shoulder. "A thousand years ago—eight hundred years ago—a girl wouldn't marry a man unless he did something to win her—sacked a town and carried her off. Now they want flowers, and chocolates, and candies, and pretty speeches—ugh!"

Then he grew calmer.

"Go along up now—Ford your name is, I see—and wait till dusk. I'll try and get you all over to that walled house. It's your only chance."

I was just going, when he called out, "In case anything happens, you had better take this," and he opened a drawer and pulled out a revolver and a couple of packets of ammunition. "They say it's easier to die fighting," and he turned his back on me.

Feeling very frightened, and not quite understanding what he'd been talking about, I crawled upstairs, the Chinaman outside the door scowled at me, opened it and shut it after me, and I heard him swing the big wooden bar into its hole.

Martin and Miller were asleep—they evidently had had a jolly good meal—and presently a funny, jovial, fat old Chinaman came along and looked at my arm. He took my coat off and cut the sleeve of my flannel shirt, and the arm was a most horrid sight, absolutely all mottled purple from the elbow to the shoulder. He showed me two tiny holes, made a "poof" noise with his lips, darted his finger as if it was a bullet, and nodded at me kindly. Then I knew that it was a bullet that had broken the bone. He put on cotton wool and proper splints and proper bandages, and slung the arm up to my side and across my chest, under my shirt, and helped me on with my monkey jacket, and sewed my sleeve to the side. Really the old chap made me very comfortable.

He woke the others too, and did Martin's arm—the collar bone was broken—and cleaned Miller's head, and then went away, apparently quite honoured at being able to show his skill. I quite loved the old chap, and he made me so comfortable that I lay down, and when my head was quite still it did not throb so much, and I got in a jolly good sleep.

I woke and found the room quite dark, and Miller and Martin both snoring. My head was quite clear now, and I felt much stronger, groped about, and managed to get hold of that bowl of water, drank a little, and then propped myself up against the wall and wondered when that Englishman was going to take us away to Mr. Hobbs and Sally. It was so exciting to think that I should see them soon, that I really forgot that we were prisoners for some time; but then, after waiting and waiting, and hearing nothing except those snores, I began to feel frightened and miserable. I could think now without my head burning inside, and then I thought how I had muddled up all Captain Lester's plans, and "washed out" all that I had done for him. If I had only been man enough not to have minded Captain Marshall's chaff, I shouldn't be here, with my arm broken and a prisoner, and with Martin too; and I was so wretched, that I wished that I had been

killed instead of Tuck, that marine whom I had seen fall and dig his nails into the ground. After all I had been longing to do, it had simply come to this, and I snivelled a little, in the dark, for there seemed to be nothing more worth living for.

Presently there was a loud boom a long way off, and almost directly afterwards, the sound of a very big shell bursting. That wasn't very near either, but I knew jolly well that nothing could make that noise except one of the *Vigilant's* eight-inch guns, and I could feel my head throbbing inside again with excitement, and wondered what was happening. Then more came, and other smaller ones, from quite a different direction. I had seen an opening in the wall—you couldn't call it a window—just outside the door, and I thought that perhaps the Chinaman would let me look out; so I groped round until I felt the door, and rapped on it with my knuckles. They didn't make much noise, and I kicked it with my feet, and then listened to hear if anyone moved; but there wasn't a sound.

I tried to shake the door, and it seemed to "give" towards me, and then to stick in the frame—I felt certain that the wooden beam was not in place—but I couldn't make it budge any more. I woke Miller, and he came across and got his fingers in a crack and pulled, and the door creaked and opened, almost knocking me down. We peered through the darkness and listened, and presently I could hear a clock ticking—it was that old clock I had seen in the Englishman's room.

"I'm going down," I whispered to Miller. "Help me off with my boots."

I got them off, felt that the revolver was still in my pocket, and began creeping down that spiral staircase, keeping to the outside and feeling the wall with my one hand. Every step creaked most horribly, and I waited, trembling, each time, but nothing happened, and then I had turned the corner and saw the bottom, and that some lamplight was coming out of that room.

"Are you all right, sir?" I heard Miller whisper; and I whispered back and felt braver, and got out the revolver and crept down. I couldn't hear the clock, because my heart was beating so horridly, but I got down to the door and looked in. There was a lamp burning on the writing-table, but not a soul there, and I went through, very softly, into the room where I had had that soup, and there was another lamp burning there, and any amount of food on the table. It looked as if someone had only just finished a meal—a book and a fork were lying on the floor, and the chair had been upset.

There was a dark place beyond, with a flickering light in it, as if a fire was burning; but I wasn't plucky enough to go in there, ran back to the foot of the stairs, and could just see Miller's scared face looking down. I beckoned to him to come down, and he did so, making an awful noise, and Martin came too. They got hold of one of the lamps, and I didn't mind going into the kitchen place then. It was quite empty; there was no one there. A funny-looking kettle hung over a small wooden fire, on a big flat stone, and was singing very quietly, and there was a saucepan full of cooked potatoes. They were quite warm, and I seized one and began to eat it. It was jolly good.

Miller and Martin were so hungry, that they forgot everything else, and ran back to the table and began "wolfing" food.

I had never thought of escape till now; but it flashed across me that perhaps we could get away, and I went back to the foot of the stairs and followed a long passage, towards where I felt some cold air, and suddenly came to an open door, and put my head out.

You know what happens when you open the door of a rabbit hutch, and the rabbits come and pop their heads out, and swizzle their noses and blink their eyes, and look as if they didn't believe it, and run back again? Well, that was exactly how I felt and what I did. I ran back to Martin and Miller and told them, and they left off eating and came along with me, and we all three looked out.

It was quite dark, except for some stars overhead, and it seemed to be a small courtyard. We stepped out very gingerly—I had my revolver in my hand again—and we searched round, and found a high wall all round, and a very big door all studded with iron bolt heads, and with several thick beams across it.

We couldn't hear any noise near us, but there was a funny murmuring, buzzing sound some way off, and just like the sound of the mob at Tinghai that night of the fire, and far away we could hear big guns, and shells bursting.

"That's our old eight-inch, sir," Miller whispered, as one especially loud report shook the door. "I expects the old man—beggin' your pardon, sir, Captain Lester—is coming along to look for us." The smaller noises, right in the other direction, he said was probably the *Ringdove* and the *Oh-my-eye* on the other side of the island (the bluejackets called the *Omaha* the *Oh-my-eye*). We couldn't really quite understand why they were firing, but it was jolly comforting for all that.

I wondered what had become of the Englishman and the Chinaman who had been guarding

us, and the servant, and wished he would come back to take us to that house on the hill. Now that I had a revolver, I thought that I might still be some use in defending Sally, if once I got there.

I slipped back into the house to see if perhaps he was lying down on the bed and I hadn't noticed him, but he wasn't. The clock showed a quarter past eight, and I knew that it must have been dark for more than an hour, and felt frightened. The noise of the mob seemed to be getting louder and nearer too, and I ran back to Miller and Martin, who were still near the gateway.

Just as I got to them we heard some feet pattering along the street outside, and then more and more, and they stopped outside it and began pressing against the gateway, and then began banging at it with something hard.

The bangs seemed to go right through me. I was awfully frightened.

More people came rushing along; there was a fearful din outside; we heard something scrape against the wall, and someone scrambling up. I looked up and saw a man's head just above me. He was crawling over the top, and was just getting his legs over. I let my revolver off and he dropped back again, though I don't think he was hit, and the crowd began yelling like mad.

A rifle went off, the door splintered, and something flew past me. Martin pulled me to one side. "Keep out of the way, sir;" and the two of them hunted round for some piece of wood or other, and came back with some thick sticks. Stones began dropping over, and we crouched under the wall to dodge them. They came in hundreds all over the courtyard, and knocking up against the house. There was a terrific crash against the great gates, and they sounded as if they were giving way.

"We'll be scuppered, sir," Martin groaned.

"Run for the house," I whispered; and we rushed back. One stone nearly hit me, and I heard a thud and Miller cursing; but we all got inside and slammed the door, and fumbled about to find the bolts.

"Go and get a lamp, sir," Miller shouted hoarsely—Martin was too frightened to do anything except get in our way—and I darted off.

As I ran along the passage I heard my name shouted, "Mr. Ford, Mr. Ford! Where are you?" and a short, grey-bearded European came rushing out of the kitchen place. I thought at first that it was the Englishman, but it wasn't.

"Show us how to bar the door," I cried, and he came running with me.

"Quick, mon, quick! Bar it up—that way; there's the lock—not that way," and he shoved Miller aside and shot the bolts in.

I was too frightened to ask him who he was, and even to remember that I hadn't any boots; but Miller sprang up the stairs and brought them down. The man, whoever he was, wouldn't let me put them on, so Miller tied the laces together and hung them over my neck.

"Follow me!" the Scotchman yelled impatiently—I knew he was Scotch by his accent—and we ran through the sitting-room to the kitchen, and then we crept through a narrow door. He disappeared into the house, but came back, and I saw him shove a big key into his pocket.

"Be varry careful," he whispered, and we groped our way down some irregular stone steps. We could hear them still banging away at the courtyard door. I kept on bruising my feet and toes in the cracks, and stumbling, but the old Scotchman always seemed to keep me from falling; and at last we seemed to be at the bottom, and near some water—I could hear it lapping against the stones. "Hush!" he whispered, and bent down, stretched out his hand, got hold of a rope, began hauling it in, and a native boat came sliding up, out of the dark.

"Get in—quick!" he whispered, and we all stumbled in, one after the other, and he jumped in after us. Right above us I could see two lighted windows, and knew they were those two rooms, and as he shoved off we heard a splintering sound—the big door had given way—and heard the mob rushing across the courtyard, yelling in the most fearful manner, and begin banging at the house door.

I had hurt my arm again getting into the boat, and the pain of it must have numbed me, because I quite well remember that I wasn't so frightened then as I ought to have been.

We could just see the strange man standing up in the stern, swaying from side to side, and working a scull as the boat wriggled through the water.

"It's about twa hours afore high water, and we've the flood wi' us, the Lord be praised!" he whispered. "Keep down oot o' sight," and we tried to squirm down into the bottom of the boat below the gunwales.

He stopped and stooped down, and we saw that he was putting on some kind of a Chinaman's coat and a native cap.

Then he went on again.

CHAPTER XIII

Mr. Ching to the Rescue

Just in Time—Too Late!—In Hiding—Mr. Ching Arrives—Death of Mr. Hoffman—The Attack on the House—The Vigilant Signals—The Fog Increases—Searching for Rifles—Ford finds the Ammunition—Ford Saves the Situation—Waiting for Daybreak

Written by Midshipman Ford

We went wriggling along through the dark, and presently began to pass between junks—heaps of them. You could see nothing but their tall leaning masts sticking up like slate pencils. We dodged in and out, and sometimes a voice would sing out from one of them, and we would huddle down in the bottom of the boat, whilst the Scotchman replied in what I suppose was Chinese, and pushed on.

We must have gone like this for nearly twenty minutes, I should imagine, and then he stopped to take a breath.

"Who are you? Where are you taking us?" I whispered; but he didn't answer, and, changing his hands, went on pushing the scull from side to side very vigorously, but stopped a minute or two later and looked behind us, where we could all at once see a great red glow, which showed up the junks we had just passed.

"They've set a light to the boss's hoose," he whispered; "they'll be after seeking the little lass the noo." And he worked harder and harder, and the shadows got darker and the water more narrow, and I knew that we were getting under some high land, and wondered whether we really were being taken to that house on the hill. Up over our heads we could hear a lot of talking and wrangling, and suddenly a rifle went off, and then another, and we could hear cries, and presently all was quiet again.

My heart was simply thumping against my side.

"God grant we be in time," I heard him say to himself; and he stopped sculling for a second, peered through the darkness, and then shot the boat in till it rasped against some stones.

"Get oot!" he whispered. "Doan't talk a word, and jest follow me."

We got ashore as quickly as we could. He had a piece of rope in his hand, and made us all take hold of it, and we followed him along a steep path. We hadn't gone ten yards when there were more rifle shots and more yells.

"The Lord be praised! they're still shooting 'em," he said, and hurried along all the faster. I could hardly keep up, and the stones hurt my feet.

We seemed to be making a long curve away from the noises and the water, and he kept on losing the path, and we had to shove our way between high bushes, which scratched us; but then we turned to our right, and could see the top of a high wall right in front of us.

He broke into a run, we dropped the rope, and ran after him up to a small door. He fumbled for a moment with the lock, it opened, we crept in, and he shut it again.

We were in a garden place now, pitch dark, and he led us across it underneath some trees with low branches. The noise of rifles seemed to be right in front of us, and we came to the walls of a house with not a light showing. He knocked at a door; nothing happened. We rushed round to the other side to a smaller one; he tried his key again, and it opened, and an old Chinese woman with a tiny lamp in her hand, and her mouth open with fright, was looking down at us.

The Scotchman turned to me. "Go in there; Hobbs and his lassie are there. Get them here in two minutes; I'll be back then. We must get them away. Quick, for God's sake, boy!" and he disappeared.

I went in, and heard Sally's voice singing out—very frightened and very sad, it seemed, "Who's that? Is it Captain Evans?"

"Midshipman Ford of the *Vigilant*," I called out, not knowing the least who Captain Evans was. "We've come to take you away." My aunt! I was proud then; for it suddenly struck me that, after all, I should be able to do something for Captain Lester. Everything had really seemed to

work out right, and I expected Sally to come tearing down, and was jolly glad that there wasn't enough light for her to see me; but instead, I heard a sob and then a fall, and guessed what had happened.

The old woman brought her light, and I saw that she was lying all in a heap. I hadn't the least idea what to do. "What d'you do for a faint, Miller?" I asked. "You've been through 'first aid.'" I was frightened again, and didn't know what to do; but the old Scotchman came rushing into the house, picked her up, took her into another room, and shook her. Miller had got hold of some water and shoved it over her head, and she tried to sit up.

"Where's Hobbs? Where's your father?" he called to her loudly; and she pointed through another door. And we found the little man lying in bed, looking ghastly; he looked an absolute skeleton.

He began to curse the Scotchman, but I stepped between them. "I'm Midshipman Ford of the *Vigilant*, sir, come to fetch you and Miss Hobbs. You must come immediately; these are two of my men."

I must say that we didn't look very respectable, but we were good enough for him, and he crawled out of bed and began to dress.

"I'm too weak to walk much, but reckon I'll do it if it ain't far. You've been a tarnation long while finding us," he grumbled.

I don't think that I liked him very much.

All this time the noise outside was awful—rifles firing, crowds of people yelling—and stones began to patter against the shutters. The old Scotchman couldn't wait any longer, wrapped the little man in a long Chinese coat, lifted him off his feet, told Miller to bring Sally along, and ran out of the house. "So long as the boss's people keep firing, it's all right," he told me; and then I saw Miller lift Sally in his arms, in spite of her struggles, and we all followed, stones flying past our heads and rebounding from the walls. We went across the garden under those trees, and made our way back to that small door. The Scotchman put Mr. Hobbs on his feet, and I heard him trying to get the key in the lock; but just as he was going to open it, there was the sound of a whole lot of people running towards it, and they threw their shoulders against it and began talking very softly.

I was very frightened again, and I heard the Scotchman moan: "Too late! We're done for!" and we all fled back to the house.

The front of it was now all lighted up with a red glare, showing above the top of the wall.

"They're setting fire to the huts," he cried; "go up to the top room. Take them up there, bar the door at the front, and block it up with tables—anything." And he rushed off, came back for his revolver, which he had given to Martin, and disappeared.

"Guess Sally Hobbs ain't a ten-cent doll," I heard her sob. "You can put me down right away." She led us along some passages, up some steps, and then to the foot of a ladder. The little man got up it like a monkey, and she followed him.

"Draw it up, and let it down when you hear us call," I sang out; and then we went back and began to pull along tables and benches and boxes, everything we could find, and piled them up behind the door in the front of the house. Before we had finished, the Scotchman came running up with his hands over his head. "We're fair lost! God be merciful to us! The boss's men want to know where he is, and won't hold out many more minutes unless he turns up. They want to open the gates; say they'll get their throats cut if they don't. Jorgensen has been killed—down in the town—two hours ago—down by that six-inch gun."

"Can't you do anything?" I asked quickly.

"No, mon, they hate me; and I fear they've killed the boss, and no one else can keep them in hand. They're all round us, and they've tasted blood, and the mandarins themselves couldn't stop them.

"Hark!" he said, "they're beating down the little door in the garden wall. Oh, God, they'll be right here in a moment!"

I was in an awful funk, though not for myself, I think, but more because of Sally. When one isn't in a funk for oneself it is easier to keep one's head. I don't think that Miller or myself cared a scrap what happened to us, so long as we could keep Sally safe. The Scotchman told us to bring any heavy things we could find to block up the door at the back, and then ran off and brought some rifles and bandoliers.

We bolted the door and piled everything we could find against it, and then ran round, barring the shutters. We didn't need any lamp, because the red glare streamed through the cracks and lighted up the whole place. The old woman had disappeared. Then we picked up the rifles and

bandoliers, and he led us to the ladder, Sally crying out and lowering it. We all swarmed up and drew it after us.

The room was a small square place, with stone walls and narrow openings—you could hardly call them windows—in each wall. They were closed with iron shutters, and the one looking over the front was open, and the whole place was lighted up. The Scotchman and I looked out, and it was a most awesome sight.

Down below, about twenty yards from the foot of the house, was the wall and the big gateway, and behind it were the Englishman's men, stooping down to load and then popping up and firing. They seemed to be standing on some kind of platform or ledge, and were not taking the trouble to aim.

Out beyond there were flames pouring up from half a dozen huts, and we could hardly hear their noise because of the fearful shouts and yells from a dense crowd of people in between us and them.

They must have seen our faces in the light of the fires, for they yelled more loudly than ever, and we could see them bending down and then throwing stones at us. Stones began clattering against the outside wall all round us, and one came flying into the room, and I heard Sally sob with fright. We drew in our heads and closed the shutter, but before I drew in mine I am certain that I saw one of the Chinamen inside the wall point his rifle at us and fire. The room was almost dark now, except for one streak of light which came through a gap at one edge of the shutter, and just made light enough for us to see each other. Mr. Hobbs was lying full length on the floor near a wall, and Sally was lying down too, with her head on his chest, and moaning. I did wish she would leave off, because it made us all so much more frightened.

Directly we had closed the shutter, stones began clattering against it—and, I'm certain, some bullets too—and we heard a rush, and the mob charged the big gateway.

We could still hear the ships firing. "My God, I wish they'd come!" I heard Miller mutter; and that was what I had been praying all the time.

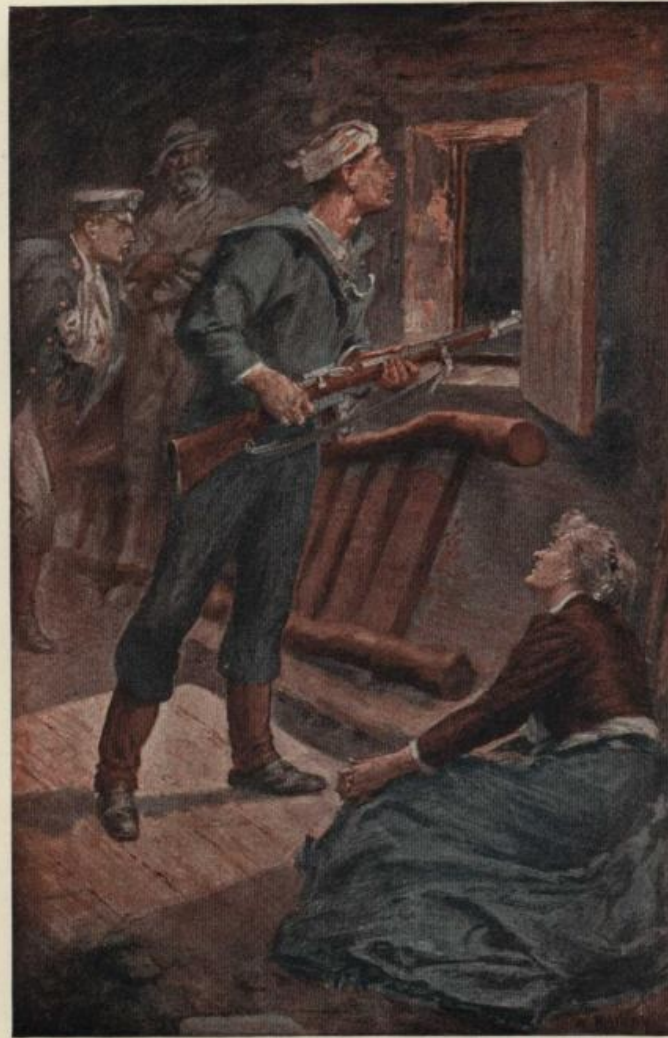
The noise at the back of the garden seemed to have stopped; but the firing from the wall was easing down too, and the Scotchman groaned out, "They're going to leave us;" and Sally, who seemed almost "off her head", kept on moaning, "Why doesn't Captain Evans come?"

I felt that I should go mad in a minute if I didn't do something. Miller must have thought the same. "It's no use sitting 'ere to get killed, sir. Can't we do something? Can't we fire at them? We've got three rifles." But the Scotchman wouldn't let us open the shutter.

"Keep still, mon; they haven't all left us yet," and we could still hear a few rifles firing from inside the wall.

Just for something to do, I began pulling on my boots—they were still tied round my neck with the laces—and it was awfully hard work with only one hand, and they were all sodden and stiff; but Miller helped me. We had just finished, when suddenly there was a rush of feet underneath us at the back of the house, and a furious battering noise on the shutters.

"They've broken in!" the Scotchman groaned, and Sally shrieked and buried her head in her lap. Miller seized a rifle and jumped across, pushed her out of the way, opened the shutter at the back, and leant out. I saw him load it, and he was just going to fire, when there were cries of "Sally! Sally! Open the door!" and more hammering.



"HE WAS JUST GOING TO FIRE"

"HE WAS JUST GOING TO FIRE"

We jumped to our feet. Sally shrieked that it was Captain Evans come to save her, Miller roared "Who's there?" and we heard someone sing out, "Who are you? Is Sally safe?"

I knew the voice; it was Mr. Ching's, the Lieutenant on board the *Huan Min*. I forgot all about my arm, and jumped over to where Miller was. "Get out of the way!" I cried, and yelled down, "Midshipman Ford of the *Vigilant*. There are six of us up here, and Miss Hobbs is all right."

"Come down and let me in."

"Right you are, sir!" I shouted, and drew in my head.

"Isn't it Captain Evans?" Sally asked me.

"No. Mr. Ching of the *Huan Min*"

She moaned and began crying again.

We lowered the ladder and scrambled down, pulled the things away from the door at the back, and opened it, and there was Mr. Ching and twenty or thirty of his men, all crowding round.

I could only say, "Thank you very much, sir," and should have blubbed if I'd tried to say any more.

"Hoffman brought us, showed us a path up from the water. He's gone to try and keep order. Can she come away at once?"

I don't know what I was going to say. It didn't make any difference, because the noise at the other side of the house suddenly grew fearfully loud, and we heard the gates give way and swing back with a crash, and the mob rush through with frightful yells of triumph. Mr. Ching gave an order, and ran round to the front of the house, and I found myself following him with Miller behind me.

Some more men joined him at the corner, and then we came out into the glare and saw the bright gap in the dark wall made by the gates being open, and a mob sweeping up to the house.

They had torches and blazing tufts of straw on poles. A few of the Chinamen inside the wall were trying to keep them back, but I could see most of them dropping over the wall outside.

Mr. Ching's people fired a volley into the mob, and then another, and some shots came from the room I'd just left—the Scotchman and Martin firing, I expect.

The mob didn't seem to have expected any resistance, and stopped and left off shouting. I could see many of them throw their hands up and fall, and there were shrieks and screams, the blazing bits of straw fell on the ground and were trampled out, and they began to fly back through the gateway.

I was swept along with Mr. Ching's men, and found myself in the gateway. Some of them were swinging back one side of it, and pulling aside bodies which were in the way.

Someone was trying to crawl away as the big gate swung towards him. It was Mr. Hoffman. I could see him well, and just managed to pull his legs clear as it swung to. He didn't recognize me.

"You hurt, sir?" I asked him.

"Shot through the chest; get me into a corner. Is Sally safe?"

Miller was nowhere to be seen, and I couldn't make any of the *Huan Min's* bluejackets understand. They were too excited.

"Try and get hold of me; get hold of my coat."

He grabbed at my left side; I gave a yell with the pain of it. "Not that side; the other, sir," and he got his fingers into the slit of my other pocket and drew himself on his knees, spitting blood out of his mouth and coughing.

Supporting himself like that, and with the other hand on the ground, he managed to crawl back to the house and then rolled on his back.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"I'm Ford of the *Vigilant*."

"Thank God you are safe! I'm dying. Bring Sally to me;" and he coughed again.

"It's not safe for her here; I'll try and get you round to the back."

I heard my name called, and ran towards the gate, and there was Mr. Ching looking for me. "Where is Hoffman? Are you all ready to start? We can keep them off for a time," he panted.

I pointed to where Mr. Hoffman was lying. "He's shot through the chest. He's dying. He can't move."

Mr. Ching groaned. "We shall have to stay here till daylight. I can never find my way back without him."

I forgot about the Scotchman.

The last of his bluejackets rushed back through the gate, the other half were swung across, and we were in darkness again, except for the glare over the top of the wall. Bullets were now spattering against the front of the house, and bits of plaster were trickling down, and we knew that the Chinamen from inside must have joined the mob. Mr. Ching rushed off to place his men round the wall, and I went back to Mr. Hoffman. He was trying to pull himself up against the side of the house, and I gave him my right shoulder to lean upon, and we got round to the back like that and to the door; but he couldn't drag himself over the boxes and piles of things heaped there, and lay down with his head on the stone slab, half in and half out of the door.

"Get me some water and bring Sally," he whispered. "I'm finished. God have mercy on me!"

I couldn't see his face—it was so dark—but his voice sounded awful.

I was trembling all over, and scrambled in and called out for Sally. I forgot to call her Miss Hobbs.

She was still in that small room, and I heard her crawling across the floor. I heard the Scotchman and Martin firing out of the window too.

"What is it?" she asked in a scared voice. "Are we safe? Has Captain Evans come?"

"Come down with me. Mr. Hoffman's dying, and wants to see you."

She wouldn't come for some time; and when she did come she was trembling all over, and I had to steady her with my right arm along the passage.

We found a tin with some water in it, and I took her to Mr. Hoffman, where we could just see him lying.

"Thank God!" I heard him whisper, when she bent over him.

I went away, wanting to cry.

Then I suddenly remembered that the Scotchman could guide us down to the water, and ran off to find Mr. Ching, but couldn't.

Miller appeared from somewhere.

"That old Scotchman could guide us back," I said. "Where's Mr. Ching?"

"That ain't no good, sir," he said. "They're all round us now, 'undreds and 'undreds of 'em, an' 'e's got only fifty men with 'im." Then I noticed that bullets were coming from the back of the house as well, and heard furious firing near the little gate by which we had entered.

"That Chinese Lootenant is over there now, sir."

I went across for him, but couldn't find him. His people were outside the little doorway, firing into the dark, and he must have been there too, and I didn't dare to go out. I couldn't see a yard in front of me.

I think I must have been too absolutely "done up" then to do anything more, and I really forget what I did and what happened. I know that I sat down on a stone somewhere near that small doorway, and rested my head on my knees, and squeezed my left arm to change the pain of it. I know that rifles were going oft all round me, and people were shrieking and yelling, and sometimes I heard Miller's voice shouting; but everything seemed to buzz round in my head, and nothing seemed to matter in the least.

I rather fancy that my idea was to wait there till Mr. Ching came back, and tell him about the Scotchman.

I was roused by hearing the door slammed and being nearly knocked over. Mr. Ching saw me. "Get along back to the house," he gasped—his face was streaming with blood—"I can't hold the walls any longer. I have not enough men;" and he more or less lifted me to my feet and gave me a push, and I went staggering along with my legs giving way under me.

I remember seeing Mr. Hoffman lying flat on his back, with his face turned up and his eyes looking at me, and remember speaking to him; but he didn't answer. Sally wasn't there either, and I stepped across him, and somehow or other found myself stumbling up the ladder into that room, and heard Sally sobbing in a corner. I was shivering, and my teeth were chattering, and that horrid sick feeling came on again.

Just as I got to the bottom of the ladder a stream of fire shot up across one of the windows, and I heard a rushing noise, as if it were a rocket; but I didn't take any notice of it, for everything seemed to be going round and round. People crowded up after me, and pushed me aside, and began firing out of the windows, and the room felt stuffy and full of powder smoke. Sometimes someone would give a cry, and once someone fell across my legs, and I tried to pull them from under him, but couldn't, and let them stop there, and remember that the weight was pulled away presently, and I was pushed nearer the wall, and someone gave me some water.

* * * * *

The next I remember was recognizing Miller's voice; it sounded muffled and cotton-woolly and very far away. He was saying: "The Chinese Lootenant wants to know if you can take in Morse[#], sir. The *Vigilant* is signalling. We fired a rocket an hour ago to let 'em know that the *Huan Min's* men were 'ere, an' we've been tryin' to take in their signal."

[#] Morse code for signalling at night by means of long and short flashes of a lamp.

"I can't take in flashing lamp," I told him, trying to make my brain work.

"It ain't flashing lamp, sir; they're adoin' it with a searchlight, and very very slow, sir, an' the Chineese signalman what came along with 'im, sir, is dead, sir. You'll 'ave to come along pretty quick too, sir; there's a 'orrid fog been shuttin' everythin' out ever since, but it's just cleared off for a time. The wind's gone round to the south, and it 'as been as thick as pea soup."

I told him that I would try, and got him to help me up. I knew that I could read it if it was slow enough, and my brain would only remember properly. We had to go to the other end of the house, and I don't know how Miller got me down that ladder. I know that I slipped and was caught at the bottom, and my left arm was wrenched again. The pain seemed to wake me up, but I had to grind my teeth and sing out.

Miller helped me along the passage and made me stoop down when we passed a window, because the shutters had been thrown back and men were standing at them firing out, and sometimes bullets were coming in.

"How are we getting on?" I asked him.

"Pretty middlin', sir. We've only had about three killed and two or three wounded, and we can keep the skunks out of it when we can see them, which we can't always do on account of this 'ere blessed fog."

He helped me up some steps, and then up a short ladder. Someone hauled me out of a small

square opening, and I saw that there was nothing but fog all round drifting slowly past. I heard Mr. Ching's voice: "Can you take in Morse? I've forgotten it, and my signalman is dead—shot half an hour ago;" and he pointed to a huddled-up figure beside him. "They've been trying to signal through the fog ever since I fired that rocket, and he got one or two words, but it's been too thick till now. They're just starting again."

I did my best to pull myself together, and asked him where the *Vigilant* was, and followed his finger, pointing through the mist, and suddenly saw a very faint searchlight beam sticking straight up.

"Don't stand up; kneel down," he whispered. "They are firing at us." So I knelt down very quickly. Just seeing that beam made me buck up, and I watched it very steadily. I had only just knelt down in time, for a bullet came flying past, and made me crouch still lower.

Then the beam began to wag very slowly—long sweeps down to the ground for "longs", and short ones only half-way for "shorts".

"Get your knife and scratch 'longs' and 'shorts' on a tile as I sing them out," I told Miller, and heard him do it.

This is what I took in: "... rst ... tenant to Lieutenant Ching (full stop). Captain landed with one hundred and fifty men two hours ago (full stop). Afraid dense fog has de—" Then the beam disappeared as a thicker bank of fog rolled across; but it was grand news, and I wanted to cheer for joy, and kept my eye fixed on the same spot, and presently the beam showed again, and I spelt out: "rocket if Midshipman Ford, Armourer's Mate Miller, Private of Marines Martin is with you."

"They want another rocket fired, sir," I told him.

"I haven't any more rockets," Mr. Ching said. "We only brought one; the others were left in the boats by accident."

The beam started again. "First Lieutenant to Lieutenant Ching (full stop). Captain has—" They were repeating the signal, but then the beam disappeared entirely, and we could see a white wall of fog creeping along the ground, and even swallowing up the trees underneath us.

"They ought to be here soon," Mr. Ching said, "if only they can find their way."

He sent a man round with the news, and we could hear his bluejackets making a funny cheering noise.

I felt ever so much better, and simply being able to take in that signal, and be of a little use, cheered me up wonderfully. It was so grand to know that the Captain had landed with so many men and was coming to our rescue. I knew he would come just as quickly as he ever could, and oh! I did so long to see him, whether he was angry or not, and to tell him that it wasn't the Commander's fault—not in the least, and to know that Sally and all of us should be safe.

"Does Mr. Hoffman know?" I asked Miller. Mr. Ching had sent me down again, and had come down too, see how his men were going on.

"He's been dead this last hour, sir." He was dead when we had to come back to the house, and we dragged him in after us.

I did feel so sorry, because we should never have found where Sally was but for him, and he had done so magnificently; and I knew that the Captain would be so sorry too, especially as Mr. Hoffman had beaten him at weight lifting.

"You go and get some more sleep," Mr. Ching told me; but I felt so much better, that I implored him to let me stay with him, and he did.

"We are doing all right, aren't we, sir?"

"So far; but this fog makes it difficult for us to see them, and I fear they may try and rush us. We have not much ammunition left."

We went all round the house, and he spoke very cheerfully to all his men. They were at all the windows with their rifles pointing out, and peering into the fog. One or two men were wounded, and sitting with their backs to the wall.

"I am going to tell the news to Hobbs and his daughter," Mr. Ching said, when we had come to that end of the house. I had been going to ask him if I could do this, but he said it so curtly, that I thought he wanted to do it by himself, so didn't go with him.

"You have a lot of blood on your face, sir," I told him. "I hope you aren't hurt much."

"Only a stone," he said; but he wiped it off, till I told him there was no more showing—he wiped it off very carefully—and then went up the ladder.

Miller hadn't the faintest idea what time it was—somewhere about midnight, he thought. We were standing near one of the open shutters, and could just see the three or four bluejackets who were guarding it. Outside there was simply a grey black wall of fog. It had settled down so

thickly, that you couldn't see a yard from the house, and was drifting in through the windows all damp and beastly. Everything was pitch dark; I couldn't see the flames at all (as a matter of fact, the huts had burnt themselves out, but I didn't know that); and Miller told me that everything had been pretty quiet during the last half-hour, nothing except an occasional shot, and that the Scotchman and Martin were still in the upper room. "We had a stiffish bit of business getting back to the house, sir. There seemed to be thousands of them on top of us, but they seem to have cleared off—some of them—and I'm thinkin' they may be after going for the Captain's party."

"Have you heard nothing of them—no firing or anything like that?" I asked; and when he said "No", asked him if he thought they would be able to find their way to us. He scratched his head and wouldn't give an answer.

"It's lucky, sir, you picked up that bit of Morse, sir; it's put new life into all of us."

I was so proud and conceited of myself, that I told him to go and lie down, and that I would look after the lower windows.

"No, I dars'n't, sir; they're keeping quiet now; but I'm dreadin' they'll be tryin' to rush us. I durs'n't, sir. We've only got about ten rounds a man left, and it may come to bayonet work, sir, afore we get through the night."

There really wasn't a sound coming from outside, and it all seemed so dark and moist and "creepy", that I really had a most horrid feeling "inside".

Mr. Ching came down the ladder. "She's asleep," he said, and I knew that he was disappointed. He began going round the men at the windows, seeing that the ammunition was distributed equally. Some men had only two or three rounds left, and I knew by the sound of his voice that this worried him very much.

One of his men brought round a huge bowl of boiled rice, and the bluejackets scooped it out with their hands and stuffed it down. They brought another one for Mr. Ching, and he shared it with Miller and me and the Scotchman and Martin. It was jolly good and jolly warming, and I have never forgotten it; and now, whenever the messman has a lot of scraps left over, and gives us curry in the gunroom, I think of it and of trying to save the bits of rice that wouldn't go into my mouth, and of that horrid fog.

Mr. Ching was talking of the possibility of getting some ammunition by searching all the dead Chinamen between the house and the wall, but then he remembered that the bluejackets' rifles wouldn't take the pirates' cartridges. They were using Mauser, and his men had only a very old pattern rifle.

"Why couldn't we bring in rifles too, sir?" I said. "There must be heaps of them lying out there;" and then, without thinking what I was going to do, I sang out to Miller to give me a "leg up", and scrambled through the window, and slid down on the ground underneath. Miller slipped down alongside me.

"Come back," I heard Mr. Ching say, but not very determinedly, and I had such a lot of "leeway" to make up for all the stupid things I had done, that I would not have gone back for anybody. You see, I thought that I might do something useful, and also I was rather ashamed that Mr. Ching and his men should have done everything and we so little.

"Give me two bags," Miller whispered; and Mr. Ching handed out two things like haversacks, and he slung one over my shoulder and one over his.

"Tell your people, sir, that we've gone, in case they think we're pirates, please;" and then we crept along until we found the door in front of the house.

"Most of them are in the path to the gate," Miller whispered, and we groped along it.

We hadn't gone five yards before my foot struck something soft, and it was a body, and I felt it all over, but couldn't feel any cartridges, and there was nothing either on the ground all round. I found several more without ammunition, and then, presently, a couple by themselves, with two rifles lying on the ground close by. It was ripping to feel their cold barrels, and the men had full bandoliers round their waists. I couldn't take them off by myself, so whistled for Miller very softly, and he came over to me. He had found another rifle and a good number of cartridges.

"Better take these back," he whispered; and we did, groping our way through the fog, and handed them in at a window.

I knew that there ought to be a good many on that ledge under the wall, where I had seen the Chinamen standing to fire over it, and told Miller.

"Right you are, sir! Let's try;" and we shoved off into the fog again.

"Is that gateway still closed?" I asked him.

"Been smashed over an hour, an' they've been swarming all over 'ere, up to 'arf an 'our ago, sir, just where we are now, sir."

Phew! I'd never thought that the pirates had been right inside the wall again, and I'm certain that I never should have come if I had—I'm positive about that.

I was fearfully nervous, and I think Miller was too, and we stopped and listened, and tried to peer through the fog.

We couldn't hear a single thing, and started out again. Then I ran into a tree, and the wet leaves and twigs scratched across the raw part of my face, and I let out a little "yelp", and we stopped to listen once more.

"We're too much to the right, sir," Miller whispered, and we both kept close together and moved towards the left.

We came on the wall all of a sudden, and felt that ledge. There still wasn't the least sound of anyone moving.

"You go that way, sir, and I'll go the other," Miller whispered, and left me, and I felt my way along towards where I thought the gateway must be. I felt any number of empty cartridge cases, and every now and again my fingers clutched a loaded one, and I slipped it into the bag; and I felt a rifle and was awfully pleased, and slung it round my neck—it was jolly difficult to do it with only one hand, and jolly uncomfortable too. Presently my foot hit up against some big wooden thing, and I knelt down and felt it, and thought it must be a part of the gateway, and that I must be right in the opening. That made me frightened, and I crept across and bumped into the other side of the door; it was simply swung back. I had kicked another rifle, but hadn't the pluck to go back and fetch it.

I just held on, trembling all over, and waited and listened, and then started again, following the door round till I got to the wall, and there, the first thing I felt, was a box on the ledge, right in the corner between the door and the wall. I felt it all over; it had a square hole in the top, and my hand went in and—oh! it was such a jolly feeling—it was nearly full of paper packets of ammunition.

It was too heavy to lift with my one hand, so I began to whistle very softly for Miller, and waited for him to come. I heard his whistle, but almost at the same moment I heard someone moving on the outside of the wall. I knew that it couldn't be Miller, and I do really believe that my hair stood on end with absolute funk. I couldn't have whistled again if I'd tried, and could not have run back to the house, however much I wanted to, because my feet wouldn't—absolutely wouldn't—move an inch.

There were more than one coming. There seemed to be a long string of them, and there was a funny rustling sound against the wall, as if they were carrying something soft, and they began coming round the doorway, some of them stepping on that rifle that I had kicked, but not picked up. The gate door was pushed back on me, and I squeezed myself into the corner against the ammunition box, and they began running past me, going along inside the wall—away from where Miller was. I could hear them breathing hard, and held my breath, till I thought I should burst, and thought they must hear my heart thumping—it was thumping away like anything. I'm not at all big, and I huddled down so close, that they went by without finding me, though once or twice something brushed my face, and knew by the touch and the smell of it that it was straw or hay, and that that was what had made that rustling sound.

I guessed directly what they were going to try to do—pile it up against the house and set fire to it.

I waited till the last one had gone, and then I managed to get to my feet, and heard Miller's whistle, very close, on the other side of that door, and that started my legs working, and I ran, stumbling, back to the house, with Miller after me. We bumped up against it; I don't remember getting inside, but only remember telling Mr. Ching everything, and that the Chinese seemed to be following the wall in order to get to the back of the house.

"The left side of the gate door doesn't seem to be damaged, sir," I told him; "they swung it back on me."

He made up his mind in no time. "They'll try and burn down the door at the back, there's no window from which we can shoot them," and he gave Miller ten men to go and close the left half of the gateway, whilst he took another ten and slipped round to drive the Chinese across to him.

He wouldn't let me go.

"Keep the rest of the men at the windows," he said, and disappeared in the fog. I ran round the windows to see that the men were there properly, and then went and stood behind the things piled behind the door at the back and waited.

It seemed like twenty minutes—it probably was only about one—and I was trembling with excitement, and when a little piece of mortar or something fell down the wall, I nearly yelled with

fright. Then I heard the rustling noise again, and heard a bundle pushed against the bottom of the door, and then another and another. All of a sudden Mr. Ching's voice shouted, and there were cheers and shrieks, someone fell against the door with a soft noise, and there was the noise of people scampering all over the ground outside. A volley sounded out from behind me—the crash seemed to come through the windows—and more shouting and yelling, and I couldn't think what that meant, because the men with the straw couldn't possibly have got round there by that time.

I ran round to one of the windows at the front, and was just in time to prevent some of the bluejackets jumping out. We couldn't see anything, not even the flashes of the rifles at the gate. But the firing died down almost at once, and then people began running past the house, and we could hear them panting, and heavy blows and shrieks, and knew that Mr. Ching's bluejackets were chasing them. It was awfully weird, knowing all going on round us, and not being able to see anything.

Some of the bluejackets were so excited, that they did scramble out to join in the killing, and Martin and the Scotchman called out, from the top of the ladder, to know what was happening, and I heard Sally, very scared, asking too.

The noises stopped, and we could hear our people calling to one another; and we all shouted to let them know the way, and they gradually began to come back, climbing through the windows and panting for breath, several of them wiping their sword bayonets.

"Did you kill them all?" I asked Mr. Ching.

"Most of them, I think. You've done us a good turn—very lucky that you saw them."

He had left half a dozen men at the gateway to give him warning if they made another attempt, but Miller himself came back and brought that box of ammunition and two more rifles with him.

Mr. Ching was very pleased with these, because we now had altogether eleven Mauser rifles and seven or eight hundred cartridges.

It was grand, and I forgot all about the mistakes I had made, and my arm, and only longed for the fog to clear away and to see the Captain stalking through the gateway, and Blucher—I knew that Blucher would be there—smelling the bodies and wagging his tail and looking up at him, thinking he had shot them. It was splendid to know that it was partly due to me that we had driven them off, this last time, and that I had found all that ammunition.

"What were you firing at?" I asked Miller; and he told me that a lot of Chinamen had tried to rush through the gate—not the men with the straw bundles, but others from outside.

"We gave 'em 'gip', sir." He was very happy.

Mr. Ching told me afterwards that they had some tins of paraffin to throw over the straw. Wasn't it lucky that I had spotted them?

Sally was awfully sweet to Mr. Ching, said that he had saved her life twice, and was so nice that he ferreted round and got her something hot—tea, I think.

The old American was still sticking to his corner; I don't think that he had moved all the night.

After we had spoiled their little game they let us alone, and all we had to do was to take it in turns to lie down and sleep, and when we were on watch, to listen for any sign of Captain Lester.

The ships hadn't fired since the fog had come on. We had wondered what they had been firing at all the time.

You can just imagine how we did long for daybreak, and for that beastly fog to clear away.

A long time afterwards Miller came up to me; he was very excited.

"Listen, sir! Listen! The Cap'en's a-comin'."

I jumped up; it was still pitch dark, and the fog just as thick as ever, and then I heard far away the noise of Maxims—tut-tut-tut-tut, tut-tut-tut-tut.

"Them's Mary and Jane, sir, right enough." Those were the names the men had given the two Maxims which we used to drill on field-gun carriages.

"They've been firin' for the last twenty minutes, sir."

The Captain's coming at last. Hurrah! I couldn't help giving a shout of joy, and ran off to tell Sally, but Mr. Ching had told her a quarter of an hour ago.

"Guess I'm right tired," was all she said to me, and began crying again. I know she had something she wanted to ask me, but didn't like to.

She didn't seem half as pleased as I thought she ought to be; but that didn't worry me at all, and I went round the men who were talking and chattering, and I grinned at them in the dark, and I'm sure that they grinned back. I could have hugged them, they were such fine great

fellows, and Mr. Ching squeezed my arm—not the bad one—and said, "We've saved Sally Hobbs all right, Ford."

I was absolutely happy, and felt jolly hungry at the same time.

CHAPTER XIV "Old Lest" takes a Hand

Holding on—"Old Lest's" Sorry—The Marine Lands Again—"Old Lest's" going on—In the Fog—The Fog Lifts—After them!—The Maxim Gun—Keeping 'em on the Run—Shelling the Town—Resting—"It's Boss Evans!"

*Written by Captain James A. Marshall,
Royal Marine Light Infantry*

Fancy me writing a book, or rather, helping to write one. I know a good lot of people will think the world's coming to an end, or that I've turned over a new leaf, and am becoming really a credit to the family. It's about time I did become a credit to them, poor things! I should imagine.

When I was asked to drive the giddy nib, I laughed. Laughed! why, I've never laughed so much since father died, as a dear little girl from Massachusetts told me once, when I tried to cheer her up, after that sad event had happened to her family.

We tried to get old "B.-T."[#] to wield the flowing pen, and tell of all his heroic deeds, but—well—he wasn't taking any—thank you kindly—and they got me to take on the job.

[#] Lieutenant Gore-Travers, known as Bored-Travers, or "B.-T."

You see, whilst old Truscott, the Commander, was lying on his downy couch with a bullet in him somewhere, he couldn't be expected to know much of what happened outside him, could he? Old Mayhew, our boss doctor man, wouldn't say where the bullet really was. Why, bless your soul, he wasn't going to give himself away, not he, and hung round Truscott's cabin with a face as long as a jews' harp whilst he was outside it, and as round and smiling as a Dutch cheese with a slice out of it when he went in.

It was all because that silly young ass Ford saw "red" that night we landed with my chaps to have a bit of a plugging match, whilst Whitmore went off with a No. 9 detonator and something in the gun-cotton "line" to blow a gun of sorts.

He thought that he was half-back in a "footer" scrum, or something like that, charged the whole blooming pack of Chinese, got "offside", and was collared and carried off the ground before we could get the referee to sound his whistle.

We argued it out with them for a while, but when old Truscott was doubled up with a bullet in him (you'd better ask Mayhew where), and two or three of my chaps had had holes made in them, we had to drop back to the battery, and couldn't even bring away Tuck, one of my men who'd been killed. They were so jolly anxious to make our acquaintance, that it was all we could do to hold on behind the wall, and the bank on the beach, till Whitmore had said goodbye to his chums and got aboard the cutter. Even then we couldn't have got away, if young Withers in the barge hadn't dropped a few gentle hints with his Maxim and emptied a couple of belts.

We pulled away back to Lawrence, who was waiting for us in the steam pinnace, and I ought to have been standing up in the stern sheets, waving my gory, glittering sword over my head and singing, "With a long, long pull, and a strong, strong pull, cheerly! lads! pull away", to encourage the sailor men. The only reason why I didn't, was because in the last rush to the boat I'd got a clap over the head which knocked me silly, had been plumped down in the stern sheets, and didn't know anything about it till we'd got aboard the old *Vigilant*.

I opened my eyes to find myself in my own virtuous bunk, daylight starting the flies skylarking, and Grainger, my servant, the trusty, faithful and never-to-be-forgotten one, poking me to see if I was still alive. I had the dickens of a headache, and at first thought it was due to the

usual cause; but Grainger held up the serge frock[#] which I had worn the night before, and I remembered what had happened.

[#] Serge frock is a tunic made of serge, worn on undress occasions.

"That were your second best serge frock, sir," he said sadly, when he had recovered from his surprise at finding me alive. "Cost you four pun', three-and-sixpence—with postage, sir."

It was soaked with mud, and had a bullet hole through one sleeve. There was a dark patch of blood, too, just in the centre of my manly bosom, which Grainger never could wash out. Whose blood it was I never knew, and old Mayhew threw things at me when I afterwards asked him if he could examine it, and see if it belonged to a Chinaman whom I had opened up a little during the scrap.

"We 'aven't paid for it, 'ave we, sir? We couldn't send it back as a misfit or some'ow, I s'pose? I knew you'd be doing som'ut like that, sir, if I let you wear it, and your third best pair of trousers is all split over one knee another three-pun'-ten gone slosh, sir—that is, if they won't take 'em back, and there's another of our hye-glasses gone too."

He shook his head reproachfully at me, and told me that I'd had a crack on the "nut". When I pressed him as to who had been so kind as to see me safely home, he wouldn't answer, but went on brushing the mud still more firmly in.

"Beggin' your pardon, sir, I hauled on your legs—a little," he said at last. "An' I'm feared that 'twas I who split them trousers." He said it as if he didn't think he'd done a very praiseworthy thing in probably saving my life; possibly he hadn't.

"I'll double your pay, Grainger; 'twas jolly good of you. Hope you came out of it all right?"

"I came out of it all right. I don't go ashore on one of these 'ere shows with my second best things on. Thank you very much, sir, but you've forgot to pay me anything for the last three months."

I knew that perfectly well, and it closed the discussion. Financial matters are peculiarly distressing to me in the early morning.

He roused me presently with "'Ere's your usual breakfast, sir," and put down a tray with a bottle of soda water and a biscuit on it, and looked amazed when I clambered out and demanded shaving water and a bath. It was somewhat out of my ordinary routine to turn out much before 9.30, and he, I saw, thought that that crack on my head had affected my brain.

The old Skipper came in whilst I was dressing. I had never seen the old chap so gentle. "I'm all right, sir, thank you—right as a trivet—my head's the only part of me which would have stood it. Very sorry we couldn't do much for you last night. How's the Commander?"

"Umph! Can't say. Mayhew can't say either. Pretty bad, I fear. The others are doing all right. Ran you up against a bigger thing than I thought. 'Old Lest's' sorry."

"Fortune of war, sir. I'm paid twelve-and-sevenpence a day for it by a grateful country—less income tax."

The dear old chap grunted and went out again.

It wasn't till I went into the ward room that I heard that, besides young Ford and Tuck missing, Martin, one of my chaps, and Miller, an armourer belonging to Whitmore's party, had been left behind.

The Skipper sent a boat to try and communicate with the pirates, and find out whether young Ford and these two men were alive and kicking. The boss pirate man was most polite, wrote back that they were doing well (we didn't know whether that meant that they were wounded or not), and implored the Skipper not to attack the island again, as he was certain that it would provoke a massacre, or something equally unpleasant, of all the Europeans there, including little Sally Hobbs herself.

He added that he was keeping his prisoners, and as they would probably be the first victims, he thought this knowledge might add force to his entreaties to be let alone.

He didn't know "Old Lest"—not by a long chalk.

The *Huan Min* turned up during the morning, and that chap Ching (he was a good enough chap to have been a marine, if they had luxuries like that in the Chinese navy) and the skippers of the *Goldfinch* and *Sparrow* came across to the *Vigilant*, and had a regular pow-wow, talkee-talkee in the Captain's cabin.

Ching was to land at sunset with some fifty of his men, and Hoffman was to go with him and guide him across country, straight to the walled house on the hill. They were to get through at all

costs. It was Ching's own suggestion; he and Hoffman thought they could do it, and I knew they would, if it was possible. Whilst he made a dash for the house, all the ships were to plug shell at two places in the island, some distance from the town itself, in order to distract their attention.

Hoffman wasn't exactly dead, but that was about all you could say. He must have had an enormous amount of vitality, or whatever you call it, to keep "going". He looked most ghastly ill.

It was determined that every man we could fit out with a rifle and other conveniences for hurrying his "dear brethren" into eternity was to land from the *Vigilant* and the four gunboats about an hour after Ching, and the whole day was spent in communicating with the *Ringdove* and the *Omaha* and completing these arrangements.

I've always longed to be a pirate myself, and the next best thing was to have the job of collaring one. My detachment were just as keen as I was, especially after last night's shindy, and we fell in again and prepared to land, and have another go at 'em, as cheerfully as ducks in a thunderstorm.

"Ever shoved it into a 'uman afore, sir?" Grainger asked me, whilst he was helping me on with my sword and leather gear. He'd been polishing it outside my cabin, on and off, all day long.

"Never; nothing bigger than a cockroach."

"Well, sir, it 'ull be some'ut to 'ang up in the 'all at 'ome when we draws our pension. Won't it, sir?"

"If we don't have to pawn it," I told him, and went off to look at Truscott. Poor chap! he was worrying about what would happen to his wife and kids if he "pegged out", so one couldn't do much to cheer him. He was very down on his luck.

We were a goodish bit behind time getting ashore, as the very dickens of a fog came up from the south and wrapped us in its "blissful mantle of white", as the young padré would have said if he'd been there. It was beastly annoying, and took all the gloss out of my moustache; but old Lawrence got us round to the back of the island somehow or other, chiefly by the sound of the *Ringdove's* guns, I think. Of course, he jolly well pretended that he did it with a boat's compass and a pair of parallel rulers on a chart he'd made. Bless me! I never could understand why navigators make such a song about their job; it's easy enough—shove on till you hit up against the shore—push off again and go on—that's all that's wanted. I bet I would navigate any ship you liked, anywhere you liked, if she'd stand a bit of bumping sometimes. I've often asked Lawrence to let me try, but, funnily enough, he won't.

I'd had an awful job with Grainger to let me wear my other serge tunic—my best one—and it was only by telling him that I wasn't going to bring discredit on "The Corps" by being found dead in the one I'd worn last night, that he let me wear it.

"I make it a rule in life," I had told him, "never to wear any serge in more than one battle," and he had gone away muttering that "he supposed that they hadn't either of 'em been paid for, and never would be, so it didn't hardly matter, though he was blowed if he knew what I was going to wear to-morrow".

Some of his statements were remarkably accurate. We had brought along one of Hoffman's Chinamen to guide us, but, bless me! by the time we'd got ashore, with wet feet, we couldn't see two yards in front of us. The fog was as thick as pea soup, and it was like trying to wade through velvet.

I had a pocket compass—we all had—and Lawrence had given us the course we were to steer, but I'm jiggered if I know how we got along at all. I was supposed to be in front, with people thrown out on either flank, as laid down in the "drill book", but it was all I could do to keep them bunched up together, touching each other, and the section leaders bawling out, every minute or two, to give the others a notion where they were. My old sergeant-major nearly wept because he couldn't know whether they were "dressed" in proper line.

We stumbled through it somehow, going on for two minutes and halting for five or ten, whilst they hauled one of our Maxims along on its carriage behind us, and the shouting that went on to know who was there, and where who was, was enough to wake the dead.

The Skipper landed with us, in an old pair of shooting-boots with huge soles on them—the two-to-an-acre kind—and with a big oak stick in his hands. Young Ponsonby came as his "doggy", and Whitmore had brought Rawlings as his. My marines—Langham with the machine gun section, old "B.-T." with "A" company, and Trevelyan with "B" company—brought our "field state" up to a hundred and fifty-four, all of them *Vigilant's*, and Barclay came along with a dozen stokers as stretcher-bearers. About two miles to our left, farther along the island, the other landing party, which was supposed to make for the walled house, with Sally in it, and join hands with us there, should have commenced their march already, but we hadn't the faintest notion whether they'd

been able to find the place to land. The skipper of the *Omaha*, Captain John A. Parkinson, U.S.N. [#], was to have been in command, and to have had forty men from his own gunboat and thirty each from our three with him, bringing their brigade up to a strength of one hundred and forty-two—that is, with a few details of stretcher parties.

[#] United States Navy.

We only hoped that they'd been able to find each other and get ashore.

"'Old Lest' don't care whether they come or not," the Skipper growled to me, when we'd run up against each other in the fog. "'Old Lest's' going on. Umph!"

Even Blucher was unhappy, and wagged his tail doubtfully. He had never been on a shooting expedition like this before, and he didn't know quite what to make of it, or the fog, and stuck to the Skipper like a leech, for fear of losing him.

We had heard a lot of desultory firing going on, even before we had landed, and couldn't quite understand it, as it came more from the direction of the walled house than from where Ching should have been; but we did not worry much about that.

We found ourselves running up against huts and bamboo fencing about two hours after we'd landed; but there wasn't a single soul there, and as we were getting out of them I happened to bump into Trevelyan, who'd lost himself. We were wondering what had become of the inhabitants.

"They've gone into town to the theatre, and supper afterwards at the Savoy or the Carlton, I expect," he said jokingly.

"I jolly well wish I had," I said.

That set me thinking of the good times I'd had in London, and I forgot, for a second, all about the beastly island and the beastly pirates, but woke up again with the sound of heavy firing—volleys, too—from the same place from where we'd heard the firing before.

"That's Ching," I thought; "he's got his hands full."

We ran into some people ourselves in front of us, heard them yelling, and heard their footsteps, but never saw them. There must have been a goodish lot of them, to judge by the noise they made, and sometimes they fired rifles, and bullets went by, overhead, but they didn't worry much, and we pressed them before us. Eventually they got all round us, yelling "blue murder", but daren't come near enough to be "spitted", which was a pity, as their noise was very irritating, and made the men jumpy.

There was no sound of the other little brigade having landed, and in about an hour after the heavy firing had started, it died down again. We were rather worried lest this meant that Ching had failed, but an occasional shot coming from the same direction told us that, at any rate, he was still holding on. I don't believe that we made half a mile in the first three hours, the fog and darkness were so intense that one actually couldn't see one's hand.

A halt was called—for the hundredth time, I should imagine—and presently the Skipper came up, singing out for me, and being passed on from one section to another. "The first bit of firm ground we come to I'm going to stop there," he growled. "It's no use going on like this. I haven't the shadowiest idea where I'm going."

"Not the foggiest, I imagine you mean, sir."

"Umph!" he grunted.

He rather liked my polished wit.

It really was the most extraordinary sensation you can imagine, to go lumbering along at this snail's pace, and to hear those fellows just ahead booing and yelling, and to hear them running towards us, shouting something rude and unladylike and running away, without ever seeing a soul.

We ran up against a bank shortly afterwards, and stayed there for the remainder of the night, the fog sometimes clearing away slightly, but always shutting down, like a blanket, directly we thought of moving on. We found a little gap in the bank for the Maxim, and formed more or less of a hollow square all round it, with my chaps lining the bank.

We let rip a few rounds from it whenever we thought we could hear a lot of those fellows close together, and thought we managed to wing one or two. We certainly found two dead pigs in a sty alongside a hut, about fifty yards away, when the fog did clear away next morning. Ask Whitmore about his Maxim gun and the two pigs; but see that you've got a clear start first!

We made ourselves as cosy as we could—from a "drill book" point of view, I mean—and had

to be on the alert all night.

The Skipper and Whitmore paced up and down behind the Maxim gun, the Skipper smoking cigar after cigar, and worrying a good deal about not being able to get on. Old "Blucher" came across to me presently, to where I was sitting on the trail of the Maxim gun, eating some sandwiches which Grainger had brought for me, and telling yarns to young Rawlings and Ponsonby to pass away the time. He sat down between my knees and finished off the gristly parts of the beef inside the sandwiches, and wanted his ears played with. He wasn't at all happy, and the noises all round us and the yelping of dogs had got on his nerves.

I had thrown out half a dozen marines as sentries—only ten yards in front of our bank—and one or other of them kept on letting off their rifles and scooting back. I had to lead them out again, firmly but gently. It's bad enough on an ordinary dark night to have to do sentry business, but in this fog, when you couldn't see anyone till he touched you, it was only the steadiest old soldier who could "stick" it. I was at last compelled to keep walking from one to another myself, and spent most of the night doing this.

There were one or two, what you might call, "incidents".

One happened, once, when I'd brought Rawlings and Ponsonby with me, and stumbled over a Chinaman, crawling along the ground. He fled like a rabbit, but the two mids were on him like terriers, I shouting all the time for them to come back. There were two or three revolver shots, which started all my sentries easing "off", and then back they came, bubbling over with excitement. It was lucky that my chaps hadn't shot them.

"Bagged him?" I asked.

"Rather! Got him with my second; he ran into a tree," Rawlings said, but Ponsonby was much too excited to speak.

The other incident occurred just before we shoved on again.

I had put one of my "bad hats"—an old villain who spent most of his time doing "cells" and 10A[#]—on the extreme left of the line of sentries, and I thought I had heard a bit of a scuffle somewhere in his direction, and presently managed to find him. He was standing over a Chinaman, perfectly unconcerned. "Killed that 'ere little lot, sir; crawled up to me and was going to knife me—the dirty thief; did it with this bagonet—'arf an 'our ago, sir."

[#] 10A.—A particular scale of punishment.

"I wonder you didn't shoot him," I said. And he snorted, "There's plenty as would 'ave," and gave the body a kick, "plenty as would 'ave, and waked the 'ole blooming camp."

When he was eventually relieved, he dragged it back with him to show his pals, and kept the knife as a trophy. The fog began to clear away about six o'clock in the morning, and as it gradually became possible to see a few yards ahead, we shoved again. We had just got up to the hut and pigsty I told you about, and were chaffing Whitmore about the effect of his Maxim, when we heard, about a mile off, the report of a gun. The Skipper came swaggering up, his fierce old eyebrows covered with fog (all of us were as wet as drowned rats with it)—"What's that, Marshall? What d'you make of that? Field gun, eh?"

"Sounds like it, sir;" and we heard it fire again, and it went on regularly at about three or four minute intervals. We could hear volleys, too, all from the same direction, and felt pretty certain that good old Ching hadn't let them have it all their own way.

"It means that they're shelling that house. Umph! And that means that Ching has got inside it," the Skipper growled, rubbing his great hands in delight.

"Shove on! They've been waiting for us too long already;" and he came along with me, Blucher yawning behind him, and wondering, I suppose, when his job was coming on.

Directly we had moved forward we stirred up some Chinamen in front of us; but they were not giving us much trouble, and we now felt a breeze in our faces, and saw the fog streaming across our front. Almost immediately afterwards we heard firing away to our left, where the other "landing party" ought to be, and were jolly pleased, and knew that the fog must have "lifted" over there as well.

"We shall have it clear in another quarter of an hour," the Skipper growled, and went back to hurry everyone forward, for that gun ahead of us was firing regularly, and made us all rather dread what was happening.

We were getting on some high ground now, making fine progress, and almost before you could tell when it happened, or how long it took to clear, the fog had swept past us, and, quite

suddenly, we saw frightened Chinamen flying in front of us, to take cover behind a bank somewhere about a quarter of a mile away. I couldn't help laughing to see them tumbling over each other in their hurry to escape, now that the fog had uncovered them. We bagged a good many before they got over that bank.

"Don't give 'em any time; after 'em, Marshall," I heard the Skipper shouting, and we simply did a record sprint, "Blucher" going on ahead of us, thinking that his show had come along at last, and barking loudly, like the useless, untrained, old brute he was. We were over that bank before they could fire half a dozen shots, and had bayoneted half a dozen before you could say "Jack Robinson". My men were so glad to get a sight of the fellows who'd been worrying them all night, and were so keen to pay them "out", that there was no stopping them. Those few shots, though, were quite enough for old "Blucher", who went yelping back to the Skipper, with his tail between his legs, more mystified than ever.

The ground sloped upwards behind the bank, and we were after them like redshanks. I knew that Trevelyan with "B" company was somewhere on my right, and that "B.-T." was coming along in reserve, and that the Maxim kept chipping in occasionally; but I had all my work cut out to keep my marines in hand, and did not pay much attention to anything else. One or two of my chaps got bowled over before we got to the top of the slope; but we were up it and over it in a "jiffy", and saw the cowardly brutes running down the other side, dodging in between some native graves and some big boulders, and shooting up at us.

I made my men halt and take cover to get their breath, and waited for the Skipper. He came grunting and puffing after me.

After that beastly night, it was grand to be able to use one's eyes again, and see where we were and what we were doing. The ground sloped down from our feet to a little shallow valley of paddy fields, intersected by banks and small irrigation streams. It rose again on the opposite side to form a ridge about eight hundred yards away, a little tree-topped ridge, with the walled house, where Ching and Sally and all the rest of them were, at its right end, and a few huts on its left end.

As the Skipper came up, I saw a cloud of white smoke burst out from behind those huts, and heard that gun fire again. I pointed it out to him.

"There's someone showing on top of that house, sir," Trevelyan sang out.

"Where's one of the signalmen?" the Skipper roared. "There you are—are you—wave something; get on top of that hut and wave your flags." (We were standing close to a small mud hut.)

"He'll draw their fire all right," I chuckled to Trevelyan—there were a good many bullets flying past us—and when he did scramble up to the top and begin waving his semaphore flags, they left off firing at us, and paid all their attention to him, bullets whistling round him and smacking up against the side of the hut.

"A jolly good 'wheeze' that," and Trevelyan winked at me. "You must put that in your blessed drill book, eh, soldier?"

The signalman stood there with his telescope between his knees, calmly trying to attract attention, whilst the Skipper stood below and cursed him, and "Blucher" went smelling up every time a bullet splodged against the mud wall, and then ran away, thinking people were throwing stones at him. He didn't know what to make of this picnic.

"There's someone waving on top of that house," several sang out; and we saw someone "wagging" a long stick.

"E's only got one arm, whoever 'e is," the signalman muttered, "an' 'e don't know much about Morse."

"It's Mr. Ford, sir," he sang out. "He says, 'All well so far—Mr. Ching here—gun doing damage'."

"Splendid!" we all shouted; and just then the signalman came toppling down with a bullet through his leg, and sat there holding it and looking very white.

Old Barclay was on him in a moment—terrible keen chap he was.

When we looked again, young Ford had disappeared. I expect that he had found it a pretty warm corner up there.

Old "B.-T.'s" little lot in the rear were having trouble now. They were below us, at the foot of the slope we had just climbed, and were lying down and shooting at a crowd of Chinese clustering round the huts near that pigsty.

"We must have got round 'em in the fog," Trevelyan chuckled.

"Where's that darned Maxim?" the Skipper roared. "Get it up here."

Young Rawlings rushed away to hurry it, and it came rattling up, Langham, who was in charge of it, and his men panting and tugging for all they were worth.

He was ordered to try and stop that gun firing, and then fat little Ponsonby was sent flying downhill to tell Travers to leave the Chinamen alone and come along after us.

The Maxim gun began its "tut-tut-tut-tut", "B.-T." and his chaps came bounding up the hill, and we all roared with laughter as little Ponsonby came running after them, his eyes and mouth wide open with fright at being left behind. "B.-T." was sent down the slope in front of us, with his company, to clear out the chaps who were sniping us; and very prettily he and his two Mids, Jones and Withers, did the job, whilst Trevelyan looked after the brutes in our rear.

They were simply swarming down there behind those huts, and there was not the least doubt that we had got round their main body in the fog. They did not dare to come out in the open, and were keeping up a very wild fire at us.

Langham couldn't get near that gun, and just as it fired again, and someone had sung out that they could see stones and bits of wood flying from a corner of the house, we saw Chinamen streaming across the paddy fields on our left, running and turning, and firing backwards. We could hear heavy firing from somewhere out of sight, and the noise of another Maxim and the chip-chip of a Colt automatic gun.

We all knew that it was the gunboat's brigade driving the Chinese in front of them.

"The other chaps will be there before 'Old Lest', if we don't get a move on. 'Old Lest' ain't going to be beaten by them," the Skipper grunted, and sent me and my marines flying down into the paddy fields below us, after Travers, who had halted and taken cover behind a bank on the other side of them, just before the ground began to rise gently up towards the walled house, and where the gun was a little farther to the left.

"Take ground to your left, and both of you 'go' for that confounded gun," the Skipper had roared after me. "I'm coming along after you."

It's all jolly fine to tell one to charge along through paddy fields. Grainger was just behind me, and I felt sorry for him, because I kept on going in up to my knees in beautiful, rich, black mud, and knew that he had his eye on me and my second best pair of trousers. But we got up to old "B.-T." all right, and I shouted for him to come along and shove on for the gun, got my men extended well to the left, gave them a "breather" whilst he swung his men a little to the left as well (brought his right shoulder up, as they say in the drill book), and then off we went, howling and cheering, straight towards two little white huts behind which the gun was still firing.

Whitmore appeared from somewhere and took charge (he was the senior), Rawlings and a bugler boy legging it after him for all they were worth.

A good many bullets came whizzing past, and I saw chaps dodging about round those huts and under some trees. My men were coming along well, and old "B.-T." with his long legs was sprinting along in front of his chaps like a camel.

Away to the left people began cheering—"Rah! Rah! Rah!"—and I knew that came from the *Omaha's* crowd, and wasn't going to be beaten by them. Nor was more either; and though I knew that the "show" was not quite according to the "drill book", I wasn't going to let the "U.S.N." or our gunboats get there first.

Young Wilkins, running just behind me, gave a cry and fell; I heard the old sergeant-major cursing and hurrying on the men; we got in among the trees, my chaps half a dozen paces behind me; a chap got in my way and fell down—I suppose I did it; two or three fellows rushed out from the side of a hut and came for me with swords; but the well-beloved Grainger wasn't going to let them damage my best "serge", if he could prevent it, and we got rid of them between us. "B.-T.'s" chaps and mine were now all mixed up. There were a few "bickerings" going on round the huts and among the trees, and then we saw the gun standing by its "lonesome", and went dashing across to it.

One of "B.-T.'s" able seamen was the first to get to it, Whitmore and Rawlings close behind, and "B.-T." and I made a dead heat for fourth place.

"Don't 'hee-haw' like a jackass," Whitmore said, when he'd got his breath. "What's to be done now?"

I'm hanged if I could help laughing at the sight of old "B.-T." legging it, with little Withers, only about half his height, trying to keep up with him.

"Give us a cigarette, and don't be an ass, soldier!" "B.-T." sang out. "Your legs are funnier looking than mine, any day."

"Drill book, Whitmore, old chap! Drill book! When you've got 'em on the run, keep 'em on the run," I said, when I could stop laughing, and he agreed, and "B.-T." agreed, and we got our

people together and followed them. As we left the gun we saw the *Omaha's* people "doubling" up to it.

We must have followed them for the best part of a mile, I should imagine, but they ran a jolly sight faster than we could. We were pretty well "winded", and when we'd driven them back to the outskirts of the town, they rallied there, and we had to pull up and go back again, carrying along three fellows who'd been knocked over in the last hundred yards. They began pressing along after us, and a lot of chaps—some of those who had run away from the other brigade—began worrying our flank, streaming across the paddy fields and firing at us. We managed to keep them back, alternate sections lying down and firing whilst the others ran back fifty yards and lay down in their turn, and covered the retreat of the first little lot. A nice little show it was too—all done according to the drill book—and when we'd got back to within a hundred yards of the walled house, and were passing through the remains of a lot of burnt huts, young Ponsonby came running up with orders from the Skipper to halt there and take up a position.

"He's pretty angry, sir," he told Whitmore; "he's been sounding the recall for the last half-hour."

The fact was that the Chinese hadn't yet had a sufficient lesson, and didn't quite know what it was to run up against us in the daylight, and were now coming for us "hammer and tongs".

Instead of going back to the walled house, and bending on one knee before Princess Sally as her gallant knight, who had lost a couple of eyeglasses, and spoiled serge frocks, two in number, and two pairs of embroidered overalls—bills not yet paid—in her service, and receiving her gracious thanks, I had jolly well to dodge beastly bullets for a couple of hours.

The old Skipper often came round, with "Blucher", to see if things were going all right, and generally stopped to have a yarn with me.

It was from him I learnt that poor old Hoffman had been killed.

"Jolly hard luck after all he's done for us, sir," I had said; but the Skipper only growled "Umph!" and for some reason or other didn't seem so sure.

He had managed to get a signal through to the *Vigilant*, and ordered her and the gunboats to shell the town and that six-inch gun which Whitmore had tried to destroy.

From my position, looking across the Chinese town and the little creek crowded with junks, I could see them steaming slowly inshore, and presently they began firing very deliberately. (Of course they had only a few seaman ratings left on board to man the guns.)

Their shells burst all over the town; but it takes a lot of shells to set fire to a house, and it was some time before they got a good fire going. A few shells which didn't burst ricocheted over our heads, and one or two fell pretty close to the house; but the Skipper didn't worry about them now. He had lowered little Sally down a shallow well, somewhere in the garden behind the house, and so long as she was safe, he didn't worry about anyone else.

His idea was that if we set fire to the town, most of the people would go back there to try and extinguish the flames, and that then we would tramp back across the island to where we had landed last night.

Certainly a good number of fellows did go back, and except from that hill on the other side of the paddy fields, from where we had seen Ford's signal, we were not much bothered with rifle fire.

It was at the back of the house, where the ground fell steeply towards the creek, and was covered with scrubby bushes, that the Chinese seemed now to be trying to force their way in. The lower slopes were simply swarming with them, and more kept moving up the creek in boats to assist them.

The Skipper came across to me. "Umph!" he growled. "You're a soldier, aren't you?" and when I had acknowledged the soft impeachment, "Umph! What would you do? I'm not a soldier. 'Old Lest's' not much good ashore except after 'birds'. How'd you get out of this mess! Ugh!" and he growled at me as if he would have liked to eat me, and so fiercely that old "Blucher" thought he was in for a row, and cleared off to have a yarn with his chums, the marines. He took me across, behind the house, to have a look at the state of affairs there.

Don't think that he wanted advice. He only wanted someone to talk to, and everyone else was too busy. I wouldn't have suggested anything to him for "worlds".

It was then that I saw Hobbs and Sally for the first time since they had been "burgled". They had fished her up from the well, and she had come across to the Skipper, looking like a ghost, her sad little face all pinched and careworn, hardly the princess I'd all my life been longing to rescue, and throw myself and all my unpaid bills at her feet. She was a most distressful little object, and when the Skipper put his great hand very gently on her shoulder, and told her we were going to

start off almost directly, she began crying, and said she didn't want to go.

"She's gone daft about that man Evans," Hobbs whispered to me. He looked more like a monkey than ever.

So that was it, was it? And our little princess didn't want to be rescued! Poor little princess! I just noticed that the front of the house had been pretty well battered in by the Chinese gun, and then caught sight of Ford and Rawlings looking like long-lost brothers. Ford was a pretty ludicrous spectacle, with one side of his face black and blue, one eye closed, and his left arm slung up inside his monkey jacket. This was the first time I had seen him since we had landed to destroy that gun, and he got very red; I remembered that he hadn't taken my jokes in very good part, so went across to make my peace with him.

"We all saw you signalling to us this morning, Ford, on the top of that roof. You must have been under a very hot fire, eh?"

He wasn't quite certain whether he was going to make peace, but he couldn't stand out against a little delicate flattery, and we made friends again, and he went off with Rawlings, looking very conceited and happy.

Fat little Rashleigh was there, too, buzzing about like a bumble bee, and offering everyone a drink from his flask, and patronizing Ching, and talking about the gun he had captured. I never realized what he meant till afterwards.

Old Ching was pretty well played out, but looked proud and happy, and I gave him one of my last three cigarettes, and told him one or two yarns, though he didn't take much interest in them, and kept his eyes fixed on little Sally.

The Skipper had given him the job of escorting her down to the coast, and jolly well he had earned it too.

Parkinson, the *Omaha's* skipper, had a yarn with me. "Guess I shall be a flag officer before I'm sixty. Reckon they'll have my picture in all the journals in the States, and maybe they'll remember John A. Parkinson is still alive and kicking, up at Washington. They seem to have forgotten him awhile." He was "talking sarcastic". He was a fine grim-looking chap, without an ounce of spare flesh on him, and as old as most of the rear-admirals in our navy, though only in command of a small gunboat.

There was an old Scotchman who had helped Ford and the two men escape from the town to the walled house, and had been helping to defend it all night. He was a funny old bird, and didn't quite know where to "place" himself, and wasn't looking particularly happy. Old "B.-T." had recognized him as the chap who'd run the show at the other island, when "B.-T." was a prisoner, so he knew that we had sufficient evidence to hang him, and was only too jolly anxious to escape being killed by Chinamen in the meantime.

He thought that our best plan would be to go back the way we had come. It was more open country, and, except for the first three-quarters of a mile, better "going" and more open than if we attempted to work round the outskirts of the town itself, where the ground was nothing but swamps.

It was now about half-past one o'clock, and the Skipper thought that it was about time to be starting back.

The great trouble was the number of wounded who would have to be carried. Of Ching's original fifty men only forty-two could walk, and the two landing parties now had six men too badly wounded to walk. Young Wilkins, my bugler, and a seaman belonging to the *Goldfinch* were the only two Englishmen killed so far.

These two, Hoffman, and five of Ching's people had been buried during the morning, under the trees in the garden, behind the house.

The Skipper also wanted to go back the way he had come. He told me that I should have the first job—to seize the hill opposite us across the paddy fields and hold it whilst he, Trevelyan, and "B" company and Ching's bluejackets brought along Sally, her father, and the wounded.

Parkinson, the *Omaha's* skipper, was to stay behind with the gunboat's brigade and act as rearguard till the Skipper had got safely across to me, and then I was going to do "rearguard", whilst they all went on.

He hoped to get in touch with the *Ringdove* and *Omaha* a mile from the shore and obtain some assistance from their guns, if he was much pressed by the Chinese. He was just going to give the order to "carry on", when we saw a little party of people approaching with a white flag waving over their heads. It was headed by a most respectable-looking old "jossler" beautifully dressed in silks, with a mandarin button on his cap, and a most benign, fatherly expression on his face. He was brought along to the Skipper, and the old Scotchman acted as interpreter.

He had come to offer to let us go back to our ships without being molested, if we would only leave off shelling the town, and was very surprised when the Skipper refused to do so. Then he called up a man who was standing behind him with a bundle in his hand, and made him empty it on the ground, looking at us and expecting to see us beam with delight. Ugh! I was nearly sick, for out rolled the head of a white man.

"It's Boss Evans!" I heard the Scotchman mutter under his breath.

We all involuntarily stepped back in disgust, and the old gentleman opened his eyes in amazement when he saw that we were not pleased, and explained that it was the Boss Pirate himself, the chap who'd done everything he ought not to have done, and that now they had killed him, and that we had seen that he was really dead, and had got Hobbs and the girl, "it all makee end—all belong plenty too much bobberie—no can do—vely good—vely good", and he rubbed his hands together, and bowed and beamed at us again from behind his great horn-rimmed spectacles.

"Chuck him out!" the Skipper roared, and walked away.

The poor dear old Chinee chap was almost in tears when he was led home again, and wasn't allowed to take the head with him either.

We buried it alongside the other dead.

Someone must have told my poor little princess, because she was now only too anxious to get away, and looked more mournful and heartbroken than ever.

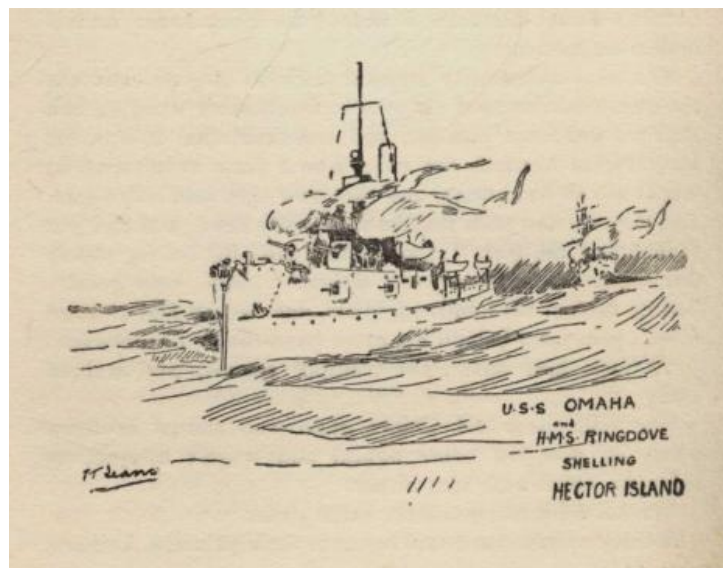
It was half-past two before this little business was concluded, and Whitmore and I were jolly anxious to start.

"The old man's wasting daylight with a vengeance," he said to me, but had hardly spoken before young Ponsonby came running up—"From the Captain, sir; you're to carry on."

As I hurried past the Skipper, he sang out, "Drive those fellows off that hill!"—pointing with his big stick. "Travers will go with you, and I'll send a Maxim along after you, and am coming on directly."

"Very good, sir," and I saluted and went off to tell my men what we had to do, and sang out to Travers, "Come along, old 'B.-T.', bring your people along."

We started off.



U.S.S. Omaha and H.M.S. Ringdove shelling Hector Island.

CHAPTER XV The Retreat

Old B.-T. Wins—A Hard Retreat—A Case of Speed—A Race against the Fog—
Hand-to-hand Fighting—Captain Marshall is Wounded—The Captain's Life
Attempted—Round the Fire—Ford is Indignant—On Board Again

Written by Captain Marshall, Royal Marine Light Infantry

Old "B.-T." and I extended our people, ran down towards the paddy fields, crawled and dodged across them, and prepared for the "do-or-die business" up the farther slope.

It was a bit of a rush, and old "B.-T." looked "bored" when we met again at the top. The blighters had never given us a show, but had cleared out, pretty well most of them. A few had run into "B.-T.'s" little lot by accident, and been polished off, that was all.

I don't suppose that they were expecting us to go at 'em so soon.

The Maxim came along after us, and we helped Langham up with it, and spread ourselves out, to cover the retreat of the Skipper with the main body, which came along almost immediately in a long line, slowly trailing down the side of the hill from the house. We could see that they were carrying the wounded, and they had got halfway across the paddy fields before the Chinese seemed to "tumble" to the fact that we were clearing out, and began to pour back from the outskirts of the town and open fire at them.

"B.-T." and I managed to keep them in check, and the Skipper got across without any casualties, "Blucher" coming galloping up the hill, wagging his long whip of a tail when he spotted me.

But by this time a number of Chinese had crept along behind the banks intersecting the paddy fields, and we couldn't get at them with rifle fire. They were right in between us and the walled house, cutting off Parkinson's retreat.

We could hear that he was having trouble—he was firing very heavily—and directly the Skipper and his little lot had got across safely, we saw his people begin leaving the house and falling back down the slope. We saw them turning and firing back, and retiring by alternate companies, and natives were swarming round the house and among the trees at the top of the ridge. We knew that they must be having a pretty warm time of it.

Those fellows who had crept round their rear began firing at them too; but one of their companies simply charged down at them, broke right through, and, opening out to left and right, swept them on one side. They were the *Omaha's* men. We could tell that by the peculiar noise they made and by their uniform. Langham was able to let rip into the Chinese as they sprinted out of reach of the Yankee bayonets, and hurried them along "pretty considerable", as Parkinson told me afterwards, we were also able to stop the people swarming down that ridge after him, and gave him time to bring along his Maxim and Colt guns, and to extricate himself from rather an awkward position. He made a wide sweep, so as not to mask our fire, and came across; but I saw that he had to carry four or five men, who had been knocked over in the open, and they delayed him much.

That is always the rotten part of a retreat, especially when fighting semi-barbarous natives. One dare not leave the wounded behind, and each one who cannot walk requires two able-bodied men to carry him.

From where "B.-T." and I were standing, I should think that we could see at least seven hundred Chinamen, and away on the left, we could see any number more hurrying: from the town.

"Buck up, old chap! Don't look so blooming bored!" and I slapped him on the back. "We'll have our work cut out in the next half-hour, when we are doing rearguard."

"Keep your beastly fists to yourself," he growled.

Old "Blucher" had bounded back to the Captain directly our Maxim had begun firing.

"Old Lest" and his little lot were in the rear of our hill—at the bottom of it—waiting for Parkinson to go on past them, farther back. We saw Parkinson drop his wounded people and sweep past and away towards two small rising bits of ground, about four hundred yards in the rear, and the Skipper, picking up his wounded, followed slowly.

Then came our turn as rearguard.

My Christopher Columbus! we had about all we could do to keep the beggars back. The heathen Chinees was simply seeing "red", and came charging across the paddy fields, rushing up towards the slope in front of us, and getting round both our flanks. They thought that they'd got

us in a hole, I expect, and they spared a couple of hundred fellows to sneak away to the right, behind some banks, hoping to catch the Skipper in the open. They would have done it too, and got right on top of him before he could have spotted them, had not "B.-T." taken half his company down the hill at a run, and posted himself behind a couple of broken-down huts and a bit of another bank, and given 'em "beans" as they went doubling along below him. It was really a race who should get to the bank first, and old "B.-T." won.

They were now actually crawling up the hill in front of my chaps, dodging among the "scrub" and among the grave mounds, and they were getting round my left rear as well. There must have been four or five hundred of them, and they were taking cover so well, that it made it confoundedly difficult to hit them.

Langham caught a few of them in the open with the Maxim; but it's such a jolly extravagant kind of weapon as regards ammunition, and puts a dozen cartridges into a chap before another can take his place, and get his own share.

Young Withers was in command of the other half of "B.-T.'s" company of bluejackets on my left. I sent one of my chaps across to him to tell him to retire, and he began to fall back steadily. He was keeping his head, but looking very white. Langham's Maxim section began to haul their gun back, and everyone was a bit flurried. Two men got bowled over. One sprang straight up, with one hand clawing the air, and I knew that he was shot through the heart. I've seen a good many men do that in my time, and they all had been shot through the heart.

I had a funny feeling in my right arm, too, and guessed that it had got in the way of a bullet, but could move it all right.

I looked back to see whether the skipper had got safely across yet, and saw that he was just disappearing between the two little hills or ridges which Parkinson was holding; so it was time for me to be off, and we began to retire according to the laws and regulations of the dear old drill book. I sent the Maxim downhill with a run, and Withers and his half company with it, to get behind a bit of a bank two hundred yards in the rear, and held on with my marines, dropping a few Chinese who were brave enough to stand up and show themselves; but most of the skunks were simply wriggling along from one bush or grave mound to another, and I'm jiggered if you can hit a man who's crawling and dodging—that is, when you are excited, and your heart is trying to thump its way out of your chest, and you are expecting the order to retire and have one eye on the rear.

They began to get round my right flank then, and I was beginning to think that "little James" was in a pretty tight corner, when old "B.-T." saw them and came back, just in time, cheering as if he was winning the battle of Waterloo and Trafalgar all rolled into one, and went careering right into them.

This checked them for half a minute, and gave my people time to drag our wounded man—I had to leave the dead one—down the hill, and for the rest of us to fall back together halfway down the slope.

"B.-T." came along after us, and we faced round and walked backwards very slowly, and they didn't like the look of our bayonets and wouldn't charge down, though they were swarming up above us and yelling like stuck pigs. (If they had charged they would have swept clean over us.) We managed to bring along two more of my chaps who were hit and couldn't walk, and sent them on to the rear, and when we got to level ground again we opened out, and bolted for where the Maxim and "B.-T.'s" other half company were. They gave them blue blazes as they came screaming after us, and dropped dozens.

I saw one of the bluejackets fall forward, his head striking the soft ground, and go slithering along. The Chinese were not twenty yards behind, so "B.-T." and two of his chaps stopped and tried to bring him with them. Old "B.-T." had to do a bit of work with his sword and revolver for a minute or two; but we'd got our breath behind the bank, came along to his rescue, and beat 'em back, Langham picking the fellow up like a sack of corn and carrying him to the rear.

"Look at that rotten thing," "B.-T." panted out, as he got behind the Maxim, holding out his arm and showing me where his sword had broken off, about twelve inches from the hilt.

"If you *will* do the V.C. act, old chap, with a rotten tailor-made sword, what can you expect?" I told him.

The Chinese daren't face our fire in the open, and funked it, so that we were able to fall back again all serenely. It wasn't the fear of seeing any of our people getting killed that worried me then; it was the dread of seeing them wounded so badly that they had to be carried, because, as I told you before, each one so wounded meant two sound men to carry him away, and handicapped us so tremendously.

We were behind Parkinson now, and gave our wounded to the Skipper's main body. I caught a glimpse of "Old Lest" standing, with his great feet wide apart, and of "Blucher" squatting between them. He was watching the Chinese through his glasses, and young Ford and Ponsonby were standing close to him, looking white and nervous. He shouted out, "Well done, rearguard!" and we hurried past and came to a group of Chinese bluejackets, standing shoulder to shoulder. In the middle of them, I knew, was my poor little princess and her miserable little father. You see, bullets were still coming past pretty thickly, and Ching was shielding her with his men's bodies.

That old Chinese gun was there too, with some of the *Ringdove's* people to drag it, and a few yards farther along half a company of Trevelyan's men were sitting on the ground resting till they had to move on again.

They gave us a cheer as we passed them, jumping to their feet and waving their caps, and off we went at the double for a low ridge about a quarter of a mile farther to the rear. We expected to be able to see the gunboats from there, and were ordered to try and attract their attention. They had been told to keep a lookout for us.

This bit was only a case of speed, and we were all blowing like grampuses when we stopped, and the men flung themselves down and faced round, my little lot about a hundred yards from "B.-T.'s", with Langham and his Maxim between us.

Some of his people had tied their silk handkerchiefs to their bayonets and were waving them to attract the gunboats. I heard "B.-T." yell something, and saw him pointing away towards the sea.

It was there all right, but, buttered crumpets! a beastly fog-bank, like a solid wall of cotton wool, was creeping down from wind'ard. When I first looked I could see the *Omaha's* one mast and tall funnel, but three minutes afterwards the fog had blotted her out of sight, and I could watch it creeping towards the shore. Great bluebottles! I didn't like it; another night like last night would about send me off my "crumpet".

I was just thinking that it would have been better for me to have gone into the Church, as my old dad always had wished, when Withers came running across to ask if I could lend "B.-T." a cigarette.

"You might get your pater to give me one of his livings," I told him. "I'm going to be a parson if we ever get out of this."

"He's very particular, sir," the cheeky young rascal grinned, and ran back with my last cigarette. Old "B.-T." would have borrowed my matchbox, but I sent Withers to tell him to *rub two sticks together* and light it that way; it would be good exercise, and the cigarette would last longer.

I saw him shake his fist at me when he got the message, and then walk down his line of men to try and borrow a match from one of them.

The main body was coming past now; Whitmore and Rawlings, at the head of the little column, were just passing Langham's Maxim; then Trevelyan's right half company, a dozen Chinese bluejackets in a circle round Sally and Hobbs, with Ching and the old Scotchman walking behind them. Then there was a gap, a long string of Chinese bluejackets carrying their wounded, the rest of Trevelyan's chaps carrying ours, the *Ringdove's* people dragging the little Chinese field gun, and Trevelyan with a few men bringing up the rear.

They came to a halt behind us, and laid down their wounded very gently.

"There's no one behind us, I think," "B.-T." shouted to Whitmore. "But just look at that fog! It's hidden the *Omaha* since we've been up here."

"Where's the Skipper?" I asked him.

"Taking charge of the rearguard. This job isn't exciting enough for him. They'll have all their work cut out to get back to us, and I don't know what will happen if we get many more wounded."

I had to go back to my men then, as I saw the rearguard already on its way, fat little Rashleigh toddling along in front of two companies from the left of the two little hills, and the Maxim section rushing their gun towards us. From the right the rest of the rearguard commenced their retreat, and I saw "Old Lest's" great broad shoulders swaggering back, with Parkinson, as thin as a lamp-post, striding along beside him, and "Blucher" slinking between them.

Contrary to Whitmore's opinion, they had very little trouble in extricating themselves, because the ground was so flat on the other side of those two little hills, that the Chinese had not dared to come to close quarters, and they were more than halfway towards us before the enemy occupied the slopes they had just evacuated, and stayed there, contenting themselves with opening a very heavy but miserably directed fire. They made rotten shooting.

I felt that we had now got over by far the worst part of the show, all except the beastly fog part, which had already hidden the line of the shore a mile away, with its advance guard of feathery mist quickly creeping along the ground towards us.

The Skipper came along grunting and growling, lighting another cigar, and highly pleased with himself and everything else so far; but when he saw the fog he stormed and cursed.

"'Old Lest' won't worry about those chaps behind him. He'll march straight for the shore," he grunted, and sent Parkinson and the gunboat's brigade straight ahead, and ordered my marines and "B.-T.'s" bluejackets to remain in the rear. He took charge of the rearguard himself, but practically gave the job to me. I suppose that he knew that I had conducted many skilful retreats across the exercise ground at Forton Barracks, so would know all about it.

Anyhow, it was a great compliment to me, and old Whitmore was as sick as a cat with a fish bone in its throat, only he tried not to show it.

No one troubled us in front, and we marched along quite quickly—as quickly as it was possible to carry the wounded.

It was really a race against the fog. Everyone knew that, and we got over the first half-mile without difficulty.

The Chinese were not worrying the rearguard much; but of course they saw the fog almost as soon as we did, and many of them began streaming away to the left and right, and I knew that they would scoot round our flanks, try and get in between us and the sea, and hem us in as they had done during the night. I didn't like the idea of that—not a little bit.

But with only another half-mile to do, the moist tongues of fog began drifting overhead, and in five minutes we couldn't see fifteen yards. We recognized the huts with the dead pig's near them, and some of my chaps had a brilliant idea, and brought them along on their bayonets. "Wat 'o! Bill, for a bit of the Gunnery Lutenant's sucking pigs when we gets aboard," I heard one of them sing out.

The advance guard halted to let the main body get up to them, and threw back their flanks to overlap it, and as we came up we threw forward our flanks, and this meant that we practically formed a hollow square round the main body and the wounded. Like this we marched very slowly along, keeping in touch by shouting to each other. The Chinese were now beginning to draw up to our rear, and we could hear them yelling and firing rifles at us, the bullets seeming to make much more noise in the fog.

They didn't venture close yet.

In another five minutes the fog was so dense that I couldn't see the third man from me in the ranks. The skipper made a bugler with the main body in the centre sound two "G's" every half-minute, and that was a great help to us to keep in station. All round us I could hear the non-commissioned and petty officers singing out: "Not so fast on the right! Keep up on the left! Close towards the bugle, you on the flanks! Where's No. 1 section? Don't get ahead too far!"

These cries, with the howling of dogs and the yells of Chinamen, who had got all round us now, were extremely discomposing. When presently they did leave off yelling, and we had no idea where they were gathering or where they did intend to attack us, I must admit that it was still more disconcerting. But we could hear the sea beating on the shore, and smelt the decaying seaweed, and knew we should reach it in a few minutes. The Skipper must have been a little nervous too, for his bugler sounded the "halt" and the "close", and everyone drew in towards the centre till our little square was as complete as we could make it in that horrid yellowish-grey fog.

We were just preparing to move on, when there was a most hideous uproar on our right flank. People began firing; there was the noise of hundreds of feet rushing towards us through the fog, a fearful din of yelling, shrieks of pain, then the noise of bayonets at work, and I could feel that the right side of the square was giving ground and being pressed back, and could hear the strange, choking, grunting noise men make when they are fighting hand to hand, and being overcome by numbers.

I had heard it once before with General McNeil's column in the Soudan, when our zareba had been rushed, and it was touch and go for a few moments whether we were entirely wiped out or not. I was only a newly caught subaltern in those days, and I shall never forget that rush.

Old "B.-T." ought to have written about this one, not I. He would have done justice to it. I know that I can't.

It all happened in a moment, and we had the yelling brutes all over us, pushing a thin fringe of struggling bluejackets in front of them. They looked huge as they rushed at us in the fog, but the first two or three who came my way must have been pretty sorry that I hadn't forgotten to load my revolver. It was a regular pandemonium for about sixty or seventy seconds, I should

fancy. Ching's men were making a strange, squealing, hissing sound; the Yankees had a different row; and our people were grunting and cursing. I could hear the Skipper roar: "Close on the centre!" and his bugler kept on sounding the two "G's" to let us know where the centre was. I found myself near him. He had his coxswain, and a couple of signalmen, and the two mids—Ford and Ponsonby—close to him, and was laying about him with his big stick, and punching fellows in the face with his fist. His coxswain knocked over one brute who was coming for him at the back, and I helped him get rid of another and then lost touch with him, and came across the wounded trying to scramble up and defend themselves with their bayonets, Trevelyan's men standing over them, clubbing their rifles and making a grand fight of it. I saw that they were holding their own, and with a dozen of my own marines at my back, ran and forced my way into a lot of fellows who were trying to cut down Ching's men. I suppose they hated him and his jackets even more than they hated us.

My Christopher Columbus! we did give 'em beans, and I'm precious glad that my sword was the best that could be bought (well, perhaps bought isn't the right word; so I will say obtained), for their heads were as tough as iron, and the wadded cotton coats they wore made it jolly hard to use the point. For all that, though, it tickled one or two of them considerably.

Old Grainger clung to me like my shadow. He always seemed to be handy when I'd got two people to manage at the same time, and we always managed to scoop the pool.

We eased off the pressure round my princess, especially when Parkinson's First Lieutenant, a man nearly forty, came along from the left with twenty or so of his people, shouting, "Rah!—Rah!—Rah!—O!—Ma!—Ha!" and burst in among them and began clubbing. Little Rashleigh suddenly shot into view with a broken sword in one hand and a revolver in the other. His scabbard got between his legs, and he fell sprawling, and would have been killed if Langham hadn't suddenly sprung out of the fog and run a chap through who was standing over him and just going to jab him with a bayonet.

The three machine-gun carriages and the little Chinese field gun were all rallying places for our people, and I suppose I must have got into the "focus of disturbance", as they say about earthquakes, because, although the fog was so thick, I saw nearly all our officers at one time or another, and we got so jammed together—Chinese and marines and bluejackets—that we could hardly move.

I nearly came to grief near that Chinese gun. A wretched chap thought he could prod people from beneath it in comparative comfort, and tried his hand on me, but wasn't quite quick enough. He got me a beastly rip in the leg just above the knee.

Then "Old Lest" seemed to elbow his way along. If you'll believe me, he still had a cigar between his teeth (Whitmore saw it, and his coxswain swears that it was even then alight). He had broken his stick over the heads of two big ruffians, and they bungled against the gun carriage, and just as I thought that it was my turn to do something prompt, he caught them by their pigtails and "wanged" their heads together. That knocked them out of time, and his coxswain saw to it that they were dead.

Well, that was my little show, and I felt dizzy, and Grainger lowered me on to that gun wheel. The old sergeant-major came up streaming with blood and loaded my revolver for me, and Grainger wiped a lot of blood stuff off my face, which was interrupting the view of the surrounding scenery. People seemed to be leaving off fighting; our fellows were cheering like mad, and the buglers began sounding the "fall in" and the "cease fire".

I was all right in a second or two, and went back to my old place in the rear, and my people began limping back, calling each other and falling in, talking twenty to the dozen, and wiping their bayonets with tufts of grass.

My sergeant-major got them into something like order again; there were only twenty-seven on their feet out of the thirty-nine who had landed, and only about four of these who had nothing in the way of cuts or stabs to show for it.

Presently the bugler sounded the "still", and the coxswain piped, "Officers commanding companies report to the Captain," and I groped my way across the ground, simply littered with dead bodies, and found him and Parkinson. "Blucher" was sitting behind the Skipper, and looking extremely ashamed of himself.

Gradually all the officers commanding companies came up, except "B.-T.", who had a bayonet wound through his thigh and couldn't walk, and the *Omaha's* First Lieutenant, who had been killed just after I had seen him charging with his men.

Young Jones reported "A" company, and that Withers was missing; but then someone came up to say that he'd been found with his head cut open, and quite dead. Poor little chap! he was one

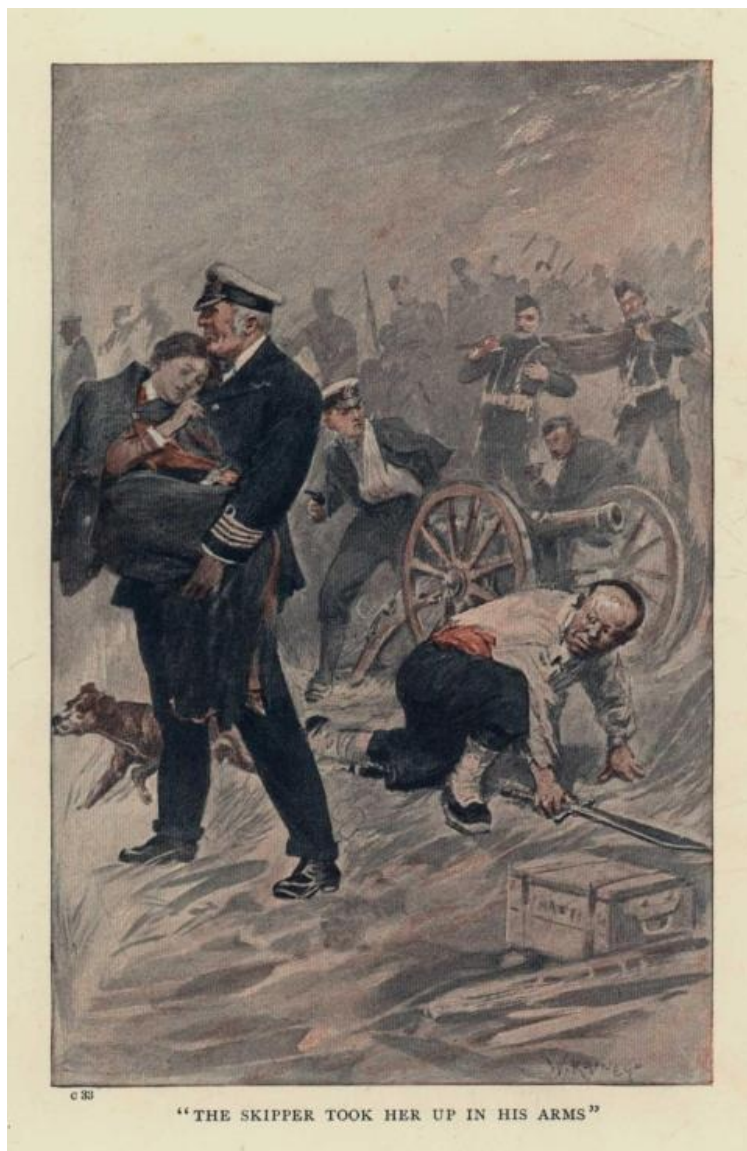
of the brightest and most gentlemanly youngsters on board, and I and my marines owed him a great deal for the way in which he covered our retreat to the barge two nights ago.

The doctors were singing out to let people know where they were, and I ran up against old Barclay. He seemed to have had a bad time of it himself, but was busy dressing people and fixing them up. Old "B.-T." was sitting with his back to a Maxim carriage wheel, waiting his turn and holding on to his leg. He wanted to borrow another cigarette, but he'd had my last half an hour ago. I managed to get one for him, however, and then found Whitmore. He'd had one of his thigh bones smashed by a bullet, and was in great pain. The whole place was nothing but a shambles. The *Sparrow's* people, who had borne the brunt of the first attack, had come off worst, and after them Ching's bluejackets; but you will see by the list at the end what the actual casualties were.

Ching himself had a slash over the head, but looked as though he was treading on air, he was so proud and happy, and I knew that there was a good deal more than the love of fighting to account for that.

"How's the little lass?" the Skipper said, and I followed him across to the Chinese gun, and found my poor little princess bending over it with her head buried in her hands, and Hobbs sitting on the ground beside her.

The Skipper took her up in his arms and carried her off to a place where there were not so many dead bodies. Then happened something which, though disgraceful, is true. He was stalking along with her in his arms, and had just made a long step across a body, when we were horrified to see the apparently dead Chinaman spring up and raise a sword above his head to strike the Skipper. He would have been killed for a certainty, because the sword was a very heavy one—an executioner's sword—had not young Ford, who luckily had his revolver in his hand, placed it against the man's back and shot him.



"THE SKIPPER TOOK HER UP IN HIS ARMS"

The Captain turned round and growled out "Umph!" but took no further notice. However, the word was passed round that a wounded Chinaman had attempted to kill him, and the men were so enraged that they made certain that there were no more wounded pirates left inside the square.

This is a fact, whatever you may say about the rights and wrongs of it.

The Chinese had had enough fighting to last them for a "month of Sundays", and let us alone after that, and gave us time to look after the wounded. The men, of course, all had their little packets of field dressings with them, and did a good deal of amateur doctoring, whilst Barclay, Hibbert of the *Ringdove*, the doctor of the *Omaha*, and their stretcher parties looked after the more seriously wounded.

Then we staggered down to the beach, wading through the fog with our wounded.

When I say staggered, I mean staggered. Our people had been fighting for practically twenty-four hours with no rest, and they were done to a "turn". After that strenuous sixty or seventy seconds' struggle, and the square had been re-formed, and the wounds had begun to pain, and arms and legs and bodies to feel stiff, reaction set in, and if you had seen them walking that last three hundred yards, you would have thought that most of them were drunk.

Lucky indeed it was that the Chinese let us alone till we could get the wounded down on the beach behind a bank, light several fires to comfort them, and gradually warmed our fellows up again.

I suppose that if they had charged out of the fog again, our men would have roused themselves and put up just as good a fight; but I must say that I felt most extremely anxious till we had the sea at our backs, and that bank at the top of the beach with a deep ditch below it in front of us.

We had hoped to find our boats lying off waiting for us, and tried to attract attention by shouting and firing rifles. Eventually we heard one of the gunboats begin firing a gun every half-minute. It turned out to be the *Omaha*, and presently she began to make a signal with her fog siren. We knew that she was feeling her way in towards us, by the sound of the blasts coming nearer; but of course we could see nothing whatsoever through that maddening nightmare of dirty fog, and out of it came the moaning blasts of the *Omaha's* siren with the message: "Have seen nothing of your boats since this morning. *Omaha's* boats have been sent down the coast to where gunboats' brigade originally landed, and have not come back."

We well knew that that meant a night to be spent on the bleak shore till the fog should clear away and allow the boats to find their way to us.

It was then that the tired men were set to work collecting drift wood and making fires under the bank, whilst Rashleigh and Trevelyan had to line the bank itself, and guard our two flanks across the beach.

Although the fires were fairly large ones, they could not be seen fifteen paces from the far side of the bank. That will give you some idea how dense was the fog, so that we were quite safe in making them, and we brought the wounded across and settled them as comfortably as possible. When I talk about the wounded, I mean, of course, the badly wounded, men who were obliged to lie or sit perfectly still; but besides these, nearly everyone was slightly wounded, but could still handle a rifle.

Trevelyan had brought a tin of tea tabloids—he always had some dodge up his sleeve—and with the water in our bottles, we made enough tea to give the wounded and my poor little princess a hot drink.

Old Grainger "managed" to find another packet of sandwiches for me, and was very disgusted when I gave them to Sally. A strange old chap he was. I suppose that I owed my useless life to him half a dozen times that day, but he would have been offended if I'd even suggested thanking him. He had been my servant for nine solid years, and treated me as if I were a helpless idiot, and that his whole business in life was to turn me out on parade a credit to "The Corps". (I don't mean to infer that he was the only one who treated me as an idiot.)

Even during the night, when after a couple of hours' sleep the marines had to take their turn on top of that bank, he began bothering me about my clothes.

I had noticed him looking at me as I stood warming myself in front of a fire, and he began: "Them clothes won't be no blooming good again, sir, I'm thinkin'. Two serges and two pairs of trousers in three blessed nights! We ain't got enough gear to turn you out proper now, sir."

"That's all right, Grainger; we'll be at Hong-Kong in a fortnight," I said to cheer him.

"Ong-Kong!" he sniffed. "They knows us too well there, sir. They wants ready money from us there, sir, and we ain't got none. 'Ow's your arm, sir? You never showed it to the Doctor."

I hadn't, I know; but he wouldn't be satisfied till I had pulled up my sleeve, and he had found a bandage and stuck round it, to cover up the two little marks where a bullet had gone in and out.

It really didn't trouble me much, except to make my arm stiff.

Then Ford and Rawlings came up to me. They ought to have been asleep. They were like two little cock sparrows with all their feathers ruffled.

"Would you mind telling us, sir, who captured that gun?" Rawlings burst out very angrily.

"As far as I remember," I told them, "one of 'B.-T.'s' people was first; beat you and Whitmore by a short head."

"There!" they both burst out, looking at each other joyously. "Do you know, sir, that Mr. Rashleigh says it's his, and that he captured it?"

"Stuff and nonsense! That's all my eye! His people were nowhere in sight!"

"Well, he's got it, sir, and the *Ringdoves* dragged it back, and they say they've got it, and are going to keep it."

"Come and ask Mr. Whitmore," young Ford said; but I told them that they were not to wake him, and not to be blithering idiots waking the whole camp.

"Wait till the morning; no one can take it away to-night."

I knew that if it belonged to anyone it belonged to our Skipper, and that it didn't matter a tuppenny biscuit who claimed it now, for "Old Lest" would have it in the long run.

Our two hours' watch passed without any serious trouble, a few shots occasionally whizzed overhead, that was all, and before daylight the fog lifted a little, as it had done the previous day.

As soon as they could see us, the Chinese made a very half-hearted attack, and the whole brigade had to stand to arms and line the bank; but we had no difficulty in driving them off and keeping them at a respectable distance.

As the sun rose the hateful fog swept away altogether, and it was a most blessed sight to see the sun glittering on the muddy water, and the *Omaha* and *Ringdove* close to one another, and only about half a mile from the shore.

Little Sally looked such a forlorn, draggled little woman in the damp daylight, that I thought she'd be only too glad for anyone to say something kind to her, so old "B.-T.", moving in a very "dot-and-go-one" manner, and I went over to say "how d'ye do" to her and give her a treat. We were the best-looking fellows in the *Vigilant*, but old "B.-T.", what with his limp and a forty-eight hours' beard round his aristocratic chin, wasn't looking his best, I thought, however, that the bandage round my noble forehead (to cover up a cut someone had given me) would just about "fetch" her, and that she would be interested in about a dozen different specimens of paddy-field mud which were plastered over me.

However, she "bristled" up when we came along to pay her homage, and "guessed she didn't want anyone fooling round her—just yet awhile". Poor little princess! She was so miserable, sitting on the beach behind that bank, with the Skipper's overcoat buttoned round her.

About an hour after daylight, and the fog had swept away, our boats managed to find us.

Old "Blucher" had had enough shooting expeditions to last him till he got home, and jumped into the very first *Vigilant's* boat that had run up the beach, got under the thwart in the stern sheets, and never moved till she got alongside the ship.

The Skipper gave me the job of covering the embarkation, and it wasn't all "beer and skittles" either, for the Chinese kept up such a persistent and annoying rifle fire, that we had to get the *Omaha* and *Ringdove* to shell them out of some paddy fields and clumps of bamboo trees. They tried to steal round the beach and cut a few of us off, and just as we were getting "busy" with them, young Ford and Rawlings came rushing up again, right in the middle of everything, and squeaked out that fat little Rashleigh was taking that wretched Chinese gun aboard the *Ringdove*, that he had actually got it aboard one of his boats, and was just going to shove off, and that as Whitmore was on the sick list, and "B.-T." had gone off to the *Vigilant*, couldn't I do something? They wanted me to go to the Skipper, or something like that, and tell him that it really belonged to the *Vigilant*.

"My dear young gentlemen," I told them, when we'd stopped a bit of a rush, "if you'll be so obliging as to go out there and ask about five hundred Chinamen, who are very anxious to obtain specimens of our livers, to cease firing and stop where they are till we've decided who shall own their toy cannon, I'll do the best I can to help you. Tell them that the matter won't admit of delay, and no doubt they will oblige you."

They looked angry, and rushed away to try and interest someone else in the important question.

Gradually everyone was withdrawn from the shore, till there was no one except the Skipper,

myself, and my marines remaining. We kept the fellows at bay till the barge came along for us, and then we bolted down to her and scrambled in, the Skipper being actually the last to embark. We had hardly begun to shove off, before the Chinese had lined the other side of that bank and began firing at us; but two can play at that game, and we had another boat and the steam pinnace lying off, to cover our retreat, and they peppered them pretty severely.

The *Vigilant* had come round to meet us, and we got away out of range all right and alongside her by seven bells in the afternoon, just in time for afternoon tea.

As soon as I could manage to do so, I slipped away to Truscott's cabin, and found him much more cheerful.

Old Mayhew had said that he couldn't tell what would happen till the end of the third day, and this was the third day since he was wounded, and he had no bad symptoms.

"To tell the truth, soldier," he whispered, "I'm as hungry as a hunter; tinned milk and soda water ain't very filling, and Mayhew won't let me have anything else, and precious little of that."

I felt pretty well "done up", now that everything was finished, so Grainger got me a steaming hot bath, and I turned in and slept till next morning.

Before I went to sleep, Grainger came back looking very cheerful. He held up my two damaged pairs of trousers. "We can do 'em all right, sir; one pair 'as a slit in the right leg, and the other a split over the left knee. We'll 'ave a try at taking 'em to pieces, and makin' one good pair out the two of 'em, sir."

"All right, Grainger; it will be better than having nothing to wear at all, won't it?" I told him, and went to sleep.

I copied this list of casualties from somewhere or other, and think that it is pretty accurate as far as our own ships and the *Omaha* are concerned, though I cannot guarantee the figures given for the *Huan Min*.

The "slightly wounded" were those requiring some treatment, and most of those who were on the sick list only a few days.

CASUALTIES DURING OPERATIONS ROUND HECTOR ISLAND.

| Name of Ship. | Landed. | | Slightly Wounded. | | Severely Wounded. | | Killed. | | Died of Wounds. | | Captured and subsequently rescued. | |
|---------------|-----------|-----|-------------------|-----|-------------------|-----|-----------|-----|-----------------|-----|------------------------------------|-----|
| | Offi-cers | Men | Offi-cers | Men | Offi-cers | Men | Offi-cers | Men | Offi-cers | Men | Offi-cers | Men |
| Vigilant, | 15 | 145 | 8 | 75 | 4 | 27 | 1 | 9 | ... | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| Ringdove, | 3 | 34 | 2 | 23 | ... | 5 | ... | 2 | ... | ... | ... | ... |
| Sparrow, | 2 | 39 | 2 | 20 | ... | 9 | ... | 6 | ... | 1 | ... | ... |
| Goldfinch, | 2 | 32 | 1 | 16 | ... | 3 | ... | 3* | ... | ... | ... | ... |
| Omaha, | 4 | 41 | 2 | 27 | ... | 8 | 1 | 2 | ... | ... | ... | ... |
| Huan Min. | 1 | 56 | 1 | 29? | ... | 16 | ... | 8 | ... | 1? | ... | ... |
| Totals, | 27 | 347 | 16 | 190 | 4 | 68 | 2 | 30 | ... | 4 | 1 | 2 |

* This includes the two men killed by the six-inch projectile which struck the Goldfinch.

CHAPTER XVI

Ford saves "Old Lest's" Life

The Vigilant to the Rescue—Rushing the Gun—Ford is Miserable—The Ringdove Steals the Gun—Ford Bucks up Again—Mr. Rashleigh and the Gun—The Burial at Sea—Letters from Home—A Letter from Nan

Written by Midshipman Ford

Before I tell you anything else, I must tell you this—it is the only thing I can think about at

present, and has wiped out all the silly, and idiotic, and bad-tempered things I have ever done—I have saved Captain Lester's life.

But for me—Dick Ford, a midshipman only just out of the *Britannia*, a worm, I suppose you would call me—he would be dead now, and Mrs. Lester and Nan and his other girls, and all Upton Overy, would be awfully miserable, and everybody else who had ever known him.

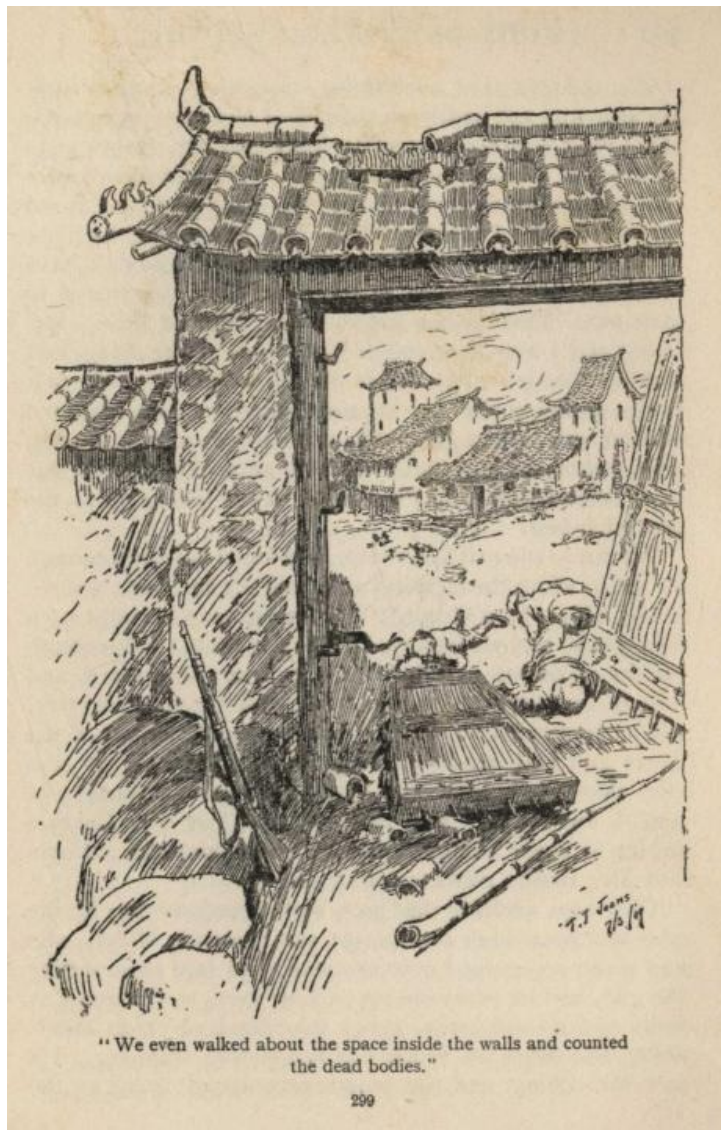
I just look at him when he's striding up and down the quarterdeck, and think that now, in a way, he belongs just a little bit to me. I know that his coxswain, and the signalman, and any number of others who were near him when the Chinese broke our square, saved his life a great number of times; but you have read what Captain Marshall wrote, and know what happened, and what, by good luck, I was able to do, so I don't mind in the least sharing him with all of them, so long as I know that a bit of him does belong to me.

You see, I knew all the time that I'd really only made an ass of myself when I was captured, and had my arm broken, and all that, and that instead of helping him in any way, I really had only muddled up his plans. Just before we began the march back to the coast, Jim and I had a long yarn about what was best for me to do, and the only thing he could suggest—you know, of course, that I only had one arm to use—was for me to keep as close to the Captain as he would let me, and always have my revolver handy, in case any Chinese did get near him. Jim said that there was always the chance of some chaps trying to rush us, and it was the only thing he could think of, and as the Captain only had his big oak stick, and never thought of danger to himself in the least little bit, I might make myself useful. Well, that is why I am so absolutely happy—I feel now as though nothing can ever make me feel really miserable again, for long—because if anything does begin to do so, I just think about Captain Lester, and that stops it.

When I finished telling you about that awful night in the walled house, we had heard the sound of the Maxim gun firing, and knew that the Captain was coming along to rescue us. That made us all "buck up" tremendously, and the fog lifted a little, and it began to grow lighter, and we could just see the wall and the half-closed gateway, and some of the dead people lying about, and presently we heard the sound of firing coming nearer, and began to think that another half-hour would bring them to us, and that Sally would then be absolutely safe.

The pirates were not worrying us at all—there had hardly been a shot for the last two hours—and we guessed that most of them had gone away to try and stop the Captain coming.

We even walked about the space inside the walls and counted the dead bodies—there were forty-seven—and peeped through the two gateways, and collected some more Mauser rifles and any amount more ammunition. We made a fire too, and found some food in the house, and tried to make Sally eat some breakfast, but she couldn't touch anything, and went to sleep again.



"We even walked about the space inside the walls and counted the dead bodies."

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"We even walked about the space inside the walls and counted the dead bodies."

We thought that everything was going on jolly well. My arm was not nearly so painful—I had had some sleep; Mr. Ching was very cheerful; Sally and Mr. Hobbs were both sound asleep; and Miller and the old Scotchman were coiled up asleep as well. Martin, the marine—well, I'm not certain whether I cared much for him—kept on grumbling about his arm, and reminding me that he wouldn't have broken it or been taken prisoner but for having tried to save me. That rather irritated me after a time. Mr. Ching and I were listening to the sound of the firing, and looking through a window in the direction from which it came, watching the fog clearing away from the low land on that side, when all of a sudden there came a roaring noise out of the fog, and something struck the house close to us with a crash, and we heard stones falling on to the ground below.

We ran to where it had struck, and found holes big enough for me to climb through in both the front and back walls.

Mr. Ching gasped out, "They must have brought up a field gun;" and we looked, but the fog wasn't thin enough yet for us to see anything. He was very frightened, and ran up to that little square room with the iron shutters, and came down with Sally in his arms, took her out of the house and laid her down behind the wall, where it was very thick. He was only looking frightened because of her, I know that, and that he was just like Captain Lester in never being frightened about himself. Martin and Mr. Hobbs came scooting out too.

They kept on firing that gun, and sometimes they hit the wall and sometimes the house; and presently Miller, who had woke up, peeped over the wall, and said he could see the gun, and he lifted me up to look over, and I saw it as well, under some trees, about five hundred yards away, along the ridge on which the house was standing. He and Mr. Ching and the bluejackets began firing at the men round it; but they couldn't see it clearly because of the smoke it made and the

fog, and as they didn't really know how to sight the Mauser rifles properly, they didn't seem to be able to hit anybody.

At any rate, we couldn't stop it firing, and it was knocking the house to pieces.

Then a shot struck the top of the wall, and made a gap in it, and stones went flying round, and one struck a bluejacket sitting down, not far from where Sally was, still asleep, struck him on the head, and killed him. Mr. Ching didn't know what to do, because he was so worried lest she should be hurt; and two or three more came along, all hitting the wall, and it was jolly unsafe to stay anywhere near it, so we made her go and lie down behind a very big stone or rock behind the house, and leant some planks of wood against it to make a kind of roof to keep off falling stones.

Her father crept under them too.

If the firing became more dangerous, Mr. Ching did think of lowering her down a shallow well in the garden under the trees, but that was never wanted.

The rifle and Maxim firing became very heavy, and we could hear it coming rapidly nearer, and the fog, which was still lying very dense below the house, now swept away, and we could see that there were flat paddy fields there with a small hill on the other side. It was glorious to be able to look all round again, and suddenly Chinamen went flying down our side of that hill opposite, and we could hear cheering, and then, in a minute or two, some dark figures, waving their arms over their heads, came on to the sky line, and we knew that they were our people, and we all cheered tremendously.

You can have no idea what we all felt like, because, although we were expecting them, it was quite a different feeling when we actually saw them.

"Look there, Miller!" I shouted. "There's a dog there running backwards and forwards;" and Miller spotted it too, and I knew that it must be jolly old "Blucher", and that the Captain must be there.

Mr. Ching asked me if I could signal to them, and I managed to do so, climbing up to the top of the square room, and getting out through a hole which the field gun had made in the roof. I was so fearfully excited and happy, that I forgot all about the danger from the gun, and Mr. Ching helped me up and steadied my feet, and I waved a long bamboo, and signalled in Morse that we were all well, but that the gun was doing damage. I saw some tiny little flags waving to say that the signalman with the Captain had read it, and then Mr. Ching pulled me down, and only just in time, because the field gun made two more holes close by, almost immediately afterwards.

I was too much excited to worry about the gun in the least—we all were—and went and watched them over the wall at the side, and saw some dark figures come racing down the hill, and presently others whom I knew were marines came along after them and joined up in the paddy fields, and I thought I could recognize Mr. Travers and Captain Marshall by their long legs. It made me go just a little hot all over to see Captain Marshall, because I hadn't forgotten what he had said when I had run away from the bullets, near those burning huts, and didn't quite want to see him.

There was a lot more rifle firing and machine-gun firing farther to the right, and the field gun stopped shooting; but we couldn't see the marines and those others now, because they had got across the paddy fields and were under the brow of our ridge. We could hear them cheering, however, though they were out of sight, and the noise seemed to be going towards the gun, and we knew that they were charging it, and simply held our breath and watched Chinamen dodging about, round it, and under the trees, and firing downhill.

Then they began bolting away out of sight—we knew what we should see in a moment or two, and held our breath—and almost directly afterwards a whole crowd of our people went dashing across the open space, and swept round the gun.

We all jumped down, made a rush for the gateway, cheering like mad, and waving, and then I saw someone jump on top of the field gun and wave his cap, and knew that it was Jim Rawlings. I was certain of it, and Miller said he thought it was too, and this simply added everything to the joy, because I had been wondering and worrying whether he was killed or badly wounded—ever since Miller had told me that he had seen him knocked down two nights ago, when Mr. Whitmore's party was retreating, and just before he himself had been captured.

I felt all "bubbly" inside, and didn't quite know what to do, and felt very "sniffy", and ran towards the gun, with Miller and Mr. Ching and a lot of his men. Before we could get to it, the first lot of our people had gone off after the Chinese, who were running away; and the next lot of people I saw was a company of American bluejackets, with their long thin Captain in front of them. He gripped my hand and said he was "right glad to find us alive", asked after Sally, and

rushed on to the house, his old-looking First Lieutenant shouting out, "Guess things are real bully," as he followed him. Then Mr. Rashleigh and the "Ringdoves" came running up, clustered round the gun, and began cheering. Dr. Hibbert gave me a cheery wink, and Mr. Rashleigh patted me on the back and hurt my arm, and I hadn't forgiven him for that unfair report of his, and hated him touching me.

I heard him tell his coxswain to take the gun back to the *Ringdove*, and I thought that he couldn't possibly have known that our people had captured it first; so I told him about it, and that they had only gone in pursuit of the Chinese, but he took no notice of me, and I forgot all about it in the excitement of seeing Captain Lester coming striding along, puffing and blowing, "Blucher" barking and prancing ahead of him, running up and smelling the gun and one or two dead bodies very gingerly. Then he spotted me, and came wriggling up to be patted.

The Captain looked very sourly at me and growled out, "Where's that chap Ching, and the little lass and Hobbs?" and wanted to know whether Martin and Miller were with me. I must have looked a most awful sight, I know, because I could still only just manage to see out of my left eye by lifting up the lid with my fingers, and of course I was covered with mud, and my left sleeve was dangling down, and my arm was inside my monkey jacket, where the old Chinaman had bandaged it. But, for all that, he didn't even ask me how I was, and that made me miserable.

"Pongo" came panting along after him, and when he had recovered his breath, I asked if the Commander had landed with them.

It was then that I heard that he had been shot through the body, and that Dr. Mayhew didn't know whether he would live or die. That made me feel even more wretched, and the Captain, hearing me ask about him, turned round and growled: "If you hadn't been such a blamed little idiot, he'd never have been shot. Umph! His little finger is worth more than all you confounded young midshipmen—umph!—put together;" and he stalked off to meet the American Captain.

"Pongo" told me that Dicky was going on all right, and then wanted to know all about my arm, and my face, and everything that had happened; but I wanted to be left alone and be miserable, and went away and hid somewhere—I didn't care what happened; and wanted to run away and get killed, or something like that, till I heard Jim's voice calling for me. And he found me and comforted me a little, and said that Dr. Barclay did not think that the Commander would die, but that Dr. Mayhew wouldn't say for certain till another day had gone by. But all the joy and the excitement had gone out of me, and I felt wretched and ill, and had a bit of a "weep", and didn't mind Jim seeing me, not in the least, and he cleared out and left me, and went away to Mr. Whitmore and presently came back, and told me all about Mr. Whitmore's party, and how they'd had a pretty tough job getting back to the boat, and never got halfway to the gun. He hadn't been wounded at all—he didn't even remember falling down—so Miller must have made a mistake. He was awfully keen to see over the house, and went everywhere, and before I could stop him he poked his nose into the little room place where they had put Mr. Hoffman and five dead bluejackets, and that made him feel rather ill.

Everybody seemed to come up after this. Dr. Barclay had a look at my arm, and I saw the corners of his mouth go down. "'Twill be a long job," he said, and did it up again as comfortably as he could. Miller had coiled himself up behind the wall, and was fast asleep, and so were Mr. Ching and most of his bluejackets—I would have done anything in the world for them. Old Sharpe came up to have a yarn, and cheered me up a little, and Captain Marshall caught sight of me, and came along and said something nice, and I knew that he was sorry, and I was so longing for someone to be pleasant that I made friends. He didn't "hee-haw" either, as I expected he would, when he first saw my face, and he told me that the Commander knew that I had sent off that message in the letter which the Englishman had written, and was pleased about it. This cheered me a little.

But the Captain took no notice of me, and every time he passed, my heart just felt like lead inside me, and everyone seemed to know that I was in disgrace, even old "Blucher".

It seems silly to say so, but I did fancy that he was not so affectionate as he usually was, and it hurt me.

Then they brought a dead man along with his face covered up, and someone told me that it was Wilkins, the marine bugler, who had helped me to set fire to one of those huts, and throw stones at the dogs, and that made me sadder than ever again.

Both of the landing parties must have managed to slip through in the fog without really running up against many of the Chinese; but now they were swarming all round us, and there was so much to do to keep them off, that I was left alone, and got into a safe corner, and watched the ships firing at the town and the six-inch gun. Sally had been put in a safe place, so the

Captain didn't care in the least where their shells went; and a good many did come pretty close to us, and one of the *Vigilant's* eight-inch shells didn't burst, and came roaring overhead, and fell into the paddy fields below.

Presently a number of houses in the town caught fire, and a lot of the Chinese ran away to try and put the fires out, so that we were not so much worried with them.

I wasn't there when the mandarin came to see the Captain, and didn't hear that he had brought the Englishman's head with him till afterwards, and by that time so many sad things had happened, that I did not feel so very sorry for him.

Then we began our retreat, and it was just before we started that Jim suggested that as I only had one arm, the best thing that I could do was to stick quite close to the Captain. He offered me his revolver, but I still had that one the Englishman had given me, and a good many cartridges for it were still in my pocket, so I got him to load it for me. He said a lot of things to buck me up before he went away, and I tried to feel happier, but it wasn't much of a success, at any rate whilst I was near the Captain. You see, he didn't even notice me. I thought that perhaps he would send me away from him, but not noticing me hurt me almost more, and I didn't want to talk to "Pongo", because he was nearly as much an idiot as "Dicky", and though he tried to buck me "up", he only made me want to kick him. He would keep going at it, too, and I was jolly glad whenever he had to run on a message for the Captain, and left me alone.

I saw Captain Marshall and Mr. Travers rush the hill opposite us, and then we had to follow them across the paddy fields, very slowly, because we had eight wounded men to carry. Eight men from the *Ringdove* dragged that Chinese gun along behind us, and Jim came up when we were halfway across. He had caught sight of the gun, and was simply furious, because it wasn't their gun at all, and we both told Mr. Trevelyan so, and he was just as angry.

"Have you said anything to the Gunnery Lieutenant?" he asked.

Jim had told him, but he wasn't going to do anything. He thought that the Captain had probably given Mr. Rashleigh permission, so wasn't going to be mixed up with it, and we couldn't speak to the Captain himself.

We got across all right, but Captain Parkinson lost a lot of people in the rearguard when he left the walled house, and that meant more wounded for us to carry, and then we dragged on again, and Mr. Travers and Captain Marshall had a fearful time when they tried to leave their hill. They did it splendidly, and it was grand to see their men walking backwards down the hill, with their bayonets all sticking out at the brutes above them, and when they ran back, Mr. Travers and Captain Marshall and two or three men had to stop and keep the Chinese from killing a wounded man who had fallen almost in front of their feet—they were so close behind them. We saw Mr. Langham rush back from the Maxim gun and pick him up and carry him along, whilst the others kept the Chinese off, and we all cheered. It was a grand sight, and it washed out a lot of silly things Mr. Langham had done to us in the gunroom.

After that we had seventeen people to carry, which meant very slow work, and then the Captain took charge of the rearguard, because it was the most dangerous place, and I kept close to him and saw that my revolver was all right; but nothing much happened, and we cleared out back to within half a mile of the shore, where that beastly fog began.

I never even saw Sally all this time, because Mr. Ching's bluejackets stood in a ring all round her, touching shoulders, so that none of the bullets that were always coming along should touch her. I did see her skirt once when we were halted, and she was sitting on the ground in the middle of them; but that was all.

We all joined up together then, and went as fast as we could, and the fog rolled all over us and shut out everything. It was perfectly awful, and we seemed to lose each other and then find each other again, time after time, and there were all our people shouting, and trying to form a square all round us, and farther away in the fog Chinamen were yelling and gradually getting round our flanks, and at last they were even ahead of us.

It was then, that the Captain spoke to me for the first time, and ordered me to try and find Captain Parkinson, and tell him to close his men on the centre, so as not to have too broad a front, and to go very slowly. I did manage to find him, after stumbling into a ditch and hurting my left arm, and very nearly losing my revolver, and was only able to get back to the Captain because his bugler kept on sounding "G's".

Just being taken notice of bucked me up again very much, and when the Chinese suddenly rushed against our square, making a most awful noise, I wasn't really frightened—I didn't want to live unless I could do something to wipe out everything that I had done wrong—and this was my chance, I thought. I was shoved about from side to side, and jammed in among a lot of our men,

and was so small, that the brutes perhaps didn't see me, and somehow or other I managed to keep near the Captain, and his coxswain, and the signalman, and I think I helped them keep the Chinese off him. I know that my revolver was empty when the fighting left off, and I had tried very carefully not to fire except when a Chinaman was almost touching. I had been knocked over by our own men just before the finish, and lost the Captain, but found him again, and got one of the signalmen to reload the revolver.

I have often been asked whether I was frightened, and people think that I am only putting on "side" when I tell them I was not. But I wasn't, not in the least, because, as you must understand by now, from all I have written, I was too frightfully miserable and too ashamed of myself.

Well, you know what happened, and that I managed to kill a brute who pretended to be dead and tried to kill the Captain, as he was carrying Sally away from those dead bodies round the Chinese gun.

The Captain did not say anything about it at the time, but that didn't stop me being happy in the least. I didn't want thanks, I was simply satisfied to have done it—all by myself, too—with lots of people looking on, so that there could not be any mistake about it. Jim soon heard about it, and found me, and gave my good arm a squeeze and went off. I had heard Captain Marshall "hee-hawing" about Ching looking as if he was walking on "air", and I didn't know what he meant at the time; but now I knew, for I felt that I was walking on air too, and forgot my arm and my face and of being so tired—forgot everything except having saved the Captain—and I'm certain that Mr. Ching could not have felt more happy than I did.

I still stuck to the Captain, although he didn't say anything to me, and even when I heard that Withers had been killed, I couldn't feel as sad as I ought, though he was really a chum of mine.

Presently, when all the terrible number of wounded had been patched up, we brought them and the dead down to the sea, and when we got that signal out of the fog from the *Omaha's* siren, we settled down to spend the night on the shore, behind a damp bank, and made some fires, and tried to make the wounded comfortable round them. When the Captain had seen to everything, he went over to one of the fires and sat down to light a cigar, as he had run out of matches. I think that he must have been a little tired.

I sat down behind him, with "Pongo" and "Blucher", and presently he turned round—he could see my face by the light of the fire, and I was trembling all over for him to say something—and he growled out, "Haven't improved the look of your face, Dick!"

Well, I simply ran down towards the sea and hid in the fog, and sat down in the mud and cried for joy. No one else could see me, and I didn't much care if they did, for I felt too happy to describe it to you. I knew that everything was wiped out at last.

Of course he never cared a little bit about himself, so probably never thought it was such a splendid thing to save his life, or worth the trouble of thanking me for doing so. That is why he hadn't done it, in so many words; but just that "They haven't improved the look of your face, Dick!" was all I wanted, and I was too shy to go back for a long time, till I got so cold that I had to, and found Jim there and told him, and he squeezed my arm again, and I know that he was as happy as I was. He hadn't got hurt all day, not even in the fight in the square. He'd been knocked under a Maxim carriage whilst he was trying to help Mr. Whitmore get into some safe place, after his leg had been broken, and had nothing but a few bruises to show. He really was rather worried about having nothing else to show for it.

He was still bubbling over with anger about that gun. He disliked Mr. Rashleigh even more than I did, and he hated him having it. We couldn't do anything, although Captain Marshall said that he had no right to it whatsoever. Mr. Travers, with his leg jolly painful, didn't want to be worried about anything, and Captain Parkinson was too sad about his First Lieutenant having been killed to think of anything else. He did say, "Guess your marines had gone by when my boys came up, and that little fat chap was behind me—some."

"I actually stood on it, sir! Didn't you see me, Dick?" Jim told him, and I told Captain Parkinson that I had seen him, too, from the gateway with my own eyes, and that was a long time before anyone else came in sight.

He wouldn't say anything, so we went away and sat down close to the Captain, and began talking about it—you know what I mean—talking just loudly enough for him to hear, if he wanted to; but we were both too frightened to talk too loudly, and I don't think that he did hear.

It was grand to see the fog rolling away in the morning, and to see the gunboats showing up, and when it cleared away altogether, it was grander still to watch them peppering the Chinese with shells whenever they came out in the open. Then the boats came along, and you should have seen old "Blucher" scrambling into the first *Vigilant's* boat that ran up the beach. It made

everyone laugh.

I was sent back with the second batch of wounded, and Dicky met me at the gang-way, looking awfully white and scared. He told me that the Commander was doing all right; but I wasn't allowed to see him, and Dr. Mayhew was almost off his head with worry and work, and hadn't time to talk to me.

When I saw my face in the looking-glass I didn't wonder why people had smiled whenever they saw me. The left side was all purple and black, and my forehead was raw, and my left eye and upper lip all swollen.

Old Ah Man burst into tears, when he saw me—he was a funny old chap—and went away and kicked his Chinese stewards and "makee learn" boys, and brought me some beef tea and custard, and cried again when he heard that Withers had been killed.

Then I had a hot bath, Dicky helping me, and turned into my hammock, and it wasn't till next morning that my arm was properly dressed and put into plaster of Paris.

I knew, even before I went on deck, by the noise of the bell being struck every two minutes, that the fog had come on again. It was denser than ever, if that was possible, and we had to switch on the lights all over the ship to see our way about.

At midday we buried Withers and the five men belonging to the *Vigilant* who had been killed—buried them overboard. Captain Lester had brought them off from shore, because he feared that if he buried them there the Chinese would dig them up and mutilate them.

It was most awfully solemn and depressing, in that damp, raw fog, with our bells tolling and our colours half-masted and dripping down limply. Out of the fog, on each side of us, the gunboats' bells were tolling, for they were burying their dead too, and the noise seemed to throb right through you. The Chaplain read the funeral service over the six bodies, covered with Union Jacks, and lying in a row on the quarterdeck, Withers being the smallest and being placed farthest aft, because he was an officer, and the Captain stood behind them, without moving a muscle, and looking terribly stern.

The marines fired three volleys, and "A" and "B" companies fired another three volleys, and then the two bluejacket buglers sounded the "Last Post" six times, and each time, as the last note died away, there was a splash, and I felt as if something icy cold had struck me right in the middle of the back.

I did not dare to look at anyone except the Captain. Then the band played a cheerful march, Mr. Lawrence sang out—"Ship's company! Right and left turn! Quick march!" and the men marched for'ard into the battery, very silently, looking over the side at the water as they went through the battery screen door.

"Hoist the colours!" the Captain said, and went below. His lips were very tightly squeezed together. No one could eat any lunch, we were all so miserable, and no one even heard Captain Marshall "hee-hawing" for a long time—not for days and days.

But the Commander's third day had gone by, and Dr. Mayhew and Dr. Barclay, both of them, said that he would get well, and that cheered us all; and in a couple of days or so the Captain began to get angry again, and to grunt and growl at everybody, which was another good sign, and cheered us up a great deal. He was fearfully angry about the fog; for it settled down and never lifted for four days, and was so thick that we could do nothing all that time, and of course the Captain had only half finished his job, and wanted to burn the town and the junks and recapture the yacht.

It did lift on the fifth day, and when the gunboats stood inshore and the Captain landed, with everyone who was well enough to land, there was no one there to oppose him, and only about twenty small junks still remaining in the creek. The pirates had simply cleared out in all the big junks and escaped in the fog, and before they left they had set fire to the yacht and the tramp steamer, and these were simply complete wrecks. Jim told me that they were nothing but bent and warped iron.

The Captain was in a terrible rage about it; but I don't see how he could blame himself, and it was only lucky that the fog had lifted during the morning on which we had all got off.

He burnt the rest of the town and destroyed the six-inch gun; and the Chaplain went ashore, with a firing party, and read the funeral service over the graves of Mr. Hoffman and Wilkins, the marine bugler, and fired three volleys, and the bluejacket drummer-boy used Wilkins's own bugle to sound the "Last Post". When this was done, and when the *Huan Min* had towed away some of the junks and burnt the others, we all steamed back to Tinghai.

The *Ringdove* was sent up to Shanghai to communicate with the Admiral, and took with her our mails. I wrote a most gorgeous letter to my mother, and you can imagine what tremendously

exciting letters we all had to write home.

Jim was in charge of the boat that took the mail bags across to her, and he came back red with anger. "They've got that gun all burnished and polished, just abaft the mainmast—I saw it;" and that made us all, everyone in the gunroom, angry again. We had almost forgotten about it in the excitement of getting back to Tanghai and writing home.

Sally and Mr. Hobbs went in her, but before they went Mr. Langham coaxed her down into the gunroom to cut those ribbons across the piano. She was very nervous and uncomfortable, and just as she was going to do it with Webster's dirk, someone suggested that Withers's ought to be used, so we went away and fetched it from his chest. When she knew whose it was she cried, and we all felt horribly "snuffy", and then she opened the piano and sat down, but only touched one note and burst into tears again. Mr. Langham pulled out his big handkerchief, shoved it into her hands, and she ran away.

Directly she had disappeared Mr. Langham locked the piano and threw the key through the scuttle into the sea.

When the *Ringdove* came back she brought six weeks' mails, and that was the first thing that really cheered us up. We were quite happy.

I had six long letters from my mother, the first I had had since leaving home, and I sat on my chest in a corner by myself and read them, and it was very jolly to hear all that had happened at home; but they made me miserable, for although she tried to write cheerfully, I knew that she was really very worried. You see, my father would put all the little money he had into silly swindly things which he saw advertised in the papers, and my mother often told me that some of the religious papers had more swindling advertisements in them than ordinary daily papers, and of course my father, being a parson, often saw these. I don't know much about it, but she used to tell me that if he saw an advertisement telling anyone to send, say, five pounds to a man and he would be sure to make it into ten or twenty pounds in a week—by some certain plan he had invented for dealing in stocks and shares—my father would nearly always do it, if he could manage to scrape any money together.

I know that my mother often cried about it, and I've often heard him say, "Well, my dear, they seem to know what they are talking about. They can't be all swindlers, or else the editors wouldn't print their advertisements, so I'll just try, this once."

He always lost his money, and I know, for a fact, that my mother only had one new dress all the time I was on the *Britannia*, so as to have enough money to pay for me there.

I know that this is rather a "sniffy" chapter, but I can't help it, and I'm telling you just what happened, and how I felt about everything.

The Captain sent for me before I had read my letters more than twice, and I shoved them into my chest and ran aft to his cabin.

He was sitting at his knee-hole table in his shirt sleeves, smoking a cigar, with heaps of letters all around him, and "Blucher's" head close to his elbow.

"Good news from home, I hope, Ford? Here's something for you from my girl Nan," and he gave me a folded-up piece of notepaper with "Dick" scrawled across it.

I was running out again when he gurgled: "Arm all right? Let me see you move your fingers. Umph. You'll be all right. Umph! I wrote to the missus to tell her you'd shot that chap who tried to cut me down; wrote to your mother too, to tell her you were going on well—told her about it as well. Umph!"

"Did you really, sir?" I gasped. "Thank you very much indeed, sir!"

"Umph! Do you know where we are going? Yokohama!—to-morrow; got orders to-night; off you go."

I rushed off to tell everybody, and was awfully happy again—everyone was; but what made me so happy was to know that Captain Lester himself had written about me saving his life, and that everyone at Upton Overy would know about it. I knew how my mother would love her letter, and keep it, and read it over and over again. Nan wrote an awfully spidery kind of a fist, and wanted me to bring her a whole lot of "curios" when we came home. She said that I had promised to do so, and that this was just a "reminder". It was jolly to hear from her, and she sent her love to old "Blucher", and wanted to know whether he had had any of his "fits" lately.

My face was nearly all right again by this time, but the forehead was darker on the left side, and Dr. Barclay said that he thought it would always be like that.

I didn't really mind, because it would always be something to show, and to remind me of everything.

As a matter of fact, I was rather pleased about it, but had to pretend I wasn't.

CHAPTER XVII

Goodbye to the Huan Min

Out of Danger—Goodbye to Ching—Mr. Rashleigh's Report—at Hong-Kong

Written by Commander Truscott

I thank God that I am not lying under the muddy water rolling round the Hector Group, with Withers and those other poor fellows of ours.

It was to Marshall and his marines that I owe my life, and I wish that it was in my power to repay them. In attempting to rescue young Ford that night he was captured, I had been shot clean through the body, below the left ribs, and two of the marines—I do not know which two, and they have never come forward to tell me—carried me back to the walls of that battery, whilst Marshall kept the Chinese at bay. It was Barclay who told them to carry me as gently and smoothly as possible, as this was my only chance, and they carried me as if I had been a baby asleep, although the Chinese were closing all around them. They got me down the mud shore, and into the barge, only just in time, and it was whilst I was being lifted in that Marshall received the blow on the head which knocked him over. There was a most desperate fight to save him, and then poor young Withers managed to drive them off with his gun.

When they got me aboard the *Vigilant*, Mayhew would not give me any opinion as to what my chances were. "Look here, Mayhew!" I told him, "I'm not a baby; tell me;" but he only said, "Wait for three days, and eat nothing till then. I cannot tell you before."

I had to be content with that, and to lie in my bunk, with the pictures of my wife and my two boys smiling at me out of their frames, and watch the hands of the little clock she had given me crawling round its face, and wondering, whenever I had a twinge of pain inside me, whether the trouble which Mayhew feared had commenced, and whether the end was near.

Mayhew used to come to my cabin half a dozen times a day, feel my pulse, and take my temperature. "Hungry still, Commander?" he would say, and smile and go away, and each time I would watch his face to see if the smile was only there to cover his real feelings. No one who has not been through a time like this can imagine how awful is the suspense.

On the morning after the Skipper had come back with the landing parties, bringing Sally, her father, young Ford, and our missing men with him, Mayhew found my temperature and pulse normal. He gave a whoop. "You'll live to enjoy your pension all right, Truscott," and told me that I was practically out of danger. Barclay came in and confirmed his opinion. I lay back, too filled with emotion to speak. Those photographs seemed to smile even more at me—they represented all I had to live for—and life seemed very good.

Neither of the doctors had had any sleep during the night, as they had been busy with the wounded, and Barclay looked pretty ghastly. He had had a blow on the head during the fight in that square, but fortunately the sword edge had been turned by his cap.

The Captain came in almost immediately afterwards, growling very fiercely to hide his feelings. "Umph! I've kept back the *Ringdove* till I heard about you from Mayhew this morning. Going to send her up to Shanghai at once. I'll be off and write a letter to your missus. Umph! You want shaving—badly;" and he gripped my hand and went out again.

I finished my letter home—as you can imagine I finished it—the sentry outside was waiting for it, I heard the boat shove off to take it to the *Ringdove*, and I thanked God once more and felt inexpressibly at peace.

At the same time that she heard the news of my wound, my wife would hear that I was out of danger, and this, too, caused me to be very thankful.

Some little time afterwards the curtain was pushed aside, and young Ford's extremely disfigured face peeped through. I smiled at him, and he gave me a frightened cheerful smile and drew it back again.

Poor little chap! he'd been pretty badly knocked about. I ought never to have let him go on that "fool" errand of his. But he was as happy as a lord, because he had saved the Skipper's life.

In a week's time I was allowed to sit up for an hour or two a day, and in ten days' time to walk

about a little.

Then the *Ringdove* arrived with six weeks' mails, and orders from the Admiral to proceed at once to Yokohama with the gunboats, to land all the wounded still requiring hospital treatment, and to join the flagship somewhere off the coast of Corea. We were to proceed with "despatch", as political complications in Europe threatened war with a country which maintained a considerable fleet in Chinese waters.

The Captain of the *Huan Min* had received orders by the *Ringdove* as well, and had to continue the search for the remainder of the pirates—those who had escaped in the junks.

Ching and his Captain dined with our Skipper that night, and, for him, "Old Lest" was extraordinarily gentle. He felt, I am sure, that he was leaving them in the lurch, with all this work still in front of them, and thought it was hardly "playing the game", after the magnificent way in which they had helped us.

I heard him tell Ching: "Umph! But for you, Ching, we should never have done it, never have rescued the little lass" (I saw Ching wince), "and everyone would have called 'Old Lest' a silly old fool. I only wish that we could stay and help you; but we can't. There's trouble comin' along, and the Admiral wants every ship he can get hold of, so we've got to be off." He grunted and growled a few times, and then burst out fiercely with, "'Old Lest' will never forget you."

He gave Ching a photograph of himself, and a silver cup he had won years ago as a midshipman. It was the Admiral's cup for the Channel Fleet in the old days, and he valued it more than anything else he had in his cabin. I told Ching so afterwards, in order that he should appreciate it all the more.

He had written to the Foreign Office as well, about Ching, and we all hoped that eventually he would get his promotion.

To continue the search for the fugitive and scattered pirates was like hunting for the button in a Christmas pudding after the thimble and sixpence had been found—a good deal of trouble, and not worth the bother when you did find it.

Little Sally was the thimble, and the yacht and the tramp steamer the sixpence, and we all knew well enough that Ching wanted the thimble, and didn't care in the least for anything else.

He had told me that he was hoping to be sent back to Shanghai, and I know that he wanted another chance of seeing Sally, and that the prospect of cruising alone among those bleak, fog-bound islands, now that she had been rescued and had gone out of his life, was very dreary to him.

Before he went back to his antiquated old tub, he was taken into the ward room, where they gave him a great "send-off". Everyone knew that but for him Sally would not have been rescued, everyone on board admired his pluck and gallantry, and everyone was extremely sorry to part with him.

At daybreak next morning the *Huan Min* got up her clumsy anchor and steamed away, and we all manned ships and cheered her as she passed us, and waited on deck till she had disappeared round the island, out of sight, and nothing of her remained but a dense cloud of oily black smoke.

"Umph! There goes a confounded fine chap", the Skipper growled, as he went below. We ourselves, with our gunboats, left shortly afterwards for Yokohama, and Parkinson in the *Omaha* came along too. There are small English and United States naval hospitals still kept up in this Japanese town, and all the bad cases were sent ashore to them.

Parkinson, after having landed his, left for Chemulpo in Corea, and we gave him and his officers a great farewell dinner to commemorate the termination of the expedition.

I did not take part in this, however, because Mayhew forced me to go to hospital with Whitmore, Ford, and seven others of our men.

I was very loath to go, because I felt as fit as a fiddle, and war troubles were brewing, and my place ought to be on board. However much I dreaded a big naval war, there was always the chance of some promotion, and I hated to be left behind.

However, Mayhew wouldn't hear of my coming, and we had to watch the old *Vigilant* steam away past the breakwater without us.

I rather fancy that the doctors were a little too careful about me, for, as a matter of fact, I never felt better in my life.

Before the *Vigilant* sailed, the Skipper brought "Blucher" up to the hospital to say goodbye to us, and told me many things. One was that he had allowed the old Scotch engineer, whom we had brought with us from the island, to go ashore and disappear.

"Umph!" the Skipper growled. "Had enough evidence to hang him a dozen times; but he

helped our people in that house, and Ford and those two fellows would have been scuppered but for him, so I sent him ashore at night, gave him a ten-pound note, and told him to clear."

The ten-pound note was out of his own pocket, I knew well enough.

He was asking my opinion as to whom he should mention by name in his despatches, and, just as he was going, said, "Umph! Truscott, I sent that Report of Proceedings back to Rashleigh with a copy of Trevelyan's and young Ford's. Told him to rewrite his. Told him that I wouldn't forward it to the Admiral till I was satisfied with it, and he's written quite a different yarn. Umph! I told him what I thought of him—pretty plainly."

Young Ford had been bothering me, time after time, to do something about that Chinese gun which Whitmore, Travers, and Marshall had captured, and which Rashleigh had claimed and kept. From all that I had gathered, especially from Whitmore, there was no doubt that Rashleigh had no earthly right to it. I took this opportunity of mentioning the subject.

"Umph! I know the fat little beggar's got no right to it. Thought he had when he asked me for it, so gave it him, and let him take it away; but when 'Old Lest's' given anything away—umph!—he don't go back on his word. It belongs to me, I suppose, and I can do what I like with it, eh?"

After he had gone I let Ford know what he had said about that Report, and he was extremely delighted; but the possession of that gun still rankled very deeply, and I felt sure that he would not be content whilst it remained aboard the *Ringdove*.

From a few things Ford said, more or less under his breath, I had a dim suspicion that if it wasn't handed over to the *Vigilant*, the gunroom meant to do something or other.

"What's the game?" I asked him; but he wasn't going to give away any secrets.

For four weeks we were left to ourselves, and young Ford and myself were able to have many pleasant little excursions up country, and each day's excitement was the arrival of Reuter's telegram at the English Club on the Bund, with news of the gathering war clouds.

As war seemed to be becoming imminent, both of us felt our position very keenly. Poor Whitmore with his smashed thigh was, of course, totally helpless, but, as I said before, I was as strong as a horse again, and Ford's arm did not entirely incapacitate him.

Just, however, as we thought that war was only a question of hours, the war clouds disappeared, to our intense relief, and presently the *Vigilant* came back to pick us all up again, the Skipper having orders to proceed to Singapore, and to act as Senior Officer there till it was time for us to go home and pay off.

I was fit for duty now, even Mayhew couldn't deny that, and right glad I was to get back to my work and to my own bunk.

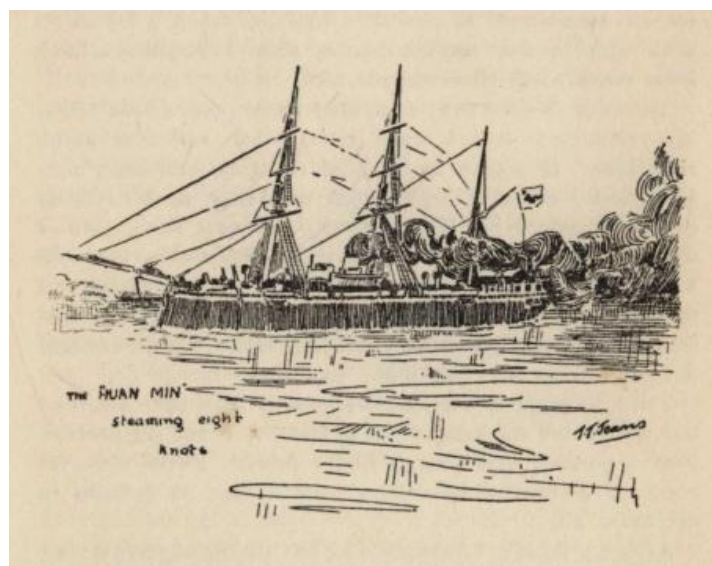
We called in at Nagasaki for coal, took in four hundred tons, and then left for Hong-Kong, where we arrived in the middle of June, just before the hot weather had commenced, and made fast to one of the buoys off Murray Pier.

It was very pleasant being back there, and we were obliged to remain for a whole week, whilst the dockyard made a few slight repairs.

The only other man-of-war in the harbour besides the *Tamar* and the old *Wyvern*, moored off Kowloon, was the *Ringdove*, secured to another buoy farther inshore.

Young Ford can tell you better what happened there during that week than I can.

As a matter of fact, I am not supposed to know anything about it, and don't *officially*.



CHAPTER XVIII A Midnight Adventure

Sent to Hospital—The Subscription—The Sub's Plan—An Exciting Moment—
Mr. Rashleigh Rages—Jim is Safe

Written by Midshipman Ford

I was very sorry indeed to say goodbye to Mr. Ching—we all were—and, of course, I had had such a lot to do with him in that walled house, that I ought to have been more sorry than anyone else.

The day before we separated from the *Huan Min*, Mr. Lawrence and I went aboard her and had lunch with him. It was a funny kind of meal, and with only one hand I couldn't help myself very well, so Mr. Ching cut my food up into little pieces, and sent for a pair of chopsticks. If you have ever tried chopsticks, you will know that the first time you try them you cannot do much, and I could hardly pick up anything at all, and didn't do more than taste anything before the others had finished theirs, and my plate was taken away.

They thought it was jolly amusing to watch me, and though I was as hungry as a hunter, I had to pretend that I wasn't, and that I didn't mind. There were all sorts of curious things there, and I had so wanted to eat them all.

Afterwards, Mr. Lawrence and Mr. Ching began yarning about old times when they were midshipmen together in the *Inflexible* years and years ago, so they didn't want me, and I slipped away and went round the ship, and when I saw any man who had been in the walled house that awful night, I shook him by the hand, because I was so glad to see him again.

I think they liked me doing it, and they all grinned and saluted very smartly.

Mr. Ching gave me one of the gold-lace dragons from the sleeve of one of his uniform coats. I wanted that more than anything, and still have it, and I gave him my stamp album. It only had a few stamps stuck in here and there, but there was a dark-red English penny stamp which, I believe, was rather valuable, and I had nothing else worth giving away. He seemed very pleased with it, and made me stick my name in it, so that he could remember me. I did hope that he would.

Mr. Hobbs and Sally had not given him anything at all. Wasn't that nasty of them, after all he had done? But he still kept that tam-o'-shanter she had worn; I saw it in his cabin.

Then the *Huan Min* went off, to carry on hunting for pirates by herself, and we went up to Yokohama, and when we arrived, the Commander, Mr. Whitmore, myself, and seven of our men were sent to hospital.

I rather liked going, because it was so uncomfortable on board, with only one useful arm; but then we heard that there might be a war, and it was perfectly horrid to see the *Vigilant* steaming away without us.

Still, I Was jolly happy, because, after she had gone, the Commander told me all that the Captain had said about Mr. Rashleigh and his Report of Proceedings. That didn't square up everything, not by a long chalk. We wanted that gun, and we were going to have it, too, and before I'd been sent to hospital, Mr. Langham and everyone else in the gunroom had sworn to get it back, and had begun inventing plans for doing so.

Then three weeks went by, my arm had been put in plaster again, and back the *Vigilant* came. There wasn't to be any war, and she took us all down to Hong-Kong, and we found the old *Tyne* there, which made me think of the first time I had seen her, and of how miserable and happy, in turns, I had been on board her.

But just ahead of the *Tamar* was the *Ringdove*, quite close to where we made fast to one of the outer buoys, and when she was swung by the tide in one position, we could see that Chinese gun just at the foot of her main mast.

That made us all "bristle" up again and get most frightfully angry. We had almost forgotten all about it in the excitement of knowing that we were going south to Singapore, to wait for our relief ship to come out from England, and then go home to pay off.

At dinner that night we were as hot about it as ever, and we made up our minds again to get it, somehow or other. It was jolly difficult to know how we could manage it, and nobody seemed to have any good schemes to suggest. Webster's idea was to run alongside during the dinner hour, when probably only the quartermaster would be awake, but that was silly. We couldn't possibly do it in the daytime, and we couldn't even think of a plan for doing it at night without being discovered. We knew jolly well that if we were found out, there would be a most awful fuss, and we should get into hot water with the Captain.

We made such a jolly row, all shouting and suggesting things, and calling each other silly idiots, that Mr. Langham stuck his fork into a beam overhead.

That is a signal for all the midshipmen and cadets to clear out of the gunroom, and as the last "out" always had his "extra" bill stopped for three days, so could not get any sardines or pickles from Ah Man, we were all out in a jiffy, and left Mr. Langham, Mr. Hamilton the big Engineer Sub, and the "A.P." to work out a scheme between them.

They wouldn't let us come back again, and I know that they didn't decide upon anything; but during the middle watch that night something happened which showed us the way.

It was Mr. Langham's "watch", and at about five bells there suddenly had been a lot of shouting under the bows, and he, the quartermaster, and the signalman had all run for'ard to see what was the matter, and found that a junk had fouled the buoy, drifted down against our bows, and carried away a mast.

They got her clear, but it took a quarter of an hour to do it, and, of course, during that time there had been no one aft at all, and anything might have happened there without anyone knowing of it.

Now, don't you see what the idea was?

Mr. Langham didn't tell us what he was going to do exactly, for fear that we should be asses enough to talk about it to everyone, and that the "Ringdoves" would hear about it as well; but he went aboard the *Ringdove* in the morning to see the navigator, who was a pal of his (except for the "gun question"), and came back again very excitedly.

"I had a good look at that gun, you chaps, without pretending to do so. The wheels are simply lashed down to some ring bolts, lashed down with rope, and we could cut them adrift as easy as winking."

He and Mr. Hamilton went ashore together and came off late at night, and we all waited for them, and knew that something was in the "wind", but they wouldn't say what, and only told us that they wanted twenty pounds. Mr. Langham said that he would give ten (he was very well off) if we would subscribe the rest, and you may bet your best waistcoat we got that other ten pounds pretty quickly.

We hadn't the faintest notion why he wanted it till two nights after, and then, just before "lights out" in the gunroom, he sent for us all and told us.

My aunt! it was jolly exciting.

He had bought a sampan—one of the Chinese sailing boats which used to bring us off from the shore if we missed the ordinary ship's boat—and had had two large holes made in the bottom, with plugs fitted in them and ropes made fast to each, so that a jolly good strong jerk would pull them out. He had had her loaded with stones, so that she would sink quickly after they'd been pulled out.

"I'm going to sail her across the *Ringdove's* bowsprit," he said, "and shall get my rigging foul of her, if possible. If I can't, I have a grapnel, and shall catch hold of her cable, and when the sampan can't drift away, I shall pull out those plugs and begin "hullabalooing" like a Chinaman. When she sinks I shall hold on to the buoy and go on squealing till the quartermaster comes along, and when he hears where I am he'll probably get into the dinghy to pick me up.

"I sha'n't be there when he comes," he added, grinning. Of course, in a small gunboat the only man on watch at night is the quartermaster, and if there wasn't much of a row, he probably would not call anyone else.

"Now, what you have to do is this"—we all got fearfully excited—"I've asked the Commander for his gig to-night, told him I wanted it for a special purpose, and he played the game and didn't ask for what, and said she needn't be hoisted out of the water. She's quite big enough to take the gun and carriage, and Hamilton and the 'A.P.' and six of the strongest of you midships have to go away in her at about half-past two in the middle watch. You must be down astern of her, not close

enough to let her spot you, by a quarter to three, and then wait till you hear me start squealing.

"The *Ringdove* has her dinghy made fast to the starboard boom to-night, so you'll have to pull alongside her port gangway as 'gingerly' as ever you can, get aboard and bring back the gun, and the carriage too, if you've got time. The trunnions of the gun are only secured in the carriage by bands, and there are pins in them which can be pulled out—well, a good many of you have seen them already. Don't worry about me; I'll swim back."

That was the scheme which he and Mr. Hamilton had worked out between them, and it was jolly exciting. Mr. Hamilton was to go in charge of the gig, and as he was very strong—nearly as strong as the Sub himself—he had to do the lifting with Mr. Moore (the A.P.). Webster, Jones, and Jim Rawlings and three of the others were told off to pull the oars, because they were the strongest of the midships.

"Dicky", who was quite all right now, wasn't to go, because he was too excitable, and "Pongo" was too fat and useless. I wasn't going either at first, but I implored them to let me steer. I could manage with one hand, if they fixed up the wooden tiller the Commander used when he took the gig away sailing, and I said that I had some right to go, because the gun had fired at me so often. Jim backed me up, and Mr. Langham agreed that I had some right, but told me that I should have to sit on the gunwale, behind the stern sheets, so as not to crowd the boat too much.

You may jolly well imagine that I didn't care where I sat or what I did, so long as I could take my share in the job.

Presently Mr. Langham compared his watch with Mr. Hamilton's, and went ashore in a very old flannel suit; and we had to turn in and pretend to sleep, though that was impossible, and we kept on running up on deck to see what kind of a night it was.

It turned out to be jolly dark, which was splendid; but there was only a very little breeze, and that was blowing from Kowloon, on the mainland, straight towards Hong-Kong. This was a nuisance, because it meant that Mr. Langham would have to beat off shore in the sampan, and as there would be a jolly strong tide running, it would be very difficult to just hit off the buoy and the *Ringdove's* bows, especially as he was going to do it single-handed.

Mr. Hamilton was rather worried about this, and just after midnight he came along to Jim and told him he had better go ashore, find Mr. Langham, and help him sail her. Jim was about the strongest swimmer of all us midships; that was why he chose him. And Jim was jolly keen to go, and Mr. Hamilton pulled him ashore in the skiff, told him where he would find the sampan, and pulled back again.

Well, I never thought the time for starting would ever come; but at last "four bells" struck, and we all dressed, Dicky helping me because of my arm, and we sneaked on deck like mice, and there was the gig waiting for us alongside.

Mr. Trevelyan was the officer of the watch, and I heard Mr. Hamilton say to him, "Going for a little exercise, Trevelyan;" and heard him reply, "Well, good luck! I've got everything ready to hoist it in." So of course he must have known all about it.

We crept down into the boat; I squatted in the stern, jammed my feet against the ribs there to prevent myself falling overboard, and we shoved off without making a sound, and pulled away till we were some way astern of the *Ringdove*, catching hold of the next buoy to hers and hanging on to it.

Then we waited in the dark.

We couldn't see a single light in her except her "riding" light for'ard, and a very faint glimmer amidships, where the quartermaster ought to be. Presently five bells were struck aboard the *Vigilant* and aboard the old *Tamar* astern of us, and a few moments afterwards we saw a light moving for'ard aboard the *Ringdove*, her funny, "tin-kettly" bell was struck, the light came aft again, and we knew that the quartermaster, at any rate, was awake.

"Old Langham ought to be shoving off now," Mr. Hamilton whispered. It was so dark round us that we couldn't see twenty yards; but the shore lights lighted the water close in under Murray Pier, and we all kept our eyes turned that way, and presently saw a sail show out for a moment, and whispered, "There they come," and got terribly excited.

One always forgets how excited one has been before, when other things happened, but really I do think that I was fearfully excited now—as much as I have ever been.

We waited and waited, and got the oars ready, and then, all of a sudden, we heard a sound from the dark, as if something was knocking up against a buoy. I almost fell backwards overboard, but saved myself by clutching the tiller, and then there were most piteous yells, two different kinds, so that I knew Jim was there, and we shoved off and pulled very quickly.

"Port gangway!" Mr. Hamilton whispered to me, and I steered for it; and as we gradually

crept under the stern, we saw the quartermaster's lantern moving for'ard and then saw it on the fo'c'stle.

Mr. Hamilton had to help me steer her, there was such a strong tide running; but we were fearfully careful, and got the gig alongside, and Jones held on in the bows, and Mr. Hamilton and the "A.P." and Webster disappeared up the gangway in their bare feet, with a tackle the Bo's'n had given us. We could hear them very softly getting the gun out of the carriage, and the Chinese kind of yells were still going on, only more gently, and we heard the quartermaster sing out, "Who's there?" and presently he sung out, "Hold on, and I'll fetch the dinghy!"—though how he thought Chinamen could understand him I don't know.

The lantern was thumped down on the fo'c'stle, and he climbed along the starboard boom, and in a very little while there was a splash of oars, and we knew that he was pulling to the buoy.

I knew that we were all grinning, although we couldn't see each other, and imagined Mr. Langham and Jim swimming away out of sight; and I was rather nervous about Jim, because the tide was so strong, and it was quite five hundred yards back to the *Vigilant*.

However, there wasn't time to worry, as Mr. Hamilton and the "A.P." were coming down the ladder with the gun in their arms, and the gangway creaked at every step, and we were very frightened because the noise seemed so loud. They slid it down into the stern sheets on to a gymnasium mat we had put there to deaden the sound, and back they went. We heard something drop on the deck, and it seemed to make an awful row, and presently they came to the gangway again, and all of them were lifting the gun carriage, and they began lowering it into the boat with the tackle. You see, it was such an awfully awkward thing to handle, though it wasn't really very heavy.

Then we were absolutely petrified with fear, for suddenly we heard Mr. Rashleigh's voice bawling for the quartermaster, and could hear him coming along from under the poop, cursing, and wanting to know where he was, and what all the noise was about.

The gun carriage was only lowered halfway down, but Mr. Hamilton sang out very softly, "Stand clear!" and dropped the whole thing into the boat on top of the gun (I don't know how it was that it didn't break anybody), and they all jumped down in a heap, making a most fearful row. Jones slipped the boat rope for'ard, and we slid astern just as Mr. Rashleigh ran up to the gangway and began singing out and cursing, asking who it was, and what it was, and "Where's that quartermaster?"

He was in a towering passion, and we could imagine what a jolly funny sight he must be in his bulgy pyjamas, with his round red face and his bald head, but were jolly glad that there wasn't any light for us to see him or he us. We hadn't moved a muscle—not even those who had fallen in a jumble on top of each other—and simply let the tide take us down right under the stern, where it was tremendously dark, and he couldn't possibly see anything.

I don't think that he had discovered at first what had really happened, and kept cursing into the dark, but then must have found our tackle, for he was absolutely silent, and we guessed that he must have found that the gun wasn't there.

By that time the quartermaster had come back, and the last we heard was a glorious row going on. My aunt! you should have heard him storming.

We were well astern now, and Mr. Hamilton and the "A.P." and Webster disentangled themselves, and we got out the oars and pulled a roundabout way back to the *Vigilant*. She was pitch dark, even the quarterdeck gangway lamps were turned off, and we had to feel our way very gingerly to the side. This was so that we shouldn't be seen getting the gun on board. The rest of the gunroom and most of the ward-room officers were up there, and had a tackle rigged, all ready, and got the gun and the carriage on deck in no time.

They carried them for'ard to hide, and put the gun in the sand tank, covering it up with sand, and the carriage was taken to pieces and stowed away in one of the gunner's storerooms.

We were all so excited, that I forgot all about Mr. Langham and Jim till Mr. Langham came dripping up the gangway, asking if everything was all right, and if Jim had turned up, as he had lost sight of him after leaving the buoy.

"A jolly strong tide's running, and it was about as much as I could do to get here," he said, rather out of breath, and rather anxiously.

We all peered over the side, and tried to see his head coming along; but it was too dark to see anything at all, although Dicky and I went down to the foot of the accommodation ladder and looked along the surface of the water. Poor Dicky was almost off his head with fright. He kept on squeaking out: "Jim! Jim!" but daren't do it too loudly. And we listened, but there was no answer, and I, too, was quite frightened, and wished that we could do something, only it was so jolly

difficult to know what to do, and no one dare make a great noise, or run a searchlight, or anything like that, for fear of having to wake the Captain or the Commander, and giving the whole show away.

But Mr. Langham—just as he was, wringing wet—the "A.P." and Mr. Hamilton and four mids went away in the gig.

"He'll probably have drifted down with the tide, and will try and get hold of a buoy," Mr. Hamilton told me, and they disappeared in the darkness.

I could not go down below, because I was so worried, and had the most horrid feelings inside me, which Dicky made worse by asking such silly questions. Everything was so horribly dark, and the tide was running so strongly, and I knew that Jim must be in fearful danger, although Mr. Trevelyan kept saying that he would turn up all right.

I had forgotten all about the wretched gun, till someone—"Pongo", I think it was—said to Mr. Trevelyan, "Jolly to have the gun all right, sir, and the carriage. Isn't it, sir?" And Mr. Trevelyan answered, "What gun? I don't know anything about a gun. I've been forward with the quartermaster for the last quarter of an hour, and haven't seen anything."

I believe that the silly ass would have begun telling him, if Mr. Trevelyan hadn't said, "What the dickens are you doing up here at this time? Go and turn in at once!"

I really wasn't quite sure, then, whether he was "pretending" or not.

We waited for nearly half an hour, we all were fearfully nervous, and Mr. Trevelyan kept on saying, "I shall have to wake the Commander if he doesn't come back in another three minutes," and would wait, and say it again. And at last he actually started to go down to the Commander's cabin, but before he had got halfway down, the *Tyne's* masthead signal lamp began winking and blinking.

"She's calling us up, sir!" the signalman sang out; and oh! it was such a relief, for she signalled, "Mr. Rawlings is aboard", and I was awfully thankful. She was right astern of us, quite half a mile, and he must have been drowned if he had missed her, as there was nothing astern of her, no buoys, or ships, or anything to hold on to.

Dicky ran down below. He is such a soft-hearted chap.

We signalled across that we would send for him, and three of the ward room officers, in their pyjamas, fetched him in the skiff, and I almost blubbed with delight when he came alongside, looking like a drowned rat, and pulling at an oar to warm himself.

We got him down below and out of his wet things, and presently Mr. Langham and the others came back in the gig.

They had pulled round all the buoys astern of the *Ringdove* and tried to find him, and alongside the *Tamar*, hoping to find him there, and then, as a last chance, in a terrible state of fright, to the *Tyne*, and had got the good news that he had just gone back in our skiff.

"I thought it was all U P," Mr. Langham said, and changed into dry things; and then we all had a sardine supper in the gunroom, and most of the ward-room officers came down too, and we were awfully happy and contented, and Jim and Dicky and I "whoofed" two whole tins of sardines between us. Jim told me that he was pretty nearly "done" when he managed to grab hold of the *Tyne's* gangway, and couldn't drag himself out of the water till he had sung out, and someone had come down and given him a hand.

We had to be awfully quiet, for fear of disturbing the Commander, whose cabin was just overhead, and that was the only drawback to the supper.

Then we all turned into our hammocks; but Jim and I were much too excited to sleep, and besides, we had eaten too much.

Wasn't that a glorious night, and hadn't we jolly well got level with Mr. Rashleigh?

"Worth the risk, every time," Jim whispered.

"But won't there be a glorious row to-morrow?" Dicky squeaked. He was frightened about it already.

CHAPTER XIX

The Captain Receives a Present

"Old Lest" Flares Up—Recaptured from the Ringdove—Sally Again

Old Truscott has asked me to write this chapter, because he says that he is so confoundedly busy paying off the old *Vigilant*, that he hasn't a moment to himself.

That is his reason for not being bothered with the job; but for all that he manages to get into plain clothes all right, and fly to the beach and the bosom of his family, directly after evening "quarters" every day. He is so beastly happy, that I don't really mind shoving another chapter into this immortal book for him.

Although it is three months since we left Hong-Kong, I shall never forget old Rashleigh, in frockcoat and sword, coming fuming on board there, and wanting to see the Skipper about that wretched pop-gun which he swore we had stolen from him during the night.

I most distinctly remember having assisted to hoist something on board, at a most unusual hour of the night, but of course it was much too dark for anyone to be able to swear their Bible oath that it was his gun, though it certainly seemed to be wonderfully like it.

I said "good morning" to him as kindly as I could, and mentioned the fact that we were having very seasonable weather for this time of the year; but he was most distinctly rude, and when I saw his little eyes sticking out of his head, squinting round the quarterdeck and expecting to see his gun there, I nearly died of laughing.

His coxswain followed him up the ladder with some rope and blocks and flung them down on the deck.

"There's your confounded tackle you left aboard me last night. You're a confounded lot of burglars, the whole boiling lot of you," Rashleigh said to the Commander, and I am certain I could detect some slight traces of irritation in his manner.

Old Truscott himself flared up then—I'd never seen him angry before—and cursed the coxswain for throwing the tackle on the quarterdeck, and ordered him to pick it up again. He then took the fat little sausage, stamping with rage and red as a lobster, down to see the Skipper, whilst the others hauled me into the battery, banged me on the back, and implored me in the most gentlemanly way to stow "'hee-hawing', like a whole pack of jackasses, you chump-headed son-of-a-sea-cook, or you'll be giving the whole show away".

As Trevelyan had been the officer of the watch when the dastardly outrage was supposed to have taken place, he was sent for to throw some light on the subject, and after Rashleigh had gone away we heard from him all that had happened down there.

Neither the Skipper nor Truscott actually did know anything about it at all, and when Rashleigh, like the blundering ass that he was, suggested that they both did, the Skipper naturally flew into a rage, and after Trevelyan and the quartermaster who had been on duty at the time had sworn blindly that they'd seen nothing come on board during their watch (they had taken jolly care to be out of the way whilst we hoisted it in), he roared out, "What have you to say to that?" and little Rashleigh didn't know what to say, but was so madly angry, and so certain that no other ship could have taken it, that he stammered out that he would like the ship searched.

"Search 'Old Lest's' ship for your lousy gun! You! You!—"

Fortunately the Skipper could never do justice to his vocabulary when he really was angry, so could not think of any particularly appropriate epithets suitable for this occasion.

But Rashleigh wasn't finished with yet, and stuttered out, "I'll report the whole thing to the Commander-in-chief!"

"Report till you're blue in the face!" the Skipper roared. "You've got no blessed right to the gun—no more right than the other gunboats; you got it under false pretences, in the first place;" and he shook his fists at him.

"If a gun and its carriage—umph!—can be taken off your quarterdeck without anyone knowing about it, you must run your ship in a pretty smart way. Umph! If you can't be trusted to keep it safely, I'll take jolly good care you don't get the chance again. You got it by a lie—yes, a downright lie—and if it does turn up aboard here, you can shout yourself hoarse for it. 'Old Lest's' blowed if he'll give it you again."

The Skipper practically turned him out of his cabin, and ordered him to take the tackle back with him. Rashleigh was so furious when he went back, that he was quite white in the face; and I mentioned the fact to old Barclay as a phenomenon of medical interest, but he was so busy trying to prevent himself exploding with laughter, that the interesting information was wasted on him.

It was lucky that we left Hong-Kong two days afterwards, for feeling ran so high between the two ships, that otherwise there would have been serious trouble ashore between our liberty men

and hers.

We steamed slowly away for "England, Home, and Beauty", with our paying-off pendant streaming from our masthead, and the gilt bladder at its end jumping about in the water astern of us, our wretched band blaring away "For Auld Lang Syne"—a most inappropriate tune for the "Ringdoves"—and "Rolling Home for Merry England", till we were halfway through Lyemooon Pass.

The Commodore had made a "general signal"—"Cheer Ship"—and the unhappy "Ringdoves" had to climb on her nettings and give us three cheers as we passed, though little Rashleigh didn't appear on deck, as you may imagine. "Hardly what you'd call 'arty cheers,'" I mentioned to old Whitmore, who had been brought up on deck to see the last of Hong-Kong.

We returned them with three absolutely "top hole" shouts, for there were only two people aboard who didn't know for certain that the gun was somewhere on board us—the Skipper and Truscott—and they all knew that the "Ringdoves" had no more right to it than the man in the moon, so cheered "according".

We stayed a couple of months at Singapore, waiting for the *Fisgard* to come out and relieve us.

At last she arrived; we transferred some of the midshipmen and cadets to her, cheered ship, and away we went for Colombo and home.

I assure you, on my solemn "Alfred Davy", that till next morning neither the Skipper nor Truscott did know anything about that gun, however much they may have suspected. When I went on deck, the first morning after leaving Singapore, there it was, mounted on its carriage, just below the muzzle of our after eight-inch gun. A brass plate had been screwed on to the carriage and engraved with—"This gun was captured during the operations against Chinese pirates in the Hector Islands, and presented by the Officers and Ship's Company of H.M.S. *Vigilant* to Captain Chas. E. Lester, R.N., and Mrs. Lester".

They had had the plate engraved ashore at Singapore.

Of course the Skipper saw it directly he came up to "divisions" and "morning prayers", and it was as good as a play to watch his face.

Truscott had been let into the secret an hour before, and he and the chief boatswain's mate asked the Skipper if he would mind accepting it.

"Mind accepting it?" he roared, when he'd read the inscription on the brass plate, and "Blucher" had sniffed round the wheels, "Mind accepting it? I'm proud to accept it, and the missus will be prouder still. Umph! You're a darned set of rascals! But that plate, wants something added to it. How about 'Recaptured from the *Ringdove*'?"

The men all laughed and guffawed. They were as pleased as "Punch".

"There is something I'd like to have on that gun," he growled, more gently—"the names of those of us who were killed; and if the Commander and the chief bo's'n's mate will see to that, 'Old Lest''ll take it home with him. Umph! When we get home I'm going to try to get you a week's extra leave—for your active service—if none of you give the Commander any trouble at Portsmouth."

The men were dismissed, and crowded for'ard, as happy as kings, and I heard the Skipper growl to, old Truscott, "Umph! you rascal, waited till we got off the China station, did you? Umph!"

"I knew nothing about it till this morning, I assure you, sir," he answered.

"Umph!" he grunted to me, "you're looking mighty pleased with yourself. What did you have to do with it, eh?"

"I did happen to lend a hand at hoisting in something very like it, sir."

"You're a disgrace to the marines," he growled, and went below grandly pleased.

* * * * *

By the end of August we were made fast to the north railway jetty at Portsmouth, and, as I knew they would—my troubles began. They were mostly connected with unpaid bills, so I won't bother you with them; but it was Grainger, my trusty servant, who was more angry at them bothering me than I was myself.

"'Ere's a 'ome-comin', sir," he said mournfully, as he was packing my gear and snorting at the condition of my worn-out plain clothes; "'ere's a 'ome-comin', and arter all we've done for "The Corps", to say nothink of the wound in your for'ud, and that 'ere jab in the leg, and those trouses and serges, abso—lutely ruinationed. We can't 'ardly turn you out fit to march the de—tachment into barracks, sir, that we can't."

One thing gave him a little pleasure, and that was producing an eyeglass which he'd carefully preserved in a corner of a drawer. I thought that I had broken my last one before leaving Aden, but he had been keeping this one to make certain that, when the time came for marching into barracks, I should have one jammed in my port optic. "They'll think there's summat gone wrong with us, sir, if you don't 'ave it—up in the hofficers' mess."

Some of us had expected to be made a fuss of when we arrived at Portsmouth; but it was four months since the papers had been full of our exploits, and everyone had forgotten all about them—and us.

Old "B.-T.'s" leg was all right again, and he and I got Old Bax to advance us some pay, and had a couple of days in London together. We ran up against—whom do you think? Old man Hobbs and Sally—my little princess looking absolutely sweet. They had come along across Canada.

We helped them choose a dressing-bag for Ching, of the *Huan Min*. It was fitted with more things than I dreamt could be crowded into a bag—everything gold-mounted, and costing a small fortune.

What the Christopher Columbus old Ching would do with it, "B.-T." and I couldn't think; and we knew, jolly well, that the only thing he would want to find in it was my little princess herself.

We dined with them at their hotel, and next night "stood" them a theatre, and supper afterwards.

Old "B.-T." wasn't in very good form, because I'd cut him out with the little princess—my little princess—and he'd been saddled with old man Hobbs, and didn't like it a little bit.

They'd asked us to spend some of our leave with them up in Scotland; but "B.-T." had the "hump", and refused, though you may bet your life I was going, if I could only raise enough money to pay my fares.

* * * * *

"What d'you think of me getting married?" I asked Grainger, when he brought my breakfast the morning after my return to the ship.

"Who's it this time, sir?"

"What d'you say to a princess?"

"If she be a real princess, sir," he snorted, "she won't darn your socks, so won't be no 'elp to me. You don't want none of them sort, sir. You want one of 'em steadyin' kind of ones, if you don't mind me a-sayin' so, sir."

"Just you wait and see," I told him.

I had asked them to come down to Portsmouth, to see the old *Vigilant* again, and they did. They stayed there till we paid off, and I had a great deal of difficulty to boom the others away from my little princess, but managed it fairly successfully.

At last the great day of paying off did arrive, the white ensign and the pendant were hauled down, and we all began scattering to the winds.

Everyone said goodbye to everyone else, and I shook hands with dear "Old Lest".

"Umph! Where are you going?" he asked.

"Going to march the detachment into barracks, sir."

"Umph! I know that. What are you doing with your leave?"

"Going up to Scotland, sir."

"Umph!" he growled. "That's it, is it? When you get tired of Scotland, come down and get a bit of shooting with 'Blucher' and me. The missus will be glad to see you."

"Thank you very much, sir, but I hope not to get tired of Scotland as soon as that," and marched down the gangway to the shore for the last time. The old sergeant-major reported the detachment present; I sung out, "Royal Marines! At'shun! Shoulder arms! Left turn! Quick march!" and we left the old *Vigilant*, which had been our home for three years, and embarked in a tug for Clarence Victualling Yard, at Gosport, where headquarters' band was waiting to play us into barracks.

I left Grainger behind to bring all my gear across later on.

CHAPTER XX Home Again

Written by Midshipman Ford

Jim Rawlings, Dicky Morton, and I had been such a very short time on the China station, that we all three ought to have gone to the *Fisgard* when she came out to relieve us.

But just after we had reached Singapore, the Captain asked me whether I wanted to go home with him in the *Vigilant*, and though I felt an awful brute at leaving Jim and Dicky, I simply jumped at the chance. I wanted to see them at home so much, and go back to Upton Overy and see people nod at each other, and know that they were saying, "That be Master Dick who saved the Cap'en's life," that I forgot all about the other two. I was jolly sad to see them go aboard the *Fisgard* with their chests, and they were jolly sad too. Dicky was quite well now, and not half the ass that he had been when he first joined.

What made them more sad than anything else, was not being able to see the Chinese field gun given to the Captain. We gave it to him the morning after they left, when we were at sea. He was awfully delighted with it. You could see that by the way he patted it, and ran his fingers over it, and lifted it out of its carriage to test his strength, grunting and growling splendidly.

I wrote to tell Jim all about it, and sent the letter from Aden.

Before we left Singapore, we got the English papers with the accounts of all our fighting, and I was awfully proud to see my name in among the severely wounded, and rather expected that they would make a great fuss of us all at Portsmouth. They didn't, however, and when I went ashore to give "Blucher" a run, and got out of the dockyard gates on to the "Hard", I was disappointed that people didn't take the least notice; you know the funny sort of feeling one has. I kept on thinking whether any of them had an idea that I had been the captain of the junk *Sally*, and had been all that terrible night in the walled house.

Wasn't it strange for Mr. Hobbs and Sally to turn up there whilst we were paying off? A lot of our chaps think that she's "spoony" on Captain Marshall, but I rather think that she'd be "spoony" on anyone who was tall and good looking—if he took any notice of her.

Mr. Travers thinks so too, because I heard him tell Captain Marshall so; but he only "hee-hawed", and said something about "sour grapes".

She was jolly smartly rigged out, and Webster said she looked a perfect "knock out"; and she came down into the gunroom one afternoon with Captain Marshall, and, I suppose, had forgotten about poor old Withers, because she wanted to play the piano. Mr. Langham sent for the armourer to force the lock, and it was Miller who came, and she recognized him, and asked him if he remembered carrying her across the garden in that walled house. He got frightfully red and out of breath, and scratched a lot of veneer off the piano.

Mrs. Lester came to stay at Portsmouth, and was jolly nice to me. She came so that the Chinese gun could be properly presented to her, and the men were awfully pleased.

You remember Martin, the marine, and how he had made me so tired by telling me so often about having tried to save my life. Well, this had taught me not to remind people about things like that, so I never even led up to it; but Mrs. Lester said awfully jolly things about my having shot that brute. She had brought messages from my mother and Nan, and from lots of people; but my mother couldn't come herself, because she couldn't afford to, and I had to wait to see her till we "paid off", and I went on leave.

I did go to see Mrs. Scroggs and all Scroggs's children. She had come to live quite close to Portsmouth, and Sharpe, the petty officer, came with me, and we had a very "weepy" time, because she was so miserable, and cried a great deal, and said that it was awfully hard to make both ends meet on her pension, even with what we had subscribed. The children were all growing up, and wanting boots and things, and had most tremendous appetites.

I was jolly glad to get away, and I'm certain that Sharpe was.

Mrs. Lester went back two or three days before we actually did "pay off", and then came the morning when we all said goodbye. The marines marched away, and the bluejackets streamed ashore with their bags on their shoulders to go on leave, and cabs came rattling up to take us to the station.

I did intend to walk, because all my heavy gear had gone to the "outfitters", and I only had two small bags and some paper parcels with that boat's ensign and the presents for Nan and my father and mother; but the Captain called out, "Comin' with me, Dick?" and I actually went with

him and "Blucher" in his cab, with "Willum" sitting up on the box, and right the way to Upton Overy with him in a first-class carriage. He paid for it, too, and gave me some grub at Salisbury, and a ripping tea at Exeter.

We didn't get to Upton Overy till ten o'clock at night, and I was so jolly excited, and so fearfully proud of being with the Captain, that I couldn't feel tired; and when we ran into the station they fired off fog signals, and there were flags all over the place. Old Puddock, the station master, opened the door, and Mrs. Puddock "bobbed" behind him, and I caught sight of my mother under a lamp, and forgot all about my bags and parcels, and rushed across to her.

"Blucher" nearly went off his head with joy, and chased Mr. Puddock's cat till it turned round and faced him, and then he forgot about it. I do believe that everyone in Upton Overy was waiting outside, and there were more flags in the streets, and a triumphal arch, and Mrs. Lester was waiting in one of the carriages. Everyone was cheering like mad, and the fishermen had taken the horses out of the carriage and were going to pull the Captain up to The House.

My mother and I slipped away—I'd asked Puddock to send up my things—and got home, and it was grand being back again, though my father was very worried, and hardly cheered up when he saw me. My mother had told me how miserable he was, and that I must be very quiet and not talk too much or too loudly, so that rather took the gilt off the gingerbread.

Even when I showed them the white ensign with the bullet holes in it, and told them all about it, he only said that it was a shame to send a child like me away on such a job, and said it was time to be going to bed, and he was thankful that I wasn't a cripple for life after having my arm smashed.

"He'll be all right to-morrow," my mother told me, and I showed her my arm, and the places where the bullet had gone through it, and moved my fingers, and picked up heavy things to show her that it really was quite strong, and that I should not have to leave the Service and simply stay at home and be an expense to them, and we just hugged each other, and I went to bed presently.

I was up again very early in the morning, and ran down to the beach to see all my chums in the fishing boats, and they "bucked me up" splendidly. They all crowded round, and had heard about everything—everything—and they told me all the news, and that Ned the Poacher was in prison, and his wife and children had gone to the workhouse, and that old Gurridge was coming back at the end of the week and wanted to see me, and I slipped back in time to prevent my mother worrying about where I'd gone, and after breakfast I rushed up to The House.

The Captain was there in his old shooting suit, with a gun over his shoulder, and "Blucher" was careering all over the flower beds, and not stopping when he was told to. "Umph! I'll shoot that dog if he don't come to heel when I tell him," the Captain grunted, and I ran off and managed to catch him. I knew jolly well that old "Blucher" might have destroyed every flower in the place if he wanted to, for anything the Captain would have done to him.

"What became of you, Dick, last night? The missus waited for you and your mother till we couldn't wait any longer. Umph! Must go down and see her and the Parson after lunch."

I very much hoped that he wouldn't, because I was afraid my father would say something to him about sending me away in charge of that junk. I told him about Ned the Poacher and his wife.

"Umph! Serve the beggar right; we'll see what we can do about his missus and the kids. Umph! Go in and see the girls, and then come along with 'Blucher'. I'm going after rabbits."

I'd brought a Chinese embroidered skirt for Nan, and she simply loved it, and I couldn't get away, and didn't want to, and presently the Captain began bellowing "that he couldn't wait till Domesday", and Nan said, "I'll come too", and we raced each other round to the stables to get "Blucher's" chain, and off we went.

It was awfully ripping, and "Blucher" gave us no end of a time, pulling us about whenever the Captain fired his gun.

* * * * *

[Transcriber's note: the source book had running headings on its odd-numbered pages. In this etext, those headings have been combined into an introductory paragraph at the start of each chapter.]

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